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## Nostalgia, Tinted Memories and Cinematic Historiography: On Otto Preminger's *Bonjour Tristesse* (1958)

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### Historiography, colour and cinema

Colour in film is a matter of subtle photochemical processes and inscriptions on delicate skins, called *pellicula* in Italian and *pellicule* in French, indicating proximity of physical and chemical procedures in the perception of the world. Inscriptions of light on film surfaces can create pleasant effects of shades and tones, but when applied excessively they ruin the surface and destroy the image. A similar phenomenon occurs on human skin. If exposed to the sun, Caucasian skin may stage a play of colours from pink to dark red. Colour films that have made an issue of the sunburn, usually on female skin, closely parallel the experience of seeing colours and that of feeling colours, giving a painful reminder of the physical basis in all filmic perception. It reminds the spectator that memory, as Nietzsche insisted, is always linked to a trace and a pain that remembers.<sup>1</sup> Colour in films, then, can be discussed as a special form of relating the technological, the physical, the aesthetic and the social side of cinema. Colour is a barely perceivable yet affective thread in the texture of cinematic historiography.

Colour sensation is an unstable element, especially in the case of cinema perception. Although colour film stock is usually durable, colours are perceived differently over the course of time, since their cultural impressions are subject to change. Film colours that appeared to be bright in the 1950s have become dull since more brilliant chemical colours have taken over the surfaces of things, textures, exteriors and, for that matter, cinematic looks. On the other hand, when in 2012 a digitally restored version of Méliès's *Le voyage dans la lune* (1902) was

shown in theatres and on television screens, audiences were taken aback by the neon-coloured images, which did not at all fit with what colours were expected to look like around 1900. Colour perception is relational, linked to temporal and spatial environments, even if these are imaginary or virtual. Colour in cinema is a matter of giving consistency to a fictional world, as Stanley Cavell asserts (1979, p. 81). Memory as triggered by colour is linked to a historical and culturally moulded spectrum on the one hand, and on personal reminiscences on the other. Historical films exploit these impacts of colour (the greenish tones of the 1930s, the specific reds of the 1940s) to evoke the feeling of a certain historical time. Acting as parasites on colour-memory, those films create a sense of 'pastness' through stylistic connotations, which Fredric Jameson in his essay on postmodernism has called nostalgic (1984, pp. 67ff). While nostalgia etymologically refers to a disease incited by the wish to return home, in the case of colour this malady has temporal rather than spatial ramifications. Specific colours evoke the wish to return to the familiar order of things as they are supposed to have been in the past. Nostalgia's time is the *futurum exactum*. While history as 'real history' is erased, colour perception marks the present as historical time, a symptom of the present's 'imprisonment in the past' (Jameson, 1983, p. 116).

Although colour obviously links historical, personal, cultural and psychological elements, it often escapes critical analysis. From the Renaissance onwards, knowledge has relied on the calculable, on the mathematical index of *disegno*, line, form, geometry and perspective as forms of controlling space. Colours and tones belong to the incalculable, are a matter of feelings and emotion, of involuntary associations, often associated with female approaches, with uncertainty and fading. Since Goethe's *Farbenlehre* and his discussion of physio-psychological effects in colour perception, the after-image for example, colours have, in psychology as in art history, been related to a form of automatism or an unconscious in human thinking, operating halfway between the wishful and the compulsive. No wonder, then, that uncontrollable phenomena of sudden and involuntary memories should be associated with indistinct yet striking sensuous perceptions, not only taste and smell, as in Marcel Proust, but also with light, lighting and, eventually, colour. A striking example is the flashback, both a technical and a psychological term. In its techniques of flashback, cinema's aesthetics are able to simulate mental procedures, as Hugo Münsterberg argued very early on in film theory (Münsterberg, 1916, p. 46). Cinematic flashbacks are often put into practice through effects of light, flash frames or a changing of tones or colours. They not only represent a change of mental mode in

the film's characters or plot, but also actually act on the minds of the audience, operating just below the level of conscious perception. Film aesthetics thus link the cultural and individual forms of remembering. Especially through colour, cinema relates, mixes and confuses personal and social memory. The analysis of this entanglement is difficult, since colour, as opposed to the logics of the line in *disegno*, generates its effects through interrelations, differences and vicinities, which are not easy to describe.

