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## Colour Consciousness and Design in *Blanche Fury* as Technicolor Melodrama

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This article addresses colour and music as elements associated with the rhetoric and excesses of film melodrama through a case study of *Blanche Fury* (1947). Music is discussed as an analogy for thinking about colour composition and the moving image through the rhetoric and practices of Technicolor design and a theoretical context contemporary to the film's making discerned in both production materials and film text. Colour takes on a musical value which serves a diegetic function by both situating characters in relation to the *mise-en-scène* and operating as a cue to instances of perception attributed specifically to the female protagonist. Drawing on theories of melodrama and colour I will argue that colour and music are integral to and offer material for further explorations of feminine desire and sexual difference as they can be seen to operate in this particular melodrama.<sup>1</sup>

For Laura Mulvey, the premise that film melodrama offers the illusion of a coherent image of the world indicates the potential of fractures for a progressive text (1989: 39). Melodrama stages scenarios that engage the spectator's fascination by veiling mechanisms of representation and foregrounding moments of excess; within this system, elements that elide the unfolding narrative logic of the film touch upon unarticulated desire. The potential of a film which is dependent on the concealment of the marks of production, its material ground and technology (celluloid, dyes specific to three-strip Technicolor) to disturb the construction of an illusion operates through the interrelations of the film as process and text.

The narrative of *Blanche Fury* traces a discourse of familial loyalty, dispossession and desire surrounding ownership of the Fury family name and estate at Clare Hall. The film's disowned heroine, Blanche Fury, returns to Clare Hall at the invitation of her uncle, Simon Fuller,

for employment as governess to his granddaughter Lavinia. Blanche's ambitions for status and possession of the estate are gradually eroded by her moral ambiguity. She marries and then betrays her cousin Lawrence through her fascination with the dispossessed heir to Clare Hall, Philip Thorn, who occupies the estate's peripheral buildings. Blanche's desires develop through a series of illicit encounters with Thorn and manifest themselves in her complicity with his plot to murder Simon and Lawrence Fuller as a means of regaining control of Clare Hall. It is Blanche's maternal guardianship of Lavinia which reinstates her moral standing against Thorn's continued treachery as he instigates scenarios that endanger the child. This discourse of ownership and dispossession is articulated through colour as the visualisation of the characters' relationships to the spaces they inhabit. As Blanche first meets Thorn his identity is undisclosed; her misrecognition of him as her cousin Lawrence is underscored by a similarity between Thorn's gesture and that in the portrait of an ancestor, each holding a shotgun towards the ground. In this sequence the neutral brown and pale grey hues of Clare Hall are disrupted as a reverse-shot of Thorn against a red background in turn reveals Blanche framed by an intense blue wall. This alternation of colour signals their relationship. The peripheral spaces occupied by Thorn are demarcated by this blue in contrast to the neutral hues of Clare Hall. Shifts in the balance between red and blue detail the interplay of their relationship and rivalry over the estate; red signals Blanche's desire and perception of Clare Hall, while blue traces Thorn's dispossession.

*Blanche Fury* as melodrama sustains the complexities of *mise-en-scène* familiar to the genre through a complex pattern of associations that trace the interrelations of characters and the spaces they occupy. Blanche progresses from her alignment with the muted hues which form the background to her work as housekeeper in the opening section of the film, to her association with the colour red at Clare Hall which draws attention to her as protagonist. As the narrative unfolds red shifts from a signifier of her curiosity and desire to a marker of transgression. Through these alterations red first evidences murder and then indicates Blanche's reclamation of moral ground in the coloured binding of legal documents and the Bible as she invokes the law against Thorn. Red is accentuated in the image as a complementary harmony with the colour blue which revolves around Thorn. As the narrative elicits a sense of tension and emotional excess in a sequence mid-way through the film, the image is dominated by broad areas of colour contrast and begins to operate at the limits

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of the Technicolor process. The recurrence of a close-up of Blanche becomes a complex of the fetishised image of woman as spectacle, a questioning female voice in dialogue and the broader commodification of the female star image.

