



**Directed and written by** Krzysztof Kieslowski  
**Produced by** Jacek Szeligowski  
**Original Music by** Wojciech Kilar  
**Cinematography by** Krzysztof Pakulski  
**Film Editing by** Elzbieta Kurkowska

Boguslaw Linda... Witek  
Tadeusz Lomnicki... Werner  
Zbigniew Zapasiewicz... Adam  
Boguslawa Pawelec... Czuska  
Marzena Trybala... Werka  
Jacek Borkowski... Marek  
Jacek Sas-Uhrynowski... Daniel

**KRZYSZTOF KIESLOWSKI** (27 June 1941, Warsaw, Poland—13 March 1996, Warsaw, cardiac arrest) directed 40 films, the last of which was *Trois couleurs: Rouge/Trzy kolory: Czerwony/Three Colors: Red* (1994), the final part of a trilogy the other two parts of which were *Trzy kolory: Bialy/Three Colors: White/Trois couleurs: Blanc* (1994) and *Trois couleurs: Bleu/Three Colors: Blue/Trzy kolory: Niebieski* (1993). Some of the others were *Double vie de Véronique/The Double Life of Véronique/Podwyjne zycie Weroniki* (1991), "Dekalog" (10 episodes 1989-1990), *Krytki film o milosci/A Short Film About Love* (1988), *Krytki film o zabijaniu/ A Short Film About Killing* (1988) *Bez konca/No End* (1985), and *Amator/Camera Buff* (1979). Before turning to fiction films he did numerous documentaries, some of which were *Przeswietlenie/X-Ray* (1974), *Murarz/Bricklayer* (1973), *Podstawy BHP w kopalni miedzi/ The Principles of Safety and Hygiene in a Copper Mine* (1972) and *Urzad/The Office* (1966).

**BOGUSLAW LINDA** (27 June 1952, Torun, Poland) has appeared in 76 films and tv series, the most recent of which is *Mika i Alfred* (2008) (completed, not yet released). Some of the others are *Jasne blekitne okna* (2007), *Summer Love* (2006), *Haker* (2002), *Pan Tadeusz* (1999), *Billboard* (1998), *Sara* (1997), *Pamietnik znaleziony w garbie/ Diary in a Marble* (1993), *Magneto* (1993), *In flagranti* (1991), "Dekalog," *Porno* (1990), *Sztuka kochania/Art of Loving* (1989), *Przypadek/Blind Chance* (1987),



*Synteza* (1984), *Danton* (1983), *Czlowiek z zelaza/Man of Iron* (1981), *Wsciekly* (1980) and *Dagny* (1977).

**WOJCIECH KILAR** (17 July 1932, Lwów, Poland. [now Lviv, Ukraine]) has composed music for 159 films, among them, *We Own the Night* (2007), *Persona non grata* (2005), *Vendetta* (2003), *The Pianist* (2002), *Salwa* (2001), *Pan Tadeusz* (1999), *The Portrait of a Lady* (1996), *Cwal/At Full Gallop* (1996), *Death and the Maiden* (1994), *Dracula* (1992), *Le Retour/The Return* (1990), *Salsa* (1988), *Przypadek/Blind Chance* (1987), *Imperativ* (1982), *Smuga cienia/The Shadow Line* (1976), *Opetanie/Obsession* (1973), *Dancing w kwaterze Hitlera/ Dancing Party in Hitler's Headquarters* (1971), *Rejs/The Cruise* (1970), *Lalka/The Doll* (1968), *Katastrofa/Catastrophe* (1966), *Czerwone berety/Red Berets* (1963) and *Narciarze* (1958).

**Kieslowski, from *The St. James Film Directors Encyclopedia*. Ed. Andrew Sarris. Visible Ink, Detroit, NY, 1998. Entry by Blazena Urgosikova**

Polish. Born Warsaw, 27 June 1941. Education School of Cinema and Theatre, Lodz, graduated 1969. Worked as director of documentaries and fiction films for TV, from 1969; directed first feature for cinema. Blizna, 1976; vice-president of the Union of Polish Cinematographers, 1978-81; member of faculty of Radio

and Television, Silesia, 1979-82; made *Dekalog*, series of short films for Polish TV, 1988-89, then gained financing to make longer versions of two episodes for cinematic release.

