

## **VISUAL IDENTITY: THE IDZIAK LOOK**

### **The “WYSIWYG” Generation**

For those of us who remember the early days of computer programs, the principle “what you see is what you get” actually described one thing on a computer screen and something else emerging from a printer. Now we see exactly the same things on screen and in print.<sup>1</sup> This principle also applies to film tools recording, showing, and instantly replaying everything we want to capture. My generation of filmmakers had different tools. In the 1960s in film school we had huge and heavy cameras, equipped either with a parallax viewfinder or with the possibility of looking through the negative.<sup>2</sup> The camera operator saw a picture different from that recorded by a camera, or shadows on the negative visible through the viewfinder. The black-and-white film with its tonal range, contrast, sensitivity and other parameters was more limited and, because of numerous technical improvements, modern cameras see much more than the eye. Once upon a time, the profession of a cinematographer was like that of a translator who, wanting to show “everything his eye saw on a screen” had to “translate the real world.” Using the existing tools and technologies, a lot of work and effort were required to get “into the picture” everything from the real world. A film director entering the set of a night scene and seeing the amount of light used for illuminating it would almost always ask, “But it was to be a night scene?” “It’ll be,” was the cinematographer’s answer and he usually kept his word.

The cinematographer was like a guardian of secrets on a set. He was asked by directors and actors keen to find out what the camera had “seen” and how it’ll look on screen. It was because the cinematographer’s work—the images his camera registered—could be seen only after watching dailies a day or two later. In a way, the image was first generated and developed in the cinematographer’s imagination and the comparison of his vision with the reality of what was recorded emerged when the material was screened.<sup>3</sup> Modern cameras are like mirrors showing the surrounding world in real time. Set monitors instantly display images that can be recorded and played back. The cinematographer’s job had lost the magical properties of authorship (or co-authorship) of a film’s image.

The cinematographer’s role was generally taken over by tools and other professionals, and his experience is encapsulated inside the “Record” button on every camera, even those for the average consumer. The ability to develop an image in one’s

mind was lost and replaced by tools that took away the cinematographer's place in the filmmaking process. Of their own will, many cinematographers relinquished their gift for creating images because, chained to their tools and traditional ways, they didn't notice that their work on set became more meaningless. Pleased with the "what you see is what you get" principle, more often than not cinematographers overlooked that their role is limited to watching what their tools had created for them. The development and ideas for film images had moved elsewhere. With increasing frequency the cinematographer copies what was done earlier and whatever he does on the set is merely a transitional stage of a process that transforms the outcome with computers operated by other artists and technicians. Companies and professions which replaced this creative function continue to flourish and grow. Among them are storyboard artists, pre-visualization and animation specialists and, in postproduction, computer graphics experts.

## **Eyes and ears in film**

A single person cannot act, direct, write, compose and perform music, and photograph a film. Film structure is too complicated to be handled by a lone artist. Regardless of how many critics will assign the film's authorship to a single person, films are always made by a creative group. There is no individual authorship, only a group product. Addressing visual dramaturgy, I'm focusing on the profession of a cinematographer. I find that many of my observations also apply to other areas, like acting or music composition.

I'm certain that the cinematographer does not "dream his own dreams." He must eschew his own vision, become a creative medium and, in collaboration with a director, he should influence the attainment of commonly agreed-upon visual goals. To get there, his role in filmmaking should change. As a visiting professor for many European film schools, I was surprised that future cinematographers aren't taught the importance of creative partnerships with directors. They are rarely made aware that the dramaturgy of the word exists side by side with that of the image. The latter is governed by different laws than the literary aspects of the script. Unfortunately, from the very beginning, student cinematographers focus only on tools. Technology is certainly important, but it's not a deciding factor in creating an unforgettable and permanent image in the memory of our audience. Generally, the director, who often authors a script, is a gifted writer.<sup>4</sup> To put it simply, his hearing is better than his eyes. The cinematographer lends his eyes to the film

and only a harmonious creative relationship between the two senses makes an original outcome possible.

### **The camera setup: where and why?**

The functionality of the camera and its role as a carrier of emotion in film is of primary importance. Kieślowski used to say, "We can set up a camera *anywhere*, but we should know *why* we have done so." Such use presupposes the camera's transparency since it should remain invisible as a tool. Various shots are like bricks used to build a house: the scenes are like rooms, the sequences are like apartments, and film acts are like floors. Since we live in that house, we don't think of, or see, the bricks. But poorly placed bricks will affect the comfort of our life, making the house warm or cold and the walls straight or crooked. The question of where and why we place a camera is foremost to the overall architectural design. Making a film, we should remember that the script will undergo changes and when the director edits it, he should have enough material to painlessly make all necessary changes. He must be able to shorten or lengthen scenes and have the tools enabling him to change the order and importance of various plot lines in the story. We mustn't forget the shots which will connect the film anew, because they are like cement binding the bricks in our film. Since in most cases these shots aren't logically connected to certain scenes, they could be used exactly where needed. Shots "without a stated purpose" will enable us to recast the film painlessly and remain invisible to the viewer. Paraphrasing Kieślowski we could say, "We can tell *any* story, but we should know *why* we are telling it." The goal or the mission of our film requires shots that do not only serve the story. Our home needs windows and interior decoration in order to acquire its personality. In film these are shots or sequences constantly reminding us that hidden, deeper truths are under the surface and we aren't merely narrating anecdotes but *what* we say relates to our common consciousness. One ought to contemplate how these images signal and underline the premise of our film. And I'm not thinking of mere ornaments..

### **A tree obliterated by ornaments**

Watching contemporary films, especially studio films, we often get the impression that their visual language is like decorations on a Christmas tree. The split authorship

process responsible for the film's visual side is like a race by the overindulgent heads of various departments to decorate the tree with effects and ornaments. In the current mode of filmmaking, there are no clear outlines for building the film's look. It usually begins with specialists in pre-visualization and set designers, followed by cinematographers and computer graphics designers, not to mention wardrobe specialists who also have something to say. Naturally, there is a director but what happens if he isn't gifted visually? The lack of clear authorship for the visual outcome causes the "ornaments" on screen to obscure its substance. As it invariably happens around Christmas, we forget the drama of a tree dying under the excess weight of ornaments and decorations. Exactly the same comes to pass in many films. The wealth of new technologies, rich lighting, and the surfeit of music often serve as deadweight to the film's message. Rather than aid it, surface glitter often covers the narrative and the image stifles drama instead of helping it. In order to touch the canvass with his brush, the painter must first see his work through the eyes of his soul and guess how it will be perceived. He has to create his plan. Like a bare canvass, the empty screen requires careful and consistent development of an idea. This situation applies to more than just one image—it extends to sequences of them. The visual dramaturgy is the main object of this essay but before I address it, we should consider where we are and describe the circumstances we find ourselves in.

### **Shooting images: the viewer as prey**

In my forty-five years as a cinematographer I've worked in a profession that enormously influenced shaping the perceptions of today's world. The cult of the image—especially of the moving image—as well as its development, growth, and its menacing presence everywhere had changed the landscapes of our lives. From morning until night we are bombarded by images: this assault is caused by developments in technology and its ease of use. In the past half century, the number of images and screens attacking our senses had grown exponentially. During my life in Poland, television displaced radio as the most important social media. We used to visit photography studios to record key moments of our lives—birthdays, religious rites, high school graduations, weddings, or deaths. Today everyone has a camera, often as a mobile phone application. Taking photos and shooting videos became routine for almost everyone. In the internet age of ever-present screens, billboards, computers and laptops, the luxury of having a TV set in the 1960s and watching one or two available channels seems as distant as cave painting. Like bullets, the images

assault us from all sides. Our attention is always a fair target—at home, on the street, and in the workplace. We are amidst an inescapable audio-visual avalanche of signals. Constant battering of our senses has changed our collective subconscious, causing indifference and cynicism regarding the signals from the surrounding world. To a varying degree, the average man's defensive shield became hard to penetrate but I'd like to concentrate on the decline of high culture in favor of pop culture. The key to reaching pop culture circles is to relentlessly attack emotions and simultaneously diminish the intellectual effort expected from a target audience.

We must clearly define the starting point for the visual dramaturgy in a feature film. New tools at our disposal will lead to a new language and serve many different film genres. It will happen only if we understand the dynamics of continuous language development and the insularity and impatience of the viewer that comes with it.

### **Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Blue*: Case study of visual dramaturgy**

Although *Blue* was made two decades ago, many viewers regard it as timeless. Like a mediaeval craftsman, Kieślowski was an exceptional artist with a long apprenticeship in his profession. Through the medium of short films, he honed his skills until he decided to devote the rest of his too short a life to features. The knowledge he accumulated perfecting his craft allowed him to make outstanding films, which touched mainly upon the spiritual lives of his protagonists. Although I photographed his *Przejście podziemne*, *The Scar*, *The Double Life of Veronique*, and *Thou Shalt Not Kill*, my choice of *Blue* as the case study for this essay was motivated by the fact that in his very personal, non-mainstream films, Kieślowski never lost the emotional bonds with his audience, which proved to be a particularly difficult task in *Blue*.

Making his exceptional films, Kieślowski was always mindful that the fictional life on screen is supported by emotions shared with the viewers. It meant that the reality we construct in film is present only when there is an emotional bond between the image and the viewer. When the film loses emotions, the reality constructed by a filmmaker is lost. The viewer walks out of a theatre or uses a remote to change channels. All film analysis regarding its language, structure and contents are based on a simple rule: making films is like working in a factory of emotions. Our artifact is emotions emanating from the finished product. Without the emotional charge one cannot engage the intellectual interest of a viewer and our task is to create something that will forever become a part of our viewer's

life. Naturally, it's also a matter of the subject or of our film's message, as well as the grasp of mechanisms that will engage the viewer. It was Kieślowski who had taught me to respect such basic rules of film grammar.

### **Is a pilot on board?**

In order to reach our destination safely, we must have a good pilot. However, every pilot does not rely solely on instincts and well-practiced routine: before each takeoff he carefully checks if all of his instruments are working and ready for the task ahead. It's impossible to dress a sentence with words and paint a film with images unless such a checklist is completed. During my years on film sets I became convinced that images in film play many roles, but their common denominator is their functionality within the compass of the script and its requirements. I begin my lectures at film schools or at Film Spring Open workshops with these words: "I've got some bad news. I won't talk about film *technique*; I'll talk about film *grammar*."

### **The story: who, why, what subject?**

Every film can be compared to a car. Its value isn't dependent on its skin (body style and options) but on the power and performance of the engine and steering systems. The story is the engine of every film. This is just as obvious as the three questions posed above. They should be answered by the director but, interestingly, they also apply to the author of images. The analysis of the story we have and answers to these questions should influence the film's look.

A romantic comedy will require a different portrayal than a crime story. Genre is a deciding factor in selecting the narrative mood for a film being made. We need to know who will see our story and must imagine the target audience exactly. Whilst we tailor our imagery to the viewers' expectations, we must always hold in our arsenal something that will surprise them—images the viewers haven't seen yet. Changes in the narrative will also change the story, since filmmaking is a history of duplications. We always shoot in the same places—hospitals, police stations and cafés, and tell the same stories—melodramas and thrillers. Within this avalanche of duplications there can be only one original component:

*how we tell the story.* By changing the narrative, we change the story. Although it seems the same, it somehow isn't...

## **Why?**

Such devices should serve us the way certain clothing suits a woman of a particular type. Her dress should accentuate beauty and charisma and help the viewer fall in love. She is mysteriously beautiful but always inaccessible. *We have her and yet we don't know why...* Her sexy clothing is only the beginning of our efforts. We dress her only to undress her later and, from that moment onwards, we become her slaves. The farther we go, the camera—just like a woman's purse—should serve the story and help answer a question, "Why?" The viewer knows (perhaps not in every instance) that she will be (sooner or later) undressed, yet he remains with us because he wants to know how it will come to pass. We cannot narrate the story according to the viewer's expectations since we must surprise and seduce him, yet we must also be faithful to our tale. The camera fulfills this subservient role and its function is to become a slave of the story. The problem is that cinematographers often forget this rule. The film's magnetic force and the element generating emotions in a cinema is the main plot, usually a story with a conflict of some kind. "Conflict is a central feature of the screen story. Man against man, man against environment, and man against himself are the classic versions found in the screen story."<sup>5</sup> The rule of the camera's subservient function and the support it must give to this conflict is the first commandment in a cinematographer's work.

## **What subject?**

Just as each dress has various extras, our story includes the main plot and subplots. The proportions between them and understanding how they affect the viewer form the core of our analysis. Our story is dressed with a variety of elements, including subplots. Subplots are necessary: their presence makes stories deeper and places them within a historical, psychological or social context. However, we often forget that subplots don't generate emotions in film. I made about seventy films as a cinematographer and noticed that the main error made by even the most famous directors is to burden the film with an excess of subplots. Like every man who tells the same story hundreds of times during preproduction

to actors or producers, the director is tired of the story. It ceases to be his fascinating first love—the happy result of his initial encounter with the story or the script. The story is no longer a mysterious beautiful lady but an old wife and the director starting a film is like a husband just before a divorce.

Since he isn't interested in his old wife, the director's psychological focus now turns to new things, like subplots. In this he is cheerfully assisted by a cinematographer who offers all kinds of goodies. The result is a film that meanders and is too long. The author of film images must always weigh his strategy in relation to the rules regarding the main plot and subplots. The criteria will vary, depending for example on the amount of coverage required for editing a given scene. Such coverage should always be greater for the main plot and plots that are dramatically important than for all the others. This rule also applies to managing the screen time. We should also analyze all scenes important to the story, beginning with those relating to conflicts, as they form the basic menu of our film. Besides conflict scenes, we have others that provide the viewer with information necessary for understanding the story with all its implications. These may be scenes of limited emotional impact and the author of images must remember this fact. The management of screen time and understanding of how the sagging narrative can ruin the interest of the viewer must accompany us at all stages of filming such scenes and the proposed ways of covering them.

### **The protagonist, not the star**

I photographed a directorial debut, featuring a well-known star whose days of fame were long past. She played opposite Daniel Craig, whose days of fame were still to come. The star's whims have ruined the young director's debut. They also ruined the relations between Daniel Craig and the star, since she hated him and was convinced that he wasn't her equal. Since the film was about love, the star's fake attachment on screen to Daniel was also a failure.

The protagonist—rather than a side character—makes us undertake the emotional journey of watching a film, forgetting our life and everyday problems for two hours. The process of identifying with the protagonist—a requirement for watching a film—is undoubtedly the reason behind the success of films we've seen. Anyone who begins a film will look for inspiration, a key to the story, or an idea creating images for the story. For me the protagonist is such a key. I imagine standing in front of a monstrously large screen, where his face covers fifty meters square. If I were a policeman, I wouldn't use the

polygraph: a close-up of an interrogated criminal on a very large screen would suffice. Reading a script I'm like an investigating officer trying to uncover every secret of the protagonist, including those omitted by the writer. As a cinematographer but also as an audience, I have the right to see and interpret the protagonist's actions a little differently than the writer or the director. As I follow the protagonist through plot twists, I try to imagine what could happen if the events unfolded differently or if a given scene was set in another landscape. I search for a visual key to depict the protagonist's dramatic journey and changes in his behavior, as required by the events unfolding in the script. In analyzing the protagonist we must first understand his motivation, find a key to portraying the depth of his character, and follow it up. We must know and understand the inner conflict that usually results from a chain of dramatic events. The difference between the paper-thin quality of a television series hero and a deeply-moving portrayal of a protagonist in a feature is the depth of his character. Our work—the work of a film crew—becomes meaningful if we find the appropriate means of expression so that the protagonist and the audience for two hours inhabit the same emotional space or are at least fascinated with his character (such is the case with negative heroes). Just like it's in the script, the catalyst for the process of identifying with the protagonist in a finished film is the ability to present a conflict in which the lead is trapped. It's not about a superficial clash sometimes present in the plot—it's about a conflict all of us experience, a struggle between our subconscious and rational behavior resulting from reactions by the protagonist to the challenges in the script. The camera can and should in this case behave like an x-ray machine and see more than the protagonist is willing to show. The skill in providing visual clues and reaching deeper by illustrating what's invisible is among the most important obligations of the author of images in film.

### **The visible, the invisible and how to show it**

Kazimierz Kutz, a well-known Polish director, told a story about a cinematographer meeting a director after reading a script.<sup>6</sup> He asked him, "Hey chief, what's it all about? I've no idea what your protagonist wants. What's his problem?" The director was indignant. "You'll understand when you see it. Don't be difficult, just keep filming. I'll have the whole country on their knees with my film." To which the straight-talking cinematographer replied, "Be careful, chief! When the whole country rises up on their feet and smacks you, you'll have a problem."

The “main problem” is the axis—or the engine—of the film. Regardless of whether we make a war film or a romance, there is one central element of primary dramatic importance. In a typical studio script, the absence of a clearly defined main problem often disqualifies the story. The story and the protagonist become fused because this “main problem” exists. Transformed by such questions as, “Will good or evil prevail?” or “Would a tragic love lead to murder?” the story forms the emotional bedrock of the film’s appeal. In studio films the absence of a tragically infatuated protagonist, of a lead bravely fighting the adversaries, or of a hero dramatically entwined in several historical events can also disqualify the story. This clearly formulated concept becomes complicated when the central conflict is hidden or not so plainly outlined. This type of cinema is found more often in Europe. Risking oversimplification, one can state that American studio films prefer the first kind of conflict, whereas (for the most part) European filmmakers probe deeper and their quests cannot be so easily categorized. Simplifying the argument further, we can say that the difference comes from a slightly divergent definition of the role culture and film play in the life of the society. Ironically put, European cinema continues to nurse the ambition of making films seeking to have the population on their knees. More seriously, European cinema wants to discover new territories and avoid well-worn schemes as well as serve the mission of high culture. With a few exceptions, the popular cinema—a studio factory output—is directed towards the average viewer, whose expectations are clearly outlined. Returning to the role played by authors of film image, we must remember that the slightly obscured presence of the main problem and its intimate nature often force the image-makers to assume the role of interpreters. The evocative image will uncover the invisible and be the foundation for searching.