Threads of this colour system can be tracked throughout the film. The stables and apartment occupied by Thorn contain conspicuous details such as the visual repetition of architectural ornamentation marked in blue. As Blanche calls on Thorn following her engagement the muted greys of her clothing are met by the vivid blue of his apartment as he refuses to recognise her adoption of the Fury name. A subsequent sequence showing their first illicit encounter finds her in a white lace dress which veils a blue lining, her waist accentuated by blue trim as a trace of her emerging association with Thorn. An ensuing encounter in this room finds Blanche clothed in red and in medium close-up; she looks down at her wedding ring and as they embrace light encapsulates her expression, framing her in close-up and emphasising her to-be-looked-at-ness. As they turn, the contrasting red of her shawl reveals the blue stone of Thorn's signet ring and thwarted allegiance to Clare Hall.

This analysis of *Blanche Fury* draws from an analogy of colour and music which participates in the construction of film image and narrative, soliciting the gaze and tracing an economy of relationships that make the internal melodrama of the film visible. The interplay of red and blue as colour contrast traces this discourse through the *mise-en-scène*, exaggerating colour harmony through variations in hue and saturation. Here, the visual tension between the two colours begins to signify. As a concept, colour harmony traces a nexus of possibilities in melodrama from Thomas Elsaesser's attention to the emphatic significance of both colour and music as diegesis and excess, to a facet of colour design advocated by Natalie Kalmus' Technicolor consultancy service, and to the theories and practices of Adrian Cornwell-Clyne. It is in this sense that an attention to the diegetic and expressive function of colour can be informed by colour design contemporary to the film's making.

Steve Neale has noted that 'the efforts of Natalie Kalmus were directed towards the melodrama of colour systems, their subordination, not just to narrative, but also to referential properties of the cinematic image' (1985: 157). Kalmus' direction of the Technicolor colour consultancy service advocated 'colour consciousness', a concept marketed in trade and popular papers (Hillier 1956; Tildesley 1935) and her own essay of that title (1935). Colour consciousness drew attention to its significance as an integral element within a system

of representation to diminish the view of colour as an expensive and optional addition. Kalmus emphasised the dramatic potential and scope of image resolution to construct a cinematic illusion of 'natural colour'.<sup>2</sup> The rhetorical function of her writing, which has been noted as a facet of marketing the three-strip Technicolor process, also suggests the association of colour, music and melodrama. Kalmus writes of colour balances and design, suggesting that 'we must first develop a colour sense... We must study colour harmony, the appropriateness of colour to certain situations, the appeal of colour to the emotions' ([1935] 2006: 24). In this sense a chart detailing the colour design of each set, sequence and character which could 'be compared to a musical score, and amplifies the picture in a similar manner' (ibid.: 28) was advocated.<sup>3</sup> Music offered an analogy for the variations in colour contrast and balance which occurred from one film frame to the next, so that effects of colour composition could be considered across a sequence and duration of shot. In this sense, three-strip Technicolor was promoted as a process and system of representation that was designed to be both unobtrusive and so complicit with ideology of 'natural' colour, and responsive to the dramatic requirements of different genres.

In *Colour Cinematography* Cornwell-Clyne continued his study of music and light, initiated in the design of the Klein Colour Projector as a musical keyboard instrument producing 'colour music', to formulate a theory of colour design (Klein 1926). Cornwell-Clyne addressed music beyond its semantic resonance with colour in timbre, tone and harmony, as an analogy of colour composition and movement. Lighting, costume and set designs encountered the kaleidoscopic turns of colour composition which occur across series of still images. Cornwell-Clyne suggested a colour scale or progression designed for each film within the limits of colour resolution available to each film stock and process. These chromatic scales operated through a series of base note colours threaded with intense or contrasting colour highlights. This discourse was noted by cinematographer Guy Green (1947) who photographed the interiors of *Blanche Fury* and who observed that that colour design for cinema encountered 'the serious objection... that the picture moves. Separations and colour compositions change within the scene and the dramatic effect tends to disintegrate with movement.' The proposition that colour could underscore dramatic moments and play to the emotional tone of a scene engaged the temporal and diegetic form of music for the design of visual chromatic scale. A colour system of representation depends on (in)consistencies of continuity and juxtaposition within complex

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layers of colour components (hue, value, saturation), surface area and rhythms of repetition and association.

