

Color and its relation to the female figure in the cinema

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze historically the relationship between the introduction of colorization techniques of movies on the female figure in the cinema. The process of colorization has changed throughout the history, manual painting has given way to industrial techniques and currently entered into the digital universe. Throughout this historical process it is possible to observe the erotization and exaltation of the female image as a product, helping to spread and increase the consumption of the movie art. The erotization of the body, not only in the cinema, but in other medias, has become recurrent throughout history. The movie industry also erotizes them. The color, in this context, amplifies the perception of this erotization, since it is used in conjunction with the female figure for the commercialization of films, emphasizing the women's role in merchandising.

KEYWORDS: Cinema, Women, Color

INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the cinema was dominated exclusively by men, because it was mainly the men who had the technological and financial means and the scientific knowledge for the development of this art. However, since its beginning, cinema has also been colored. Despite the black-and-white negatives, there was never a period where the color, with regard to the hue, did not appear in some works. The first process of coloring the negatives was done by hand painting, and women were employed for this function. According to Yumibe (2012:45), the female workers were in general, wives of the male employees involved in these productions (YUMIBE, p. 45, 2012).

It was not just as a labor force that the relationship between women and color took place in the cinema. Early color works - *Annabelle Serpentine Dance*¹ (1896), for example - evoked body and female movements to attract audience to theaters. This practice involving color and its relation to the female figure continued to follow the history of color in the cinema for the following decades. In the recent period, it is possible to observe digital colorization techniques used to rejuvenate women and keep audiences avid by the female figure and body.

The action of the feminist movement in the cinema sought better wages and equal conditions of work between men and women. Actresses like Patricia Arquette, Charlize Theron, Jane Fonda, and others sought better working conditions for women in Hollywood in an attempt to change this scenario, not just for the actresses but for all women involved in filmmaking.

¹ This movie is available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kplIO9F7Pg> . Accessed in July 25th. 2016.

THE FIRST YEARS OF CINEMA

To cheapen the costs of coloring the negatives, the companies hired women, usually young, to the service. It was also believed that women were more skilled than men to work with painting, they were more attentive and detailed, and perceived colors better (YUMIBE, 2012). From the beginning of the cinema, color was associated with the female spectacle (YUMIBE, 2012: 49). According to Yumibe, in the 1890s, the association between manually colored films and dance constituted a first category of specific cinematic color, providing the viewer with both visual attraction for moving bodies and moving colors. Thus, one can say that the relation between color and femininity in the cinema begins with the first dance films of the early twentieth century. Not only did the Edison Company produce their hand-colored films starring Annabelle², a famous dancer of the time, but other companies and filmmakers also hired dancers to produce hand-colored films.



Figure 1 - Annabelle Frames in her Serpentine Dance

The eroticization and sensuality associated with the female body have become common, and are related to other technological processes of insertion of color in the cinema, as in the period in which the company Technicolor dominated the colorization of the films. Much of the marketing of films produced between the 30s and 60s exalted the figure and female body, which could now be seen in color. "At a time when the *stars system* dominated, color served the purpose of emphasizing the appearance and beauty of 'female stars'. (COSTA, 2011, P p.35). "

Several authors, when perceiving the association between colors and the female body, wrote texts, chapters and entire books to her. Steve Neale dedicates an entire chapter of his book *Cinema and Technology: Image, Sound, Color*, to address the theme of the association of color with the female body and "natural beauty," a term, according to Neale, commonly used to connect Technicolor to the female body

"[...] the discourse of "natural beauty" existed alongside, in combination with, the discourse of glamour. Here the extent to which the spectacle of the female body involved an explicitly eroticized male look was perhaps much more explicitly recognized. "(NEALE, 1985: 154)

Despite working in the cinematographic field, the Technicolor company never bothered to produce the films that it would colorize. Their system demanded something close to a joint production with the producer that contracted them. In order to monitor this process that involved huge cameras, lots of lighting and the idealization and organization of all the chromatic aspects of the film, including costumes, scene objects, specific makeup, among others, the company created the position of *Color Consulant*, a specialist, for so to speak, in the process and in the color of the films. The most important and memorable color specialist of the company was Natalie Kalmus.