In the late 1970s, when the conflict between the State and the citizens of Poland was imminent, a new trend emerged in cinematography—the “cinema of moral unrest.” All the films in this trend have one common denominator: an unusually cutting critical view of the state of society and its morals, human relationships in the work process, public and private life. It is more than logical that Krzysztof Kieslowski would have belonged to this trend; he had long been concerned with the moral problems of the society, and paid attention to them throughout his film career with increasing urgency. The direction of his artistic course was anticipated by his graduation film *From the City of Lodz*, in which he sketched the problems of workers, and by his participation in the stormy protest meeting of young filmmakers in Cracow in 1971, who warned against a total devaluation of basic human values.

A broad scale of problems can be found in the documentary films Kieslowski made between shooting feature films: disintegration of the economic structure, criticism of executive work, and the relationships of institutions and individuals. These documentaries are not a mere recording of events, phenomena, or a description of people and their behaviour, but always an attempt to look underneath the surface. The director often used non-traditional means. Sometimes the word dominates the image, or he may have borrowed the stylistics of slapstick or satire, or he interfered with the reality in front of the camera by a staged element. Kieslowski did not emphasize the aesthetic function of the image, but stressed its real and literal meaning.

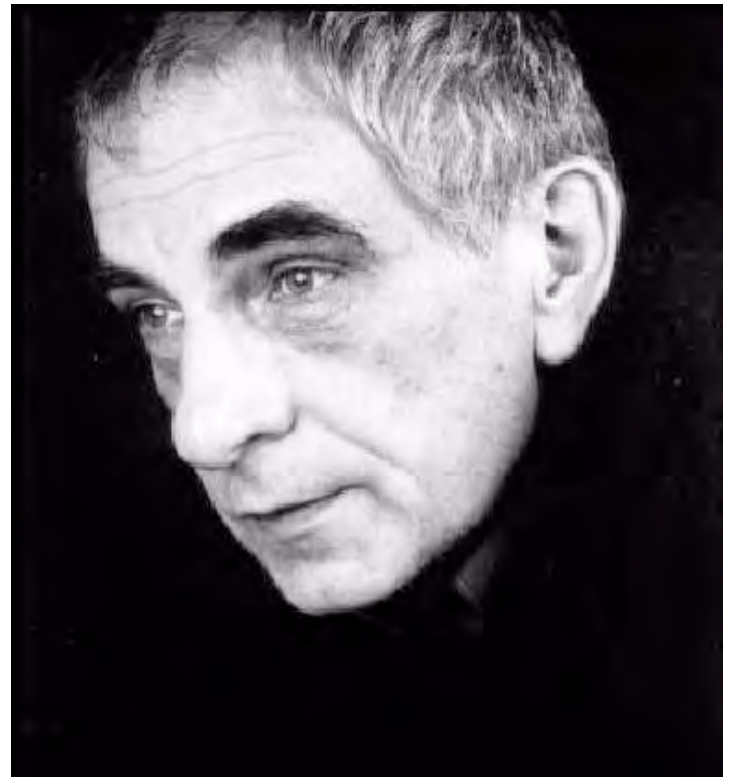
His feature films have a similar orientation: he concentrated on the explication of an individual’s situation in the society and politics, on the outer and inner bounds of man with the objectively existing world, and on the search for connections between the individual and the general. He often placed his heroes in situations where they have to make a vital decision (in his TV films *The Staff* and *The Calm*, and in his films for theatrical release).

*The Amateur* is the synthesis of his attitudes and artistic search of the 1970s, and is also one of the most significant films of the “cinema of moral unrest.” In the story of a man who buys a camera to follow the growth of a newborn daughter, and who gradually, thanks to this film instrument, begins to realize his responsibility for what is happening around him, the director placed a profound importance on the role of the artist in the world, on his morality, courage, and active approach to life. Here Kieslowski surpassed, to a large extent, the formulaic restrictions of the “cinema of moral unrest” resulting from the outside-the art essence of this trend. These restrictions are also eliminated in his following films. In *The Accident* (made in 1981, released in 1987) he extended his exploration of man and his actions by introducing the category of the accidental. The hero experiences the same events (Poland in 1981) three times, and is therefore given three destinies, but each time on a different side. Two destinies are more or less given by accident, the third one he chooses himself, but even this choice is affected by the accidental element. The transcendental factor appears in *No End* (a dead man intervenes in worldly events), but the film is not an exploration of supernatural phenomena so much as a ruthless revelation of the tragic period after the declaration of the state of emergency in December 1981,

and a demonstration of the professed truth that private life cannot be lived in isolation from the public sphere.

In the 1980s Kieslowski’s work culminated in a TV cycle and two films with subjects from the Ten Commandments. *A Short Film about Killing* is based on the fifth commandment (Thou shalt not kill), while *A Short Film about Love* comes from the sixth. Both films and the TV cycle are anchored in the present and express the necessity of a moral revival, both of the individual and the society, in a world which may be determined by accidentality, but which does not deliver us from the right and duty of moral choice.