The script for *Blanche Fury* was written by Norman Spencer and based on Gabrielle Long's novel of the same title, penned under the name of 'Joseph Shearing'. The production script and revisions are indicative of an attention to colour and music in the design of the film. The opening scenes of the script initiate a narrative strand of sounds, such as the faint chords stirred from the strings of a mandolin by the storm that surrounds Clare Hall and of whispering voices that are attributed to Blanche's perception in the form of a hallucination. These elements evoke the artful and obsessive atmosphere of the film and although this particular sequence was later omitted, both music and sound remain integral to the film released (Spencer 1946, 1947).

A sequence detailed in the draft script finds Blanche selecting colour textiles for a new wardrobe as she is assimilated into the wealth of Clare Hall: 'on the table there are several lengths of material . . . some wound round bales . . . some folded . . . there are rich blue taffetas, pale greys, bright silk tartans, and other samples for Blanche to choose from' (Spencer 1946: 26). A discussion ensues between Blanche and her uncle, Simon Fuller, concerning suitable colours for a woman of her age and social standing as she studies the effect of different colour textiles against her hair (ibid.: 27). That such a sequence was outlined is suggestive of an association with fashion that persisted in the marketing of the film. The pressbook contemporary to the film's 1947 release offered short articles on the clothes worn by Valerie Hobson as Blanche Fury, and a lip-colour available in 'Fury Red'. Although these scenes were deleted, the fascination with colour persists in the circulated version of the film.

Throughout the script the colour red is associated with Blanche as an image of femininity and transgression, from the bowls of red roses set throughout Clare Hall which visually situate her for the spectator, to the embroidered red flowers on her dress at an evening meeting concerning the estate. In this sense the colour red operates within the film's unfolding themes of residence and dispossession through its narrative significance and as a site of tension within the composition of the image. Throughout *Blanche Fury*, the colour red operates as a site of tension. It is the colour of the neckerchief that is bought from an encampment of travellers trespassing on the estate and later employed as a disguise and distraction by Philip Thorn to murder Lawrence and Simon Fuller. The red roses are also suggestive of a link to Thorn and his mother Rosa Spina. An unfilmed sequence in the script details Blanche's dialogue in regard of her 'new green dress with the roses'

(Spencer 1947: 60) and suggestively attributes the orientation of colour design around the female star to the character she enacts. This level of complicity sutures over the distinction between screen image and marketing materials, toward an image of woman constructed as a commodity beyond the film text, which can be disputed in *Blanche Fury*.

Although the script outlines a colour scheme primarily through costume design coterminous with the appropriation of the image of woman, in certain sequences colour details operate as a facet of perception attributed to Blanche. A sequence of the film which is retained from the script highlights the colour red as Blanche first encounters her young cousin Lavinia, who has been placed in her care. Spencer details Lavinia's 'small red slipper peeping out from the black shadow formed by an armoire in the passage' (1947: 27) which draws the spectator to follow Blanche's visible response to the noise of Lavinia's movements. In this sense, colour and sound act as a cue to the spectator at points that are significant to the unfolding of the narrative.

Thomas Elsaesser has related the use of music to mark emotional effect as 'a system of punctuation, giving expressive colour and chromatic contrast to the story line, by orchestrating ups and downs of emotional intrigue' (1987: 50). Yet Elsaesser does not specify the historical context of the relationship between music and cinematographic colour design. Instead he comments on the significance of the repetition of prosaic detail to note that the recurrence of a colour, though seemingly insignificant in itself, elicits a rhythm that can counter symbolic meaning (ibid.: 45). Similarly the emphasis of colour, through an increase in saturation or a move from accent colour to dominant hue can underscore the dramatic emphasis of a sequence by marking difference within the colour design. For example, the colour red initially organises the composition of the image to frame Blanche as object of desire. Following Blanche's marriage to Lawrence, we find her seated for supper alone amidst the grandeur and space of Clare Hall. The camera tracks forward and follows her across the hall; a few steps on to the staircase she hesitates and turns, the duration of shot and medium close-up emphasising the vibrant hue of her red dress and necklace. This practice also serves a narrative function by signalling her perception of Clare Hall in contrast to that of Thorn. In certain instances, however, the orientation of colour within both image and narrative are constructed to indicate Blanche's perception as a point of identification for the spectator. Blanche is seen to respond to the sound of Lavinia's footsteps, remarking her perception as point of identification and agency.<sup>4</sup>