In cinema, a transformation from present reality to the past, to memories, dreams, visions or otherwise altered mental states in a film, may be achieved by a change of material from colour to a sudden black and white, or the other way around. The classic case is MGM's *The Wizard of Oz*, released in 1939, which starts in a grey monochromatic world called Kansas (or, for that matter, 'home') from where the main character, Dorothy Gale, is blown away by a tornado into the colourful world of Oz. Seemingly pure fantasy, this world will in the end be called 'a real, truly live place'. The girl Dorothy in this film is not nostalgic, not homesick for a place better than Oz. The misery of Kansas, depicted as dull, as in documentaries from the Depression years, is obvious to her and to the spectators. The film in its dual colour structure is illusory and disillusioning at the same time, as expressed in the *double entendre* of the girl's final statement: 'there's no place like home.' In the case of Victor Fleming's film, the difference between black and white and colour distinguishes two mental states of the protagonist uncannily meandering around the threshold of adulthood: while dressed as a child, actress Judy Garland is definitely a maturing young woman, something that definitely should have remained hidden in the toy-story of Oz.<sup>2</sup> Uncanny, then, is the return of the drives beyond the narrative plot. Desires and anxieties are present in the colours of the film, while the restraints and denials of real life are shot in shades of black and white. Spectators participate in the changing mental states of the protagonist through the film's colour dramaturgy. But audiences will do so differently today than at the time of the film's first release.

As well as the diegetic form of flashback, there is an extra-diegetic one. In this case, personal and biographical memories are triggered by film colour. An excellent example is Salman Rushdie's essay on *The Wizard of Oz*, in which he keeps involuntarily floating back into his own childhood memories through the colours. His meticulous analysis of the film is repeatedly interrupted by memories of his childhood in India triggered by the specific Technicolor of Oz. 'Thinking back once more to my Bombay childhood in the 1950s, a time when Hindi

movies were all black-and-white, I can recall the excitement of the advent of colour' (Rushdie, 2002, p. 32). Looking at old films in their specific colour qualities, spectators are likely to be drawn into personal flashbacks, as trips down the memory lanes of their own biographies. While watching old Technicolor films, or while looking at the specific colours of Super-8 films or the strange colours of early video formats, different age groups will be differently drawn into their own biographical colour environments, into a specifically tinted childhood imaginary. These memories are ambiguous in themselves, since remembering those colours is remembering the times when they did not attract our attention, when they seemed normal, transparent, just representing the real. As soon as colour ceases to be transparent and appears as a quality in its own right, it indicates 'pastness' in Jameson's sense: it communicates the illusion of returning home and opens personal doors of perception to historiography.

### Membranes and memories

Just as Victor Fleming in 1939 had used black and white to show the reality of depression in the US, Otto Preminger, in his *Bonjour Tristesse*, a film released both in Europe and in the US in 1958 as an adaptation of François Sagan's bestselling novel, used black and white to distinguish a depressed perception of the present from reminiscences of an untroubled past, a vacation by the Mediterranean sea which was interrupted by a dramatic, possibly even traumatic, incident. In *Bonjour Tristesse* these flashbacks are shot in Technicolor. A good deal of the nostalgia this film evokes today is due to the design, the fashion, the music, the acting and the moving bodies of the 1950s. Jean Seberg is the protagonist, Cécile, a sun-tanned strong and sporty party girl in a variety of fancy 1950s bathing suits, mingling associations of Greek physical ideals with anticipations of the 1960s' athleticism and libertinage. Seberg is the first American cinema girl to remodel European femininity through the American youth cultures that were broaching the issue of sexual relations. Sex, in all its bourgeois varieties, from pubertal innocence to incestuous compulsion, melancholy and sadism, Americanness and Frenchness, rules the plot. As Jean-Luc Godard had it in his *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, 'Bonjour Tristesse -Le fond des choses- le cul' (Godard, 1999, p. 39). Another major part of the film's nostalgia is related to the Technicolor material itself, to its lighting and cinematic surfaces. The deeply tinted colours of the landscape, the sky and sea are contrasted with the fragility of surfaces of dresses, skins and faces. This heightens the