After the fall of communism when, as a consequence of changes in economic conditions, the production of films experienced a sharp fall in all of Eastern Europe, some Polish directors sought a solution to the ensuing crisis in work for foreign studios and in co-productions. This was the road taken by Kieslowski, and so all his films made in the 1990s were created with the participation of French producers: *The Double Life of Véronique* and the trilogy *Three Colours: Blue, Three Colours: White, Three Colours: Red*—loosely linked to the noble motto of the French Revolution: liberty, equality, fraternity. In these films Kieslowski followed up on his films from the 1980s in which his heroes struggle with the duality of reason and feelings, haphazardness and necessity, reality and mystery. Even in these films made abroad we can also trace certain irony and sarcasm which first appeared in his films made in the 1970s in Poland.



***Kieslowski on Kieslowski*. Edited by Danusia Stok. Faber and Faber, London & Boston, 1993.**

***“Chance or Fate” BLIND CHANCE (PRZYPADDEK) (1981)***

I don’t really know why there wasn’t any true description of Poland in the 1970s in the other arts. There wasn’t even a proper description of it in literature and literature is easier to produce than film. It’s not subject to censorship to the same

degree although individual writers or individual books might be. Yet films offered the best description of Poland in the 1970s. At the ends of the 1970s, I realized that this description was limited, that we had reached these limits and that there was no point in describing this world any further.

A result of this train of thought is *Blind Chance*, which is no longer a description of the outside world but rather of the inner world. It's a description of the powers which meddle with our fate, which push us one way or another.

I think its fundamental flaws lay in the script, as usual. I like the idea to this day; it's rich and interesting. I just don't think it was made adequate use of, this idea of three possible endings—that every day we're always faced with a choice which could end our entire life yet of which we're completely unaware. We don't ever really know where our fate lies. We don't know what chance holds in store for us. Fate in the sense of a place, a social group. a professional career, or the work we do. We've got much more freedom than this in the emotional sphere. In the social sphere we're greatly governed by chance; there are things which we simply have to do, or we have to be the way we are. That's because of our genes, of course. Those were the thoughts which preoccupied me while I was making *Blind Chance*.

Witek, the main character, behaves decently in each situation. He behaves decently even when he joins the Party. At a certain moment, when he sees that he's been manipulated into a situation where he ought to behave like a bastard, he rebels and behaves decently.

The third ending is the one which means the most to me—the one where the aeroplane explodes—because one way or another, that's going to be our fate. It's all the same whether this happens in an aeroplane or in bed, it doesn't matter.

The film wasn't going all that well. I'd shot about eighty percent. I edited it and realized that it was going in the wrong direction; it was equally inadequate in the way it was being filmed and in the way the idea of the three individual endings was being expressed. It was mechanical. It had been inserted into the film and didn't give the impression of forming an organic part of the whole. So I stopped shooting, and had a break for two or three months. Then I reshot about half of the material and another twenty percent of new material which I needed. And there was a considerable improvement.

I often worked that way—and I still like doing this—that at some point I'd stop shooting and give myself a certain margin of freedom so that I could check in the cutting-room and on screen how various elements work together. Here, in the West, it's difficult to work in this way because there's a lot of money behind any project and it's terribly hard to play with this money. It was easy in Poland, at that time, because the money didn't belong to anybody, even though you had to take care not to make the films too expensive or unnecessarily extravagant. I was always careful in this way. But you could play around with the money. You could manipulate it. And I often did.

***The Cinema of KRZYSZTOF KIESLOWSKI variations on destiny and chance.* Marek Haltof. allflower Press, London and New York, 2004.**

*Blind Chance: Variations on Fate*

“I still think that, together with Munk's *Bad Luck* and Zanussi's *Illumination*, *Blind Chance* belongs to our most important achievements of intellectual cinema.” —Tadeusz Sobolewski

The script of *Przypadek (Blind Chance)* was written before the Solidarity period and was later published in 1981 in a prestigious journal on drama, *Dialog*. Produced in 1981, the film was immediately shelved by the authorities after 13 December of that year. A still from *Blind Chance* appeared on the front cover of the last issue of the monthly *Kino*, published before the introduction of martial law in Poland. Six years later, in 1987, *Blind Chance* was quietly released with a group of other distinguished banned films including Janusz Zaorski's *The Mother of Kings* and Jerzy Domaradzki's *Wielki bieg (The Big Run, 1981)*. In 1988 Agnieszka Holland's *Kobieta samotna (A Woman Alone, 1981)* was 'unshelved' as was the preeminent Polish film of the early 1980s, Ryszard Bugajski's *The Interrogation*, one year later. At the 1987 Festival of Polish Films in Gdansk, Kieslowski was

awarded the Best Screenplay award for *Blind Chance* and its star Boguslaw Linda received the Best Actor Award (the award also recognized his performance in Filip Bajo's *Magnat [The Magnate]*).