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The repetition of similar colours can be tracked in the complementary harmonies of colour contrasts that dominate in the main section of *Blanche Fury*.<sup>5</sup> Complementary harmonies or 'colour chords' operate on the basis of antithesis, colour contrast eliciting a resonance which engages visual perception (Higgins 2007: 18–19). As discussed the complementary harmony of vibrant blues and reds traces the interrelations of Blanche and Philip Thorn and the sense of ownership or dispossession in the spaces they occupy. An exaggeration in this scale of chromatic contrast is employed for 'momentary or punctual effect' (ibid.: 18). For Elsaesser the repetition of prosaic and homely details begins to operate as a parody, so that in melodramas such as *Blanche Fury* where these details are colour coded 'the rhythm of experience often establishes itself against its value (moral, intellectual)' (1987: 45). In *Blanche Fury* the function of complementary harmony escalates from prosaic details which frame the film's heroine in a mode complicit with the dominant scopic of economy of melodrama, to sequences which contrast colour through an increase in saturation and the area of image covered. As Blanche visits Thorn's rooms for the third time, the saturated blue which has sketched out the discourse of dispossession is highlighted through its contrast with the intense red of Blanche's dress. Here, colour contrast dominates the filmed space. In this sequence diffusion affects the clarity of the close-up by design and paradoxically marks the unintentional bleed of colour.<sup>6</sup>

The construction of femininity in *Blanche Fury* incorporates elements of colour design that foreground the analogy of colour and music as a marker of perception and participant in narrative progression. The perception of colour is reliant on difference, such as that which occurs across a sequence of notes or alterations in a chromatic scale.<sup>7</sup> For Kristeva, the semiotic dimension of colour is suggestive of the materiality of language, so that the shifts and rhythms of colour and music trace the emergence and dissolution of narrative form. A moment in which the progression and interpretation of the cycle or narrative is disturbed, such as that of a material contradiction, is suggestive of a different mode of engagement.<sup>8</sup> In this sense the residual impression of *The Remembered Film* (Burgin 2006), in which the recollection of composite image of film and ephemera loosens the binds of the narrative, may be the 'image' proximal to a sense of subjective perception. Here, the accumulated image of a discordant instance of colour resists the articulation and syntax of the system. Such a shift in context reconfigures meaning.

The night of Blanche's third sojourn into the buildings occupied by Thorn finds her in the sculpted form of a red satin dress, the cut

of which frames the ruby necklace adorning her neck. Her red lip-colour now appears more intense in the pool of light that encloses her in the eroticised image of a close-up. In this sequence the threads of colour which can be tracked throughout the film now dominate the surface area of the image. The antithesis of complementary harmony in the juxtaposition of red with the blue of Thorn's retreat underscores the significance of this sequence as a turning point in the narrative. For Higgins, such 'brief flourishes of colour that might renew the spectator's awareness' indicate 'a style that encouraged the keying of colour contrast to specific transitory moments of narrative' (2007: 90–1). The foregrounding of colour and drama initially seems to be contiguous with the image of woman as commodity through the marketing of 'Fury Red' lip-colour noted in the *Blanche Fury* pressbook. However, the comparative stillness of framing familiar to the close-up emphasises the colour contrast that dominates the image. To recall Green's observation, 'colour composition and separations change' (1947) their dramatic effect disintegrating with movement; the colour bleed destabilises the alignment of close-up, image of woman and commodity.