perception of vulnerability that creates the film's impact. The restored, digitally remastered version in the original Cinemascope format was celebrated at major film festivals throughout 2012. It communicates an immediate impression of the specific surface design and colours of the 1950s. Yet the colour perception of current festival audiences probably differs greatly from what contemporaries saw in 1958. As documents prove (Hirsch, 2007; Fujiwara, 2008), even contemporary reception differed significantly between American and European audiences. Reality and its approach through cinematic forms, conveyed in colour or shades of black and white, obviously is a different matter for different people and audiences. And even individual distinctions are indisputable. While the film seems a feast of bliss and *bonheur* to some, others are irritated by its disturbing elements, which are also triggered at the level of colours. The presentation of sunburnt skin is not the least of irritations here. The fissure which colour dramaturgy provokes in the film is not just a chronological one between past and present. Colour, rather, exposes layers of both the film's and the girls' skins, addressing the issue of membranes of memory. Here, history and the return of various repressed issues come into play, which link historical, aesthetic and personal aspects. Preminger's views on European post-war society are communicated through colour and its irritating effects on perception.

The distribution of black and white and colour as signatures of the real, on the one hand, and signatures of fantastic dream worlds, on the other, is not historically stable. While colour in early films indicated a mode of spectacle, attraction and illusion (Gunning, 1995), it was only later conceived of as a necessary completion to represent reality. As Edward Buscombe stated: 'We perceive the world as coloured, after all, and therefore an accurate representation of it should also be coloured' (1985, p. 88). This statement itself could only have been made in the 1970s, in the decade of colour TV's triumph over cinema. Colour is a matter of industrial standards rather than of the real or fantastic.

But, even in the longer course of history, colour had never been a simple or reliable indicator of the distinction between reality and imagination. Film styles change with technological innovations. The first complicated forms of colour film demanded several cameras, and later a single camera which was heavy and hard to handle. Colour film stock was expensive and difficult to process. Colour demanded meticulous planning in terms of lighting and acting. But it allowed surprising effects in a consistently composed world. Genre styles that relate to the utopian or to the lost, musical, Western or melodrama, have always relied on strict colour schemes. Until the 1970s black-and-white material had

indicated mobile and journalistic forms of filming, reminded audiences of photojournalism and reportage, and was aesthetically closely connected to the retrieval of social and political evidence. But as soon as 16 mm colour reversal films entered the scene of news coverage in television, this relation was inverted. Only through time is the historicity of colour and colour relations conveyed. Usually, every contemporary form of technical and photographic image is perceived as transparent and apt to represent reality. This is as true for black-and-white photography as it was for the images of Technicolor in their unlikely shades and tones. In retrospective, it is irritating to think that they were once conceived of as adding realism to films, albeit an *enhanced* one, as Natalie Kalmus, wife and on-set controller of Technicolor inventor Herbert Kalmus, put it in her famous article *Colour Consciousness* from 1935: with chromatic sensations, 'motion pictures are able to duplicate faithfully all the auditory and visual sensations. This enhanced realism enables us to portrait life and nature as it really is' (Kalmus, 1935, p. 139). Instead, different colour schemes transform the logics of plot, character and impact. Discussing what cinematic reality could be, Stanley Cavell asserts that the use of colour in his contemporary cinema had a 'de-psychologizing and de-theatricalizing' effect on its subjects (1979, p. 89). Discussing the films of Michelangelo Antonioni, the cinema of the Nouvelle Vague and of Alfred Hitchcock, Cavell observes that these directors were constructing reality through the inventive use of colour, as opposed to Jean-Luc Godard, whom he accuses of adopting a dramaturgy of colours that is close to advertising. Godard does, in fact, draw our attention to the fact that advertising and its colours are exactly where urgent and emergent collective imaginaries come into view. In an article on colour strategies of the Nouvelle Vague, Alain Bergala points out that Godard's use of colour created new forms of spatio-temporal relations in cinema. In this sense, Godard seems to have been the first after Méliès to use colour as a deliberately untransparent mode of depiction. He strove for an impression of reality by emphasising the artificiality of colour and consequently marking the film as screen and medium between the world and the viewers. Preminger's strategy of colour, especially in the film *Bonjour Tristesse*, is radically formalistic and surprisingly close to Godard's own. While it is well known that Godard, as author of the *Cahiers du cinéma* that featured Seberg on the cover in February 1958 when the film opened (De Baeque, 2010, p. 120), directly picked Seberg from the set of *Bonjour Tristesse* to star in *A bout de souffle*, Godard's debt to Preminger's work with colour seems underrated. Richard Brody related the structure of Godard's *Eloge de l'amour* (2001) to Preminger

