

Erik O. R. Hedling:

Color and Monochrome in Lindsay Anderson's *if...*: An Analysis

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Color films are actually as old as the film medium itself. As early as 1894, Edison's Kinetoscope-studio used hand-applied paint to make the spectacular new attraction even more spectacular in *Annabelle's Dance*¹. George Méliès, generally considered to be the first film director, used this device frequently in his filmic tales of the fantastic from 1897 onwards. In about 1907, when the first real industrial phase of cinema started and films grew in length, hand-coloring was abandoned² in favour of tinting and toning³, which – in spite of early experiments with two-color systems like Kinemacolor – remained the dominant ways of coloring films until the end of the silent era. The twenties saw the advent of Technicolor's two-color system, as been shown in Albert Parker's *The Black Pirate* (1926). Color films, in the modern sense, arrived in the thirties with Technicolor's three-color system; Rouben Mamoulian's *Becky Sharp* (1935) was the first feature film shot entirely in color.⁴

Today it has become inevitable to consider color as an important formal property of cinema which has to be taken into serious consideration when analyzing specific films, genres or different modes of narration. It adds a semantic dimension to films and can be used by filmmakers in many different ways. One interesting possibility is the use of black and white sequences in color films or vice versa. It is my concern here to try to show how this alternation works in a specific film: Lindsay Anderson's *if...* (1968).

The Background

No film is, of course, entirely original; it more or less depends – among other things – on its relations to other films. In its use of a formal property it can conform to extrinsic norms, deviate from them, or do both. Therefore it is necessary for the critic to construct a coherent background against which to read the film⁵: in the present case the necessity lies in outlining briefly the historical norms that determine the alternation of color and black and white in narrative films.

In classical Hollywood narration⁶ this kind of manipulation of the visual surface can be read according to a limited number of cinematic sub-codes⁷. In some films it functions as a means of separating "objective reality" from "subjective fantasy" (or what Edward Branigan has called "mental process narration"⁸). In Victor Fleming's *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) the Kansas scenes are in black and white (sepia-tinted) and the Oz scenes in color. The main part of the narrative consists of a dream had by the protagonist, Dorothy (Judy Garland). By using color in the dream sequence, as opposed to the use of black and white in the "real" scenes, the narration makes clearer the fact that it is "dreaming". A similar use, albeit with a radically shorter dream sequence, can be found in Clarence Brown's *The Secret Garden* (1949). Another example is Samuel Fuller's *Shock Corridor* (1964). In the latter film the director includes color footage from his own Cinemascope feature *The House of Bamboo* (1955)⁹. The sequence signifies a deririous dream had by Johny Barrett (Peter Breck), a journalist who disguised as a patient gradually declined mentally while trying to investigate the unsatisfactory state of things at a psychiatric clinic. Fuller repeated this trick in *The Naked Kiss* (1965), where 16 mm color footage from Venice was used for Kelly's (Constance Towers) day-dreaming¹⁰.

A different practice has some of its roots in the silent era and in the first tentative experiments with Technicolor's two-color system. The color sequence was inserted into otherwise black and white films for *dramatic emphasis*, as, for example, in Cecil B. de Mille's *The Ten Commandments* (1922), Rupert Julian's *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) or Fred Niblo's *Ben Hur* (1927). Spectacular, crucial and/or symbolically important moments were highlighted or created with the aid of color. This strategy continued in the sound era, and thus in the early thirties musicals often went into color for their climax number. In *The Women* (1939) George Cukor used color for the splendidly lavish mannequin show, which according to Eithne Bourget was a metaphor for the superficial

"theatricality" of the diegetic world¹¹. In Albert Lewin's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945) the image goes into color whenever the picture is shown. A modern example is Francis Ford Coppola's black and white *Rumble Fish* (1983), where hand-coloring is used to emphasize the metaphorical status of the fish. Conversely, black and white, with its traditional ability to connote "reality"¹², can be inserted into color films; in the end of Walter Hill's western *The Long Riders* (1979) the image fades to black and white as if to further stress the tragedy. An original use of color images can be seen in Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull* (1980), where excerpts from a "home movie" in color are juxtaposed with black and white pictures from a boxing match in a montage sequence. The color change here underlines the incompatibility of the private and public worlds of the champion Jake la Motta (Robert de Niro)¹³.

