

The Buffalo Film Seminars



Directed by Krzysztof Kieslowski
Written by Krzysztof Kieslowski & Krzysztof Piesiewicz
Produced by Leonardo De La Fuente
Original Music by Zbigniew Preisner
Cinematography by Slawomir Idziak
Film Editing by Jacques Witt

Irène Jacob... Weronika/Véronique
Halina Gryglaszewska... La Tante
Kalina Jedrusik... La femme barjolée
Aleksander Bardini... Conductor
Wladyslaw Kowalski... Weronika's father
Jerzy Gudejko... Antek
Janusz Sterninski... Lawyer
Philippe Volter... Alexandre Fabbri
Sandrine Dumas... Catherine
Louis Ducreux... Professor
Claude Duneton... Father of Véronique
Lorraine Evanoff... Claude
Guillaume De Tonquedec... Serge
Gilles Gaston-Dreyfus... Jean-Pierre

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/Podwójne życie Weroniki* (1991), “Dekalog” (10 episodes 1989-1990), *Krótki film o miłości/A Short Film About Love* (1988), *Krótki film o zabijaniu/A Short Film About Killing* (1988) *Bez końca/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).

SLAWOMIR IDZIAK (25 January 1945, Katowice, Poland) has shot 57 films, the most recent of which is *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2007). Some of the others are *Black Hawk Down* (2001), *Gattaca* (1997), *Weltmeister* (1994), *Traumstreuner* (1994), *Trois couleurs: Bleu* (1993), *La Double vie de Véronique* (1991), and *Zawal serca/Heart Attack* (1967).

April 1, 2008 (XVI:11)
Krzysztof Kieslowski THE DOUBLE LIFE OF VERONIQUE
1991, 98 min



IRÈNE JACOB (15 July 1966, Suresnes, France) has appeared in 41 films and television series, most recently *The Dust of Time* (2007). Some of the others are *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* (2007), *Nouvelle-France* (2004), *Automne/Autumn* (2004), *The Pornographer: A Love Story* (2004), *My Life So Far* (1999), *U.S. Marshals* (1998), *Othello* (1995), *Trois couleurs: Rouge* (1994), *The Secret Garden* (1993), *La Double vie de Véronique* (1991), *La Veillée* (1990), *Au revoir les enfants* (1987) and *Brigade de nuit* (1987). She won the 1991 best actress award at Cannes for her performance in *La Double vie de Véronique*.

ZBIGNIEW PREISNER (20 May 1955, Bielsko-Biala, Poland) has done the scores for 52 films, 17 of them with Kieslowski: the ten films of “Dekalog” (1989), the *Three Colors* trilogy (1993-1994), and *Bez końca/No End* (1985), *La Double vie de Véronique* (1991), *Krótki film o miłości/A Short Film About Love* (1988) and *Krótki film o zabijaniu/A Short Film About Killing* (1988). His most recent film score was for *Un secret/A Secret* (2007). From IMDb: “Born in Poland in 1955, Zbigniew Preisner studied philosophy and history in the university of Cracow. In his twenties he started to study music in an autodidactical way: buying records and learning to write by taking the music in parts. He started to write his own compositions. His style has always been very romantic, influenced by romantic Polish composers from the XIX century and others like Paganini or Sibelius. He has always emphasized the importance of melody in music. He doesn't like

experimental modern music.

In 1981 he began his collaboration with filmmakers. While he was working with Antoni Krauze's movie *Weather Report* he met director Krzysztof Kieslowski who invited him to work in his new movie *No End* about Poland under the martial law at the beginning of the 80s.

With that movie he began a very close collaboration with Kieslowski and his screenwriter Krzysztof Piesiewicz. He works while the script for the movie is still being written but he usually also takes part in the editing of the movie.”