### **The message—a true artist looks further**

The central problem often is the hidden message of our film. We see thousands of films and most of them slip into oblivion as soon as the screening ends. Some, however, remain in our memory and scenes from them accompany us throughout our lives. Aside from trying to tell a story, the main difference in great films is *something* that the average film doesn’t have. In great films the stories serve a core idea related to us by the author through a narrative device. I still remember Ken Loach’s *Kes*, photographed by Chris Menges, which I saw in film school. It’s a story of a young boy from an impoverished mining town who trains a falcon. The film becomes unexpectedly powerful when the boy’s school is

visited by recruiters from a local mining pit. They try to persuade the youngsters to become miners after graduating. It's an apparently innocent scene with the elders politely trying to convince the young protagonist to spend the rest of his life below ground. Although a mere recruitment pitch, the conversation has an explosive power. The viewers realize that the choice faced by the young man is illusory. Whether he wants it or not, he is destined to become a miner and his training of the falcon becomes a metaphor for the lack of choice. Lured each time to return for a piece of meat, the falcon becomes a symbol of enslavement. Weeping in the cinema when the bird is brutally murdered by the protagonist's jealous older brother who is already a miner, we realize that the young man's fate in some way applies to us all. Ken Loach told us a story, but it is much more than just a narrative: its connective tissue and intellectual integrity flow from its clearly defined message. When we leave the cinema, we won't cast this film away to the heap of forgotten memories. It will haunt us or—at least—it has haunted me. I wasn't surprised when I read someone remembering Kieślowski who, in film school, apparently was heard saying, "I'm not good enough to be his assistant, but I'd be happy to serve Ken Loach coffee on the set."

Were I to define message—or the film's premise—as far as my life's experience is concerned, the case above exemplifies it. If someone only narrates and shares the story with the audience, he is just a craftsman. The work of a real artist serves a higher cause. Artistic films—and this applies to all of Kieślowski's opus—besides the well-told narrative always contain a hidden message, the reason for the story he tells us. A successful premise in film always touches us all and works on our subconscious. Every time *Hamlet* is staged, the director must share his interpretation of the story with actors, set designers and others before his vision is staged. He must explain why this material is timeless and why it carries universal, unassailable truths that remain fresh when presented anew. He must define the message and the quality of his definition will decide the valor of yet another approach. Many news comments following the September 11, 2001 tragedy in New York began with the sentence, "The world will never be the same." In my opinion it would be a great premise for a film, yet I cannot recall a film describing changes in our collective subconscious after that fateful day. A fundamental message touches us here and now. Without a well-defined message there is no true work of art. A solid premise assures the film's integrity and for the authors of images it serves as the primary tool for filtering our ideas. We aren't free when we construct a visible world into which our narrative and protagonist are placed; our choices are always determined by the goal of concentrating the viewer's attention on elements that remain with him after he leaves the cinema. The film's visual component is the best but

entirely hidden signpost concentrating the viewer's attention on something that's not obvious and what serves as a real goal for narrating a story.

The story I'm about to quote is an example of searches made with Kieślowski. Years ago, when I was filming *Liebe und Maloche* in Berlin I heard from Krzysztof, who was in Berlin for a festival, I think.<sup>7</sup> We talked on the phone about a phenomenon that interested him. He saw an article about a scientific experiment on rats, proving that if a new rat poison was introduced in the United States, only a day later European rats behaved just as suspiciously when faced with the same poison as their American cousins. A year later Krzysztof brought me a script for *The Double Life of Veronique*, an incredible history of two identical women, born to different families in different countries, who never met each other. In Kieślowski's script the life of Polish Veronique mysteriously influences the life of the French Veronique.



Figure 1. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)

When I worked on it, I constantly thought of telepathy and our conversation. I'm quoting this story because in March of 2013 I saw the following note on the internet:

Brain signals about completing a simple task were transmitted from one rat to another. Scientists have connected the brains of lab rats, allowing one to communicate directly to another via cables. The wired brain implants allowed sensory and motor signals to be sent from one rat to another, creating the first ever brain-to-brain interface. The scientists then tested whether the rat receiving the signal could correctly interpret the information. As the ultimate test of their system, the team even linked the brains of rats that were thousands of miles apart.<sup>8</sup>

The message is a trademark of great artists who look further and describe something that already exists in the collective consciousness but hasn't yet been debated or explored.

### **The structure. Nobody awaits our films**

In one of his interviews Milos Forman stated that whenever he makes a film, he remembers that his audience expects "a holiday from the routine" and tries to make sure

that his viewers' "holidays" are enjoyable. The tool for evaluating our film-building tactic and its success comes from the structure.

My approach to treating film structure as a separate subject on a roadmap that we must carefully examine before embarking upon filming stems from the fact that in film we don't have as much space to manoeuvre as in a literary work. Writing a novel we have no size limits—it can be fifty, one hundred or five hundred pages long. The film's length is defined by world standards and cinema and television distribution. Making a feature we know that it shouldn't be shorter than eighty minutes or longer than two hours. We must keep in mind that the potential viewer has a choice of many films and when he decides to buy a ticket, he gives us a vote of confidence. The money he invests in our story must bring "a holiday from the routine" he hopes to experience watching our work. The time he places at our disposal is clearly defined. He wants to join us on an emotional journey. It's not his maiden journey: he has made it thousands of times. He enters the cinema like an examiner, subconsciously comparing our work to thousands of other efforts. His expectations are tied to the axis of time, where each minute must serve a well-defined role to emotionally bond him with the film. Not understanding this principle is a recipe for failure.

In a sense, the film structure is (or should be) our guide and a map to the emotional commitment of the viewer. His collective subconscious instantly measures whether he sees a good or bad film. Watching films is common to us all and we must consider an educated viewer whose knowledge of cinema is as good as ours. I'm certainly conscious that only a handful of viewers hold academic degrees in film, but all in fact had studied film from their infancy by watching films throughout their lives. A good example of this phenomenon is Kieślowski's *The Double Life of Veronique*. The script was cast in two acts—two histories of identical women living in two different countries. They had nothing in common besides the same actress playing the two roles and the "telepathic" influence that the life of one had on the life of the other. That's how the film was shot. During editing Krzysztof realized that the first Veronique's death (the end of her fate) comes too late. The viewer is unaccustomed to the rarity of a two-act structure and Kieślowski shortened the first Veronique's story to fit the dimensions of a typical first act. The return to a structure found in ninety-nine percent of films shown in cinemas had changed the film beyond recognition. The death of Polish Veronique (of a heart attack during a concert) wasn't the end of the first story in the middle of the film, but came across as a natural curtain scene in act one.



Figure 2. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)

Watching student films I have the impression that they think the world is waiting for their films and that everybody will follow long and boring expositions. When he buys a ticket, our viewer is impatient; the level of his impatience stems from the pace of our lives and doubts in his mind whether he invested well. His investment is a temporary divorce from daily routine, problems, or boredom. If by a certain time we fail to engage him emotionally, feelings of disappointment and bad investment take over and he leaves the cinema or uses a remote at home to switch channels.

Moreover, the rules of drama sometimes change and shows that were once popular become stale. We could say that certain methods and strategies of narrating a story become second-hand. The average viewer's impatience also relates to the abundant supply of commercials or music videos assaulting his emotions. Some time ago we were told that the expository act in a feature shouldn't be shorter than twenty minutes. For years, depending on the film genre, this timeframe had shrunk. A young filmmaker ought to remember that once, according to the statistics, surveying the website content on the internet took minutes; now it's just seconds. Whilst we still have more time for exposition in film, this time is constantly getting shorter. I keep telling my students, "Nobody waits for your films. Your mistake is to imagine a viewer waiting for your film as you begin working on it. You'll make a hit when you imagine a viewer who'll hate it, who is tired of constant visual assault. An image of an apathetic viewer will help you design a strategy allowing your film to penetrate the wall of his indifference."

### **The beginning of a film. Conflict between the drama of words and images**

Entering the cinema, even the apathetic viewer knows that the director needs time to introduce him to the story and its turns, that he must receive the necessary information about the "who, where, and when." The exposition cannot be too long, yet it's necessary for building the emotional relationship between the viewer and our story.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the

viewer loans the director some time to be introduced to the narrative. Although the director has a moment to make this introduction, the author of images does not have such luxury. The image must hit home at once, without warning, and be as forceful as possible.

In accordance with our biological nature, the first encounter with our film should hit the sensory imagination of our viewer. As the highest order of mammals, our subconscious evaluates in a fraction of a second whether we like something or not. Once upon a time, such a trait was required for survival. When early man encountered an animal in a primordial jungle, he faced three choices: killing the animal, fleeing from it, or being indifferent to it. This trait of human perception remains and when we talk of "love at first sight" we instinctively return to the subconscious process of evaluation accompanying us throughout our lives. The process is exactly the same in a theatre or a cinema. The viewer's encounter with our first image or sequence may not make our film good or bad, but will help immerse him in the story. It will help his subconscious and facilitate his parting from perceptions. By living in a certain town all of our lives, we develop a deeply emotional connection to it, but we'll never be able to conjure up the image in the mind of someone arriving in our town for the first time. The strategies of the artist responsible for the story and the one responsible for the images represent the conflict between the drama of words and images in a film. This conflict pertains in particular to the beginning of a film.

The clash with the "new" is the most important rule in visual drama. The beginning of a film is like a gate to the viewer's subconscious. If from the outset we can grab the viewer with images and music, we'll evoke in him a state of positive expectations. The viewer will absorb more willingly the necessary information because he'll feel that the world we present is interesting and original. As soon as the screening begins, he senses that the world on screen has something unexpected and unique and the images, as well as our presentation, transmit the extraordinary aspects of this world.

We tend to tell similar tales of love, killing, historical breakthroughs and, to put it simply, it's not *what* we are talking about but *how* we talk about things that make our film stand out. Briefly, we could say that the main aspect of visual drama is its asymmetrical relationship with the dramatic contents of the narrative.

How does it work? As we narrate a story, we use dramatic tools to construct an environment conducive to the viewer's emotional engagement and his total immersion in our story. Confronted by difficult choices, the protagonist will set out on a journey full of surprises, unexpected plot turns, various difficulties, and so on. We can say that the dramatist is someone who throws obstacles in the protagonist's path. Pitting him against assorted difficulties forces a process of constant challenge that changes the protagonist. His

dramatic journey succeeds if he endures his challenges and is transformed by them. As a rule, at the end of the film we face a different character from the one we encountered at the beginning. As I mentioned before, the measure of success for our protagonist is the degree of the viewer's engagement with our hero's ordeals.<sup>10</sup> This process takes time. We do not weep watching TV news reports describing exploding bombs and hundreds of casualties. Since they are about strangers, such stories do not touch us. At the beginning of the film the protagonist is also a stranger and the director's must build a story about him so that the estrangement—the wall of separation between the viewer and the protagonist—vanishes. Time is needed to accomplish this task and the viewer knows it. He has thin reserves of patience for the time needed to close the distance, so that he could see the rest of the story from the protagonist's point of view and become moved along with his emotions.<sup>11</sup> From the beginning, our protagonist moves within a world that we depict and it makes a difference what kind of a world it is. The image defines the environment in which the protagonist functions. The camera in our hands is a basic narrative tool. Generally speaking (in terms of editing, choice for the points of view and selection of sets), we use the camera so that the viewer is unaware that what he sees on screen is registered in many takes. We can simply say that the camera "serves" the protagonist, since its role is to portray the story and make the viewer receive the full emotional impact of the narrative, including insights into his deepest doubts. The camera's utility and functionality is clearly necessary in a well-narrated film. Such functionality isn't always needed and here I return again to the beginning of a film. At that point the camera doesn't need to serve the protagonist, because he isn't introduced yet or is just about to appear in our film world. This world isn't (or shouldn't be) a reflection of reality—it is *our* world. This is what should distinguish our film from countless others the viewer had seen. Since we're responsible for the visual qualities of our film, we should remember that we don't have the same exposition time that the director has for the development of the same story. The force of our images and their role at the beginning of a film cannot be underestimated. The rule of "love at first sight" fully applies here. The artist who doesn't follow it fails to use the basic principle of perception, an effect every woman knows when she dresses up and selects a perfect moment to enter a ball to make the maximum impact.

By attacking the viewer with our vision of the world we can abandon the story. Quite often the film's beginning is a sum of parts freely pasted together and connected to the story only peripherally or not at all. Such is the case in *The Double Life of Veronique* where, at the outset we see an upside down image from a point of view of a child held in mother's arms.



Figure 3. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)

Off screen, we hear, "Do you see the stars up above?" The problem is that the child is held upside down and the "stars up above" are the illuminated windows of a city skyline.



Figure 4. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)

Immediately afterwards, a French-speaking mother describes to the little girl the structure of leaves. Such bilingual lessons about the world could easily have been cut and the viewer leaving the cinema would know just as much about the two protagonists regardless of whether the "added" opening sequence was there or not. But the image of a city seen upside down by the child is intriguing and it concentrates the viewer's attention. When we shot this opening, we were convinced that because of it the viewer will be more likely to follow the grown-up Veronique singing in a rainstorm.



Figure 5. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)

We must remember that the relationship between form and content is a dynamic phenomenon and a powerful tool at our disposal.

## Film style and genre

Nobody ever attempted an experiment where the same script and actors would be filmed by one hundred directors and cinematographers. The result would be one hundred different films along with the striking impression that the same set of adventures appeared in so many different worlds. Although we had an identical narrative and exactly the same faces, each director would have told the story differently. We could conclude that each of them had unpacked the story his way. The recipe was the same, the ingredients likewise, but the outcome tasted differently. The phenomenon examined here often serves as an ingredient ultimately deciding the film's merits.

Standing in front of a multiplex and facing many film posters, the viewer (if he didn't see reviews or isn't interested in the cast) will decide what he wants to see based on the genre that's usually clearly defined on a poster. If our life is boring and barren, we may select a film that will dynamically influence our emotions. It could be a war film, crime story, or a thriller. If our cinema outing is linked to escaping from various problems we suffer in private life, we may settle for a comedy or a melodrama.

When the viewer declares, "Let's see a war film," he thinks of a genre-specific imagery quite different from "Let's see a sci-fi movie." We should never forget this fact when we plan how our film will look. Authors of images cannot disappoint the audience, because in many cases we encounter highly sophisticated viewers who watch only one genre of films. Those responsible for the visual side must be very conscious of the genre they are portraying and remember that we constantly tell nearly identical stories. The viewer saw hundreds of them and he compares our film with other, better examples of the same genre. Very quickly he knows whether he is led by a real artist who can give him the emotional experience, or watching a product by someone without such skill or talent.

Although we invite the public to see something they have already seen, we should get there without replicating the work of others and disappointing the viewer's expectations. Very often the room for manoeuvre is quite limited, usually by the expectations of big industry producers. Technical possibilities (in their current scope) and discoveries by others in a given genre should serve as the starting point for our ideas and plans, rather than a template for imitation. Our viewer is likely a fan of a certain genre and knows all about it since he wanted to see our film.

Before working on *Black Hawk Down*, I carefully studied various battle sequences in *Saving Private Ryan*, shot by Janusz Kamiński, as well as other war films. Still, I searched

for another key by studying texts about the soldiers' psychological mindset on a contemporary battlefield. I have certainly copied from others, but tried to dress it up in my own way.

The genre and audience expectations that follow form the starting point for considering our film's style. Of course it doesn't imply that everything we do can be categorized. The reader here can question what kind of genre is discussed when we quote films by such masters as Fellini, Lars von Trier or others who are in a category of their own. The goal here is to analyze films that begin trends and are different—films portraying the world in a wholly original way. This situation is similar to the history of art, where great artists pioneered various discoveries, founded schools or launched trends that furthered their innovations. I nonetheless think that even great and singular film masterpieces require an analysis of their roots, the degree of their departure from the norm, and their remaining links to the laws of the genre.

On a film set the director is like the Almighty and often abuses this privilege. Kieślowski was undoubtedly an outstanding director but, more than anything, he was an incredibly able craftsman. He was quite conscious of the practically unlimited possibilities that making films had presented, but simultaneously aware that breaching certain boundaries would cut his ties with the audience. Playing with form without respecting the viewers' expectations often brings interesting discoveries that are usually seen as experimental films. Fascinated with form, some authors forget its subservient relationship to content, and sever the connection with the viewer. Genre-neutral, indistinct films often remind me of student films. From the outset the viewer has no idea whether it will be a comedy, a psychological drama or a thriller. We are just as confused as if we received an invitation to a formal evening and, dressed-up in black, we find ourselves at a costume ball. Today's finicky viewer has much to select from. He wants to know what he'll see and expects that the offer (a film trailer or poster, perhaps a review) will meet his expectations. When we promise something and don't follow through (or do it poorly), we unleash feelings of irritation. A viewer who purchased a comedy film ticket and during the first ten minutes saw nothing funny will feel disappointed. The same applies to a viewer seeing huge talking heads or images typical of television series. He instantly feels the loss of his investment, since talking heads are a staple of the home television set, not to mention the internet.

Film is a sum total of work by many artists and polyphonic aspects of their efforts often cause cacophony. Rather than help the story and its message by finding the common denominator for the film's form, these elements become merely a glitter of ornaments.

## **Building the world anew**

In one of his interviews, Pedro Almódovar said that in order to understand the nature of film we must remember that real rain does not exist in it. It simply isn't seen. I know this problem as a cinematographer. Drizzle or light rains are invisible on screen: it must rain buckets. Film rainstorms must be backlit and are best photographed against a dark background. When we make films, we remake the world. We translate our understanding of the story into forms understood by cinema audiences. We make choices, manipulate elements, and often flee from realistic depictions only to make sure that the public will experience a given scene in an emotional and realistic way.