when he remarked that 'the film's colour scheme, with the present shot in black-and-white and the flashback in colour, is derived from Otto Preminger's *Bonjour Tristesse*' (2008, p. 606), stressing the fact that *Eloge de l'amour*, too, is dealing with the presence of the past in personal, political and cinematic terms, 'a film of history in which the past is revealed to live in the present' (p. 588). Apart from this overall structure, Preminger's work with primary colours, which adds a layer of chromatic relations to the chronic plot of figures and forms, antecedes Godard's colour dramaturgy. Preminger and Godard use colours in an alienating way and to accentuate film and screen as transformative media devices. In Preminger's film, primary colours are used to combine ineffable relationships: the incestuous ties between Cécile and her father, which Preminger and his cameraman Georges Périnal manage to keep constantly present by focusing on identical, corresponding, complementary or contrarian patterns of colour in Raymond's and Cécile's clothing. On another level, these colours are embedded in the surrounding or environmental colours, in natural or urban textures. On a third level, vectors are construed towards semantic or symbolic codes of colour: whiteness for presumed innocence, blue, white, red for the French tricolour, and an insistent green for the dresses of those who don't fit in with the bourgeois environment. Repeatedly colour is applied to irritate, to disturb and to point out an irreconcilable element.

The element of control of colours is addressed in the character of Anne Larson (Deborah Kerr), the fashion designer who joins the vacationing crowd and who, as a false but dictatorial mother-figure, will be the victim of Cécile's machinations. Anne Larson fails in her effort to control. An inscription of colour turning evil or even malign is achieved by repeatedly focusing on the sunburn of the father's young mistress, Elsa Mackenbourg (Mylène Demongeot), clearly depicted as an Eastern European figure by look, behaviour and language. This sunburn, the apparent destruction of a *jeune fille en fleur* who has not stayed in the shade, already appears in Sagan's novel. But the film stages it in a downright sadistic way, the burnt and oversensitive skin relating both to the excessive desire of the girl to please elderly gentlemen and to her visible vulnerability. Thus, the vulnerability of all membranes involved in cinematic perception is envisioned. In Preminger's film, two levels of colour schemes interlace: sadistic games of physicality and surface, and schemes of primary colours that introduce abstraction and a larger social matrix of symbolic colourings.

In view of the close resemblance of Preminger's and Godard's operations with film colours, the question of the real in those aesthetics

can be reconsidered. Preminger's film *Bonjour Tristesse*, which in its title already evokes the notion of the nostalgic, that is, an operation of erasing history in favour of a feeling of 'pastness', reveals a new layer of meaning if it is perceived according to colour. The film was produced, directed, shot and post-produced over the course of Preminger's post-war return to Europe. Being Jewish and fed up with German cultural politics, Preminger had left Europe in 1935 on the invitation of Joseph Schenck and Twentieth Century Fox. After the war, Preminger's adaptation of George Bernard Shaw's *St. Joan*, shot in black and white, for which he had discovered the actress Jean Seberg, was a first step to working with British personnel according to the post-war Eady plan devised to distribute a share of the American production capital within England (Fujiwara, 2008, p. 198). *Bonjour Tristesse*, shot just a year later and mostly on location on the French Riviera and in the seaside villa of publisher Pierre Lazareff, differs fundamentally from *St. Joan* in all aesthetic categories. Its colour dramaturgy evokes differences of perception between audiences in Europe and in the US, between audiences then and now, between the feeling of post-war *bonheur*, definitely a symptom of nostalgia, and the discomfort of those who returned from voluntary or involuntary exile.