KRZYSZTOF PIESIEWICZ (25 October 1945, Warsaw, Poland): “In 1970, graduated in law from Warsaw University. Articled as a judge and as a barrister. In legal practice since 1973. Is mainly a criminal defence lawyer, but has also specialised in family law and in protection of personal goods and chattels. During Martial Law, acted as defence counsel at numerous political trials. Was Assistant Prosecutor in the case of the abduction and murder of Father Jerzy Popieluszko. For many years was a member of the Barristers' Council and Expert for the Mazowsze Region Branch of the Solidarity Trade Union. Lectured for articling law students and was member of the examination committee....Member of the American Academy of Motion Pictures. Regular contributor to several weekly and monthly magazines. Member of Senate (Higher Chamber of Polish Parliament) of 2nd (1991-93), 4th (1997-2001) and 5th (since 2001) term” (IMDb). He has written 12 film scripts, 17 of them with Kieslowski: the *Three Colors* trilogy, all 10 episodes of “Dekalog,” *Bez końca/No End* (1985), *La Double vie de Véronique* (1991), *Krótki film o miłości/A Short Film About Love* (1988) and *Krótki film o zabijaniu/A Short Film About Killing* (1988). The other four are *Nadzieja/Hope* (2007), *L'Enfer/Hell* (2005), *Heaven* (2002) and *Cisza/Silence* (2001)

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.

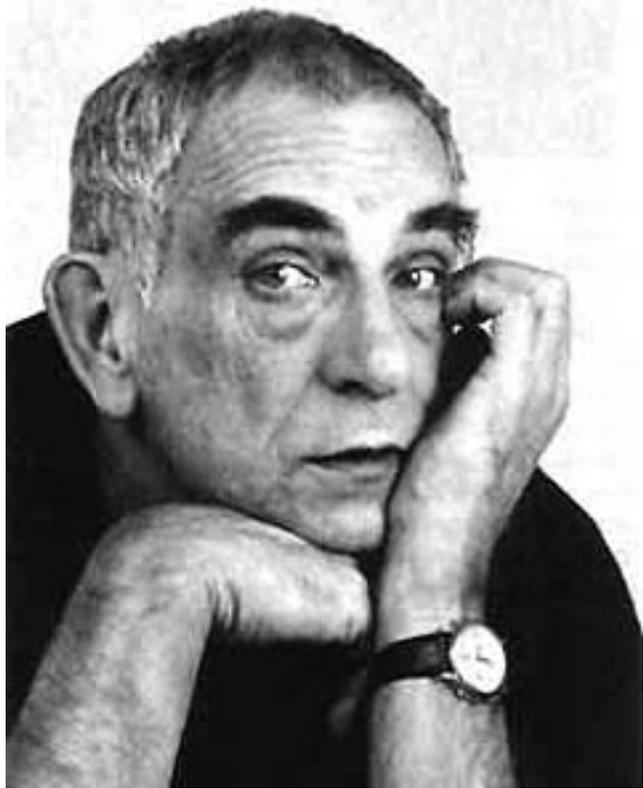
His feature films have a similar orientation: he concentrated on the explication of an individual's situation in the society and politics, on the outer and inner bounds of man with the objectively existing world, and on the search for connections between the individual and the general. He often placed 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.



from Criterion DVD 2006
“Pure Emotions *The Double Life of Véronique*” Selections
from *Kieslowski on Kieslowski*. Faber & Faber 1993

I often have the title of a film first of all and know exactly that that’s what the film’s going to be called, and it doesn’t change. Like *The Calm* [1976] or *Blind Chance* [1979]. That’s what the films were called right from the beginning. Those were the titles when the screenplays were written.

With this film we kept thinking about the title right from the moment we started working on the screenplay. It was much easier in Poland if you didn’t know at first what the title would be. Publicity around a film wasn’t all that important, so I’d find a title once the film was edited. At least, by that time, I’d know what it was about, which made things easier. Here a title’s got to be found as soon as possible, and the producer was quite rightly cross with me for not being able to decide. The screenplay was called “Choir Girl” (“Chorzystka”)—not the greatest of titles, let’s say, although it accurately describes the main character’s profession: she is a choir girl. However, it turned out that this had bad connotations in France. somebody, having read the title, said, “Oh God, another Catholic film from Poland.”

The main character’s called Weronika/Véronique, and right from the beginning her name seemed to me to be a good title. But it was impossible. The ending of the name in French—*nique*—describes, not very elegantly, an activity that occurs every

now and then between a man and a woman. So again we abandoned it. The producer’s a jazz fan, so he kept finding poetic titles of jazz numbers—“Unfinished Girl,” “The Lonely Together”—which seemed somewhat pretentious to me, so we abandoned them. The producer was pressing me. Everybody was involved in looking for a title. My wife and daughter suggested all sorts of words. The assistants read Shakespeare’s sonnets, because they thought that the Bard had a pretty good brain. Traveling across the city, reading posters, announcements, and newspapers, I caught myself constantly looking for an intelligent title. I also announced a competition among people working with me, with a good money prize. In the end we decided on *The Double Life of Véronique*. It doesn’t sound bad in Polish, French, or English, is quite commercial before you see the film, and renders its contents quite accurately after you’ve seen it. It has one fault—neither I nor the producer is actually satisfied with it.