A good example of this approach comes from action pictures. Let's imagine that, from a distance of one hundred meters we see an accident: two cars collide in a massive wreck. There are casualties. Watching it, our pulse quickens and the adrenaline levels rise. We're moved to witness the accident with our eyes. Were we to shoot it for a feature film, a master shot of the accident from a distance of one hundred meters would never distress the viewer. Why? After all it's the same accident and the same count of casualties. We are in a cinema, a special place, and our viewer has a comfortable seat. He is several generations away from his great-grandfathers, who fled theatres seeing a steaming locomotive entering a station in a film by the Lumière brothers.

Hollywood makes mainly action movies. If they aren't action films, each psychological thriller will have an accident or crime scene episode. For a long time, all action scenes and how they were photographed had nothing of the realistic experience of shooting an accident from the protagonist's point of view. Such an approach became obsolete long ago. It's difficult to emotionally engage a contemporary viewer. Ensconced in his seat, he knows that everything is under control and that no shrapnel from the battlefield will hit him. He knows that wrecked cars aren't dangerous. He watches calmly, subconsciously analyzing our way of showing an action scene, comparing it to thousands of others he saw. We must remember this principle, especially when we make action films. Most importantly, we must challenge the viewer's sense of security; our basic approach is to provoke a sense of anxiety in him. We become anxious when something escapes our control and when events develop ahead of our ability to maintain a degree of control. In cinema we achieve this level of viewer's anxiety by applying techniques of wholesale assault. Simply stated, shooting such scenes is based on the rule, "The thicker and quicker—the better."



Figure 6. *Black Hawk Down* (2001)

Watching in slow motion (frame by frame) such action films as *Saving Private Ryan* or *Black Hawk Down*, we quickly conclude that they have little or nothing to do with realistic portrayal. The amount of explosions and the ammunition used as well as their placement have no connection to a real battlefield. In *Black Hawk Down* our actors often shot at people using grenade launchers. The consultants were dismayed because nobody shoots at people using such weapons. Ridley Scott was adamant—he knew that shots from a normal gun are invisible on screen, but the sight of a grenade launcher discharging a ball of fire sows fear. The same principle applied to the altitude of flying helicopters. They flew at forty to fifty meters above ground because of the Cinemascope format we used. If the choppers flew higher, they wouldn't be visible and one could only photograph them against the sky, which would automatically becalm the whole image. The thickening of the image is one of the basic rules for photographing such scenes. We wanted to frame them and make sure that none of the elements looked peaceful. When we analyzed completed shots, Ridley Scott and I constantly heard, "You must have another chopper in the corner up there, and down there you need three more explosions. And you need to shake the chopper a lot."

The helicopter was suspended from a special crane that could be shaken. The rig was invented by Neil Corbould, a genius in special effects. We did not shake only the helicopter; we also shook cameras shooting the scenes. In an action film cinematographers appear to suffer an epilepsy attack and it really looks funny. Since there were many of us on the set of *Black Hawk Down*, we looked like a band of epileptics.

We also resorted to other strange tricks. Action scenes are almost never shot at a regular speed. Quite often things that move fast (like a flying grenade) were slowed down. Others were made more dynamic by speeding up the movement of vehicles, for example. In his classic battle scene from *Saving Private Ryan* Janusz Kamiński changed the 180-degree

camera shutter to 90 degrees, achieving a more staccato character in the soldiers' movements.

All of these resources, including shaking cameras, extreme use of lenses from very wide to very long, sudden changes of focus and film speed, deformations of image, smoke and random explosions, as well as every possible aftereffect applied with computers in postproduction—everything current technology has on offer—are used for filming such scenes. Only this kind of approach can really shake the viewer! I remember that after the premiere of *Black Hawk Down* an army general responsible for Special Forces in Poland came to congratulate me, saying that it was the first film that realistically depicted contemporary skirmishes in the Third World. I thought I was dreaming: I'd understand if he were an average viewer. But a specialist? I didn't question him about the altitude for flying helicopters, but clearly the film didn't disappoint even those who were in Iraq and participated in such battles.

The action scenes described above and how they were photographed don't necessarily define the obligatory method of filming such episodes. I will address this issue in detail when analyzing the accident scene in Kieślowski's *Blue*. Most importantly, when we look for the style of our film, we shouldn't ignore core techniques used to present a given genre. We must begin our analysis for finding the appropriate imagery for our film by not ignoring how a given genre is made by others. I don't suggest direct replication—quite the opposite, in fact. I'm advocating researching and departing from typical solutions, like a genre-specific approach applied to a totally different genre.

### **Artist as a child**

A simple experiment will suffice. Ask your (or friend's) child to draw a house. A few seconds later a house with windows, doors, and a roof appears. Then ask the child to draw mom and dad at home. Without hesitating, the child will draw these figures on the wall of the house. When we observe that mom and dad are invisible because they are behind the wall inside, the child is unperturbed. A child sees much more, just like Jean-Pierre Jeunet in *Amélie*, showing the actress with a visible, beating heart.<sup>12</sup> It's a principle worth keeping in mind, because my comments at this point might be more useful than the excess of red wine, mentioned below...

## **Inspiration and self-censorship**

A few years ago, IMAGO (the European Society of Cinematographers) organized a seminar in Copenhagen on inspiration in our profession. My speech came at the end, well after my distinguished colleagues showed scenes from their films and spoke of being inspired by music, painting, and photography. I had nothing left to say, except that personally I sought inspiration in alcohol. That once, in Communist times when I could barely afford the habit, I drank cheap vodka but now I drink red wine. I added that, if anybody had carefully watched all of my films (I'm not recommending it since there are many mediocre ones among the seventy I made), he would clearly see when the vodka period ended and the red wine era began. During the Copenhagen seminar I placed that line at *A Short Film About Killing*, adding that my travel to France with Kieślowski to shoot *The Double Life of Veronique* enabled me to discover a completely different set of emotions after consuming the red liquid.<sup>13</sup>

I remember that my audience was amused, but it was more than a joke. Our work is burdened by artistic and financial responsibility. The marketplace is difficult and it's very hard to succeed. A young professional who has a chance of a debut faces many doubts and feels the weight of responsibility not only for his work but also for a group of people who work for him and believe in his success. Quite often the burden on his shoulders limits his inspiration to copying the past. Instead of searching for his own solutions and letting his hidden, childlike sensitivity arise, he applies methods and solutions used in other films. After analyzing similar work by others, instead of following his own path he seeks shortcuts and steals ideas. This is partially caused by the education system. The filmmaker's education is different: unlike the schooling of a writer or a musician, large amount of money is needed to make a film. Film schools should provide filmmakers with an opportunity to experiment and search for their own, original solutions. A mistake in school is only a student error. One mistake in a professional feature debut can mean a lifelong career ban. Unfortunately, film schools often judge and promote student films just like they are promoted outside of school walls. Thinking ahead is often neglected in the educational process. Students aren't allowed to explore their artistic potential. Such an approach can only shut off their hidden talents. Materializing as soon as we enter a set, self-censorship and fear can often be a barrier for potentially gifted filmmakers, and the system in which we function makes it even worse. Such fear leads us to replicate the repertoire of others and I mention it here only because earlier I advocated studying films of similar genres. It isn't copying—it's entering a path to one's own style and to a discovery of film style that one makes. Perhaps for many

cinematographers this process is simple. For me it was always detective work—an attempt to look at the same thing from another point of view. Besides red wine (an innocent joke), it's a reminder that every method that stops self-censorship and opens up the creative process is a laborious task. You must work all day and drink wine at night. Someone was certainly right to say that genius is ninety-nine percent work and one percent inspiration.<sup>14</sup>

## Suggestions

I'm not among the cinematographers looking for inspiration in paintings or music: studying a given phenomenon or problem is far more important for me. When I worked on *The Double Life of Veronique* I read a lot about telepathy, and before *Black Hawk Down* I studied psychological aspects of soldiering on the modern battlefield. When I'm well informed and can navigate the world of a script, I can glimpse where the story of my film is located, see the protagonist's point of view and, on subsequent readings, I literally begin to look at the world through his eyes. Often it's a totally new perspective, since one needs to filter out the world conjured up by the screenwriter through the psychological makeup of its protagonist. The reality is seen differently by a murderer than it would be by a sixteen year old girl. I read the script and make drawings on the set design plans or on the imaginary sets that will chart the hero's progress. Something like a roadmap of our hero's movements throughout the entire film begins to emerge. It affords me a better view of where the protagonist is, what he sees from a given perspective, and where and how often he revisits the same places. Such a virtual journey of the protagonist throughout the script is a good exercise to make the hero's world (decorations, lighting) more fascinating. It's to see the world not as I see it, but as the protagonist does.

Writing scripts is a complicated process. The screenwriter must keep in mind a lot of elements. He must construct the protagonist and his evolution. He must create a world surrounding him and give it dramatic structure. Locations for the scriptwriter are secondary. That's why our films often take place in bars, around tables, or in bed. Often just moving the set to a new location brings in a new quality. I wasn't going to discuss my work on *Blue* now, but here is a classic example. One of the script versions I received from Kieślowski and Krzysztof Piesiewicz called for Julie's jogging in act two to balance her increasing inner tension. I suggested moving the jogging scenes to a pool. As far as the script, nothing was altered but visually this change gave us many more possibilities.



Figure 7. *Blue* (1993)

### **Visual drama or everything upside down**

The beginning of a film is very important in terms of visual drama. I also indicated that here we can depart from the story we tell. A question arises whether such strategy changes when we enter the second act. Would a certain measure of visual disengagement at the beginning be accepted later on in the film? I think not, although like everything in art, one must reserve a margin of uncertainty and my categorical answer should be somewhat qualified. Simply stated, a measure of freedom our camera had at the beginning will vanish the further we go into the film and become a slave to the story we narrate. This rule isn't absolute because of the available space and tools allowing us to comment on the story.

### **The role of the establishing shot. Is it merely geographical?**

Films are made up of shots with names. I don't want to quote definitions, since "master shot" means different things in the United States and France. In the U.S. it usually is a general shot of a given scene. In France it's the most important shot in a scene, regardless of whether it's a close-up or a general shot of the set. The French consider it the foundation of a scene with all other shots supporting it and, to an extent, dependent on it. Polish film thinking is closer to this interpretation and I'm analyzing scenes in this fashion.

We also have reverse angles, inserts, and we name the size of shots and distance from the actor, from a close-up and medium close-up to a long shot. I could mention that the shot called "the American" is known in America as the "cowboy shot." And, to cap this quick refresher, we finally have the establishing shot. Is it merely a geographic reference?

In the world of film, the literary narrator is replaced by an organic and invisible structure. Shooting a particular scene we must give the viewer the information provided by

the literary narrative. For example, "It was a stormy afternoon. In the salon, the princess turned away from the window and angrily addressed Thomas..." Filming it cannot end with the angry princess turning away from the window and telling Thomas off. It's not enough to show the curtains bellowing in the wind. The viewer wants and needs to know where this scene takes place, especially if it's the first scene in a manor house. In every serial, scenes with dialogue come after the establishing shot. It may be the outside of the manor house, a hospital, or an interior. The lack of such shots (usually in student films) makes them claustrophobic and irritating to the viewer, since he is geographically lost and cannot follow the story as it develops.

### **My definition of the establishing shot**

We must focus on something more important—the phenomenon accompanying such shots in films. They aren't directly related to the action but are registered in the deep background of the viewer's mind. When we describe the film to a friend we don't remember them since they aren't the main element of the story. *Nonetheless these shots are still there* and that's their strength. We can say that the establishing shots belong to the arsenal of images influencing our subconscious. This property enables them to serve goals much deeper than the geographical placement of our film. In my own interpretation of film grammar, the establishing shot category encompasses all shots not directly related to action. They not only provide information about the physical places of action, but also could and should play many different roles. Above all, with them we can reach the depth of the protagonist's character. In such a case, we could call them psychological establishing shots (see *Blue*). They could also intensify fear (see *The Shining*), but their greatest role is to comment on our story and direct the viewer's attention to our film's message.

In *The Double Life of Veronique*, the Polish Veronique looks at a glass sphere as she leaves her hometown forever. She sees places associated with her childhood that become distant, distorted and turned upside down.



Figure 8. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)

This shot is a natural part of the scene. But Kieślowski used it elsewhere, where this twisted and misshapen image did not have a natural connection to the scene. In act two, someone calls the French Veronique without identifying himself.



Figure 9. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)

After a moment of silence, the caller plays some music, and we see the deformed view from the glass sphere and hear Polish Veronique's singing.



Figure 10. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)

I don't have to add that this shot has nothing to do with the scene; it's a director's comment since at that point the French Veronique has no idea of her Polish counterpart. When the French Veronique wakes up in act three, Kieślowski repeats the same manoeuvre.



Figure 11. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)

These shots aren't part of the story but a director's insert underlining a mysterious connection between the two women. We could say that these are establishing shots showing a curious connection of physically identical fates of two different Veroniques.

In Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, photographed by John Alcott, we see a boy who rides his tricycle along the corridors of a huge, empty building. Kubrick returns to this shot on several occasions. The repeats and monotony of a lonely child riding around produces a feeling of paranoia. It gives off bad vibes in the place and intensifies fear.

Establishing shots often augment a film's message. It was undoubtedly related to metamorphoses or transformation in Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs*.<sup>15</sup> Clarice Starling, a young, modest and provincial FBI agent, becomes a courageous and wise policewoman after her encounter with a brilliant and psychopathic murderer and cannibal, who is also a psychiatrist. We also have a murderer who kills obese women and uses their skin to change his sex. The director logically uses "biological" shots of maggots transformed into night moths in order to underline the common denominator of transformation, an element of the film's message.<sup>16</sup>

In *The Queen*—a history of two women who never meet on screen—Stephen Frears uses establishing shots to provide epic dimensions to the conflict.<sup>17</sup> It's a scene where Her Majesty, uneasy about her own take on the events relating to Princess Diana, leaves for a lone walk to think everything over. Stopping in the woods, deep in thought, she looks at her own face reflected in a car mirror. At this moment the director cuts to a general shot from a helicopter, showing the Scottish Highlands. Just as in a Breughel painting, there are tiny human figures—part of Prince Edward's hunt. This epic shot is very long, much too long for its content, but it isn't just a postcard from Scotland. Its length is connected to the reflections coming across Her Majesty's mind. At last we hear a journalist ask off screen: "**Do you want to become a queen?**" Only then Stephen Frears cuts to a close-up of Princess Diana's face. She looks into the camera and, deep in thought, like the queen, she doesn't answer right away. We seem to think that she still "sees" the bird's eye view of her country we just watched on screen. Only a moment later, she hesitatingly says: "**No! I don't want to**

be a queen. I want to be the queen of human hearts." Here is a true establishing shot. Its epic scale connects the fates and differences in understanding of service to the country by the two women who never met on screen.

Here's one more example from *The Double Life of Veronique*. The sense of passing time was always present in Kieślowski's films. The Polish Veronique sees an old woman before a concert and offers to help her:



Figure 12. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)

An almost identical picture of an elderly woman is seen (but not commented upon) by the French Veronique as she teaches a lesson:



Figure 13. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)

Finally, an unusual example from *Breaking the Waves* by Lars von Trier.<sup>18</sup> It's a story of Bess, a naively honest woman driven to insanity by love. Told in seven acts, the narrative is intercut with shots seemingly taken from another film. Seeing them and hearing the music we have a feeling of watching postcards. These shots are sufficiently long that we unwittingly try to confront our judgment of Bess with her onscreen actions. The entire world, including clergy and the parish folk, treat Bess terribly. Looking into static and long images—establishing shots—we have enough time to ask ourselves, "How would we react if Bess appeared in our lives?" "Would it be like the religious community in the film?"

We don't remember these shots when we leave the cinema but, as the examples above illustrate, they are an important part of film structure. Unfortunately we often forget about them on the set because usually they aren't written into the script. Nonetheless, they are a versatile choice not only providing insights into our films but also helping us to

construct them. In *Amadeus*, Salieri proudly presents the Emperor with his latest work.<sup>19</sup> The young Mozart grabs the page of the score and instantly improvises a much better composition at the piano. Salieri angrily grabs and crumples it in front of the Emperor and his retinue. The director shows the page being squished in a close-up to a distorted sound of crushed paper. We still hear it after a cut and see a herd of deer fleeing into the forest. The viewer thinks that they escape the sound of the crushed paper. Of course that's wrong, because the hunt scene follows, but by using this establishing shot with the sound from another scene, the director makes the action more dramatic and dynamic.

Thanks to establishing shots we can influence a film's emotional reception. After seeing scenes filled with erotic tension, viewers laugh when they see the establishing shots of a postman in *Nine ½ Weeks*.<sup>20</sup> Establishing shots enable us to shorten scenes, edit with a different scene order and, in the last phase of editing, give the film a certain pace. One should keep in mind that these shots can be utilized or not and, if we're lucky, could fulfill an important and useful role, just as in the examples cited above. If our plans don't pan out, we can cut them out. Since they are foreign to the body of the film, we can be more experimental and visually bold because the establishing shots don't necessarily end up in a final cut. I think that writing them into the script would wreak havoc with the narrative structure of text and form. I never saw the script for *Amélie*, but simply cannot imagine writing the extraordinary amount of establishing shots into the script since it could be over three hundred pages long. As such it wouldn't be transparent enough to an editor or a producer. In my opinion, establishing shots are a complimentary but separate source for capturing some ideas or scenes. For an inventive cinematographer it's a place to shine and contribute his creative imprint toward the final version of the film.

To illustrate this thought, I'll cite a few ideas for establishing shots Kieślowski and I wanted to use during shooting of *The Double Life of Veronique*. One of the ideas was a dog, owned by the Polish Veronique, who after her death crosses Europe and reaches the French Veronique. Kieślowski quickly gave up on it not because he feared associations with *Lassie Come Home* but because he thought the dog will steal the show and nobody will care about the connection between the two Veroniques.<sup>21</sup> Another idea (also discarded) was a parallel set of adventures of both Veroniques with music pages that the Polish Veronique lost in the middle of Cracow's Old Town Square:



Figure 14. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)

We considered what could happen with a page of music and recorded a poetical sequence of it being picked up by a gust of wind, floating down a river, being tossed into a garbage bin, and so on. The script and the finished film are two different worlds and techniques for conveying the information that establishing shots provide; both can facilitate the process of transforming words into images.