Of strong and striking personality, as indicate the reports of Scott Higgins (2000) and Sarah Street (2011), Natalie Kalmus was an exceptional professional, who used the theory for the use of colors in the cinema. She wrote an article called *Color Consciousness*, which describes some conventional uses of color in films. Associating red with blood, power, passion or danger are some examples found in her work to construct

² Annabelle Moore, american dancer and actress (1878 - 1961)

narratives. According to Higgins (2000: 374), Kalmus intended to demonstrate that color could be controlled at the same time that it governed the narrative, if it was used in a color classification system.

During her trajectory, Kalmus (who signs virtually all works of the company between 1934 and 1949), suffered several attacks as a *Technicolor* specialist, allegedly disagreeing with many filmmakers. In an interview³, the director Allan Dwan - responsible for *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), *Indomitable Men* (1954), among other works - offended Kalmus, calling her a 'bitch'.

However, it was Natalie Kalmus who credited the vast majority of subsequent works and became the main name of the color industry in the cinema in the 1950s. It is important to note how she, despite a great professional, has been portrayed several times in a deprecatory manner, perhaps because of her personality and success, which bothered other professionals. Sarah Street (2011) in her article *The Natalie Kalmus Papers and the "Branding" of Technicolor in Britain and the United States* states that Kalmus became the company's top marketing girl, being responsible for most of Technicolor's great productions in the USA and abroad, especially in England.

"During the period, the involvement of women in the productions was limited, even more so than in the era of silent cinema. Kalmus's role, however, was unique and it was difficult to find comparisons or references in other areas such as editing, direction or production." (STREET, 2011: 12)



Figure 2 - Movie Posters with Betty Grable, where the actress's 'natural beauty' is exalted

THE COLOR AND THE NARRATIVE IN THE CIENMATOGRAFICOS PRODUCTIONS

Kalmus brought out the importance of the narrative of the work, stating that color could not attract more attention than the plot. This premise has guided much of the production to this day. In the 1950s, another manual for the use of color in films was produced by the Special Committee of the Association of Film and Television Engineers called *Elements of color in professional motion pictures* (2009). It is worth pointing out the character of this text when dealing with the female figure, reinforcing the stereotype of the beauty of the star, something that does not happen with the stars, which are male characters of the films.

"The female star, for example, whose appearance is of supreme concern, should be given undisputed priority as to the color of makeup, hair and costumes that best complement her complexion and figure." (Elements, 2009: 40)

³ The statement can be found here: <http://brightlightsfilm.com/angel-exile-part-ii-talking-pioneering-director-allan-dwan/#> - Accessed in January 5th of 2017.

The speech of the 'natural beauty' of female stars when viewed in color was one of the main foundations of Technicolor's marketing. In the text of Basten (1980), *Glorious Technicolor*, it is possible to observe reports of this event, making of Technicolor an ally in the construction of beauty stereotypes that leverage a consumer industry. This speech accompanies the discourse of Hollywood glam and by this the spectacle of colors is associated with the spectacle of the female body surrounded by the eroticized male gaze.

Even today, we can find associations between techniques of colorization and scanning and the female figure. Edgar Moura (2016), in his book *da Cor*, talks about the operation and use of a technique of digital film color correction called *base-light*. It uses digital devices to rejuvenate the faces and bodies of women, emphasizing a stereotyped physical beauty, often with an erotic appeal.

However, the current moment requires a new perception of these relations, from the point of view of the feminist struggle for equal rights between men and women. In this light, the challenge of the next studies will be the construction of a new look on the history of cinema and on the making of cinema today

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The commercialization of the colored films anchored mainly on the emphasis of the stereotyped beauty in the female stars and in the eroticization of the figure of the woman.

Several techniques of colorization followed the pattern of exalting and eroticizing the female figure when they were introduced. Technicolor itself has made several films marketed with marketing as the possibility of seeing certain actresses in color. The relation between the female body and the implementation of new techniques of colorization in the cinema has been recurrent throughout the situations, subjects and processes in the history of this art. However, the current moment requires a new perception of these relations, from the point of view of the feminist struggle for equal rights between men and women. In this light, the challenge of the next studies will be the construction of a new look on the history of cinema and on the making of cinema today.

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