### Colours of the real

Preminger's *Bonjour Tristesse* opens with Saul Bass's titles in their specific watercolour look characteristic of the 1950s, pans over the roofs of Paris in black and white, accompanied by the theme of *tristesse* George Auric composed for the film, to continue with a first scene in a tone of existentialist risky carelessness. Seberg's character in *Bonjour Tristesse*, Cécile, meanders through galleries, restaurants and clubs, mingles with society people, to eventually meet and dance with her rather sybaritic bachelor father and afterwards to fall into a very depressive mood, remembering a vacation on the French Riviera and her loss of innocence in all respects. Stunning in this first black-and white scene is the long enduring gaze of Seberg directly into the camera; later a leitmotiv of *A bout de souffle* (Figure 12.1).

Thus violating the Hollywood laws of framing, Preminger is literally penetrating the surface of the film. And, while crossing the invisible fourth wall of classical cinema space, Seberg's interior off-monologue mixes imperceptibly with Juliette Greco's voice singing the words of the title song, beginning with 'I live with melancholy', another mental illness that can also imply grappling with the past. Here, then, Seberg



Figure 12.1 Direct gaze of Seberg into the camera (*Bonjour Tristesse*, screenshot)

pronounces the central sentence of the film: 'I am surrounded by an invisible wall of memories.' In his film, Preminger construes this with colours, visible yet not likely to be perceived. The gaze into the camera will be constantly repeated in the film's black-and-white scenes, but it never occurs in the colour sequences. Thus, the flashy Technicolor scenes seem to represent objectively perceived reality, while the black-and-white scenes maintain the connection to the affectivity of an interior protocol. Then, during the extended interior monologue, colour gradually enters the frame like liquid being poured into it. At first blue spaces and the sea, then red objects and textures, then the white of the villa's architectural backdrop and finally the colours of the French Riviera landscape and nature, mainly shades of green, are filled into the scene. The coloured past enters as an insistent element of reality, while the monochrome present appears as an unreal, subjective and emotionally tinted layer of the film.

The film's drama and narration play on the mathematics of the number three. This is true for the magic triangle of daughter, father and his changing girlfriends in the film, but also in terms of colour structure. Three basic colours form the drama: red, blue and white. But then there is always one more, one colour too many. Sometimes a sudden green or pink, sometimes another less saturated colour is added to the primary tricolour. The structure of the film is thus based on three plus one. Three form a harmony, and every additional one causes disturbances and irritation in the story. In his colour dramaturgy, Preminger deliberately confuses the familiar mode of representing chronological time,

which would depict the present tense of narration in affective coloured images while diffusing memories in the distancing aesthetics of black and white. When asked by Peter Bogdanovich why he decided to 'use colour for the memory scenes and black-and-white for the present' in *Bonjour Tristesse*, Otto Preminger answered: 'I am not particularly fond of flashbacks, so I probably tried to make it more agreeable or interesting by doing *that*' (1997, p. 629). Through this central structure of the film, though, Preminger has made a peremptory statement concerning history and cinema.

Changing the chronological order of black and white and colour in the film's narrative contests a notion of cinema's history, which is usually conceived of as a development from black and white to colour. The reverse is true, though. Early cinema was full of colours and colouring systems, hand-painted and stencilled, tinted and toned. Only in the 1920s did cinema systematically develop the art of black and white, its mastery of light in expressionism, constructivism and film noir, until, in the mid-1930s, colour processes eventually returned to the studios, prominently in the *Wizard of Oz* in 1939 – and then to Salman Rushdie's *India*. Approximately at that time, in 1935, Preminger left Europe for Hollywood. Since then, colours have come and gone in different shades and tonalities, subjected to rules of fashion or economics. Preminger's strategy to switch from black and white to colour images deceives the viewers into perceiving a movement from the highlighted presence of the holidays at the French Riviera back to the gloomy times of wild days in Clichy or Paris; at least, for contemporary audiences. Chronologically, of course, the dark nights in Paris are the tinted present of Preminger's film, or else the tinted future of the past perfect of the lost time. Melancholy, even more than nostalgia, loses track of a chronological order of narration to highlight the story around the concealed traumatic incident. But, beyond the individual traumatic triangle of family relations (after all, the 'real' mother is missing altogether), another broader social and historical layer of memory and trauma of the film comes into sight. In the post-war politics of cinema, colour once more joins the personal and the social.