### **Working on the script or looking for style**

By coincidence I made all of Kieślowski's early feature films, including his first television film, *Przejście podziemne* and his first cinema feature, *The Scar*.<sup>22</sup> *A Short Film About Killing* was his next project—the fifth in the *Decalogue* series, which also became a feature based on the same materials.<sup>23</sup> Actually, the *Decalogue* series began with this film. Later, Kieślowski and I moved on to our first foreign film, *The Double Life of Veronique*. Although partially made in Poland, most of it was shot in France. I grew very fond of this trend and when Kieślowski gave me first drafts of scripts for the *Three Colors* and asked which of them I'd like to shoot, I chose *Blue* because it would be the first in the series.<sup>24</sup>

When I'm asked how I feel about my profession as a cinematographer, I compare my job to the world's oldest profession—prostitution. The role of the cinematographer is to dream someone else's dreams. I began to use this gentle joke only after I started making films abroad. The cinematographer's job in Poland during the years 1960-1980 was completely different from what was practiced around the world. In Poland we co-authored the visual content but elsewhere (especially in the American studio system) the job of a cinematographer is only to light the set. He is hired after the set designer and when he finally joins the crew, most of the visual decisions were made. In Poland our work always began with a script. Together with the director we wrote a shooting script, listing shots needed for scenes. In reality it became another version of the script—some scenes were added and others were cut. One could say that in the Polish system the cinematographer

was like a ghostwriter, someone out of the limelight but influential in shaping the film's character. The success of Polish cinema at international festivals was due to their extraordinary visual side, and films shot by Jerzy Wójcik, Jerzy Lipman or Witold Sobociński, were universally admired.<sup>25</sup> Their innovative style could only come from their work on the script. The film set is the last place where you can shape the film visually. Only when he began making films outside of Poland, Kieślowski realized the different role played by Polish cinematographers. He honored their contributions by adding cinematographers as co-screenwriters in all of his films in the *Three Colors* series.

## Individual or team work

The film's visual side was created after hours of conversations and rehearsals.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, there was a rule that—just like an actor—the cinematographer is hired only for a specific film. Jokingly one could say that the cinematographer was asked for a single dance only. I was lucky in life since in a few cases it didn't end with just one film, giving me a chance to develop, better communicate and implement a given director's ideas.<sup>27</sup> Before we analyze Kieślowski's *Blue*, it may be interesting to quote my earlier experiences of working with him.

Our first film was already a surprise. We shot it at night, on one location—a store in the recently completed subway under the crossing of Marszałkowska and Jerozolimskie Avenue.<sup>28</sup> This half-an-hour long television film was a remarkable study of two people who did completely different things in their lives. Besides shorts films, Kieślowski made documentaries, whereas I made features. Everything was different in those days. Certainly there were no monitors and to see the results of our work after thirteen nights of shooting we had to wait twelve more days for the lab to process our material. After we saw it, Krzysztof was furious. "It's totally artificial. There is no life in it," he said. It was his way of criticizing shooting it using reverse angles, a classical technique for a psychological drama. I disagreed but understood that for a documentary filmmaker like Kieślowski this rather mechanical and contrived way of telling the story was quite painful. He certainly didn't make his documentaries this way. It was during the period in our lives when we sought inspiration in vodka. We sat together in *Ściek* and I thought that the last shooting day could be different.<sup>29</sup> I wasn't quite sure of the outcome, but after another round of vodka everything seemed possible and I proposed that we do everything all over again. The camera will be handheld, like in a documentary reportage, and the actors will play everything in

chronological order as long as we had film. Then the assistants would reload the camera and we'll film the next portion of the script. In this crazy fashion we shot it once again without retakes. If something was slightly dark or out of focus, we didn't correct it. We had only one night and our only chance was to do it all at once.<sup>30</sup> Krzysztof was in his element. He liked the material a lot. I liked it less. What's truly interesting is that the final version kept most of the early material with reverse angles and only a small portion of the last day's "documentary" material. Although it was only a fraction of the narrative, it gave the film an authentic touch.

I never forgot this lesson. The execution scene in *A Short Film About Killing* was shot the same way—from the beginning to the end in long takes broken up only by reloading the camera. The most remarkable part was that the prison cell where death sentences were carried out had to be built at the studio on Chełmska Street and Krzysztof wouldn't allow the guards to begin when they entered the condemned man's cell.<sup>31</sup> He wanted to reenact the long passage from the prisoner's cell to the execution. In prison it was a corridor of several hundred meters and Krzysztof had the poor actor, Miroslaw Baka, dragged through endless studio corridors for as long as it would take it inside a real prison. He wanted the extras leading the condemned man to his death to feel their role. He wanted them to be tired of fighting with the inmate by the time they reached death row. As we shot this scene, the atmosphere was so dense that I had to occasionally sneak out for a breath of fresh air. The entire crew, especially the guards, was covered with sweat. Sometimes I wish that our films had images as well as scents!

## **Defeating fear**

One talks about fear not only in connection with *A Short Film About Killing*. From the beginning, I was lobbied by Krzysztof to collaborate on other episodes of *Decalogue* with him. But I resisted. At first it would be a television series shot on 16mm which, for some reason was poorly developed in Polish laboratories and films made in this format looked rather disappointing. Krzysztof and I were on a skiing holiday in my family home in the mountains, and each meal ended with an offer. From a few episodes in the series, Krzysztof bargained it down to two. Shortly before our vacations ended, he settled for one episode. In the end I agreed to do *Decalogue 9*, but the ever-vigilant Krzysztof was distrustful. "I know what you think," he said. When I'm working on *Decalogue 9*—the film is planned for the end of this year—you'll be offered a German film and leave me stranded." It was quite true—I

didn't want to make additional episodes of *Decalogue* for that reason. In Poland I made features exclusively but my real earnings came from working on television series in Germany.<sup>32</sup> "Here you are, in *Bystra*, doing nothing," Krzysztof continued. "You could come to Warsaw and shoot *Decalogue 5*." Krzysztof was thinking of the Fifth Commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," and planning *A Short Film About Killing*. I wasn't moved. "Krzysztof! I can't even get through that script! Why must I make a film where some brute is killing a taxi driver during the first half and is being hanged during the second half? Filmmaking is also my life, so why should I dirty my hands with this stuff?" "Because it is a good script," was Krzysztof's reply.

It was the period when our inspiration was vodka-induced, so I devised how to play along without refusing outright. "OK, Krzysztof," I said. "I'll agree on one condition. I'll do the film in green and will use a lot of my grad filters." Theoretically, he didn't have to go along. He had to make a series, and his ten films had to be linked stylistically. Together with Tadeusz Stefaniak I made a variety of optical filters and some of them were so extreme that I could hardly find a film where I could use them. I threw in some bait that shouldn't have been caught. Krzysztof returned to the subject of skiing and the question of my work on the *Decalogue* series was closed. The next day was our last skiing day and shortly before leaving he spoke up. "Idziak!" (He rarely addressed me this way). "I'm making ten films and if one of them looks like green shit, that's your business. You'll author the images, not I." And that's how I was hired for *A Short Film About Killing*.

Upset that my holiday was over, I decided to act boldly. From my collection of filters (about two hundred at that time) I selected the greenest, resembling the color of beer bottles.<sup>33</sup> On top of this basic filter, from the first shooting day I used graduated filters extensively. I inserted them into a frame in ways that were extravagantly different from their normal application. Dark parts I turned darker and I used filters aggressively to divide the screen, so that the right hand side was dark and left was bright, and so on. Right after watching the materials, Krzysztof left the screening room, slamming the doors. I was also frightened. What I saw was very far removed from anything I had ever seen. I left the screening room with my head low. My work was really a monochromatic, greenish-yellow shit. A few months later during the Cannes Festival, where the film was invited to the Main Competition, the same conclusion was reached by a *Nice-Matin* critic. He wrote that it was dramatically photographed in the color of urine and nobody had so ably conveyed the Communist reality in terms of color.

That same night after Krzysztof and I watched the materials for *A Short Film About Killing*, he called me and invited me to the studio. Irked by what he saw, instead of going to

sleep he edited the scene. We watched it together in silence. The materials were terrifying but after being put together they looked strange yet coherent. "There's something here," Krzysztof said and a heavy burden fell from my heart. I wouldn't be paying for reshooting, even if I was ready to offer this option as a plea for forgiveness.

What's the reason for quoting this episode in detail in an essay on visual dramaturgy? It's because thanks to this incident I was born again. The story of being hired for *A Short Film About Killing* did not kill the fear in the bottom of my heart, a fit of panic experienced by every cinematographer. I have the same amount of fear every time I start a new film. I'm afraid like everyone else, but after this film I understood that I must conquer my fear. It's difficult and unpleasant, because in the world of film that is run by money, doing something new and original often ends in the slamming of doors and getting fired. Using dramatic vocabulary, I could say that *A Short Film About Killing* was a turning point in my life. Sławomir Idziak became a different cinematographer after this film. I'm not saying a better cinematographer, but a searching one.<sup>34</sup> We walk the line and occasionally must cross it; such is our fate and our profession. Of course we could select a safer path to the top, a path trodden by dozens of other colleagues. We could certainly copy their surefire ideas, but why?<sup>35</sup>

I must quote another story from this film. This time my disagreement with Krzysztof was about the location of a taxi rank on Castle Square.<sup>36</sup> As a feature film specialist, I had no problem moving the "Taxi" signpost into the shadows. Right away I heard, "Idziak!" When Krzysztof was angry he always used my last name. "In my film when a passenger steps off the 132 bus on Wilson Square, there's a real bus stop and the 132 bus stops there." I reminded Krzysztof about this incident when we were location scouting in France for *The Double Life of Veronique*. Krzysztof and I spoke no French and he could assess his surroundings only as a tourist, who sees a place so different from Poland for the first time in his life. "So, Krzysztof," I said, "Where is your 132 bus now?"

Apart from our jokes, Krzysztof's instincts as a documentary filmmaker and his experience in making documentaries allowed him to spot unbelievable situations and setups. He knew exactly when the truth factor of the story was absolutely essential. That's what I learned from him and I've tried to remember this simple rule. The truth at the beginning of the film and at its end: that's two different things. When at the beginning we depict something uncommon, we create "miracles" that don't happen in a normal world. It's a mistake. The viewer will instantly feel he is in a fake, made-up world that just isn't worth watching.<sup>37</sup> When we commit the same untruth later, it's invisible. The viewer is already engaged emotionally and sometimes even expects miracles, as long as our protagonist gets

what he deserves. In the third act of *The Double Life of Veronique* the heroine is upset after a conversation with Alexandre, her love interest. She flees the railway terminal café and hides in the doorway. Alexandre follows her, but she is difficult to find on a busy Paris street. At some point Veronique runs for a taxi that stopped to discharge a passenger, and jumps in. The taxi pulls away just as Alexandre closes in, but it's too late. The taxi with Veronique in it vanishes past a street corner alongside hundreds of cars. In the next scene Veronique checks in to a hotel. When she turns around, Alexandre is there already. How did he find her in a big city? She left by taxi, he was on foot. Things don't add up, but it's not important at this point. Here is the miracle the viewer had wished for. The same scene at the beginning of the film would be a schoolboy error in narrating the story but it isn't an error towards the end.

If I were to describe Kieślowski concisely and select a trait that made him such a distinguished artist, besides talent I would first mention courage. It wasn't however the courage of an artist-visionary who was always one hundred percent certain of his ideas. Kieślowski wasn't a suicidal type; he could and he wanted to do new things, but he always wove a safety net around his ideas. His courage was supported by a solid knowledge of his craft and his unusual industriousness. Whilst he was certain of his ideas, he would also be the first to give them up. I don't think I ever met another director in my life who could so quickly abandon even his best ideas. Krzysztof's pragmatic approach allowed him to pursue his visions and let them go if they weren't practical. Once during our conversation I complained that in my profession the final outcome is a film that either doesn't look as it should, or it doesn't look the way I imagined it.<sup>38</sup> Only once I saw a good image in a lab which had an ideally calibrated theatre and projected it from the master. Afterwards, in normal cinemas I saw a different film, the copy was bad, or the projection was too dark, and so on.

"A different film and maybe another ending?" Krzysztof immediately inquired. It was because during *The Double Life of Veronique* he concluded that the ending—as written in the script—won't work. Endless conversations about the ending ensued. There were a few ideas and that's what Krzysztof had in mind when he said he could perhaps make *The Double Life of Veronique* with different endings for different cinemas. Well, maybe not for every cinema, but there would be three endings. It was a revolutionary idea and, looking at it from the perspective of time, it was a harbinger of the now oft-discussed interactive cinema. Unfortunately at that time and from the point of view of production and distribution, it was too expensive and wasn't implemented, even though all three endings

were actually shot. In the final cut Krzysztof integrated them and the film ends when Veronique places her hand on a tree growing by the entry gate to the house.



Figure 15. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)

Ironically, it didn't settle the matter. The American distributor disliked the ending and the condition of having the film distributed in the United States was to shoot another, unambiguous close. The American viewers see how Veronique runs and hugs her father who, sensing her presence at the gate, leaves the house.



Figure 16. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)



Figure 17. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)

### I don't want a monitor on the set

Over the past few years changes in filmmaking technology gathered an avalanche-like speed. It's not just the speed—it's also the depth and breadth of changes and how they influence the way we narrate and present our films. For me the line of demarcation is *Blue* which may be surprising since it was made in a traditional fashion on film stock, just like all

of my previous films and many others afterwards. My reasoning is that *Blue* was my last film without set monitors connected to cameras. We must remember that by that time this technique was already employed on many film sets. To the producer's surprise, Kieślowski rejected it. "I don't want to turn my back to the actors and stare at the monitor," he said. "And I know what the camera sees," he added.

This line of demarcation may be invisible, especially when we consider recent digital films. But I think otherwise—from the moment monitors appeared on the set, the basic approach to workflow has changed. For our generation the outcome was a great unknown—we had to wait a day or two to screen dailies and compare the results to expectations. The director and the cinematographer had to imagine on the set what they would see on screen much later. The comparison with one's imagined vision was never instant or direct. And the tools we had weren't as great as those we have today. The surprise (often a painful one) was part of the process. Personally I think that the way we trained our brains and the tension connected to the act of filming—issues less important on a set today—had shaped a different kind of an artist. I don't think a better one, just *different*. I wrote about it at the outset, calling this age group the generation of "what you see is what you get." Nowadays every photographer or cinematographer shoots and instantly controls the outcome. He can quickly correct and change things. If he commits an error, he sees it instantly. On top of that shots are recorded on the set, which means that we can replay and analyze them endlessly. Furthermore, we can shoot endlessly since digital medium is cheap. As a result, our creative mind keeps changing and degrading just like our ability to remember all kinds of telephone numbers. In the past we memorized hundreds and now our mobile phones do it for us. This lack of instant certainty and immediate proof that weren't possible before the monitors appeared produced a different kind of an artist. The visionaries like Antonioni, Fellini, and Fassbinder have their modern counterparts, but I feel that the center of gravity moves towards manipulating images already recorded. Visual aspects of contemporary films are more often created inside a computer than on a film set. We still make films according to the old system, but it is clear that it needs serious reform.

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## PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF IMAGE IN FILM: CASE STUDY OF KRZYSZTOF KIEŚŁOWSKI'S *BLUE*

Unquestionably, *Blue* is an exceptional film and the recognition it received at various international festivals makes it a "high culture" achievement.<sup>39</sup> I chose *Blue* also because it was a commercial success.<sup>40</sup> It was seen by a discriminating public looking for a deeper meaning rather than a dynamic annoyance of emotions. The average public—who watch comedies, a genre considered inferior by the critics—also went to see *Blue*. Its success was due to Kieślowski's superior command of his craft: he moved to direct features only after becoming experienced in the documentary field. These skills enabled him to bind the viewer's emotions to the screen.

### Kieślowski as a documentary director

Unlike many of his film school colleagues, Krzysztof exemplified a director with no lofty ambitions. Avoiding long and trendy discussions of films by Fellini and Antonioni in the 1960s and 1970s, he concentrated on the surrounding world instead. He saw it as an unrepresented world.

There was a need, actually quite exciting for us, to describe the world. The Communist world wasn't described; I'll put it differently—it was described how it should look, and not how it actually looked. [...] It's rather like when something isn't described, it doesn't really exist. If we begin to write about things, we bring them to life.<sup>41</sup>

I think that Krzysztof treated us—film school students who declared themselves feature directors in the making—with a degree of contempt. As he honed his craft by shooting documentaries, his friends basked in the reflected light of trendy films and artists of the day. Kieślowski searched for his own path; among other attributes, it was marked by the truthfulness of the narrative. When others notated their "otherworldly" ideas on paper, Krzysztof recorded real events in his documentaries. His viewers instantly recognized that Krzysztof's analysis of the surrounding world wasn't a figment of his imagination but an element from everyday life of the average man. The credibility of Krzysztof's stories and their authenticity wasn't the sole element of his basic training. Like a true craftsman, he learned through work. Years later, when he began his stint at the Documentary Film Studio,

he spent hours in the editing room, giving his films their final look. I remember many a night leaving the studio and seeing a solitary light in the building; I could bet anything that it was Krzysztof editing his films.

### **Discussions, fears, and searches**

I photographed *Blue* right after *The Double Life of Veronique* and it entailed a certain problem that we recognized: the two films had much in common. Music played an important role in both. Both films dealt with the inner lives of protagonists rather than their adventures. There was a danger of accidental similarities, something like cashing in on the same product once again. When we watch films by well-known directors, we often see that the world they had once depicted remains the same forever. We see identical obsessions and similar visual solutions. Krzysztof and I talked a lot about it at first, and I must admit that at that point *Blue's* style wasn't defined. We had a wealth of ideas and no answers. *Blue* is a film that received its final form in the editing room. The process of getting there was exceptionally long. It illustrates well the adage, "Each artwork has its own life." The discovery of *Blue's* own life was an arduous and time-consuming process. At first there was a script for a psychological drama with elements of music. What came of it?