In modern Hollywood-style cinema this device often signifies *temporal changes*, or, more precisely, that the filmic discourse presents story events in a non-chronological order¹⁴. A black and white sequence usually indicates a flash-back to a time prior to the "now" of the story, as in William Wyler's *The Collector* (1965). In Alan Pakula's *Sophie's Choice* (1982) Sophie (Meryl Streep) recounts her memories from war-time Poland and her experiences as a concentration camp prisoner. The black and white sequences not only signify flash-backs in regard to the diegetic "now", but also "reality" of "historical fact". Similar connotations can be ascribed to the black and white flash-backs in Paul Schrader's *Mishima* (1985) and Walter Hill's *Crossroads* (1986). Sometimes historical flash-backs are sepia-tinted in order to make them look like aged photographs, as, for example, in Sidney Lumet's *Daniel* (1983).

In the other major mode of narration in film history, labeled by David Bordwell as (European) "art-cinema narration"¹⁵, one finds very similar uses of alternation of color and black and white. This might seem odd, since art cinema – in contrast with the unity of classical films – has traditionally tended to strive for an expressive realism, in which cinematic devices and narrative strategies often are used experimentally in order to create psychological ambiguity¹⁶. Nevertheless, a few examples should show that the same sub-codes also have relevance to films made in this narrative mode.

An instance of color change as a signifier of *mental process narration* can be found in Michael Powell's and Emeric Pressburger's *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946). An interesting and original aspect of this film, as John Ellis has shown¹⁷, is that the hallucinations about heaven that Squadron Leader Peter Carter (David Niven) had as a result of a concussion, are in black and white, while the narrative "real" on earth is portrayed in Technicolor.

A more frequent strategy in art cinema as well as in classical cinema is the use of color change for *dramatic emphasis*. Some examples will illustrate this. In Jan Troell's *Here Is Your Life* (1966) there is a short two-color sequence in which we see a bird rising against the background of a valley: an obvious metaphor for the protagonist's (Eddie Axberg) breaking up from the austerity of his native land in northern Sweden. Another black and white film that begins in color is Agnès Varda's *Cleo From 5 To 7* (1962). The color sequence shows the fortune teller's cards, so that their crucial role in the narrative is brought into prominence. A famous inserted color sequence is the feast scene in Sergei Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible Part II* (1944). This spectacular musical number with the Oprichniki dancing and Fyodor singing also contains the mock coronation of Vladimir, the boyar's candidate for Ivan's throne. As Vladimir is murdered in the following black and white procession scene by an assassin

who thinks he is killing Ivan, the color in the feast scene, apart from its role of enriching the singing and dancing, also functions as a means of ironically contrasting Vladimir's sudden rise with his subsequent fall¹⁸. In Andrey Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979) we are confronted with a world struck by some kind of natural catastrophe. The area affected by this strange disaster, The Zone, is shut off by the authorities, but three men – the stalker, a writer and a scientist – defy the ban and enter the Zone. Their world is depicted in black and white, but as soon as they reach the forbidden area on their bogie the film switches to color, a sign of the mysterious, unreal nature of the Zone. Another example of using color for *dramatic emphasis* is the image of the bright square in Bernardo Bertolucci's *Before the Revolution* (1965). As in Hollywood films, black and white sequences can be inserted into color films in order to add a "documentary" dimension, as in the images from the front in Elem Klimov's *Agonia* (1981) and the scene of the murder of archduke Francis Ferdinand (Armin Müller-Stahl) at the end of Istvan Szabo's *Colonel Redl* (1984)¹⁹.

Color alternation indicating *temporal changes* can be found in art-cinema narration too, as illustrated by Claude Lelouch's *A Man and a Woman* (1966) and Andrey Konchalovsky's *A Nest of Gentlemen* (1971), where the diegetic "now" is in color and the flash-backs in black and white.

The sum up: I think it is reasonable to argue that the historical norms generally make it possible to read the alternation of color and black and white according to three major sub-codes:

1. The color change can signify a turn into *mental process narration*.

2. It might indicate *dramatic emphasis* of a spectacular, crucial and/or symbolically important moment of the narrative.

3. It can signify *temporal changes*.²⁰

These sub-codes may often overlap, but generally the narration of a specific film is highly communicative²¹ about its own intrinsic norm for color alternation. There are, however, deviations from the extrinsic norms, one of which will be considered below.

If...

Lindsay Anderson has frequently used color changes in his films. In *The White Bus* (1967) and *O Lucky Man!* (1973) the device is used in a way that conforms to the *dramatic emphasis* code. The color alternations in *if...* – a film written by Anderson and David Sherwin and shot by Miroslav Ondricek – are more difficult to grasp.