Due to conventions of representation, the mode of showing a collective past would be in black and white, complying with the conventions of most historical documentary films. But, while it is true that most newsreel material was shot on black-and-white stock, this is certainly no general rule linked to technological standards, national taste or cultural politics. Cinematic memory in post-war Germany, for instance, had for a long time preserved the past, and especially the years of

fascism, exclusively in black and white, while colour usually indicated post-war normality. Germans, so it could be claimed, preferred to remain in a colourful dreamlike post-war present, displacing evidence of the crimes committed into the distance of a black-and-white perception of the past. When colour newsreel films of Nazi Germany surfaced in the 1970s, audiences were shocked. Through colour, the horror had come closer, had become more real. For the same reason, in his *Nuit et Brouillard*, Alain Resnais interlaced colour material with the black-and-white footage of the concentration camps as they were shot in the war, thus finding a film form that would realise the presence of the past. Resnais solved the problem primarily through his montage of material – even if the text and voice of Jean Cayrol as well as the music of Hanns Eisler congenially interweave past and present in their disturbing composition of acoustic layers and overtones. Resnais's film was released in 1955, shortly before Preminger started working on *Bonjour Tristesse*.

Jean-Luc Godard has made a crucial point of the colour case in cinematic memory. In the first part of his *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988) he deals with history, film industry and aesthetics. In this section Godard discusses a 'resurrection of the documentary' in 1944, writing in verses: 'and if George Stevens | hadn't been the first to use | the first sixteen millimeter colour film | at Auschwitz and Ravensbrück | there's no doubt | that Elizabeth Taylor's | air of well-being | would never have found | a place in the sun' (Godard, 1999, I, 15, p. 43).

There are slight and probably intended inaccuracies in this. The film director and cameraman George Stevens, who had directed comedies and musicals in his earlier career, went to Europe as a lieutenant colonel in the US Army Signal Corps. Like John Ford, Samuel Fuller and others, he had filmed the liberation of concentration camps, in his case Dachau, using 16 mm colour film stock. As far as the protocols show at the Imperial War Museum, where his material is archived, he had not been to Auschwitz or Ravensbrück. Godard is obviously condensing matters in order to refer to Theodor W. Adorno's statement that there can be no poetry after Auschwitz, a position Godard has always severely contested. George Stevens compiled the material he had shot in Dachau in his film *Nazi Concentration Camps*, which was projected as evidence at the Nuremberg Trials. This introduction of colour into the reality of atrocities, or, rather, the introduction of atrocities as evidence in colour, according to Godard, fundamentally changed the idea of the documentary. With Stevens's films, the relation between film colour and reality became contingent, touched people, perpetrated the safe screen and screening of memories. The reference to atrocities was less formalised,

the images had an immediate effect, albeit a culturally mediated one. This rupture in the documentary relation was not caused by montage, but by the film stock itself. It seems that Martin Scorsese in his film *Shutter Island* (2010), set in the year 1954, takes his cue from Stevens, Resnais and Godard. The plot of the film deploys the trauma of a soldier who had been part of the US Army unit discovering the prisoners in Dachau, which in post-war times leads to an inverted and barred memory. *Shutter Island* also employs the dramaturgy of colour as of false, tinted and toned Technicolor memory when it cinematically transfers and communicates the disturbed forms of post-war memory.

In the 1940s, colour film stock on 16 mm had been widely used for home movie formats. George Stevens's images proved that the two realities, the documentaries and the home movies, the camps and the homes, had always existed side by side. Therefore, Godard continues in the *Histoire(s) du cinéma*: 'thirty-nine | forty-four | martyrdom and resurrection | of the documentary O how marvelous | to be able to watch | what one can't see | o sweet miracle of our blind eyes' (Godard, 1999, I, 15, p. 43).