- Zbigniew Preisner's score was important, but its presence in the script was much smaller than in the final version of the film.
- In the script, the role of a catalyst—a detective—discovering the complicated relationship between Julie and her famous composer-husband, was given to a journalist. She was the third person in this relationship and was cut out almost completely from the film.
- It was to be a psychological drama, but I wouldn't hesitate to call it an operatic film, since psychological drama is practically undetectable. The music has the same narrative role it has in an opera—it is in the foreground.

I'll illustrate from my own (cinematographer's) point of view how we arrived at the final shape of the film.

### **God's gift or the protagonist's charisma**

Even if I'm not sure of its authenticity, I keep telling a story of a journalist asking Andrzej Wajda about the art of directing. "It's having a good cast," Wajda replied. "Sure,

but what else?" the journalist wanted to know. "Nothing else," Wajda continued. "If you have a good cast, you'll have a good film."

It may not be quite true and Andrzej Wajda certainly knows it. When I made *The Conductor*, I saw how Wajda and his assistants changed the script to increase Krystyna Janda's role. In Andrzej Kijowski's original script her part was much smaller. Seeing her potential on screen, Wajda knew he'll have a better film if the central figure will be played by Krystyna Janda rather than Andrzej Seweryn, who played her jealous husband. We may have an excellent script, great director, good photography and music, but with a poor cast we won't have a good film. An actor well-qualified for the role is a basic requirement for the film's success. Not only that! An actor who catches your eye and makes the viewer follow him must have charisma.<sup>42</sup> My definition of film charisma is slightly different. A charismatic person in real life may not be charismatic on screen. Quite often those invisible in everyday life have a magnetic on-screen effect, "something" hard to define. I remember sitting with Juliette Binoche in a café next to the cinema, with a poster and her picture on it. Passersby never noticed that this woman without a makeup is the star whose likeness was right above our table. That's the power of the cinematic close-up. The face of the actress takes dozens of square meters on the screen and radiates every nuance, including the tiniest changes in the range of her inner emotions. We don't see such microscopic scrutiny in everyday life. The camera is a brutally honest surgical tool. Screen tests allow us to see if our actor has charisma. After five minutes of screen time, we know who we're dealing with. Does this person possess magnetic appeal? It's often the case when an actor isn't, as we put it, transparent. He or she should possess a secret or some kind of mystery that the camera will register. Of such actors we say that the "camera loves them" and only with them on board we can begin to narrate a "low concept" story. *Blue* was undoubtedly this kind of a film.<sup>43</sup> Juliette promised us an unusual and intriguing portrayal, far beyond what was in the script.

I have no doubt that *Blue* owes its success to Juliette's outstanding character and talent. With such an actress, Kieślowski could indulge himself and narrate the story differently. Dialogues scenes were replaced with scenes of heroine alone, and her screen loneliness wasn't tedious at all. But nobody had understood it at first.

### **The story in *Blue***

The story was challenging from the start. Right away we knew it wouldn't be an easy film. In a well-structured three-act feature, the exposition sets out plot complications

resulting from the protagonist's decisions or from events in act one. Comparing typical feature film structure to the world of legends and fables, we could say that act one is the normal world and act two is the world of adventure. Act one is like a hard climb, but act two is a rollercoaster, a flight into unknown with a strong acceleration of dramatic events.

The chain of events in *Blue* set these rules upside down. Everything dramatic happens in act one. There is a terrible accident and a hospital recovery (including a suicide attempt), followed by a dramatic return to an empty house with Julie's odd and unexpected decision to get rid of her possessions. At the end of act one there is a desperate love scene with her husband's assistant who is clearly aware that Julie is in love with him. The world of the second act is standing still. Julie is in a new place, far away from everybody who knew her, and she doesn't keep in touch with anyone from her former life. The entire second act is composed of episodes. Julie sets up her apartment; Julie sits in a café, listening to a street performer playing flute; she goes for a swim in a pool; she visits her mother. The mini-dramas in her life include mice invading her apartment, and a street fight that she witnesses, leading to an accidental lockout from her apartment. Her husband's assistant, Olivier, manages to find her but disappears after a quick cup of coffee.

One must conclude that the emotional makeup of act one and act two represent two different worlds. During the first, everything rushes ahead and surprises us, and in the second everything grinds to a halt. Kieślowski was conscious of this fact and it was clear to him that drama at the beginning of the film had to accompany Julie in act two. He wanted to find such means of expression that, in spite of the banality of events in act two, the viewer would feel the emotions of the film's leading character. The challenge was to depict in images the inner drama constantly affecting the heroine in spite of her efforts to break with her past. Since *Blue* was recognized as an exceptional film, how did it happen, given the clearly weaker contents of act two?

One should consider a few examples here. A classic one in terms of genre is *Saving Private Ryan*. It's a war film where the strongest scene is the opening battle. Although the second and third acts are great, none of the later scenes match the opening, where the viewers sweat bullets. A similar approach in a different genre was taken by Jean-Pierre Jeunet in *Amélie*. The impact of act one is just as powerful as the battle in *Saving Private Ryan* and nothing that follows has the emotional power of the beginning. Narrating the story of Amélie's childhood followed the strategy of an action film director: swamping the viewer with events and observations, using various narrative tricks.<sup>44</sup> The viewer is unable to process what he has seen. Although we're dealing with two different film genres, both have identical dramatic structures achieved by overwhelming the viewer with an avalanche of

events. If we were to conduct an experiment and stop the screening of *Saving Private Ryan* after the opening battle and *Amélie* after act one and ask the viewers to describe what they saw, they wouldn't be able to remember more than fifty or sixty percent of events.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, from the viewpoint of classic storytelling, everything here is upside down, and I'm fully conscious of using this description because that's exactly the case. If, in *Saving Private Ryan* the opening battle is an organic but drawn-out scene, in terms of what *Amélie*'s director wants to convey, the film's beginning is rather dysfunctional. *Amélie*'s childhood isn't the subject here. The story of the unhappy, grown-up *Amélie* searching for love is what this film is about and it could easily begin with *Amélie* working as a waitress.<sup>46</sup> One must remember that narrative structure—a traditional method of exposition—begins to lose its expository function in film. A contemporary viewer is impatient and easily bored by a drawn-out opening. There is also something else—a degree of distrust for various offers coming our way in today's world. That kind of "rejecting" mechanism in self-defense is something all of us share. The lack of patience and trust are the two mechanisms allowing us to survive in today's world without becoming crazy. These mechanisms kick in instantly—it's easier to reject something than to accept it. What methods were used by the directors of these two films? They actually demolished the conventions by using a global attack method without worrying whether they have just as exciting events to portray in later on in the film. If the viewer sweats bullets after witnessing the opening battle in Spielberg's film, the level of his emotional engagement won't make him disinterested later on. And, in *Amélie*, if we become charmed by the extraordinary richness of her experiences as a young girl, if for over twenty minutes we will laugh and admire her imagination and uniqueness, we'll certainly care about her subsequent ordeals as a grown-up woman. One should also keep in mind what I had mentioned before—the influence of the genre on the type of narration. If the narrative strategy chosen by Spielberg is typical of action films, the same approach by Jean-Pierre Jeunet is very rare in a poetical, psychological drama. We may say that the director had borrowed a strategy of narrating a story from another film genre. He used methods atypical in the world of psychological drama and, as it turned out, they functioned in this setting equally well.<sup>47</sup>

This type of narrative was also chosen by Kieślowski. He knew that by attacking the viewer from the start, he'll care about the protagonist's fate. He won't leave the director and will be open to experience everything in the second part of the story. Witnessing Julie's tragedy at the beginning and seeing her unusual behavior afterwards, the viewer won't abandon the heroine when the story's narrative becomes more one-dimensional and plain.

## **The drama and the premise in *Blue***

I don't remember who said, "Krzysztof Kieślowski's creative development is a path of an artist searching for God." Regardless of how it sounds, it's a fitting description of an artist who placed a real person—not an actor—in a particular social and political situation in his documentaries and ended with metaphysical dilemmas. The short list of films I made with Kieślowski supports this thesis. Our journey began with depicting the small problems of a decent director, a Communist Party member looking for "socialism with a human face" in *Blizna* and continued with the contemporary analysis of religious teaching and obligations in *Decalogue*. We moved on to the mysterious phenomenon of paranormal communications between people in *The Double Life of Veronique*, and ended up with the analysis of a character who, as a result of misfortune, decides to do something apparently meaningless. In *Blue*, Julie wants to challenge God's laws, control her mind, and live the rest of her life without emotions. She wants to manage it so that she will never again experience the pain of her tragic loss. It's an experiment destined to fail. This thesis emerged from the script and from our talks about the film. As a cinematographer working on yet another feature with Kieślowski, I knew I embarked on a journey with the director who doesn't treat the artistic process as something well-defined and carefully planned which ought to be completed. My journeys with Kieślowski were always journeys into the unknown.

## **In order, or the beginning of the film**

Scene 1. On location. Freeway. Early Evening

*A busy freeway. Eight lanes of traffic with cars speeding in both directions. Noise of lorries, engines, and whine of the motorcycles, dodging in and out of car traffic. A scene from hell. On screen: OPENING TITLE SEQUENCE. The camera gradually pans downwards and slowly, deliberately settles on a fast-driven, navy-blue SAAB. When the SAAB is very close, next to the camera, FREEZE-FRAME. Silence. It lasts a second, long enough to glimpse a man's face out-of-focus and just as out of focus woman next to him, and an outline of a child's face behind them, on the back seat. After a second, the film starts running again, and more cars pass by.*

In the description above (the fourth, final version of the script), the camera should certainly be placed on an overpass above the freeway. We discussed it for some time. I didn't like this beginning, and my basic argument was that it was a commonplace introduction. Krzysztof accepted my point that every television cameraman asked to cover a freeway would go to an overpass and shoot an identical scene. For me this was the worst way to open a film...

We began to search. The first task was to find in this opening something visually attractive that would instantly grab the viewer. All of us drive. When we're in a luxury car, we never consider hundreds of things that determine the safety of our driving. We had an idea to begin our film with a black screen.



Figure 18. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Later, the viewer sees movement within black space, and later still, on the right and left of the screen we see the freeway.



Figure 19. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Placing the camera under the car sought to provoke the viewer's anxiety. It was to be intriguing, because from the black background we moved into the spinning black tire and from there to the dangerously dynamic freeway traffic conditions. It would also be an unusual opening. When we shot *Blue*, the size of cameras prevented us from suspending them under the car. (Today this is not a problem). We had to construct a special rig—an extra wheel—attached to a platform. Such camera placement showed what the driver and the viewers never see. They would be frightened further by two subsequent shots of a child.



Figure 20. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

First, the shot of a hand playing with a lollipop wrapper. Afterwards, in a night scene, we see the child's face distorted by the lights of oncoming traffic. This change of time indicates long journey and the viewer becomes aware that the driver could have been tired.



Figure 21. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 22. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

The next two shots are key for this sequence. When the child goes to the side of the road to pee, we see something that is a harbinger of the accident.



Figure 23. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

An oil leak from a hose. It's a classic rule, often overlooked. The drama is stronger when it's announced ahead of time. At that point the viewer is warned about what is about to happen. From then on, every shot will increase anxiety. The clash of the child's innocent face with a dripping oil line evokes feelings of horror in cinema. Nothing has happened yet, but the goal—the emotional participation by the viewer—was reached. There is one more shot in this sequence—a shot I didn't understand at that time. It is worth describing in detail, because it indicates Kieślowski's style and is an example of the roles the camera can play on a film set.



Figure 24. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

The girl jumps out of the car and the camera follows her in a panning shot. But instead of continuing the motion, it stops at a certain point without any reason dictated by the ensuing action. Rather than follow a child, the camera scans the empty bushes and returns to the car, where a tired-looking father is stretching out.



Figure 25. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 26. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 27. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 28. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

From the beginning the film's narration dictates its structure.<sup>48</sup> During editing, we connect shots and make the links invisible. Thanks to the editor's virtuosity, the fact that the scene is composed of many shots remains imperceptible. The camera must remain a hidden tool. Here Kieślowski does something completely different and he does it at the very beginning. Today I think he used this approach to show that he, as an artist, is ashamed of the ruthlessness with which emotions and tears are often evoked in films. The visibility of the tool (the panning shots on empty bushes) briefly shows the author. Until that moment, just like in any action picture, we see one shot after another, a sequence that usually announces dramatic events to come. The camera is an organic tool. The sequence of shots showing unknown people carries some emotion with it. And right after that, where in a typical film we would see a crash, the director changes his tack. Sitting in a cinema, we are no longer following the action. Our eyes now follow everything just like an outsider would see things: a "mystery witness" who—in this case—is the filmmaker, the author of the story we are

watching. With this manoeuvre Kieślowski announces a totally different film. Just like Tadeusz Kantor, director of spectacular theatre productions, would always be on stage among his actors, in these shots we have a glimpse of Kieślowski. In a way, he personally invites the viewer to his extraordinary film. This approach he uses only once again in *Blue*, and also in a key scene for the film's structure. It's the closing scene of act two, where Julie finds out that she was cheated upon. Kieślowski here eschews the typical reverse angle technique: the camera observes the dialogue of the prostitute with Julie, moving from side to side.

### The accident

This scene was told very simply. We had two identical cars on the set. One of them was already wrecked in an accident.



Figure 29. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 29. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

One needed only to hang a car on a cable attached to a tree, shout "Action!" and lower it; add a dog running by, some smoke, a rolling ball, some sheet music falling out, and the scene was done. Because the moment of impact was heard only on the soundtrack when the car hit the tree, Krzysztof inserted a close-up of Antoine's face.



Figure 30. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

His reaction is the moment of impact. The viewers see the moment before the crash and the moment immediately after. It's an old technique, but it always works. If you ask the viewer afterwards if he saw an accident, he will answer in the affirmative, even if there was no accident shown. Cinematic technique is the simplest example of that. The motion we see in film is created by our minds. We are watching twenty-four static shots per second. This motion, just like the vision of the accident, is a figment of our imagination.

Let's return to the script and imagine that the accident scene in *Blue* was done just as described in the script. That's the accident following the planned shot from the overpass taking place right after the freeze-frame written into the script. Would the effect be the same? I'm sure it would be much worse. The emotional reception by the viewer would have been on a level similar to watching the news on television. The conventions of cinema—a series of shots before the accident described above—were designed to pump up emotions in the theatre. All of us have cars that could have a leaking brake fluid. Every viewer would opt for saving a child in a dangerous situation. The whole sequence of danger mounting before the accident builds the emotional link between the viewer and what's on screen. In this sense the accident is a culmination of something no viewer wants to see happen, but which inevitably comes to pass. Could we have shown it differently? Certainly. The opening accident scene would have been done differently in a studio film. It would have dozens of shots and the storyboard of this accident would be a separate document. It's likely that the scene would not be realistic. The accident itself would take over a minute of screen time and the number of events shown would exceed our ability to remember what we've seen. I've addressed this issue already.

There is a list of ways and methods for shooting such scenes and there are directors (usually second unit), who specialize in shooting them.<sup>49</sup> In recent years, apart from finding tools for shooting action scenes on a set, a lot of effects are added (or created from scratch) in digital postproduction. Made by professionals with lots of expensive but widely available tools, such an accident would also distress the viewer. This method would apply to studio films costing huge sums of money. I often feel that young filmmakers imagine that they can

and would like to shoot action scenes just like they are done in studio productions. They forget that European cinema is a simple artisanal workshop. It isn't tragic if their scene is poorly shot. The real tragedy happens when during shooting such scenes there are real accidents.

In *The Double Life of Veronique*, we almost had two tragedies. On a big set after Veronique's death, a huge lamp fell into the audience but, fortunately it didn't hit anybody.



Figure 31. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)

The falling light is the white spot on the right side of the frame. In the same film, as Irène ran across a street, she accidentally fell and was almost run over by a scooter.

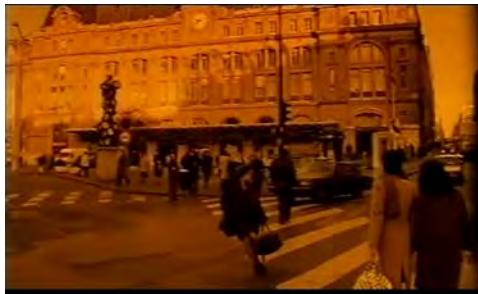


Figure 32. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)



Figure 33. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)



Figure 34. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)

We must remember that people still die on film sets and, each time it happens, it's caused by an unprofessional approach or recklessness. A person was killed on the set of one of my films during the shooting of second unit scenes because of the stupidity and low professional standards of the producers. Fearing a lost a day of shooting, they didn't even stop the first unit work and informed us about the death at the end of our workday. Too often the fictional situations we construct on the set are transformed into a dark and tragic reality. Nobody else but us—the instigators of these situations and their careless implementers—are responsible for real misfortunes that keep happening during filming. Copying the ideas of others—and copying action scenes from huge studio productions—we must consider whether we can really do them and whether professional help on hand can guarantee their safe execution. Most of all, we need to carefully consider whether we could do the same things differently. Using technical means and relying on the perception mechanisms of the audience, we could construct action scenes that are exciting for the viewer as well as safe for actors and stuntmen. Without a doubt, the opening of Kieślowski's *Blue* is an example of the latter approach.

### **Is *Blue* blue?**

The answer is no, even though most film critics think otherwise. Blue isn't *Blue*'s basic color.