In *Signatures of the Visible* Fredric Jameson examines the significance of colour contrasts where each manifestation of the colour red occurs within a spectrum of differentiation. The affect of colour contrast and harmony on the perception of the colour red, where its intensity appears to vary according to the colours that surround it, indicates the potential of a composition to disturb the 'concept of a generic colour red' (2007: 194). The susceptibility of each occurrence of the colour red to its context is indicative of the manipulations of colour representations and image resolution which characterise a film text. The shifting relations of representation and text both invoke and destabilise the concept of the colour red. The chromatic range of three-strip Technicolor exceeded that of its two-colour system predecessors, offering a construction of colour that moved towards 'realism'. Jameson writes of cinematic colour in general that film stock

'is clearly no less a translation, no less a registering and an inscription in another medium: but it does not tend to foreground itself as a representational system, or to draw attention to its distance from "reality" the way the black-and-white system does. We forget the differences between the various colour systems when we are within any one of them; and lose ourselves in the multiple oppositions between the individual colours, something that saps our attention from the strangeness of representationality itself.' (Ibid.: 263–4)

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In this sense, the perceived increase in colour intensity in sequences where red and blue dominate the surface area of the screened image is an effect of colour contrast. A shift in the colour system of the film occurs within a complex of cinematic codes and conventions that are gendered. The exaggeration of this system and its disruption in *Blanche Fury* as melodrama foregrounds colour and perception in a moment that would otherwise align the close-up as fragmented and fetishised image of woman with the female protagonist.

Steve Neale specifies the operation of Technicolor's colour design at the level of the narrative and the image of woman as both 'marking and containing the erotic component involved in the desire to look at the coloured image' (1985: 155). The formulation of a colour scheme around the female star organises visual space and situates the image of woman ideologically as a construction of femininity designed to solicit the gaze. As Neale notes 'the female body both bridges the ideological gap between nature and cultural artifice while simultaneously marking and focusing the scopophilic pleasures involved in and engaged by the use of the film' (ibid.: 152). In *Blanche Fury* the interrelations of colour design and the underlying film material and process sustain a duplicitous function. Colour design is complicit with the veiling of its presence as a mechanism of representation so that in moments where it emerges into the midst of perception, in close-up it takes on new meaning.

In reference to work with Technicolor consultants, Robert Surtees notes that the introduction of a specific colour, such as red 'should have dramatic story-telling effect' (1948: 10).<sup>9</sup> Developments in screen make-up such as Max Factor were contemporary with the advent of three-strip Technicolor and designed to improve the image resolution of flesh tones affected by altered lighting schemes. The reliance of facial modelling on variations in light and shadow shifted toward colour schemes developed around certain characters, such as that which Paul Nash notes of René Hubert's preference for taking 'all his range of colours from the shades of the artiste's lips, which, he says, should be the predominant colour on the screen' (1938: 128).<sup>10</sup> The privileging of the close-up in classic narrative cinema was infused with the general concern that 'colour would not replace the expressive possibilities of light and shadow' (Higgins 2007: 86).

The marketing of lip-colour in 'Fury Red' initially appears complicit with the construction of femininity and the image of woman as commodity, but as the intensity of Technicolor red and its employment as an 'accent colour' participates in the spectator's interpretation of the film, the emphasis of a close-up reframes this detail and reveals

the construction of femininity. Here we return to the third sequence, intimated as a love-scene, in which Blanche meets Thorn at the edges of the estate and in which he articulates the murderous intent of his desire for Clare Hall. As a transitional moment in the narrative, the antithesis of red and blue in complementary harmony dominates the image. The ebb and flow of a conversation infused with passion and the surreptitious influence of their separate ambitions is visualised by alterations in the area encompassed by red and blue. Camera movement, framing and dialogue participate in the choreography of communication and dissociation. Where Thorn stands alone, his back turned against the room, blue dominates the image. As he approaches Blanche the balance shifts emphasising the antithesis of complementary harmony which traces the emerging discord of their conversation. The repetition of a close-up finds Blanche swathed in red; clothes, hair, jewellery and lip-colour are enveloped in a pool of light against a blue surface. Close framing and diffusion close down the depth of field in a practice familiar to classic narrative cinema, which the agency of her questioning dialogue disturbs. The resonance of complementary harmony dominates the close-up and paradoxically details the bleed of colour contrast and the diffusion of light. As the camera tracks Thorn's movement across the room his speech turns to that of reflection, until he is gradually encompassed by the blue surface of the walls and aural space of a soliloquy.