While early narratives by Kieslowski demonstrate his fascination with capturing life 'as it is', they go beyond narrowly understood realism. Kieslowski admits in his conversations with Danusia Stok that describing the undescribed world had its limitations. and, therefore, *Blind Chance* offers 'no longer a

description of the outside world but rather of the inner world. It is a description of the powers which meddle with our fate, which push us one way or another.' In a characteristically self-critical manner Kieslowski blames the film's flaws on the imperfections of his script. (Interestingly, Polish critics mostly praise the script of *Blind Chance*, which was also awarded in Gdansk.) The move to the 'inner world' and metaphysics, heralded earlier by Kieslowski in the ending of *Camera Buff*, finds its epitome in *Blind Chance*.

Kieslowski's *Blind Chance*, which at the beginning of the 1980s quickly attained dissident cult status, portrays an undergraduate medical student Witek (diminutive form of Witold) Dlugosz, played by Boguslaw Linda, whose future is determined by whether he is able to jump onto a moving train. This is the beginning of Witek's three different life paths: he is a young party apparatchik manipulated by old party functionaries, a dissident activist involved in underground publishing and a person isolated from others by his desire for privacy. In each 'what-if' scenario an accidental element determines the protagonist's life—a fact



stressed by the film's title. The Polish title *Przypadek* is usually translated as *Blind Chance*, but it could as easily be translated as 'the coincidence' or 'the case' (that is, the case of Witek).

The pre-credit scene of *Blind Chance* opens with a puzzling close-up shot of a young man's face who is screaming in horror 'No!' The camera pulls toward his open mouth and the credits follow. Then the viewer sees several perplexing short scenes that make sense only during the course of the film. They provide the summary of Witek's life prior to his run after the train (perhaps Witek is looking back at his life at the moment of his death). These scenes include the death of Witek's mother during his birth at the time of bloody strikes in Poznan in 1956 (a heavily bleeding man is dragged across the hospital corridor), images of his father and Witek's farewell to Daniel, his Jewish friend who leaves Poland for Denmark during the anti-Semitic campaign of 1968. In other glimpses of the protagonist's past we see Witek kissing his first love Czuska, Witek making love to a fellow medical student Olga, the death of Witek's father and Witek's outburst of sadness at the train station.'

Only those viewers who are familiar with Polish history can understand the importance of several scenes and dates in *Blind Chance*. The protagonist is born on 27 June 1956 in Poznan. The opening scene in a hospital, filled with the dying and wounded, blood on the floor, refers to the violent workers' protest in Poznan in 1956. (The opening image is repeated later in the film.) During the strike, which concerned working conditions, reduction of work loads and salary increases, riots broke out and the army and security forces intervened and opened fire on the protesters. Witek's mother dies, along with his twin brother, while she is giving birth; the medical personnel are too busy with the wounded. As Witek later remarks, he survived because he was the first one to be born. (The death of Witek's twin brother at birth perhaps anticipates the future story about Weronika and Véronique in *The Double Life of Véronique*.) The film makes other important historical references when Witek reveals to his girlfriend Werka that both his great grandparents participated in the 1863 uprising (the so-called January Uprising) against the tsarist regime, that his grandfather took part in the 'Miracle on the Vistula'—the decisive battle on the outskirts of Warsaw during the 1920 Polish-Soviet war, and that his father participated in the September 1939 campaign against the advancing German troops and in 1956 took part in the Poznan strikes. Witek's family history and his symbolic date of birth make him a generational protagonist. This is not, however, the generation to which Kieslowski belonged. Witek, like the author of this book, belongs to the generation born after the Stalinist period, too young to remember the year 1968 in Poland, whose formative years were the late 1970s, during Gierek's era of 'small prosperity'.

The opening segment of *Blind Chance* also contains an important telephone conversation between Witek and his dying father. The father's last words—'I'd like to tell you something because it might be too late: you don't have to do anything'—are taken literally by Witek. He takes a leave of absence from the medical academy (where he presumably was studying to please his father) and tries to find his own way. The rest of the film is built around three different stories, three films within a film. They offer three hypothetical generational biographies or three variants of the same biography, three alternative life paths, three outcomes of Witek's chase after the moving train.