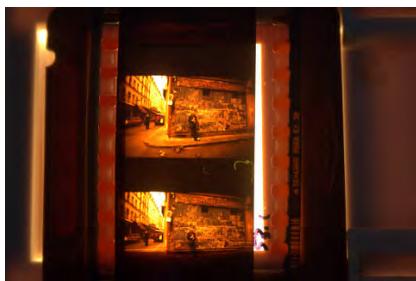


Figure 35. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Besides the opening “blue” scene of the accident, the entire film is in warm colors, closer to sepia than to blue, with blue used to accentuate important moments. It attacks the viewer dramatically at key junctions. The role of blue is to provide a visual link to the heroine’s psychological state. From my school days I remember a girl with large breasts. When she was flustered, a wave of red flowed from her eagerly-exposed décolletage, spilling into her neck and face. We can say that Julie and our film are also blushing, but in blue. Whilst psychological bluishness will be addressed later, one must consider the phenomenon of perception mechanisms of the audience. Color influences our subconscious and many studies describe how it helps the feelings of patients in hospitals. My former wife Agata took a catalogue of colored gels when she went to give birth to our daughter, Urszula, because seeing a dull hospital environment through various color filters attenuated her fears. Color is a mighty weapon in the hands of the author of film’s image, but only if he doesn’t attempt to take it literally. Generally speaking, we don’t remember the film’s color after a screening, but if we do, it’s usually linked to the opening scenes.

In the past, when I was interested in film criticism, I collected many reviews, stating that green I used for *A Short Film About Killing*, was a different color for the reviewers. It confirmed the general theory of perception, according to which we grasp the importance of color at the beginning but after a while we begin to concentrate on details. At that point color will play a role of an accent for something that seems important to us only when it’s used in a contrasting or aggressive way. From the outset, Krzysztof and I knew that *Blue* cannot be shot in blue.

### **The appearance of the protagonist**

For those who skipped the first part of this essay and moved on to read about Kieślowski, I shall reiterate that the protagonist and his emotional journey must be sufficiently important that for two hours we want to set aside our lives and problems. The protagonist and the process of identifying with him undoubtedly contribute to the success of films we have seen. That’s why first impressions matter and it’s vitally important how we present our hero for the first time. The meeting should have the power of our first, long-awaited date. It can’t be an encounter with a stranger among the crowds we see in our daily life. The star system functions so well because we visit cinemas to encounter actors who amused or moved us many times in the past. We wait for the moment when the star

appears, regardless of whether we have an external element (the star quotient) or whether we present someone for the first time. This meeting must carry an emotional charge rather than be a neutral encounter.<sup>50</sup>

Up to this point we saw the child and Julie's husband, but didn't meet Julie—the only survivor of the accident. The balance of emotions evoked had one goal: the confrontation of our feelings with Julie's, who lost two of her closest relatives in the crash. The tragic news is brought by the doctor, but the camera not only records this conversation—it also concentrates on the heroine's subjective point of view.<sup>51</sup>

The scene begins with a detail—a close-up of a goose feather sticking out of a pillow.



Figure 36. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

For the first time we're showing something that we'll return to often: details from Julie's point of view. Right after that shot we see a reflection of the doctor in Julie's eye, as he inquires about her mental state.



Figure 37. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Afterwards we see Julie's face.



Figure 38. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

I don't think there is a viewer who, seeing Julie for the first time, wouldn't sympathize with her: we see a heroine and instantly identify with her. The technique of filming aimed here at reaching deeply and more powerfully into the protagonist's drama. The lighting is quite different from the usual hospital antiseptic whites without shadows. I didn't hesitate using green light in the shadows and, to accentuate what's most important—Julie's face—I used a round graduated filter. From Julie's jaw down, I placed a dark blanket rather than a white sheet so that the viewer wouldn't move his eyes away from her face, where all the drama takes place. Because of this setup, her face is the brightest element in the frame; naturally Juliette Binoche's dark hair was also helpful.

One ought to mention how this scene was filmed since the shots discussed above represented Krzysztof's editing choices. Of course we shot many takes. It's a dialogue scene typical in psychological drama. The traditional approach to film it and have enough coverage is to use reverse angles.<sup>52</sup> Irrespective of Krzysztof's other visual ideas (the reflection in Julie's eye; the pillow feather) the methods were always the same. To begin with, we did it "straight" as Krzysztof would say, in a conventional way. It was a master shot of the entire scene. Later we did reverse angles: close-up of the doctor and Julie and also a slightly wider shot over the doctor's shoulder showing Julie in bed. As demonstrated above, the only "classical" shot we used was a close-up of Julie asking if her daughter also died in the accident. However, it was very important for Krzysztof to be able to return—at any moment in the scene—to his actors without any visual distractions. The established technique of reverse angles gave him a certainty that the camera will function organically (it won't be seen) and that during editing he'll fully control the scene.<sup>53</sup>

Our discussion of dialogue scenes must mention that digital technology leads more and more directors to record such scenes with several cameras in tandem. It gives them a degree of freedom unattainable with reverse angles. The most important aspect of the new approach is the ability to edit dialogues and dispense with the need to repeat and remember gestures and inflections in delivering lines, something that's difficult for the less technically proficient actors. Ridley Scott thinks that with multi-camera coverage dialogue scenes gain in quality and are more emotive than scenes shot with the reverse angle approach. Nonetheless, when we use multiple cameras, we should remember that getting them close to the actors isn't possible, as cameras would photograph each other. We must also realize that the angle of the actors' eyes is much farther away from the camera—and from the viewer—which often weakens the power of the extreme close-up.

## The suicide attempt

As I gave various examples of establishing shots, I described their dramatic purpose, using the example of Salieri crushing a page of his musical score. The breaking windscreen in the next scene of *Blue* serves the same function.



Figure 39. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Although this shot begins the next scene, Krzysztof uses it as an accent underlining the tragic force of information Julie had just received. We feel that it's not only a broken windscreen—something has ruptured in the heroine's head. The broken glass also links the two scenes. Using this shot enabled Krzysztof to start the scene much later than it was in the script. Here the establishing shot served as a practical tool, allowing for the foreshortening of narration, because in the script the scene began as follows:

*Julie gets up from bed and, moving still in an awkward fashion, takes a beautiful bouquet of blue flowers from the vase on a table. She weighs it in her hands—it seems sufficiently heavy. She leaves the room. Nighttime—the corridors are empty. Julie sees lights in the nurses' station and the corridor behind a shaft of light. She passes the nurses' station, crouching slightly and sees a nurse, stooped over a medication tray. She turns past the corner, passes by a toilet and, after another turn, the corridor ends with a window. Julie approaches a window at a distance and, with some effort due to her arms in a cast, she swings and throws the vase through the window...*

It seemed this opening would provoke emotions, but it washed them away instead. In the second part of the scene Julie speaks to a nurse, who sympathizes with Julie's inability to swallow-up pills. Here Krzysztof paid great attention to actors. Unlike the previous scene, here we have a classical approach to filming with reverse angles. For the viewer, the

camera fulfills its subservient role of an invisible mirror reflecting the protagonists' faces. We see every nuance of their emotions.



Figure 40. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 41. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

We also see a beautiful close-up on the nurse's face, which allowed Krzysztof to extend the real time of the scene by at least twenty percent.



Figure 42. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Only as a corollary to my comments about this scene I'd like to mention the placement of a telephone on a chair in the corridor. In a public hospital, a telephone in such a location is completely improbable. This shows how far Krzysztof Kieślowski, a documentary filmmaker, had moved on from his theories about the "132 bus departing Warsaw's Wilson Square." He was fully conscious that the viewers' emotions are so deeply engaged that the questionable location of the phone is totally beside the point.



Figure 43. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

### **The exposition scene of character number 2. Julie is out of focus...**

Olivier, Julie's husband's assistant, brings a small portable television set: the funeral of Julie's husband and daughter will be broadcast that day. Once again we have a dialogue scene and a return to the way of filming that was already announced in the first scene. After her unsuccessful suicide attempt Julie is apathetic and the camera underlines her helplessness. Olivier isn't important. The portable television set and random pictures it shows aren't important either. Julie is out of focus....



Figure 44. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

When Olivier leaves her room she doesn't even follow him with her eyes.



Figure 45. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

She continues to stare at the blank wall. We shot this scene like the hospital scene: a master shot (it wasn't in the final edit), two reverse angles (medium close-ups), a detail of a television set, and two shots from Julie's point of view. These two very subjective and deformed shots are the visual anchor of the scene. One can clearly see the director's strategy: when he thinks it important, he doesn't hesitate to concentrate solely on the protagonists' faces (like the scene with the nurse) and uses the additional material when he believes it will help the scene. His goal is to make the viewer aware what kind of film he is watching. Thanks to such choices and such use of the camera, after these two scenes the viewer begins to understand that the real subject of the film is not what's external but what's internal to Julie's soul.



Figure 46. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

The medium close-up of Olivier appears and I think Krzysztof placed it here only because he's the co-lead and the viewer ought to see him, if only very briefly.



Figure 47. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

### **The necessary information**

The scene with Olivier is followed by the funeral scene and it was very important for Krzysztof how Julie would watch it. An intimate space was needed, like a veil covering the feelings of those who grieve. The role of the veil in *Blue* was taken by a sheet. With her

television set, Julie hides under the sheet and watches her family's funeral. Her eyes tear up but the tears remain invisible.



Figure 48. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 49. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 50. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

It's a very emotional scene that conveys a lot of information. In order to cinematically narrate any story, we must answer questions, "Who?" "Where?" and "When?" It's a delivery of information to the viewer who must understand the story we are telling him. Most of such scenes are found in act one and the problem is that they are usually boring and lack many essential elements of conflict. Films often begin with dreary dialogue scenes whose sole task is to deliver information. The skill to emotionally sell the necessary information is a proof of the director's talent. Krzysztof used the funeral ceremony to end a dramatic chain of events we have just witnessed. We are moved seeing Julie's farewell with her husband and daughter and our emotional engagement helps to absorb the necessary information.



Figure 51. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

The funeral oration by the Minister of Culture provides the necessary details allowing us to understand the heroine's story that continues to unfold.



Figure 52. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

### I know you're spying on me

At the end of this scene we see something fulfilling a role similar to the shot of a girl running out of a car. Like a microscope, the camera explores the actress's face, from her quivering lips to a teary eye. The camera's closeness and obtrusiveness in spying on the tragedy visible on the actress's face is broken by Julie's direct stare into the lens. After the emotional eruption, it's a sober look of somebody who feels being spied on. It's a shocking stare. In a short period of time the director once more shuns the usual narrative structure. With his actress, he reaches the viewer in a totally different way.<sup>54</sup> Solicited by such maneuvers, this author-viewer collaboration will be useful to the director in the second act.



Figure 53. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 54. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

### The birth of style in *Blue*

The next scene begins with a typical establishing shot of a hospital. We have many such shots in act one. One must stress that besides helping the film's message, these shots are also a geographical aid helping to answer the question "Where?" In this case I think Krzysztof used them for reasons of composition. He needed breathing space after the funeral scene and during editing he cut a few scenes from this episode, so that the establishing shot of the hospital was a convenient bridge for getting him to the next scene.

*Julie reclines in a comfortable lounge chair on a terrace. The door to her room is open. The terrace is quite spacious, bordered by high railings made of blue glass. She stares into space and sets aside a book she was reading (published by Laffont). A ray of sun penetrates the blue glass and appears on Julie's face. Julie closes her eyes. At this moment we hear loud music. It lasts for about twenty seconds. When Julie opens her eyes, she feels someone looking at her and the music fades away. From behind the railing on the other side of the terrace, there is a well-dressed, older woman, looking at Julie. When the woman begins to speak in friendly tones, Julie recognizes her. This woman is a JOURNALIST.*

Julie's peaceful repose is illusory: the break is the blue light and a musical assault.<sup>55</sup> We knew it was a very important moment, but had no idea how it would be shot. I made all sorts of tests and was rather satisfied with them. But my trials were done on a cloudy day in a dark courtyard, and when we shot that scene on the hospital terrace, it was sunny. The artificial lighting that would guarantee blue light in the scene would have to be very strong. At that point, the strongest light source available could be provided by 12KW HMI lamps and I had ordered four of them. Also, when we were shooting *Blue*, today's digital arsenal of effects simply did not exist. Things that weren't recorded on the negative were extremely

difficult to correct.<sup>56</sup> It became clear very quickly that the lights I had at my disposal were wholly insufficient and the effects they provided fell far short of the scene's needs. In desperation I decided on a totally crazy move, a kind of cinematographer's stunt. With the exception of the lens, I wrapped the entire camera body in a 132 blue Lee filter gel. After starting the camera up, I was listening to the music on playback and kept rhythmically opening the camera door with the film stock moving through. I was letting in exterior light through the blue gel—via the back door so to speak—adding extra blue light to the negative. The French crew members looked at me as if I had lost my mind. I felt like an idiot, because I wasn't completely certain that this trick would work. There was no way of technically assessing (or measuring) the amount of the blue light which would provide the desired effect, or that would overexpose the image (pure white on screen).<sup>57</sup> This crazy idea came to me during shooting and I tried it in desperation. The effect was as follows:



Figure 55. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Julie hears the music and, at the same time, the electrician opens the shutters on the 12 KW HMIs plus 132 Lee.



Figure 56. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

The music swells up and I open the camera door.



Figure 57. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 58. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

I close the camera door as the music dies down.



Figure 59. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

The electrician closes the lamp shutters.<sup>58</sup>



Figure 60. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

The reason I share such backroom secrets here is because this accident—an important element of every creative effort—was the moment when the idea for the film's style was

born.<sup>59</sup> It wasn't clear to Krzysztof from the outset that it was the right approach. The search lasted until the last day of editing and was particularly time-consuming. As I analyze various sections of *Blue*, I'll return to this point again. Nonetheless, I'll skip ahead of the discussion how the film's look was finally settled and make a small summary here.

As we watched the scene, we were deeply affected by it. There was no doubt that the "musical attack" was more powerful than the conversation scene with the journalist that followed. In the first cut it seemed that the journalist scene is artificially inserted. Only in the final cut did Krzysztof discover an editing refrain that would reappear throughout the film. During that scene he sort of repeated something that had just taken place. After the "musical attack" subsides and everything returns to normal, we hear "good morning" off-screen and Julie looks to the side.



Figure 61. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Just at that moment, the music with its powerful chord attacks once again, and Julie vanishes from screen.



Figure 62. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 63. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

We continue to hear music, but the screen is black. Only when the music subsides, Krzysztof returns to the conversation with the journalist.



Figure 64. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 65. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

To put it simply, one could conclude that only during the final edit Kieślowski turned the music into a character in his film. Even if music was one of the film's subjects, it wasn't going to be used in key psychological scenes with dialogues. We could also say that thanks to such techniques, the film's genre was modified. The amount of music and its use could invite comparisons with opera. Of course it isn't an opera, but it isn't a psychological drama either. The dramatic libretto resonates in the most powerful moments through music exactly as it does in opera. This decision caused changes during editing with the rebalancing of dialogue and musical flashback scenes, clearly favoring the latter.

### **Could one (practically) cut character no. 3?**

Yes, if one has the courage and Kieślowski's editorial prowess. The secret of Patrice's (Julie's husband) creativity is probed by the journalist. Appearing a few times throughout the script, she serves as a basic narrative tool trying to discover if Julie helped her husband to compose music. When Krzysztof decided to change the film's structure, he cut the journalist's scenes wherever possible. The scene with the doctor trying to convince Julie to

talk to the journalist was cut, just like that of the journalist waiting for Julie near the hospital. Other scenes with the journalist that were eliminated included the nighttime telephone call and, most importantly, Krzysztof cut the scene of the journalist waiting for Julie near the copyist's house and trying to interview her.<sup>60</sup> That's where a question fundamental to the understanding of the plot is posed, "Is it true that you composed music for Patrice?"

Krzysztof could have cut this scene out, but the question itself had to be asked. And so it was. At the end of the scene—the first and only scene between Julie and the journalist—after a rather unpleasant bit of to and fro, Julie decides to leave. The journalist takes a photo and that's when Julie turns around and silently disappears in her room. That's how the script laid it out, but in the final edit it's a little different. The moment when Julie turns around was used by Krzysztof to insert the question from off screen: "Is it true that you composed music for Patrice?"



Figure 66. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

### The role of props and details

After a shortened hospital scene and one where Olivier cleans out Patrice's office at the music conservatory, Julie returns to her large estate on the outskirts of town.



Figure 67. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

After Julie's gardener tells her that the "blue room" was cleaned, Julie goes there at once. The "blue room" is her late daughter's room. It's empty, except for a lamp. This lamp was an important prop, because it's the only item Julie takes after deciding to "move out of her former life." Krzysztof and I discussed it at length and finally selected a lamp made of blue beads. We wanted not only the blue light of the beads but also their movement, since it would continue to remind Julie of her daughter, Anne. Looking at it from the perspective of time, it was a great choice, since it opened many visual possibilities that we weren't even conscious of when selecting that lamp. This is how it was written up in the script:

*She comes to the open door of the child's room. For a moment she looks at the empty room, painted blue, and the round blue lamp suspended from the ceiling, and closes the door immediately.*

In the film, Julie doesn't close the door. She enters the room and, seeing the lamp, she angrily pulls away two strings of beads.



Figure 68. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

A moment later when she clumsily collapses on the doorstep and blue reflections appear on her face, the viewer knows that she holds blue beads in her hand.



Figure 69. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Similarly, during the scene at her lawyer's office when she makes her incomprehensible decision to get rid of her property, her hands hold the beads and she plays with them.



Figure 70. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

When she leaves her old world and navigates busy Paris streets, she has a large cardboard box with the blue lamp.



Figure 71. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Standing in front of a gently swaying lamp, she clenches her injured fist in a gesture that the viewers understand as a measure of her determination.



Figure 72. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

When a man running away from a group of street hooligans hits her door with such force that the lamp begins to swing, Julie's face displays anxious-looking blue reflections.



Figure 73. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Here is how one decision led to a sequence of images where each of them reminds Julie—and the viewer—of the tragedy at the beginning of the film.