The subsequent cross-cutting between close-ups of Blanche and Thorn reveals his oblique gaze and marks the distance between them. The duration of each close-up traces a shift in emphasis from Blanche to Thorn. While the shots of Thorn are not constructed as Blanche's point of view, the dialogue is suggestive of her response. Blanche's enquiries elicit a sense of the wake of his destructive ambition to reclaim Clare Hall. The significance of certain camera movements and shots in *Blanche Fury* contributes to the dramatic effect of the film, but where this emphasis extends to an exaggeration of the colour design, the limits of the film material are manifest; the bleed of image definition which is otherwise reliant on highly saturated colour contrasts elides the signifying system specific to *Blanche Fury*. These unintentional effects occur where the cinematic code that associates the image of woman as commodity through the close-framing and duration of shot which emphasise her to-be-looked-at-ness paradoxically foregrounds the limits of the Technicolor process. The close-up fragments. It dislocates the image from narrative progression and reframes the 'Fury Red' linked to marketing of lip-colour in a move that also foregrounds the material and detail of

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production. The cumulative effect reveals the artifice and fragility of the construction of femininity.

Peter Wollen (1972), like Jameson later, noted that it is not the colour itself but the way it is introduced that is of significance. In a statement suggestive of the Technicolor dye imbibition process, Wollen also observed that between filming and public screening 'a whole technology of dyeing has intervened' (1985: 24–5) indicating the work of laboratories in film production.<sup>11</sup> Although this process distances the Technicolor image from a sense of the photographic index to indicate the fabrication of film colour as 'an iconic approximation of the world' (ibid.: 24), it remains susceptible to the characteristics of each film stock and the inconsistencies of colour processing. In this sense Wollen writes that 'what you see is an image and that is the power of cinema, but it is also its power for you to not think about what you do not see, which is as much the sound track and the lab as anything else' (ibid.: 25). He alludes to both the concealment of the marks of production, to enunciation specific to each film text and to the film material and process itself.

As a composite, colour offers a configuration of elements which threaten and revitalise its symbolic function. Cinematographic colour traces a nexus of processes and practices significant for theories of subjectivity, foregrounding material contradictions (rhythm, repetition) within scenarios which engage the imaginary in fantasies that ward against perceived lack. For Kristeva the semiotic breaks this closure and disrupts the symbolic. Here, the affectivity of colour is not aligned with the body of the text or film as source but emerges through interpretation of residual and unintentional contradictions that persist within colour design. In this sense, the resonance of colour contrast and antithesis becomes legible in instances of difference within a systematised design rather than being sublimated to narrative meaning. In this sense, a Kristevan semiotic traverses the unfolding logic of language, as a poetic dimension through which the narrative signified 'is able to point to its own dissolution' (1982: 214).

Fredric Jameson's emphasis on the significance of colour contrasts indicates a reading which addresses the film as material and process, where manipulations of saturation, contrast, music and sound operate at the level of film design and text. These variables indicate an instability that is characteristic of colour representation and perception as they affect the formation of meaning. The perception of colour, music and sound are relational; each depends on variations such as those that can be tracked within a musical scale or within a sequence of colour combinations. Cornwell-Clyne foregrounds colour balances,

movement and the meaning attributed to particular colours at the level of the symbolic to suggest 'the unfolding of an idea' over a lapse of time ([1936] 1951: 651). For Cornwell-Clyne 'colour harmony is, when it becomes significant, a product of the creative imagination... The colour harmonies of a great painter seem to possess the power of inducing responses from chords, so to speak, which lie deep within our natures, which are but rarely stirred' (ibid.: 645).<sup>12</sup>

