

## **Pink, gender, and automobile**

Kévin Bideaux, Guillaume Lebègue

► **To cite this version:**

Kévin Bideaux, Guillaume Lebègue. Pink, gender, and automobile: Marketing and political uses in the automobile. Belgium Colour Symposium 2019, May 2019, Gand, Belgium. 10.13140/RG.2.2.24471.83368 . hal-02140987

**HAL Id: hal-02140987**

**<https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02140987>**

Submitted on 27 May 2019

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

# PINK, GENDER, AND AUTOMOBILE

## MARKETING AND POLITICAL USES OF PINK IN THE AUTOMOBILE

Kévin Bideaux<sup>[a]</sup> & Guillaume Lebègue<sup>[b]</sup>

[a] LEGS (UMR8238), Université Paris 8 ; Centre Français de la Couleur (CFC) ; bideaux.kevin@gmail.com ; [b] Université de Lille ; guil.lebegue@gmail.com

Cars are strongly associated with the masculine, while the pink colour is associated with the feminine. By combining these two elements, pink cars articulate differently with gender ideologies, depending on whether they belong to men or women, depending on whether they are shown with men or with women. The gender relations signified by the pink cars must indeed be thought of in their intersectionality with other tie-ins and especially class relations. Through the analysis of several pink car models and different employment contexts, this is to show how the colour and design of an object also articulate with gender.

### MASCULINITY, PINK CAR, AND EXTRAVAGANCE

The story of pink cars does not start with women, but with men. In 1950, American boxer Sugar Ray Robinson posed in Harlem quarter of New York, in front of one of his Cadillacs "1950's series 62 convertible" entirely painted in pink<sup>[1]</sup>. It will be imitated by Elvis Presley in 1955<sup>[1]</sup>. By repainting their cars themselves, they display their extravagance and opulence<sup>[2]</sup> and play the incongruity between an eminently masculine object and a colour already perceived as feminine since the beginning of the twentieth century<sup>[3]</sup>. They performed a form of dandyism that plays with the codes of the gender, and which is allowed because they are part of social elites<sup>[4]</sup>. These men seem totally immune to any feminisation of pink, which paradoxically contributes both to strengthen their virility, while confirming that pink is a feminine colour.

### PINK AND THE "CAR FOR WOMEN"

In the aftermath of the WW2 and thanks to feminist struggles, the car market turned more to women, new car consumers and now allowed to drive<sup>[5]</sup>. But despite these advances, if the women are associated with the car, it is always in a perspective of making them available to men as an object of desire<sup>[6][7]</sup>, as the appearance in 1964 in the American erotic magazine for men *Playboy* of pictures depicting a "playmate" posing with a car painted in "Playmate Pink."

When women become subjects of the automobile, it is still the colour pink that is used: the representations of female conductors in audiovisual or video games productions often make use of pink to distinguish the sex of competitors; when it comes to the practice of motor racing, it is still pink that is used, as is the case of Donna Mae Mims, "The Pink Lady." An effective strategy in terms of visibility but harmful from a gender ideology point of view, since this comes to essentialize pink as the colour of the feminine<sup>[8]</sup>. While the models in other colours do not affect the gender of the consumers to whom they are addressed, a pink model is systematically thought of as feminine, becoming strictly a car for women.

### CONCLUSIONS

As deeply associated with the masculine and the feminine, we can confirm that the car, as much as the pink colour, act like gender technologies<sup>[9]</sup> that come to reveal the sexist inequalities. Even more, object and colour combine to articulate with other ideologies (class for example), or to manifest themselves in political forms of claim. It now seems obvious to us that the gendered symbols of the car and the pink are loaded with new meanings according to the people, the times, or the contexts. The question of design must therefore be thought of and analysed from the point of view of gender, insofar as female and male bodies are shaped by techniques and that objects become sexualized by practice<sup>[10]</sup>.



Sugar Ray Robinson in front of his Cadillac, Harlem, 1950



Playboy's "Pink Playmate" 1965 with a Sunbeam Tiger of PMOY



Pink Dashboard of the Citroën "Ds The MakeUp" feat. Givenchy, 2016

### REFERENCES

- [1] Grisard, V. (2018). In the pink of things: gender, sexuality, and race, in Valerie Steele (ed.), *Pink: The history of a punk, pretty, powerful color*, Thames and Hudson, pp. 145-160.
- [2] Sparke P. (2002). *Un siècle de design automobile*, Flammarion.
- [3] Paoletti, J. B. (2012). *Pink and Blue: Telling the Boys from the Girls in America*, Indiana University Press.
- [4] Lorenzi-cioldi, F. (2002). *Les représentations des groupes dominants et dominés : collections et agrégats*, Presses Universitaires de Grenoble.
- [5] Bellu, S. (1998). *Histoire mondiale de l'automobile*, Flammarion.
- [6] Blum, F. (2004). Réflexions sur les usages sexués de l'automobile en France aux XIXe et XXe siècles. Femme au volant, figure de l'urbanité ?, *Histoire urbaine*, 11, pp. 55-79.
- [7] Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema, *Oxford Journals*, 16(3), p. 6-18.
- [8] Bartow, A. (2008). Trademarks, Commoditization, Gender, and the Color Pink, text of the oral paper presented in annual symposium The Law and Society Association, Montreal, Hilton Bonaventure.
- [9] De Lauretis, T. (2007). *Théorie queer et cultures populaires. De Foucault à Cronenberg*, La Dispute, « Le genre du monde ».
- [10] Anstett E., and Marie-Luce Gélard, M.-L. (eds.) (2012). *Les objets ont-ils un genre ? Culture matérielle et production sociale des identités sexuées*, Armand Colin.