### **Details as establishing shots in *Blue***

Working with the same director on several projects leads to a level of understanding that dispenses with words. Shooting yet another film with Krzysztof, I noticed how meticulous he was about every detail. In *The Double Life of Veronique*, he patiently explained to Irène Jacob how she should touch a photograph with her finger. It happens when the French Veronique first realizes that the barely-noticed picture she has had in her purse since her trip to Kraków shows another, identical-looking woman. Krzysztof wanted the moment of touching the photograph to be tender and personal.



Figure 74. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)

Such fascination with detail is also a part of my work. As I wait for the director (whose rehearsals with actors are longer than expected), I'm trying to use the time productively and shoot extra material. Usually these are my own observations from rehearsals, which cannot really be featured in a given scene. I make them anyway, thinking they could prove useful. That's how the shot of Veronique's purse—with a glass sphere swinging on a mattress in sync with the erotic scene—came to see the light.



Figure 75. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)

Working on *Blue*, whenever I thought of such shots, I'd do them; Krzysztof also had a catalogue of ideas. It was obvious to us that with Julie shunning the world in act two, we must find a way of depicting events that constantly remind the viewer of the heroine's inner drama. These details serve as establishing shots in *Blue*.

At the Cannes Film Festival a few years ago, I met the wife of a famous cinematographer, Stuart Dryburgh.<sup>61</sup> She described her fascination with *Blue*, mentioning that when she orders coffee, just like Julie she begins to drink it through a sugar cube.



Figure 76. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Julie's attention in a café is always focused on the table. She is indifferent to people around her or life outside. She looks at her reflection in a spoon, inserted into an empty water bottle.



Figure 77. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

The spoon sways back and forth, like a metronome, measuring out the time of her new life, the life of a woman disconnected from the world of emotions.



Figure 78. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

The insular world of a café table is interrupted by music, or by memories it brings. A street flute player briefly takes Julie away from her inner world. Listening to his music, she returns to her cup of coffee and notices a shadow slowly travelling across her table. It moves with the music she hears, but doesn't follow the laws of physics because the movement of the sun was dramatically accelerated here.



Figure 79. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

This shot has nothing to do with the actual passing of time and the image loses its realistic character because the reality of Julie's world is treated here metaphorically. We wouldn't be surprised if this "trick" was used in a music video, but in a realistic psychological drama this shot is quite exceptional. The non-realistic passing of time transports the viewer to the realms beyond the objective observation. We shot a lot of details in *Blue* and their role was always the same: they had to concentrate the viewer's attention on things invisible to the naked eye, things Julie wanted to hide from herself. They were to indicate the fragility of Julie's resolve. The fact that she diverts her eyes and attention towards the street performer is like a warning that the limits she set for herself aren't realistic. For a moment she's calmly listening to the flutist and it seems that everything is under control. It's an illusion; a moment later the music she co-authored assaults her with full force. It's not how she imagined it would affect her; she didn't think that after composing it, the music would haunt her. It happens when she's exercising in a swimming pool and reaches a wall.



Figure 80. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

And then she tries to climb it.



Figure 81. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

The music in her ears is so forceful that Julie closes her eyes and slides down the pool wall.



Figure 82. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

She dives under and, crouched down in a fetal position, she still hears the music.



Figure 83. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

This scene would never happen if we followed the original version of the script with Julie jogging along Paris streets. Of course I cannot categorically state that getting this kind of a visual metaphor isn't possible in an urban setting—it would have been more difficult. The swimming pool served the same role as a place for Julie's exercise and also opened other visual possibilities. I treated it as a place far removed from a typical swimming pool. We covered one of the walls with a black curtain and added blue phosphorescent light (Lee 132). Whilst these factors did not detract from the realistic aspects of the swimming pool,

they made it like a theatre stage. Thanks to our efforts, scenes like Julie's dramatic encounter with the music didn't seem contrived—the image harmoniously coexisted with the music and the impossible became possible.

### **The drama of color, or the rabbit's death**

I may have overused the term "drama" in this essay, but if someone had asked me to define it, I'd still be in trouble. Eventually, I would have made it, but whenever I use this term, I remember our demonic macro photography film school professor admonishing us to "Provide definition!" Photographing "his stars" or microorganisms found in our schoolyard puddles, we heard the following question: "What is dramaturgy?"

Somewhat scared, we lifted our heads from the microscopes with cameras. It must be a test. But the professor did not expect an answer.

"The viewer doesn't go to the cinema to see that the rabbit was killed... The viewer wants to see *how* it was killed. He wants to see how it was strangled and hear how his bones were crushed." In an instant, the professor became a murderous demon, demonstrating with his hands how he would strangle a rabbit. Simultaneously, he made sounds of breaking bones.

"The viewer wants to see how the rabbit's eyes are bulging. How blood jets out of his ass. The viewer isn't concerned with the rabbit's death. He wants to see the process of dying. The *process* of having the experience—that's dramaturgy.<sup>62</sup>

In *Blue*, the drama of color, or the process of its metamorphosis, proceeds in leaps. One needs only to examine the frames above to see what we consider the process of color changes in film. The film begins in blue, but it's a standard color. At that time, many films were made in a similar manner. One simply wouldn't use a color correction filter to get that effect.<sup>63</sup> Using blue at the outset as something differentiating this film from others was no discovery. The proper warm sepia color used throughout the film first appears during the hospital scene. This basic color tonality provided a counterpoint to the dramatic blue accents. The violent, drastic use of color is first employed at the hospital, when Julie is flooded with blue light. Another version of blue appears after Julie returns home. Her daughter's room is painted blue and a blue lamp is hanging there. The sight of the lamp had irritated Julie, but this prop will accompany her as she tries to begin her new life. With increasing frequency, the appearance of blue color will be coordinated with sudden assaults

of music. When Julie is sitting on the steps, the silence is suddenly interrupted by music and the frame is filled with pulsating blue light that's synchronized with the music.



Figure 84. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

This color isn't a grey blue from the beginning or an even-toned blue that decorated the walls of the child's room. It's an aggressive, neon-blue light. Such techniques and their gradual development allowed us to give theatricality to the swimming pool scenes. The appearance of very strong blue light there was already prepared.



Figure 85. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Here Julie literally swims in blue light. In these scenes water and the color of light play a symbolic role. Julie isn't working out because she cares about her health: her physical effort is directed towards suppressing the returning stress related to her past experiences. She doesn't swim in the water: she swims in the universe of her subconscious.

### A few words about technique

Since we've discussed color, another technique I used in *Blue* is worth mentioning. Because *Blue* is a psychological drama, I tried to concentrate the viewer's attention on the actor's face. Wherever possible, the face had to be the most important element in the frame. I took care that the elements in the frame, especially those on its periphery,

wouldn't distract the viewer. That's why I used graduated filters whenever I had to portray actor's faces.<sup>64</sup>

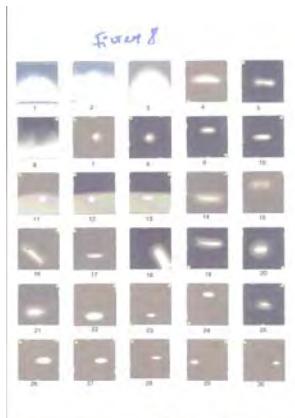


Figure 86. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 87. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

The frames above are typical of such portrayal. For the close-up I used strong graduated filter on the top and a weaker one on the bottom, and the gradient of the upper filter in Julie's close-up is much stronger than the gradient of a similar filter used in the medium close-up. This technique is quite common today thanks to digital postproduction, but earlier such effects were obtainable only by placing a glass graduated filter in front of the camera. To achieve the desired richness and texture, I began to make filters together with Tadeusz Stefaniak who worked in a specialized optical shop. Currently I own over six hundred unique graduated filters with a wide spectrum of hues. Here's an example from my collection:



A long time ago when I was badgered to talk about technique in my lectures for student cinematographers, I pulled out the catalogues of my filters and was left alone until the students had copied them all. Now I have nothing to show, since students can use computers to make their own filters.

### **Julie's insular world**

Putting it simply, the world of *Blue* consists of Julie's face and details—the establishing shots—which we forget as soon as we leave the cinema. But they are there! They influence our subconscious, activate our empathies, and stimulate the viewer's dialogue with the lonely and silent heroine. Here are a few more examples:

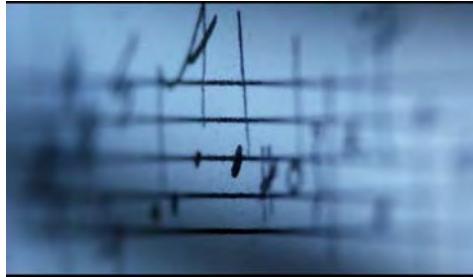


Figure 88. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

The slowly passing details of the score appear when Julie finds a piece of paper with the notation of a musical leitmotif she composed. The notes appear again in act two, when she's composing together with Olivier.



Figure 89. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

The cross, photographed up close, which Anton (the accident witness) wants to return to Julie, appears once again in act three, suspended from Julie's husband's lover's neck.



Figure 90. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 91. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Still, it doesn't imply that such close-ups replaced traditional establishing shots. In the retirement home scene we have a master shot of the facility with a huge, beautiful tree.<sup>65</sup>



Figure 92. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 93. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Against the backdrop of Paris at night, almost at the end of act two we hear a phone. A neighbor working in a night club asks Julie for help. One may ask whether a geographical reference is needed, since we already had other ideas for establishing shots in this film. My answer is "yes" although in art one rarely gets unambiguous answers. I think that the

viewer must have the information about the world we're in and such shots quite often provide the film with a measure of breathing space. A good example of a geographical reference in an establishing shot that also gives us historical background is the scene of carting away Lenin's monument in *The Double Life of Veronique*.



Figure 94. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)



Figure 95. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)

### **The sex scene as departure from a previous life**

"If it gets boring in a cinema, a sex scene always works." Those words were uttered by a certain director with whom I worked and I'll implement his approach here. Julie's sex scene at the end of act one begins with a detail. Before leaving the house, Julie burns in the fireplace almost everything she finds in her purse, throwing away various notes. Among them she finds the name of her husband's assistant, calls him and, unexpectedly, invites him to her house. It's raining, and the soaked-through Olivier arrives instantly. With startling directness, Julie asks him to undress.



Figure 96. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

She doesn't refer only to his coat, saying, "Take it all off!" as soon as Oliver sheds his outer layer of clothing.



Figure 97. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

The infatuated Olivier obeys and is fascinated to see Julie undressing as well.

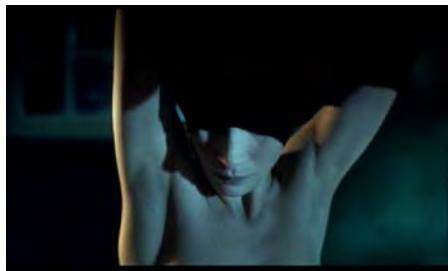


Figure 98. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Olivier approaches Julie and here the scene was to end. Or, at least, that was the plan. Sex scenes are a constant element in the landscape of most feature films. Voyeurism borders on pathological behavior and on mankind's natural curiosity to observe "the other" at a moment of an intimate encounter. This human attribute is particularly useful in filming sex scenes. We must remember that we are dealing with the viewer identifying with the protagonist. In most scenes such identification comes through a neutral observation of everyday behavior. However, such observation fails when the protagonist's emotions are deeply hidden and shown by a specific choreography of gestures that may be difficult to interpret. Usually it is body language that's complicated and hard to detect. Our task—and the camera's role—is to discover the key to deciphering it, finding a way to show what's hidden. We must answer the question of what goes on in the minds of our protagonists in the middle of a sex scene. To put it flippantly, we could say that the camera is a tool "inviting" the viewer to bed with an actor or an actress. The camera should also reach what remains hidden from the partner. It should excite the viewer's erotic fantasies. Without analyzing this subject too deeply, we can say that in such scenes the camera eschews its

usual role of a mirror and becomes an active tool. The camera's invisibility or transparency that we avoid in typical psychological scenes isn't required in sex scenes. Shooting sex scenes we can enjoy a particularly unrealistic way of narrating, a radical subjectivity of the way of looking at the event. I allowed myself such a deformed (poetical) depiction of an erotic scene in *The Double Life of Veronique*.<sup>66</sup>



Figure 99. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)



Figure 100. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)



Figure 101. *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991)

Originally, *Blue* was to have no sex scenes. Julie's encounter with Olivier would end as soon as she extended her hand towards him. The way it was shot wasn't different from typical dialogue scenes, shot using reverse angles. With light, I made it a little more theatrical. Julie's face has shadows of rain-streaked windowpanes and Oliver's approach throws additional shadows on Julie's face.



Figure 102. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

During editing it became clear that something was missing. The scene had no ending. After discussing it, we shot one more scene since there was no time for shooting more material.



Figure 103. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Unlike the dialogue scenes, in erotic scenes it's quite difficult for the director to judge the amount of screen time the viewer needs to become emotionally engaged. There is only one solution: just as in life, it's better for such scenes to be longer rather than shorter! If during editing it turns out that the scene is too long, it'll be easy to shorten it. But if it's too short, we have to return to the set and reshoot it.

### **The dramatic wasteland or Julie's world in act two**

This was our greatest challenge. Kieślowski decided to make *Blue* differently from the paradigm of a three-act structure. Not without reason it's often said that act one represents the normal world of our protagonist who, because of dramatic turns of events, is forced to confront a new world, a world of adventure. Act one exposition—often striking in itself—gains in expressiveness because of the dynamic and dramatic act two.

In *Blue*, everything is upside down. Dramatic events are at the beginning: the accident (with the deaths of husband and daughter), the suicide attempt, and Julie's strange decision to part with her wealth. And finally, the unexpected sex scene with the assistant who is in love with Julie. The parting at the end of act one is also narrated dramatically.

Leaving her estate, Julie scratches her wrists against a wall surrounding the house. This scene was very painful for Juliette Binoche: she was against stand-ins and injured herself.



Figure 104. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

As she rides the Paris metro escalator into the heart of a thriving metropolis, Julie severs her ties with the past. With a mysterious package (the viewer doesn't know what's inside) she makes a lonely entrance onto a crowded street. Thinking of it today, it's quite telling that Kieślowski joined Julie's escape into the unknown. He noticed lack of activity in front of the camera, entered the frame and followed Julie's on her rendezvous with destiny.



Figure 105. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 106. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 107. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Julie chose loneliness because the rejection of her former life could save her from continued confrontation with tragedy. New locations, unknown people, café, swimming pool, apartment, and the routine of everyday life would cut off her painful memories. Looking at it from the point of view of a typical film drama, one could conclude that Kieślowski had also sealed his fate. Instead of picking up speed, the film suddenly lost its momentum. But Krzysztof believed (and was proven correct) that the viewer will identify to such an extent with the heroine that her dilemmas will be as important to him as they are to her. He firmly believed that the void she felt will be just as tragic for the audience as it was for the main character. In addition, Krzysztof would never make his work any easier for himself. He used to say, "For this type of film one should employ an internal monologue. Let's try a narrative here and have every viewer constructing his own monologue for Julie. Let's try to provoke the viewer to do so with images and music."

I'm not the one to judge whether Krzysztof succeeded or not, but given the great public interest in the film, I think he has. One should once again think about the process from the practical side and stress how crucial the editing phase was for the final shape of this film. Without Krzysztof's training on documentaries, this achievement wouldn't have been possible.

I worked with a variety of directors and often felt that they ended the editing process exactly when Krzysztof was just getting started. They believed too much in the order determined by the script and lacked courage to reach deeper. Krzysztof never had such problems. As he edited his films in a variety of versions, he often cut away his best scenes. Before I started photography on *Black Hawk Down*, I saw a DVD featurette on the making of *The Gladiator*. There is a terrific scene of the execution, which wasn't used in the film. I don't remember how Ridley Scott explained it to the journalist, but I think he said, "It wasn't part of the story I wanted to tell." Watching it I smiled, because in Ridley Scott's decision I saw something Krzysztof would often do. He resolutely threw away good things and I think his ruthlessness towards the material helped him gain distance from it. It allowed him to see his own work from a different perspective. By "killing his own children"

he allowed his film to have “its own life.” He wouldn’t force his own will upon it—the film would dictate its own terms. As director, Krzysztof was a midwife for the film’s independent life and a creative force for its independence.

### **Changes: the actor becomes important when we see him less**

In Krzysztof’s case, changes began with a contradiction: in one of his cuts he tried to change the story and minimize Julie’s presence on the screen. His rationale was that since less of her was shown, the viewer would want to see more of Julie and become more engaged and identified with the story. Although paradoxical, the less we see of the actress the more attractive she seems to be. The viewer wanting to see her behaves like a lover, waiting for a late arrival of his date. His imagination is fired up and he becomes actively involved, ever more so since she isn’t around. In the initial cut, for me this approach led to the loss of the plot point suggesting Julie’s involvement in the process of composing music.

Krzysztof told me how once, during editing, he discovered that one his actors wasn’t up to the task, so in the final cut he shortened that role to a minimum. To his absolute amazement he discovered that the reduced presence on screen led to a completely unexpected outcome: the actor’s stature had grown. Everybody praised his performance. A poorly played part suddenly became a strong and well-defined role. “I think that’s the difference between playing a supporting role and the lead. Overacting is intolerable when we encounter it in a leading role but it works well when the actor has a short and well-defined role in a film,” Krzysztof explained.

### **Changes or different scene order: how to skillfully apply a dramatic device**

The filmmakers often forget that the amount of time for establishing the protagonist isn’t infinite. The viewer must receive the necessary information and become familiar with the world of act two, but the time for it is limited. Kieślowski decided that the opening scenes of act two in *Blue* were too long and resorted to something we could call a dramatic device.

