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Black and White in Cinema and Other Audiovisual Derivations: Symbolism and Aesthetic Option

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Abstract: Starting from an analysis of the symbolism attributed to the black and the white by the diverse cultures, we try to approach and reflect on how some cinematographic pieces, by rejecting the color, seek to potentiate their language by means of a registry in black and white. From a cinematographic approach, this study aims to analyzing how other audiovisual proposals, namely advertising, music video and virtual image created from video game platforms, seek to take advantage of the symbolic and, of course, aesthetic potentialities, provided by a black and white image.

Keywords: black and white – monochrome – cinema – advertising – music video

1 Introduction

After Rouben Mamoulian, in 1935, made the film *Becky Sharp* successfully using an innovative color registration process (Technicolor System 4) the black and white cinema freed itself of all the technical imposition until then existent and began to assume an optional and enhancer character of new aesthetic approaches replete with the most varied symbolisms.

In cinema, the symbolism of black and white is striking and strongly associated with dynamic relationships that the director intends to establish in the film. The negative black associated with evil and positive white and associated with good is a possible association, however, more evident to a Western culture in clear antagonism to the prevailing understanding of the East.

This interpretive duality provided by black and white is not exclusive to cinema and manifests itself equally in other communicational and artistic areas. The universes of advertising, virtual image and music video also seek to make the most of this aesthetics which, by monochromatic, presents itself increasingly distinctive, differentiating and full of symbolism.

2 Problem Formulation

As a form of expression, cinema manifests itself as an aesthetic language. The choice of light, rhythm, scenography, camera movements, plans and frames, the decision to choose sound or silence, color or black and white are aspects of the cinematographic language decided by the director, in full act of creation, and which are then influential elements of the perception of the viewer who, later, will or will not have an affective feeling for the piece.

In the last decades, the production of black and white cinema, although a minority when compared with the production in color, did not cease to exist. The black and white in the cinema universe seems to have come to take contours considered more artistic. Collectively it has been agreed that it is less directed to the general public, however, the aesthetic potential and the symbolic burden it entails is a remarkable tool that, skillfully used, can provoke shocking sensations to the public.

To opt for a black-and-white film record now has a huge commercial risk. The film industry continues to rely on a growing number of technological innovations that seduce the most eager viewer of novelties in a modern world that seems more strongly motivated by the more immediate sensations that color seems to provide. The television universe also shows little vocation for the broadcasting in monochrome perhaps because this is a context so associated with a technically outdated television past already far behind. Despite all these reluctance, how can black and white production in the 21st century continue to exist? What is its aesthetic

surplus value? What symbolism does the black and white entail that allows it to stay alive both in the cinema and in the most varied audiovisual proposals?

3 Problem Solution

Throughout this work, through the analysis of some cinematographic pieces, advertising campaigns, music videos and virtual images in black and white, we will try to find ways that can materialize in answers to the questions initially formulated.

The analysis of some monochromatic films from different times and of different genres will allow by means of an aesthetic analysis to enumerate the symbolic values that black and white entails and which are shown appealing in a cinematographic language. Also through an accurate analysis of some audiovisual advertising campaigns, it will be verified how the symbolism of black and white manifests an added value in the process of communication with the general public, satisfying it and making it actively interested in the message. In the field of music and the creation of virtual images through mechanisms made available by the universe of video games the way in which a tendentially younger audience is apparently objectively seduced by the image in black and white in a communicational context where color in all its chromatic splendor undoubtedly seems to prevail will be evaluated, resorting to the analysis of some examples.

4 Conclusion

Whether it is cinema, advertising, music videos or even film production using the tools of video games, the use of black and white is a differentiating intention, full of symbolism, that seeks to convey something that color cannot or can but with more difficulty. The divergent symbolic interpretations of black and white vary culturally and this appears to be a problem of difficult resolution that imposes numerous perceptual barriers.

Advertising seeks recurrently, with the black and white, to convey sophistication, distinction, luxury, seduction, prestige, irreverence and sometimes even erotic and daring tension. In the world of fashion and advertising black is presented as a "delicate, seductive, elegant, practical, attractive, mysterious and surely chic" color [1], "it is versatile and can be considered a universal passport for any event" [2]. In its turn the white is connoted with simplicity and elegance. A modern color not dependent on fashions, "the perfect option when we do not want to make a decision about color" [2].

In some cases, when what is intended is not to market a product but to propagate an urgent, sensitive and serious appeal, black and white acquires eminently sober, compromised, tense, austere and serious meanings. A black and white record provides a decrease in distractions in viewers whose attention is more easily directed to the perception of what is intended. A black and white image "frees our concentration to stimuli such as the evocations of faces ... the richness of verbal dialogue and the complexity of the narrative structure" [3].

In the adopted language in the production of music videos, one seeks with monochrome to illustrate, recreate and enrich sound environments, sometimes seeking to reach a futuristic climate full of ponderous temporal conflicts. The irreverence, the differentiation and the daring to experience something truly new and unknown are characteristics that black and white acquires when associated with the context of the production of films in a videogame environment (virtual image). We risk reversing the established concept that color is par excellence prone to the creation of universes of pure fantasy, where fantasy is defined as "precisely that which can be confused with reality" [4].

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