Synopsis

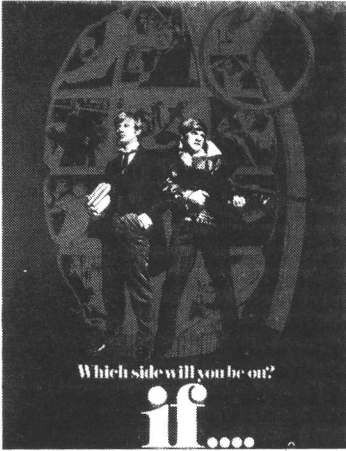
College reconvenes for the Winter Term. The boys of College House inspect lists, find their places and unpack their things. New boys like Jute (Sean Bury), are "Scum". Authority among the boys is represented by four prefects known as "Whips": the inpeccable Rowntree (Robert Swann), Denson (Hugh Thomas), a puritanical martinet... Mick Travis (Malcolm McDowell), a senior boy, arrives wearing a broad-brimmed hat and a scarf wound round his jaw to hide the moustache grown in the holidays. He and his friends Johnny Knightly (David Wood) and Wallace (Richard Warwick) have little respect for tradition.

College settles down to routine: chapel, learning, games. Jute is grilled until he is letter perfect in the obligatory slang. Mick covers his study walls with images of freedom and violence from the world outside; while dreaming, he listens to primitive music on his record-player. Biles (Brian Pettifer) is hunted, captured and strung upside-down in the lavatory. Term gets under way.

Bobby Phillips (Rupert Webster), Rowntree's attractive Scum, serves tea and crumpets to the Whips in their common room. In his study Knightly leafs through magazines, while Wallace peers into the mirror for symptoms of decay and Mick writes notes for a philosophical credo: "Violence and revolution are the only pure acts!"

Bobby Phillips is conscious of, and repelled by, Denson's yearning. Enthralled he watches Wallace perform on the horizontal bar in the gym: a friendship is formed. During a college match, when they should be "cheering loudly", Mick and Knightly escape down town, pinch a motor bike, and ride off the adventure and excitement with the girl (Christine Noonan) at the Packhorse café.

Mick, Knightly and Wallace are told by Rowntree that they have become a "general nuisance" and a bad example to the House. They are beaten. The pressures of authority mount. The three boys mingle blood in a ceremony of solidarity. During a College Cadet Corps field exercise, bullets suddenly puncture the tea urn. Mick attacks the chaplain (Geoffrey Chater). The Headmaster (Peter Jeffrey) gives the rebels a last chance: the Privilege of Service. They are set to work clearing lumber from under the stage in the College Hall. They discover a stack of arms.



Speech Day. General Denson (Anthony Nicholls) is addressing the boys and parents on the duties of Privilege when the Hall goes up in smoke. The assembly pour out into the Quad, to be met by a hail of fire. The rebels have installed themselves on the roof. The Headmaster steps forward. The girl from the Packhorse café (Christine Noonan) takes steady aim and fires. The Establishment counterattacks. Mick is firing with his back against the wall...

Monochrome sequences

if... is mainly a color film, where black and white sequences – or rather monochrome, since they are tinted in either sepia or magenta – are inserted. The following sequences are in monochrome (ordered as they appear in the film):

1. The House master's wife (Mary Macleod) accompanies the new Under-master (Ben Aris) to his lodgings in the House.
2. The outside of the House at night. Then an interior scene from the Senior Dormitory.
3. The school gathered in the chapel for service.
4. The outside of the House at night.
5. The juniors cooking food in the boot-room.
6. Chapel service. Rowntree preaches from the Book of Deuteronomy. In the middle of the sequence there is a cut to a color image of a stained glass window. The monochrome continues after a cut from the

chapel to the gym. The juniors practice vaults. Wallace performs on the horizontal bar. Mick, Knightly and Wallace fence in the gym.

7. Mick and Knightly meet the girl in the Packhorse café.

8. Exterior of the House at night. Denson talks to the Under-master and then inspects the school Armoury, where Wallace and Phillips are smoking.²²

9. Pan over the Junior Dormitory. Wallace is lying in Phillips' bed. Mick and Peanuts (Philip Bagenal) in a window. Mick looks through a telescope and sees the girl.

10. The chaplain preaches in the chapel.

11. Interiors from the empty House. The House master's wife wanders about naked. In the middle of the sequence there is a cut to the College Cadet Corps marching in color.