The three separate stories originate with a simple incident at the Łódź train station. Three times Witek runs through the

station and bumps into an older woman who drops some coins and curses him. The camera then follows one rolling coin that is picked up by a meddle-aged alcoholic man who uses it to pay for a glass of beer. In the meantime, Witek buys a discounted student train ticket and, running to the platform, either barely misses or bumps into the man with the beer, which either enables him to catch or causes him to miss the train to Warsaw (perhaps the train of destiny). Witek's three attempts to board the train are emphasized by the same memorable music score by Wojciech Kilar, one of the most accomplished Polish composers.

In the first story, which is the longest, lasting 49 minutes, Witek runs and catches the Warsaw train. On the train he meets an old-time communist party activist Werner (Tadeusz Lomnicki) who introduces him to the world of official politics. Once in Warsaw, he invites Witek to his apartment and explains events from his political and private past. Also, thanks to his high-level contacts, the now semi-retired Werner help[s] Witek advance his career by introducing him to his friend, a prominent party apparatchik Adam (Zbigniew Zapasiewicz). The ambitious and eager Witek is sent by another party official (Jerzy Stuhr) to quell a rebellion caused by alleged harsh treatment, at a rehabilitation camp for drug users supervised by the Union of Socialist Youth (Związek Młodzieży Socjalistycznej, ZMS). Although threatened by the patients, Witek succeeds in releasing their hostages, all of whom are doctors, and returns to Warsaw. Also in the first story, thanks to another chance, Witek meets his first love Czuska (Bogusława Pawelec), now involved in dissident activities, and mixes with her circle. Due to his political naivety, however, Witek betrays Czuska and her friends by revealing their political actions (distributing underground books) to Adam. After her arrest, the outraged Witek struck Adam, thus ending his flirtation with the communist ideology. The story ends bitterly. Witek's much anticipated trip to France is stopped at the last moment (at the airport) by the authorities because of strikes in several Polish Baltic ports—obviously referring to the advent of Solidarity in August of 1980.



Kieslowski paints a picture of the end of Gierek's era in Poland with a small number of representative characters, some of them almost bordering on clichés. Three different characters represent the communist side in *Blind Chance*: Werner, Adam, and the apparatchik played by Jerzy Stuhr. Werner belongs to the embittered yet still loyal generation of communists. Arrested in 1948 and released from prison after Stalin's death in 1954, Werner tells the story of his life to his earnest apprentice Witek and ends it thus: 'If we haven't done things right, maybe your generation will. You, for instance.' The participation of Tadeusz Lomnicki (1927-92) as Werner adds another dimension to this character. This great actor, known chiefly for his theatrical

performances, whose filmic career began in 1955 with Andrzej Wajda's *A Generation*, was also known for his involvement in official politics as a member of the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party. Another activist, Adam, represented the conformist mainstream of the party and is played by Zbigniew Zapasiewicz, an actor known chiefly for his role as a cynical and embittered professor in Zanussi's *Camouflage*. Interestingly, he also plays a similar Adam-like character in another shelved film, Junusz Zaorski's *The Mother of Kings*. Jerzy Stuhr, a the young party apparatchik, portrays a typical 1970s scoundrel. The 'oppositional side', represented by Czuska, also seems to have been taken from the prop-room of the Cinema of Distrust. The young rebels at the hospital may strike contemporary viewers as equally clichéd, with their 'angry and non-conformist' look and 'freedom songs' such as 'we are different, that's why you don't want to know us, we are different, but capable of many things'.

In the 35-minute second story the protagonist runs after the train, but is stopped by a railway militiaman (*sokista*), struggles with him, and is arrested. As a punishment, Witek is sentenced to community service. While working in a park on a gigantic flowerbed in the shape of an eagle (the Polish emblem), he meets an underground activist Marek (Jacek Borkowski) and, through him, other dissidents. After meeting wheelchair-bound priest Stefan (played by one of the leading actors of politically-minded cinema of the late 1970s, Adam Ferency) who is helping the dissidents, Witek converts to Catholicism and is baptised. The combination of the Roman Catholic faith and an anti-communist stance marks Witek as the emblematic Polish hero of the Solidarity period.

Like other underground activists, Witek helps with the printing of dissident literature and is preoccupied with the underground 'flying university' and with organising a free workers' union. He also helps those who are harassed by the authorities. For example, he is sent by his organisation to an older woman, an underground activist, most probably a KOR (Committee for the Defense of workers) member who was providing legal and financial aid to arrested workers. Her apartment has just been ransacked by security service (SB) men posing as grateful workers. Her calm ('Life is a gift,' she tells Witek) contrasts sharply with the dangerous situation she has just faced.