The 'unfolding of an idea' suggests a level of colour consciousness, but one that is interpreted through the spectator's revisions of the film text. Here, colour variations and contrasts are mediated through a system of representation and the design of pictorial space. Duration of shot and the disorientation of colour space begin to reveal the dissolution of the narrative it contributed to putting in place. In his 1947 essay 'Colour', Eisenstein drew on the relationship of colour, music and sound to offer a sense of montage which is specific to the layering and simultaneity of elements in any moment of the film. Shifting configurations of synthesis and difference operate as a mode of expression. In this sense the alignment and dislocation of a characteristic, such as the 'sound of leather cracking must be detached from the boot ... the concept of orangeish red must be detached from the hue of the tangerine in order for colour to be inserted into a consciously directed system of expression and action' (quoted in Jameson 2007: 324). The construction of film colour is temporarily concealed by its complicity with a cinematic system of representation, the pattern of associations specific to the film text and the limits of each film stock and colour process. This recalls Wollen's observation that Eisenstein's 'emphasis on the emotional impact of the cinema tended all the time to draw him away from the symbolic' (1972: 69). The 'iconic representation' of the close-up marks a temporal and spatial shift in the narrative. In the close-up of Blanche Fury, however, the complexity of the colour design and the unintentional effects of the material mark a shift in perception; colour emerges into new significance.

The temporal and spatial variations of colour noted by Cornwell-Clyne and Jameson are, like music, layered throughout the film. Aural and visual cues indicate instances of narrative significance by design. In the social exchanges of the ballroom sequence, a display of red flowers prefigures Blanche's encounter with Thorn; she stands before them, her eyes following his gesture toward her hand as an echo of that which marked Lawrence's proposal. The recurrence of this gesture serves a dual purpose by indicating a detail of *mise-en-scène* and operating as a visual cue. In an ensuing sequence, the flicker of orange-red light on Blanche's face signals the crackling sound of a fire

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which belies the social function of ballroom music and threatens the estate. Such instances operate as coordinates in the progression of the narrative and are similar to those noted by Elsaesser in his writing on melodrama as sustaining a metaphoric function (1987: 59).

The film text is a work of interpretation. Burgin's attention to the residual images of film ephemera indicates the influence of a configuration of materials (pressbooks, DVD) on the perception and recollection of film. This 'sequence-image' might be 'compared to a rapidly arpeggiated musical chord, the individual notes of which although sounded successively, vibrate together simultaneously' (2006: 21). In this sense, a fracture within the unfolding of colour system, design and text, in which 'this red' takes on a particular meaning within a 'generic field of reds' (Jameson 2007: 194), seems predisposed to the resonance of a 'sequence image' (lip-colour, the close-up).

An analogy of colour and music in production and film text indicates the possibilities of a design that plays on colour harmonies, rhythm and contrast as the unfolding of a colour idea similar to that identified by Kristeva (1982: 219). In *Blanche Fury* the contingent effects of design take on an expressive function which can participate in and counter narrative progression. Facets of representation, such as a colour bleed, are suggestive of the Kristevan semiotic. In *Blanche Fury*, this proposition extends to the variations in colour intensity and saturation which complementary harmonies emphasise. Investment in a facet of *mise-en-scène* or an incidental image through a shift in enunciation, such as a colour bleed, disturbs the codes and conventions of genre and film text to suggest a meaning beyond its immediate (in)significance.

The penultimate sequence of the film cross-cuts the procedure of Thorn's execution and Blanche's futile intervention in Lavinia's imminent death to intimate her perception and agency. Thorn, amid the muted blue-greys of his cell, states no desire in dialogue, while Blanche's actions are framed by the blue detailing of Clare Hall's peripheral buildings. The inter-cut image of idyllic blue sky recurs with the measured tone of the clock striking midday, marking the moment of execution. Here, blue takes on a musical value in the rhythm of its recurrence. As Blanche rushes into the fields and regains sight of Lavinia, the child's red jacket, shot at a high angle against the blue sky, operates as a visual trace of her encounters with Thorn and her desire for the child as heir to Clare Hall. An uneven balance of colours dominates Lavinia's fall to her death as the screen fades to black.<sup>13</sup>

In *Blanche Fury* the rhetoric of colour infiltrates the choreographies of design to emphasise the rhythm and bleed of colour contrasts as a

Kristevan semiotic, eluding language and historical context to evoke its expressive function through colour movement and balance. As colour mimics musical value the shift in the balance of two sub-systems (sonorous and chromatic) elicits an interstice proximal to perception within the organisation of a scopic economy around the female star. The female star/protagonist is positioned within a discourse of perception proximal to syntax and fracture to operate as a facet of an expressive form which can be read as a sub-text and agency.