12. The boys and the girl under the stage in the College Hall.

Analysis

Already after the first two monochrome sequences it becomes quite obvious that *if...* in its use of color changes, differs from most other films. In the first of these sequences we see the Under-master and the House master's wife. It could – although nothing apart from the color change indicates it – be read as *mental process narration* or *temporal change*. It could also be read as an instance of *dramatic emphasis*, since the monochrome appears to underline the depressing, "realistic", milieu that the new Under-master encounters. However, when a new monochrome sequence follows a few shots later, all of the above deductions become redundant. In this sequence we see first the House and then the Senior Dormitory. This scene, clearly, is neither some kind of subjective fantasy nor a flash-back, since the narration here does not disrupt the flow of action in space and time. The *dramatic emphasis* code does not seem to be applicable either, since we have seen the same setting in color just a few moments earlier.

If one tries to apply the dramatic emphasis code somewhat differently to the following sequences one gets into similar trouble. For example, all images from the chapel are in monochrome, which, taking the film's thematic structure into consideration, could be read as a metaphor for the repressive role of religion. But then, there are many monochrome sequences that have nothing to do with repression at all, like, for example, sequences 4, 9 and 11. Indeed, sometimes the monochrome sequences could be read as instances of *mental process narration*: the surreal touches that seem to surround the girl could give the impression that sequences 6, 9 and 11 were someone's fantasy. But then, one finds surreal elements in the color sequences as well...

Anyway, although certain patterns can be discerned at certain moments, it is more likely to conclude that there can't be any codified approach to the use of this device in *if...* The color alternation does not conform to the extrinsic norms, which renders impossible any reading according to the three major sub-codes.

The difficulties that this unusual strategy forces upon the reader are well illustrated by the fact that many renowned critics more or less disregarded the color alternation in their reviews of the film²³. In thorough study of the film, however, Allison Graham has tried to discern certain patterns:

Color is used, although not strictly, in many cases of "breaking-out"⁴ (when doors are opened, for example); this theory is supported by the fact that the last chapter contains no black and white scenes, correlating the final, explosive break-out with a fullness of vision (or an openness to the full spectrum of light).²⁴

This argument seems rather weak, since "breaking-outs" occur only twice, or, to be even more exact, only when the color returns after monochrome sequences 3 and 6. Also, the connotations of repression that Graham implicitly ascribes to the monochrome sequences can't generally be found there.

Conclusion

Lindsay Anderson has declared that the decision to shoot certain scenes in black and white was initially economic:

To shoot the picture entirely in color would have meant another week on the schedule or more money on electrics. When we got to the chapel set, Miroslav Ondricek, my cameraman, said: "We won't be able to do this in our schedule and within our budget. We can't shoot this in color." So I said, "All right, we'll shoot in black and white." And we did the same on other sequences.²⁵

Even if this remark is highly informative about the historical origin of this specific use of color alternation, it does not say much about its aesthetic function in the film. Anderson himself, however, has made quite helpful comments on that matter too:

We felt that variation in the visual surface of the film would help create the necessary atmosphere of poetic license... I also think that, in a film dedicated to 'understanding', the jog to consciousness provided by such color change may well work a kind of healthy *Verfremdungseffekt*, an incitement to thought which was part of our aim.²⁶

I think it is basically correct to agree, along with John Russell Taylor, Allison Graham and Elisabeth Sussex²⁷, with Anderson and conclude that the color alternation in *if...* works as a *Brechtian Verfremdungseffekt*, in a pure sense²⁸: it draws attention to the materials of the artwork. The color changes render the construction of a coherent story from the filmic discourse more difficult; they are there as provocative elements, and – possibly – function as an "incitement to thought". In contrast with most other films, where color alternation can be read according to the *mental process narration*, *dramatic emphasis* or *temporal change codes*, here it is used ambiguously and it could be therefore claimed that it induces spectators to participate more actively in the narration. Under all circumstances is *if...* a film that in its use of color alternation contributes to the creation of a new sub-code, and thus extends and develops the possibilities of narration in the cinema²⁹.

Notes

1. See Allan A. Mussehl, "Color in Early Motion Pictures", *American Cinematographer*, LXV/11 (December 1984), pp. 35–38.
2. Not entirely, however. In original prints of Sergei Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925), for example, the revolutionary flag is hand-colored red.
3. See Michael Joseph, "The Development of Colour Cinematography", *The International Encyclopedia of Film*, ed. Roger Manvell (London: Rainbird Reference Books 1972), p. 29.
4. See Jean Mitry, *Histoire du Cinéma*, Vol 4, ed. Jean-Pierre Delarge (Paris: Editions Universitaires 1980), p. 307.
5. See Kristin Thompson, *Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible: A Neoformalist analysis* (Princeton University Press 1981), p. 47.
6. See David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London: Methuen 1985), pp. 157–204.