In the second story Witek also meets his childhood Jewish friend, Daniel (Jacek Sas-Uhrynowski), who comes from abroad to attend the funeral of his mother, and Daniel's sister Werka (Marzena Trybala), the married woman with whom Witek later has an affair. Witek's involvement with the political opposition is abruptly terminated after the search and arrest of his friends' cell

active in underground publishing, when he unjustly accused of betraying them. Ready for a trip to France to attend a meeting of the Catholic Youth, Witek refuses to cooperate with the security service which makes it impossible for him to get a passport. Returning home, he learns about the 1980 strikes in several Polish cities from his aunt (Irena Byrska), an old-time idealist communist, now listening to Radio Free Europe.

The third story, which is only 20 minutes long, begins with the image of the running Witek who misses the train and meets his university friend and lover Olga (Monika Gozdzik) on the platform. They subsequently marry, Witek resumes his medical studies, interrupted in the first to variants, and leads a calm and politically uninvolved life.

During his work at the medical academy, under the supervision of his former dean (Zygmunt Hübner), he refuses to take sides: 'I don't want any part of one or the other', he explains, and does not sign a petition to release a group of political prisoners, including the dean's son. When the dean asks Witek to replace him and deliver a series of lectures in Libya, he agrees and decides to travel, via Paris, three days later, on 11 July 1980, after his wife's birthday celebrations. Before boarding a train he learns that



they are expecting a baby girl. The story and the film end with the image of the plane exploding shortly after take-off from the Warsaw airport.

In *Blind Chance*, Kieslowski questions the 'us' and 'them' division that defined the Polish political as well as cultural lie under communist rule. He expresses disillusionment with life in Poland and favours uninvolvedness—the model of life revolving around the personal rather than the public. According to the film's logic, one can be honest, regardless of one's political stand, even being on the side of the Communist Party. *Blind Chance* offers no proper solution for Witek. The fatal plane to Paris waits for him in every variant of his life; even being uninvolved cannot save him from his fate. In the first two variants, however, when Witek is politically active on either side of the political barricade in Poland, he is saved. As Kieslowski explains, being focused on one's personal life cannot change the world because 'the world has to be changed'. Being politically involved, however, Witek gets another chance. In part two, the likeable protagonist's aunt tells him: 'I'm glad you didn't go away, not at a time like this.'

In all three parts of *Blind Chance*, regardless of his political stance, Witek is basically the same: sincere, honest, decent, passionate, eager to act and trying to do his best in given circumstances. In every story Witek also finds for himself a different surrogate father (Werner Stefan, Dean), and falls in love with a different (with regard to her appearance, psychology and aspirations) woman. Although fate meddles in Witek's affairs and alters (or ends) his life, he remains good by nature. Perhaps Kieslowski argues that decency can be found on both sides on the political division in Poland—certainly an unpopular view in the bitter atmosphere of the early 1980s in Poland. 'Blind chance may

shape one's life but does not shape the human being', writes Polish critic Maciej Pawlicki. Perhaps, as Tadeusz Sbolewski convincingly argues, Kieslowski stresses that political and ideological divisions in Poland are a fiction and do not reflect true differences.

*Blind Chance* might be considered a pessimistic philosophical parable on human destiny shaped by the occurrences beyond individual control. On the one hand, Kieslowski's treatment of the matter stems in large part from his documentary beginnings; in this light, the film could be considered a political essay. On the other hand, by introducing the element of chance (perhaps destiny) into his protagonist's actions, the director is able to deal with questions present in his later, internationally acclaimed films, starting with *Decalogue*. Kieslowski comments that his films 'are always observations of a person who must choose in order to define one's place. This is always an attempt to consider what proper, objective reality is, or to understand the motives of a person who acts against this reality.'

Kieslowski's film about human destiny also bears some similarity to the *Three Colours* trilogy. *Blind Chance* offers three films within a film and the characters, by reappearing in other stories, sometimes add an ironic twist to the action. In the second part, for example, Witek, standing in front of the Warsaw Central Station building, asks Werner for directions. In the final part of the film, before Witek's doomed flight to France, he is at the airport where a group of young pilgrims, headed by Stefan, wait for their plane to Paris. In the same scene, a flight attendant from the first part runs with passports belonging to the young party apparatchiks. Coins also link *Blind Chance* with the *Three Colours* trilogy, specifically the rolling coin in *Blind Chance* and Karol's French two-franc coin in *Three Colours: White*.