#### Notes

1. *Blanche Fury* was initially filmed and released on three-strip Technicolor. This essay is informed by a Rank Classics DVD version (2005) and a print viewed at the BFI on 35 mm Eastmancolor stock. This print (from Rank Labs in 1989) was part of a restoration programme undertaken by Paul de Burgh for the National Film Archive and funded by the National Heritage Memorial Fund.
2. Bernard Happé notes the value of Technicolor's colour consultancy service as a concept, though suggests its influence diminished by the late 1940s. Few three-strip Technicolor films were available for reference and rushes were screened in black and white, so the consultancy service was a potential source of advice for colour design. Happé attributes the demise of the service to its encroachment on the role of set designers and art directors.
3. Cornwell-Clyne ([1936] 1951) similarly advocated a colour chart or script detailing the dominant colours for each sequence by representing them as vertical stripes of colour covering an area comparable to the intended colour areas of the image. These 'base notes' were to be layered with a transparent sheet of colour highlights used to accentuate the image. This practice follows his studies of colour and harmony in *Colour-Music: The Art of Light* (1926), which he wrote as Adrian Klein. The author was a technician and the head of the Gasparcolor offices (London) during this period, and directed *Colour on the Thames* (1935). In his 1926 work (57–8) he addresses the theorisation of a colour-music instrument suggesting correlation between alterations in volume of voice and its projections as the basis of a form of 'colour hearing'.
4. Blanche's agency is constructed at the levels of narrative and enunciation. Film dialogue reveals her decision to travel alone to Clare Hall, which instigates her meeting with Thorn and circumvents her uncle's formal introduction to Lawrence and Lavinia.
5. Higgins (2007: 18–19) describes complementary harmonies as those consisting of colours that are opposite on the colour circle and which operate on a basis of antithesis. Analogous harmonies describe those dependent on closely related hues, next to each other on a colour circle.
6. The tendency of three-strip Technicolor to bleed where two areas of intense colour meet is noted by David Pierce, Curator of the National Film Archive, who writes that 'while the colours could be bright, Technicolor dyes would bleed slightly, so the prints were never sharp, and Technicolor prints were seldom consistent from copy to copy' (2003: 17).
7. Laing (2007: 143–4) describes sonorous 'chromaticism' to define the gendered construction of characters through music and dialogue in 1940s melodrama.

## *Colour Consciousness and Design in Blanche Fury*

A chromatic scale, as a non-diatonic twelve-point scale including the semi-tones of the octave, describes a dissonant effect within the surge of symphonic music in moments of narrative disturbance. Music can conceal the female character's dialogue suggesting the dissolution of subjectivity. My use of the term chromatic scale primarily relates to the visual colour system. The surge of music which accompanies increased colour intensity which signal Blanche's realisation of Thorn's murderous intent are countered by her dialogue of questions disturbing gendered cinematic codes.

8. Kristeva (1982) explains how colour operates as a sub-text to the narrative. The unfolding of colour can offer a counterpoint to the articulations of narrative and syntax in both the fresco cycle and film as a storytelling exercise.
9. R. W. Haines (2003: 20) states that for three-strip Technicolor 'red was the most vibrant colour and tended to be used dramatically.'
10. René Hubert was the costume designer for the first British Technicolor production, *Wings of the Morning* (1936–7).
11. Three-strip Technicolor used a specialist camera and a dye imbibition printing process. In camera three-strip Technicolor used a prism to produce three colour registers (red, green, blue) on black and white film. These registers were used to make corresponding matrixes (yellow, cyan, magenta) which were aligned and printed on a single strip of film.
12. Eisenstein wrote that colour can embody sound through a film-making practice attentive to rhythm and 'the melodic outline of music and the tonal structure of systematically blended shots' (1970: 201).
13. Lavinia, as child and heir to Clare Hall, evades supervision to pursue a horse jump which she has been forbidden to try. This sequence recalls in style and content a similar occurrence in *Gone with the Wind* (1939). It is possible that the British film is being mapped in relation to *Gone with the Wind* as Technicolor predecessor as a contribution to marketing.

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