In 1945 nobody really wanted see what Stevens had recorded on colour film stock. Bergala in his essay on the Nouvelle Vague writes: '*L'horreur en couleur de ce que l'on n'avait pas voulu voir*' (1995, p. 128). It was primarily the colour of the films that produced a disturbing moment and thus fundamentally questioned the possibility of representing the horror of history. With colour, historical memory broke through the controlling fourth wall of nostalgic cinema. Instead of representation, colour was conceived of as an instant affect connecting present and past. Godard then links this with George Stevens's most successful movie from 1951, again shot in black and white: *A Place in the Sun*. As opposed to Theodore Dreiser's original novel *An American Tragedy*, the hero in Stevens's film, a young ambitious person who will be tried for murder in the end, played by Montgomery Clift, is called George Eastman. The hero is thus named after a famous pioneer of film technology who had invented perforation and worked on film stock. In Eastman's factory in Rochester, Eastmancolour had been invented in 1939, as the first monopack colour film stock, which made filming much more flexible and mobile. In Stevens's movie *A Place in the Sun*, the Eastman factory is transformed into a factory for swimming suits. The film begins with a huge billboard showing a girl in a bathing suit, in the sun, together with the caption 'This is an Eastman'. Despite references to *Eastman, in other words, to the development of colour film stock* throughout the film, colour is markedly absent, remaining a blind

spot of post-war perception, albeit an insistent one. In Stevens's film, as Godard has underlined, the emotions turn out to be an issue of the intimate as well as of the industrial. Again, colour and girls' skin are closely linked. And they are linked to industry as the masterplan of representation: 'But otherwise the cinema is an industry | and if the First World War | had enabled | the American cinema | to ruin the French cinema | with the birth of television | the Second would enable it to finance | that is, ruin all the European cinemas' (Godard, 1999, 1, 16, p. 44). Godard's argument on film colour is not one of distinguishing the real and the fantastic, or truth or fiction; he is discussing the instability, the vulnerability and destructibility of perception in terms of the personal, the industrial and the political at the same time.

### Tricolours

Film colour after the Second World War was no longer a matter of feelings and emotions, but a matter of industries, as well as politics and ideologies. Andrew Dudley (1980), in his seminal essay on 'The Postwar Struggle for Colour', underlines that the war between political systems in the Second World War extended to the aesthetic realms of the US system of Technicolor and the German Agfacolour. Film colour and film sound, those very affective and emotional aspects of cinema that strongly shape and mould memories as nostalgic feelings, are entangled with industrial plans, market strategies and imperial politics. Interestingly, and this escapes Dudley's attention, the German chemical and colours industry IG Farben, also producer of the gas for the death chambers, held a subsidiary company in California throughout the Second World War. In 1945 the French film industry wavered in its decision over a film colour system, since the development of a proper French colour film production was unlikely. In 1945, then, as Dudley writes, 'there was the assumption that the natural colour sense and good taste of the French would be able to choose one or another foreign process and put it to uses never before imagined. Choices seemed to be between Technicolor and Agfacolour' (1980, p. 63). When Preminger began to shoot *Bonjour Tristesse* on colour stock in July 1957, he did so in the midst of this historical tension, although, as an American in Paris and on the Riviera, there was little doubt that he would use the Technicolor system. Still, he addresses the issue of colour and memory in his film in a subtle and probably not altogether conscious way.

In one of the most stunning scenes of the film, which on first sight seems to stem from the tradition of the musical, the complete cast of