Kieslowski deals with personal experience but universalises Witek's experience in a parable on destiny and choices. By providing his protagonist with an almost stereotypically patriotic biography, he generalises his experiences and his dilemmas. Given his patriotic-nationalist family upbringing, however, Witek is certainly portrayed as too naïve when it comes to communist ideology in the first story of the film.

The star of *Blind Chance*, Boguslaw Linda (b. 1952), at that time also appeared in a series of acclaimed political films, including Agnieszka Holland's *Goraczka* (*Fever*, 1981) and *A Woman Alone*, Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Iron* and *Danton* (1983) and Janusz Zaorski's *The Mother of Kings*. He became one of the idols of the Solidarity generation, although the censor shelved most of the films he appeared in. Later, at the beginning of the 1990s, Wladyslaw Pasikowski's *Psy* (*The Pigs*, 1992) and its sequel released in 1994, *Psy 2: Ostatnia krew* (*The Pigs 2: Last Blood*), established him as a new charismatic Polish star. In the 1990s, Linda became an icon for another generation, and represents its nihilism and disillusionment with the new reality. The tough guy aura and cynical attitude of the protagonists he portrays in Pasikowski's films reflect the reality of the first period of unfettered Polish capitalism. Linda often stresses that the evolution of his image, from romantic, frequently anti-totalitarian heroes to the fallen angel of the old system in the 1990s (as in *The Pigs*), is intentional, an integral part of his artistic development: 'The time came when I felt that I had had enough of roles as an intellectual. I felt that such a person, without any major life experiences, torn by idealistic differences, was not a hero for the present.' Nevertheless, this shift has prompted some Polish critics

to accuse the actor of betraying his initial image. Tadeusz Lubelski, for instance, declares that contemporary Linda 'remains merely a caricature of himself'.

Kieslowski's film, firmly set during the decline of Gierek's regime, as released in a different political climate and reached another generation of film viewers for whom the experience of martial law (after December 1981), rather than the Solidarity period (1980-81), had become the most important generational experience. *Blind Chance* was received by the majority of Polish critics as an apt reflection of the state of minds of the pre-Solidarity era. Due to its shelving, however, instead of introducing an intellectual ferment to Polish cinema, it became, as Tadeusz Sbolewski puts it, 'a souvenir of the past'. Another critic called it a postscript to the Cinema of Distrust but intellectually more refined. The almost clinical study of three life variants, presented by Kieslowski, certainly has more in common of Krzysztof Zanussi's philosophical parables such as *The Structure of Crystals* and *Illumination* than with the Cinema of Distrust from the late 1970s.

Due to its cold narrative and unclear political sympathies, Kieslowski's film became an easy target for politically-minded film critics. His project had already been attacked at the script stage by functionaries of the Ministry of Internal Affairs as an 'anti-state and anti-socialist demagogy', apologetic towards the opposition and falsifying reality. Certainly, some pro-communist party critics considered its fatalistic message, the view that life is governed by chance rather than the class background or our conscious actions, as anti-Marxist.



On the other side of the political spectrum, Solidarity critics, for example, Krzysztof Klopotowski, labelled Kieslowski 'a socialist film-maker' — a derogatory term in mid-1980s Poland. *Blind Chance*, according to another Polish critic, writing under the pseudonym Marcin Sulkowski, offers 'an ironic summary of the aspirations of the [Polish] generation formed by the 1970s'. The same critic claims that Witek is like a top-of-the-class student who wants to be the best without questioning, who naïvely follows the crowd and does not search for the true meaning of life. In all three stories Witek behaves like an eager beaver and his life is ruled by blind chance. Witek, writes Sulkowski, 'resembles a mirror, a smooth surface that reflects encountered persons', and takes on alien shapes. That is probably why, in a conversation with Witek, his ailing father says, 'your good grades annoyed me. You noticed, didn't you? Know what pleased me? When you hit the

teacher in the seventh grade and then got nothing but Cs. I don't like eager beavers. I never did. My dislike rubbed off on your school.'

The unique narrative strategy of *Blind Chance* influenced, to a certain degree, two films released in 1998: *Sliding Doors*, a British film directed by Peter Howitt, and *Lola Rennt (Run, Lola, Run)*, a German film directed by Tom Tykwer. *Sliding Doors* offers not three but two versions, depending on whether Helen (Gwyneth Paltrow) catches a London train. The protagonist also does not face Witek's dramatic ideological choices. *Run, Lola, Run* relies on its MTV-like brisk editing and deals with a young punk in Berlin (Franka Potente) desperately trying to save her gangster boyfriend by getting him 100,000 German Marks. As Slavoj Žižek fittingly comments on *Run, Lola, Run*: 'The first words of the film ("the game lasts ninety minutes, everything else is just theory") provide the proper co-ordinates of a video game: as in the usual survival video game, Lola is given three lives. "Real life" itself is thus rendered as a fictional video-game existence.' Tykwer's film offers a postmodern sensibility and, although it does not have the depth of Kieslowski's film, it is saved by its venomous kinetic energy.