This device allows us to keep the viewer in suspense even if the process is totally fake and has nothing to do with the chain of events portrayed. We create a dramatic event and a mere hint of its existence is often enough to keep the viewer’s adrenaline at a

sufficiently high level. I remember a Canadian psychological drama (although I forget the title) where two married couples changed partners and the director increased the suspense by returning to the shot of a railway crossing. The barriers came up and down and a screeching alarm was heard. This recurring and vivid sequence undoubtedly implied something dramatic to the viewers. Although nothing dramatic related to trains came to pass, the noise of barriers being lowered ahead of the speeding train had fulfilled its role by pumping up the expectations and adrenaline of the audience.

Krzysztof faced a similar dilemma editing act two of *Blue*. There were too many exposition scenes and the action needed to move. Without hesitating, he changed the order of events, applying the above rule. The dramatic street fight Julie witnesses was moved closer to the beginning of act two. By itself, it had little impact on events, but edited into a different place it fulfilled the role of a dramatic device. It announced something unrelated to the heroine's fate but raised emotions by broadcasting what did not come to pass.

### **Changes or cutting a subplot**

In *Blue* we have a classic example of a subplot being the first "victim" of the editing process. The script has scenes of a drunken flute player and a thief who stole his instrument. Julie had chased the thief and recovered the flute. She called the flutist's girlfriend and returned it to him. All of it was cut according to the rule, "Strong subplot only when the main story is strong." For the cinematographer the management of the emotional quota stems from the need of the camera's increasingly subservient role the farther into the film we go. The camera's functionality is paramount in relationship to the story being told. In terms of subplots, one should add that the camera can unobtrusively enrich some scenes with additional information. Such a simple solution is represented by a few shots from Julie's childhood, placed at the nursing home sequence where Julie's mother, an Alzheimer sufferer, resides.



Figure 108. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

The camera pans from the picture of young Julie to her as an adult, standing by the door.



Figure 109. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Julie's mother, played by Emmanuelle Riva, thinks it's her sister's visit.<sup>67</sup> Thanks to this misunderstanding, Julie can say out loud what really troubles her.



Figure 110. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

### **Can we laugh as we talk about drama?**

It's a dramatic scene and nine out of ten directors I know and worked with would have made it dramatic. Krzysztof took the opposite tack. When Julie confesses her existential problems, the director makes light of them. Talking to Julie, the mother never takes off her eyes from a television set, showing an elderly man tied to a bungee cord and jumping from a trampoline.



Figure 111. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 112. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

The viewers always laugh here. Theoretically, such a manoeuvre ought to kill the drama of Julie's confession. It's exactly the other way around. Here's another rule overlooked by young filmmakers who forget that our emotions become much stronger when the polarity of feelings is violently reversed. Hate is often separated from love by one tender gesture. Comical aspects frequently strengthen the erotic charge in sex scenes. Tarantino mastered this rule (in its perverse variant) and Kieślowski shows here how powerful that effect can be. Thanks to a sudden burst of laughter in the cinema, the viewer won't easily forget the dialogue showing the first cracks in Julie's resolve to live free of painful emotions.



Figure 113. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

JULIE:

Mother...

MOTHER:

Yes?

JULIE:

Was I afraid of mice? When I was young...

MOTHER:

You weren't. Julie was afraid of them.

(The mother thinks she's talking to her sister)

JULIE:  
I'm afraid now.

As he sees Julie's closed eyes, the viewer realizes that nature will prevent her plan from succeeding.



Figure 114. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

### **Life after life or the film's ending**

The film's ending is an anchor we set into the usually shallow memory of our audience. This anchor should be strong enough for the viewer to retain the final shot or sequence after he leaves the theatre. The images should remain in the viewer's mind forever. They should also be puzzling and force him to rethink the film and analyze what he saw in the narrative. A good ending guarantees the film's immortality. We watch hundreds of thousands of films in our lifetime, but remember only dozens of them. One should recap some of these endings. The glass sphere with a childhood home under a snowfall slipping out of the hands of a dying magnate in *Citizen Kane*; the great church bell suspended from the sky, ringing the death of Bess, excluded from the cemetery by her pastor and parish in *Breaking Waves*; Amélie, who happily looks straight into the viewer's eyes as she holds the love of her life in her arms in a film by Jean-Pierre Jeunet; or the three-dimensional butterfly fluttering between the screen and the audience in Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*. This phenomenon is best described in J.D. Salinger's book, *Catcher in the Rye*. The ending of the novel reads, "Don't ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody."

Film endings should have images making the viewer miss you and your films. Whenever I watch the ending of *Blue*, I feel that these images of an operatic and poetic

journey through the life of the protagonists represent Krzysztof Kieślowski's last will. Apparently, just before death, everyone is destined to make such a journey. We recall facts that are important but often forgotten by our rational minds and see images of our own life. The unexpected ending with a visually operatic and musical sequence is just such a journey and watching it, I'm reminded of Krzysztof.

We shot this sequence at the end of the shoot on various sets and locations. Usually we were tired after a long day of work and anxious about the looming overtime that was so loathsome to the producers. It was hard to fire up one's imagination and think up complex, organic shots that would provide visually strong element for the film's close. Moreover, links between the shots were made only in the camera. There was no digital postproduction (or it was too expensive for us) that would allow us more freedom. Shooting these sequences, I hoped that a few of them would be sufficiently good to be assembled into a montage, and the rest will be cut away. As usual in the creative process, it turned out I was wrong and Krzysztof's idea had proven itself.



Figure 115. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 116. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 117. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 118. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 119. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 120. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)



Figure 121. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Like every crew member, by that time I looked forward to finishing our work and didn't believe that much would come of it. I just dreamt about a few hours of sleep. Now, when I watch the ending that's crowned with the hymn to love from St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, I always think of Krzysztof and ask: "Why did he leave us so soon?" "Why did he die so young?"

The filmmaking system had killed this great director. When his crew took showers and went to bed, Krzysztof and Jacques Witta edited what was done on the set. Krzysztof

burned himself out by working. Editing films at night, he tried to find out what kind of film he was making, what it needed, and what had to be redone to sustain the film's own life. He did it almost on a daily basis, and not only on one film. Once, in Poland, he had ten films (when he worked on the *Decalogue*), and later he worked on the *Three Colors* in sequence after finishing *Blue*. Like no other director I worked with, Krzysztof was a humble artist. It was a story he wrote together with Krzysztof Piesiewicz—a story he directed whose true nature he knew was hidden. He knew that in order to find out where he was he had to monitor his film. Like a good parent, he couldn't force his child to make choices, but he could support them.

When I finished shooting *Blue* at about eleven o'clock at night, my still warm chair was instantly taken over by Edward Kłosiński and the work on *White* commenced from a running start. There were no breaks in production. We took a commemorative photo and I left the set, hearing Krzysztof's voice, "Action!"

How long can one live without sleep? How could one burn himself out so completely at work? In Krzysztof's case it was becoming clearer with every passing day. He smoked ever more cigarettes and, after finishing each film, fell into ever deeper depression. Yet, in spite of his tragically short life, Krzysztof had transformed the art of filmmaking. All of us—friends, collaborators and audiences—shall remain profoundly grateful for sharing with us his unique and moving vision that will always make us reflect on his philosophy of life.



Figure 122. *Three Colors: Blue* (1993)

Sławomir Idziak  
Santa Maria, Cape Verde Islands  
May 2013

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- <sup>1</sup> The picture in a viewfinder wouldn't always be identical with what later appeared on screen. The same applied to early computers—what appeared on the monitor was sometimes different from what appeared in print. A human being with relevant experience was necessary to achieve the desired effect. [S.I.]
- <sup>2</sup> The camera operator saw a different picture than a camera was photographing. It was caused by the camera's viewfinder being on a different axis to the lens. [S.I.]
- <sup>3</sup> In Poland such waiting time was often much longer, extending to 6-7 working days. [S.I.]
- <sup>4</sup> Often it is the other way around. Ridley Scott, a decidedly visual director is a good example. [S.I.]
- <sup>5</sup> See Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush: *Alternative Scriptwriting: Rewriting the Hollywood Formula*, p. 3. Published by Focal Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition
- <sup>6</sup> Born in 1929, Kazimierz Kutz directed over 20 feature and television films, including such well-known features as *Ludzie z pociągu* [People on a Train] (1961), *Sól ziemi czarnej* [Salt of the Black Earth] (1970), and TV series *Slawa i chwała* [Fame and Glory] (1998). [Ed.]
- <sup>7</sup> An episode from the 1990 TV serial directed by Bettina Woernle. See filmography. [Ed.]
- <sup>8</sup> See a 28 February 2013 BBC News Science & Environment story by Jane Whyntie found at [http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-21604005#story\\_continues\\_1](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-21604005#story_continues_1). See also Scientific Reports website, found at: <http://www.nature.com/srep/2013/130228/srep01319/full/srep01319.html> [Ed.]
- <sup>9</sup> There are other strategies, but this is the most popular. [S.I.]
- <sup>10</sup> It could also include the fascination with evil. [S.I.]
- <sup>11</sup> In case of negative heroes, instead of identifying with them, the viewers become fascinated and this emotional bond with what's taking place on screen is just as strong. [S.I.]
- <sup>12</sup> Cinematography by Bruno Delbonnel. [S.I.]
- <sup>13</sup> I regret not working on Kieślowski's *Red*, since my lecture would be more entertaining. *A Short Film About Killing* was released in the U.S. as *The Decalogue V: Thou Shalt Not Kill*. See filmography. [Ed.]
- <sup>14</sup> Albert Einstein is most often credited with the quote, "Genius is 1% talent and 99% hard work." [Ed.]
- <sup>15</sup> Cinematography by Tak Fujimoto. [S.I.]
- <sup>16</sup> The murderer stuffs the maggots down the murdered women's throats. [S.I.]
- <sup>17</sup> Cinematography by Affonso Beato. [S.I.]
- <sup>18</sup> Cinematography by Robby Müller. [S.I.]
- <sup>19</sup> Cinematography by Miroslav Ondříček. [S.I.]
- <sup>20</sup> A 1986 comedy directed by Adrian Lyne; cinematography by Peter Biziou. [Ed.]
- <sup>21</sup> A 1943 feature directed by Fred M. Wilcox; cinematography by Leonard Smith and Charles P. Boyle. [Ed.]
- <sup>22</sup> Made in 1973 and 1976. See filmography. [Ed.]
- <sup>23</sup> The feature version of this film is known by the English title, *Thou Shalt Not Kill*. See filmography and endnote [13](#) above. [Ed.]
- <sup>24</sup> I also considered Kieślowski's *Red*; I really didn't want to shoot *White* since it was a comedy. [S.I.]
- <sup>25</sup> Jerzy Wójcik (b. 1930) has *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958), *Mother Joan of the Angels* (1961), *Westerplatte* (1967), and *Elegia* (1979) among his many credits; Jerzy Lipman (1922-1983) photographed *Kanal* (1957), *Knife in the Water* (1962), *Love at Twenty* (1962), and *Colonel Wołodyjowski* (1969); Witold Sobociński (b. 1929) is known for *Wszystko na sprzedaż* (1969), *The Third Part of the Night* (1971), *Wesele* (1973), *The Hourglass Sanatorium* (1973), and *The Promised Land* (1975). [Ed.]
- <sup>26</sup> The shots with the glass sphere discussed earlier were written into the script only after I showed Kieślowski test footage to let him know how this image will look. [S.I.]
- <sup>27</sup> Besides my work with Krzysztof Kieślowski, I made a lot of films with Krzysztof Zanussi. [S.I.]
- <sup>28</sup> A large and very busy intersection in the centre of Warsaw. [Ed.]
- <sup>29</sup> A telling name of a club in Warsaw (ściek=drain) located on Foksal Street in the same building as the Polish Filmmakers' Society. [S.I.]
- <sup>30</sup> Technically it was possible, since there was only one set that was lit for the scenes we shot during the previous week. [S.I.]
- <sup>31</sup> Since we did not receive permission to shoot in a real prison death row cell, we had to build it in a studio. [S.I.]
- <sup>32</sup> There was a huge gap in salaries paid in Poland and in Western Europe. [S.I.]
- <sup>33</sup> Currently I have upwards of 600 filters in my collection. [S.I.]
- <sup>34</sup> This does not apply to working on studio films, where such approach would be tantamount to suicide. [S.I.]
- <sup>35</sup> Do I use the same method for large-scale Hollywood productions? Of course not: I'm not suicidal. But I always make suggestions. I ply my directors with writings and thoughts about alternative versions of filming. To this day I don't understand why for the *Harry Potter* series several different cinematographers were hired. They didn't want

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new kinds of images. They wanted more of the same. Entering the set of the same decorations that were already lit by their predecessors, one could merely turn on the lights they left on the set. [S.I.]

<sup>36</sup> Castle Square is in the heart of Warsaw's Old Town. [Ed.]

<sup>37</sup> Strangely enough, this rule also applies to the genre films that are the farthest from realism. [S.I.]

<sup>38</sup> One of Kieślowski's favorite phrases was "Stop complaining!" [S.I.]

<sup>39</sup> This film received a total of seven awards, including the Golden Lion as well as the Best Actress and Best Photography prize at the Venice Festival in 1993. [S.I.]

<sup>40</sup> I'm aware that just like any other film, *Blue* is the sum total of work by many different artists. I'm trying to analyze it only from my point of view and recall my conversations with Krzysztof during our work together. [S.I.]

<sup>41</sup> From *O sobie* [About Myself] by Krzysztof Kieślowski. Edited by Danuta Stok, pp. 48-49. Znak Publishing, Kraków, 1997

<sup>42</sup> The standard encyclopedic definition of charisma describes it as a special gift or power divinely conferred, as the gift of prophecy; a personal aura or leadership quality endowing its possessor with the capacity for inspiring popular enthusiasm and support. [S.I.]

<sup>43</sup> American film slang has "low concept" and "high concept" films. "High concept" films usually are based on scripts with a strong element of drama, action and sudden plot twists. "Low concept" films have scripts about the inner thoughts and complications in the life of the protagonist. [S.I.]

<sup>44</sup> The narrative elements include inner monologues of the heroine, synthetic editing, presentation of many different characters who we're unable to remember or sort out, on-screen animation, captions, and a narrator who comments the depicted events off-screen. [S.I.]

<sup>45</sup> The first act of *Amélie* ends with Diane's accident. As far as remembering what the viewer had seen, were he/she asked to list different shots or scenes in act one, the result would be much worse, about 30-35% in my opinion. [S.I.]

<sup>46</sup> This would be the advice of every American script doctor. [S.I.]

<sup>47</sup> The conclusion: thinking of our film's style, we must think not only of the genre, but also of elements from other genres that we could employ. [S.I.]

<sup>48</sup> Of course we have different kinds of narration, including voiceover or the protagonist's internal monologue, for example. [S.I.]

<sup>49</sup> I wrote about this in greater detail in the section, "**Building the world anew.**" See page 20. [S.I.]

<sup>50</sup> As usual in art, it doesn't have to be a rule, but a statistically important connecting element. [S.I.]

<sup>51</sup> The doctor asks Julie if she was conscious during the accident and, sensing that she wasn't, informs her that she lost her husband and child. [S.I.]

<sup>52</sup> Shots from behind the heads of talking actors, done either with a cut into the first shot (a part of the head and shoulders of an actor sitting with his back to the camera), or without it (just a close-up). [S.I.]

<sup>53</sup> This technique of reverse angles enables one to considerably extend or shorten the scene. [S.I.]

<sup>54</sup> He dispensed with the tenet of "invisible" camera. [S.I.]

<sup>55</sup> I think that when Krzysztof wrote this scene he was inspired by *Żywot Mateusza* [Matthew's Life], a film by Witold Leszczyński. Mateusz—a weird character—hears music constantly. Witold Leszczyński (1933-2007) was a director and writer; his 1968 film *Żywot Mateusza* is a fascinating look into the world of a slightly retarded middle-aged man living with his sister in a remote rural setting. [S.I.]

<sup>56</sup> Of course some solutions were possible, but they were so time-consuming and expensive that, unless they were budgeted for, they were practically out of reach. [S.I.]

<sup>57</sup> In the same film I repeated my experiment again in a scene where just before she meets an "old" woman, Julie is sunning herself. What I feared could happen came to pass this time. Julie's image had vanished as I overexposed the negative completely. But Krzysztof used this shot in the film anyway. So I decided to continue experimenting in a more scientific fashion and I made a device that could be safely mounted inside the camera body and illuminated the negative as it ran through the mechanism using various colors with the aid of a dimmer. This is how I filmed the transition to the flashback scenes in *Gattaca*. [S.I.]

<sup>58</sup> The movement of opening and closing of the camera door was synchronized not only with the music but also with the camera movement (the camera was approaching and moving away from the actress), which I'm not showing in the illustrations. [S.I.]

<sup>59</sup> It's only my theory, of course. [S.I.]

<sup>60</sup> We see the journalist once more, at the end of act two during the television broadcast that Julie is watching at a night club. [S.I.]

<sup>61</sup> He photographed *The Piano* (1993), one of the films I love and admire. [S.I.]

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<sup>62</sup> I'd never order a rabbit in a restaurant because of this experience. [S.I.]

<sup>63</sup> The negative at that time was color balanced for artificial light at 3200K. On location filters were used that corrected the difference from 5800K to 3200K. [S.I.]

<sup>64</sup> When we worked on *Blue*, these methods of postproduction (color correction as well as adding “grad filters”) weren’t possible. I’ve used such filters practically everywhere, since they enhanced the richness of color. Using graduated filters made my colors non-linear, because my filters have different colors in different places. What was impossible to achieve in those days with color correction, I was able to get in the camera, applying these filters. [S.I.]

<sup>65</sup> Shot by cinematographer Piotr Kwiatkowski. [S.I.]

<sup>66</sup> To remind the reader, this scene follows the scene of death and funeral of the Polish Veronique. Veronique makes love to a school friend, whom she encountered by accident. [S.I.]

<sup>67</sup> A distinguished actress, born in 1927, who appeared in such iconic films as *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959), *Bitter Fruit* (1967), and most recently in Michael Haneke’s *Amour* (2012). [S.I.]