characters meets at the harbour of a little fishing town, supposed to be St Tropez. Again, introduced by a melancholic black-and-white shot of Cécile looking at the audience, at us, through the reflection of a mirror, where she remembers: 'we did have fun then, and everybody was so nice to everyone else', Preminger cuts to a Cinemascope long shot of the colour scene of a huge summer party where tourists and the town's people join in dancing and drinking. The image here is composed nearly exclusively of blues, reds and whites forming the dizzying image of the French tricolour turning into a wild vortex. When eventually everybody gets up to form a Polonaise, this is led by a bearded and dark-skinned young man wearing a Phrygian cap, which historically marked the opposition to Greek culture, a sign of those from the margins, of the peripheral people. Later it was worn by the Republican opposition in the French Revolution. In the film, the scene and its music it is linked to Eastern European cultures. The dancing, too, turns out to be not French at all but some sort of carnival movement, performed by all sorts of people and peoples. As the diverse dancers pass, a carnival of old European souls seems to spread across the marketplace. Gradually the colours of the people's costumes mix and the tricolour dissolves. Among the dancers, the sunburnt Elsa in a green dress keeps appearing and disappearing in the crowd. Again, her skin marks the vulnerability of *bonheur*, well-being, and significantly she says: 'The music is brilliant, it has even made me forget the last of my sunburn.' Truffaut, in his homage to the film, ends by stating: 'His [Preminger's] vision of Saint Tropez is not very strict. *Bonjour Tristesse* is not France as seen naively by an American, but France as shown to the Americans the way they like it, by a European who is clear minded and very contemptuous' (1958, pp. 166–167). It is significant that for Truffaut this scene should betray Preminger's attitude. Full of contempt, *méprisant*, will also be the way Godard in his later film *Le Mépris* dismisses those directors who cooperate with the American film industry. Against the American destruction of French cinema, Godard, in 1963, called Fritz Lang and his Greek Project of Ulysses to his set, prominently featuring fake Technicolor cameramen in the final shot, trying in vain to capture the invisible Greek gods for the screen. What Truffaut perceives is that Preminger's staging of the scene is not trying to simulate Frenchness, but, much rather, the failure ever to be French again. Obviously, the French themselves liked this estrangement, as Preminger remarks: '*Bonjour Tristesse* [...] was a very big success in France and in America the critics said it wasn't French enough which is very funny' (Bogdanovich, 1997, p. 629). What is striking here is that the colours themselves negotiate the Frenchness of the scene, but in a

double sense. Technicolor is pretending to do the tricolour. Colour perception as sensuous is contrasted with colour as a sign or signal. Colour as intrinsic to film stock is contrasted with the signal level of colour, which is insensitive to film stock, and thus the political side of perception. Of course, the two cannot be separated. But, in Preminger's film, the sensuous colour perception, colour as physiological affect and memory is highlighted by constantly referring to the burnt skin.

Altogether de-psychologizing the plot, colour on this level acts as a political force. The American colours themselves introduce a condescending view of Frenchness, since French cinema does not have its own colours. While using French design (the robes and swimming suits of Givenchy), it shows it on American and British actresses, imposing American sexuality through the depiction of girls and their skin and membranes. And Technicolor appropriates the French Riviera, sea and landscape. Astonishingly enough, French audiences liked the slight estrangement of the view on France, opening in the film with Juliet Greco singing her chanson in English, albeit with a sweet French accent. There is, indeed, nostalgia in this film, because Preminger is not addressing European or French history as it really was, the traumatic, the genocide, but he is conceptualising a Europe that would have integrated and sheltered all its peripheral people: a Europe that would have been like Preminger's US. This nostalgic plan is sketched out on the skin of the film and the skin of the American girl Cécile. Through its colour structure, the film reveals that Preminger's return to Europe is not a homecoming, not a *nostos*, and in no way nostalgic. Coming back, Preminger found 'a place surrounded by an invisible wall of memories', which he renders visible through the colours in his film. The issue of the surface of the girl Elsa's burnt skin keeps reminding the audience of the fact that light is not only a metaphor for enlightenment or reconaissance, but can also be destructive. There is a wound; something traumatic is indicated where the film's skin becomes dysfunctional. It is the colouring that resists closure in the film.

## Notes

1. Friedrich Nietzsche (2001) 'On the Genealogy of Morals', in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, introduction by Peter Gay. New York: Random House, Modern Library Edition, p. 497:

Perhaps indeed there was nothing more fearful and uncanny in the whole prehistory of man than his *mnemotechnics*. 'If something is to stay in the memory it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to *hurt* stays in

the memory', this is a main clause of the oldest (unhappily also the most enduring) psychology on earth.

2. Cf. Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny[1919]', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated from the German under the General Editorship of James Strachey. In collaboration with Anna Freud. Assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson. 24 volumes. Vintage, 1999, 17: 217–256.

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