### **"The forced Choice of Freedom" Slavoj Žižek**

A new life experience is in the air today, a perception that explodes the form of the linear narrative and renders life as a multiform flow. Up to the domain of the "hard" sciences (quantum physics and its multiple-reality interpretation; neo-Darwinism), we seem to be haunted by the chanciness of life and the alternate versions of reality. To quote Stephen Jay Gould's blunt formulation, which uses precisely the cinema metaphor: "Wind back the film of life and play it again. The history of evolution will be totally different." Either life is experienced as a series of multiple parallel destinies that interact and are crucially affected by meaningless contingent encounters, the points at which one series intersects with and intervenes in another (see Robert Altman's *Short Cuts*); or different outcomes of the same plot are repeatedly enacted (the "parallel universes" or "alternative possible worlds" scenarios). Even many "serious" historians have recently published on "virtual histories," interpreting the crucial modern-age events, from Cromwell's victory over the Stuarts and the American War of independence to

the disintegration of Communism, as hinging on unpredictable and sometimes even improbable chances. This perception of our reality as one of the possible, often even not the most probable, outcomes of an open situation, this notion that other possible outcomes are not simply canceled out but continue to haunt our reality as a specter of what might have happened, conferring on our reality the status of extreme fragility and contingency, implicitly clashes with the predominant linear narrative forms of our literature and cinema.

Krzysztof Kieslowski's obsession with the role of chance and of parallel alternate histories can be perceived as an endeavor to articulate this new life experience in all its ambiguity, one that links him to the more clearly "postmodern" directors of the past decade or two. (Consider the fact that it was Tom Tykwer who filmed *Heaven* the scenario finished by Kieslowski just before his death. Is Tykwer's *Run, Lola, Run* not a cyber-inflected remake of Kieslowski's *Blind Chance*?)

The lesson of this motif of chance and alternate histories seems to be that we live in a world in which, as in a cyberspace game, when one choice leads to a catastrophic ending, we can return to the starting point and make another, better choice—what was the first time a suicidal mistake can be the second time done in a correct way, so that the opportunity is not missed. In *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991), Veronique learns from Weronika, avoids the suicidal choice of singing, and survives; in *Red* (1994), Auguste avoids the mistake of the judge; even *White* (1993) ends with the prospect of Karol and his French bride getting a second chance and remarrying. The very title of Annette Insdorf's book on Kieslowski, *Double Lives, Second Chances*, points in this direction: the other life is here to give us a second chance—that is, as Insdorf states, "repetition becomes accumulation, with a prior mistake as a base for successful action." However, while it sustains the prospect of repeating the passed choices and thus retrieving the missed opportunities, this universe can also be interpreted in the opposite, much darker way.



## Coming up in the Buffalo Film Seminars:

Nov 11 Wim Wenders *PARIS, TEXAS* 1984

Nov 18 Wong Kar-Wai *IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE (FA YEUNG NIN WA)* 2000


Nov 25 Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck *THE LIVES OF OTHERS (DAS LEBEN DER ANDEREN)* 2006

Dec 2 Stanley Kubrick *2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY* 1968

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to subscribe to the weekly email informational notes, send an email to [addto\\_list@buffalofilmseminars.com](mailto:addto_list@buffalofilmseminars.com)  
for cast and crew info on any film: <http://imdb.com/>

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**K** Albright-Knox Art Gallery



3x3 @ AKAG

Bruce Jackson and Diane Christian will host a series of nine Thursday evening film screenings at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery this spring. They will present three films by three masters of film form: Jean Renoir (1894–1979), Federico Fellini (1920–1993), and Yasujirō Ozu (1903–1963).

### Jean Renoir

February 5 *The Grand Illusion* 1937

February 12 *La Bête Humaine* 1938

February 19 *Rules of the Game* 1939

### Federico Fellini

March 5 *I Vitelloni* 1953

March 19 *8 ½* 1963

March 26 *Juliet of the Spirits* 1965

### Yasujirō Ozu

April 9 *Late Spring* 1949

April 16 *Tokyo Story* 1953

April 23 *Floating Weeds* 1959s