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Visibility as an aporia. Skin and colour in Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life*

One of the most important efforts of the colour technologies developed for film was dedicated to a correct and realistic reproduction of the human skin colour. In the middle of the Thirties it became possible for cinematography to depict the full spectrum of the skin colours. From that time on feature films in the Western culture established a semantic classification of the gendered personage the black and white film formerly could only display by the gray scale. The female light skin was close related to a white middleclass existence and associated with a positive morality. The darker tone of the male skin was associated with vitality (and outdoor activities in general). Women with a darker skin however often were explicitly sexualized and close related to moral transgression. In Sirk's *Imitation of Life*, released in 1959, a young light skinned woman, born from a black mother, struggles for identity in a world of race discrimination. She sets herself as „white“ (and the film shows us the real difference between the skin colours of hers and her mother in many scenes) because whiteness is the only colour providing social success. Thus the film reflects on the particular problem of the visible character in a medium of visibility. By constructing herself as white and setting appearance as essence the light skinned „black“ woman unmasks the social construction of any racial difference.