7. Sub-code here means code applicable only to certain films. See Christian Metz, *Langage et Cinéma*, Nouvelle édition, (Paris: Albatros 1977), p. 97.
8. See Edward Branigan, *Point of View in the Cinema: A Theory of Narration and Subjectivity in Classical Film* (New York: Mouton 1984), pp. 85–94.
9. Projected, of course, without an anamorphic lens in order to make the images look distorted.
10. For a comprehensive account of the surrealist aspect of Samuel Fuller's films see Michael Gould, *Surrealism and Cinema* (London: The Tantivy Press 1976), pp. 117–133.
11. See Eithne Bourget, "Couleurs de Femmes", *Positif*, 275 (January 1984), p. 26.
12. See, for example, Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Enlarged ed. (Harvard University Press 1979), pp. 90–91.
13. One of Martin Scorsese's reasons for filming *Raging Bull* in black and white was, apparently, to protest against the deterioration of color values. See Bernard Millet, "Technique et esthétique", *La Revue du Cinéma*, 384 (June 1983), p. 82.
14. For an account of temporal order in narrative films see David Bordwell, pp. 77–79.
15. Bordwell, pp. 205–233.
16. Bordwell, p. 212.
17. See John Ellis, "Watching Death at Work: An Analysis of A Matter of Life and Death", *Powell, Pressburger and Others*, ed. Ian Christie (London: BFI 1978), pp. 79–104.
18. For a thorough analysis of the feast scene see Kristin Thompson, pp. 233–248.
19. Sometimes documentary footage in black and white can be found in films, as in the beginning of Lina Wertmüller's *Seven Beauties* (1976). For an account of the technical problems of this practice see Rick Mitchell, "B/W Stock Footage for the Jesse Owens Story", *American Cinematographer*, LXV/11 (December 1984), pp. 89–92.
20. After having finished this paper, I read an article on color alternation (in Swedish) by Leif Furhammar. Furhammar uses similar, but more elaborated "sub-codes". He also gives examples from many more films. See Leif Furhammar, "Färg i svart och vitt", *Rörande Bilder: Festskrift till Rune Waldekrantz*, ed. Leif Furhammar, Olle Sjögren, Kjell Jerselius (Stockholm: Nordstedts 1981), pp. 141–159.
21. The term is used by David Bordwell, pp. 59–60.
22. According to the published screenplay this sequence is in color after the exterior shot of the House. This is, however, incorrect. It is in monochrome from shot 415 to shot 438. See Lindsay Anderson and David Sherwin, *if...* (London: Lorrimar Publishing 1969), pp. 107–109.
23. See, for example, Pauline Kael, "School Days, School Days", *The New Yorker*, 45 (15 March 1969), pp. 152, 154, 159–161. Paul Schrader, review of *if...*, *Cinema*, 5, no 3 (1968), pp. 46–47 and Gavin Millar, review of *if...*, *Sight and Sound*, 38, no 1 (Winter 1968), pp. 42–43.
24. See Allison Graham, "Growth and Enlightenment in the Major Films of Lindsay Anderson", Ph. D. Diss. University of Florida 1978, p. 104.
25. See Joseph Gelmis, *The Film Director as Superstar* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company 1970), p. 109.
26. See Anderson and Sherwin, p. 10.
27. See John Russell Taylor, *Directors and Directions: Cinema for the Seventies* (London: Methuen 1975), p. 92. Elisabeth Sussex, *Lindsay Anderson*, ed. Ian Cameron (London: Movie Magazine 1969), p. 75 and Allison Graham, *Lindsay Anderson*, ed. Warren French (Boston: Twayne Publishers 1981), pp. 104–105. Some critics do not find *if...* to be a Brechtian film. See, for example, Alan Lovell, "Brecht in Britain: Lindsay Anderson", *Screen*, 16, no 4 (Winter 1975–76), pp. 62–80.
28. I do not think that color alternation in general can be regarded as a Brechtian distancing device. It is only, I believe, when it does not conform to the extrinsic norms that it really draws attention to itself.
29. One film that maintains the praxis of using color alternation in a way that deviates from the norm is Edgar Reitz' *Heimat* (1984).