The film is about sensibility, presentiments and relationships that are difficult to name, that are irrational. Showing this on film is difficult: if I show too much, the mystery disappears; I can’t show too little, because then nobody will understand anything. My search for the right balance between the obvious and the mysterious is the reason for all the various versions made in the cutting room.

Véronique [1991] is a typical example of a film about a woman, because women feel things more acutely, have more presentiments, greater sensibility, greater intuition, and attribute more importance to all these things. *Véronique* couldn’t have been made about a man. But I don’t divide people up like that—into men and women. They used to criticize me terribly in Poland, saying I portrayed women as one-dimensional characters, that I didn’t understand the essence of womanhood. It’s true that in my first films the women never were the main characters. There weren’t really any women in *Personnel* [1975]; there weren’t any in *The Calm*, *Camera Buff*, or *The Scar* [1976]. And if there were, they were very badly drawn. The women in *Blind Chance* were really only life companions for the main characters. Maybe that’s why I thought to myself, through ambition, “Right, I’ll make a film about a woman, from a woman’s point of view, as it were, from the point of view of her sensitivity, her world.” My first film about a woman was *No End* [1984]. Then in *Decalogue* [1988] I think I distributed it evenly. There are films about men and films about women. There are films about boys and films about girls. There are films about old men. In the triptych of films *Three Colors* [1993-94], it’s also evenly distributed. The first film is about a woman, the second about a man, and the third about a man and a woman.

I didn’t have an actress for *The Double Life of Véronique*. It was the first film I was making in the West, so I didn’t have any idea about how the casting system worked. It was pretty difficult. But I imagined that anybody could play the girl. And I thought of an American whom I still like immensely called Andie MacDowell. I wanted to cast her in this. We met. She also wanted to play in it. The contract, in fact, was ready to be signed, but my producer, who hadn’t had any experience, reckoned that if the contract was ready, then it could simply wait, and we’d be able to sign it later. But that’s not the way things turned out, because, being a European film, the contract was low budget. It was too low for the Americans. Yet in spite of this, the agent had agreed. My producer neglected to sign the contract. I was furious with him at the time, of course, because I believed that if a contract had been drawn up where he managed to negotiate half the money’s the actress’s agent originally demanded, then he ought to fly out

immediately that day and sign it. He thought, “We’re all in the same trade, after all, so they’re bound to keep their verbal agreement”; whereas nobody stuck to any verbal agreement, and Andie was offered a film from big studio. she immediately accepted, or her agent immediately accepted, because it was an American film and she’s American; it’s her world, her kind of money, her life, and it seemed obvious to me that she should accept. The producer wrung his hands and cried, because he’s of Italian descent and is, therefore, allowed to cry. But, on the whole, I was pleased that things turned out the way they did. I was pleased because I’d realized, by that time, that I shouldn’t have an American play a French role. I don’t think it would have been right. I think the French would have been furious and rightly so. They’d say, “what? Don’t we have any French actresses that an American has to play a Frenchwoman? What’s all this about? Have we got a desert in this country?” They’ve got a very strong sense of nationality, like the English, in fact. In this respect, the nations aren’t any different; each regards the others as a bunch of idiots, more or less to the same degree. Then I just started looking for an actress, in the usual way, with screen tests and so on.

I decided on the leading role. It would be Irene Jacob; she was twenty-four but looked even younger. She’s not tall and is slim. She was born and brought up in Switzerland, which I like, so that was a good sign for me. I asked experts what her French was like. “If she plays a girl from the provinces, she’ll be all right,” the experts said. She had played in small, short films; films made for a pittance, on a grant or something. She had also played a minor role in a very beautiful film, which I still love, *Au revoir les enfants*, by Louis Malle—that was the role I remembered her from. That’s why I invited her for a screen test.

Andie MacDowell was thirty when we started *Véronique*, and Irene Jacob was twenty-four. I was afraid she’d be too young, but then it turned out she wasn’t. I always thought this should be a young woman, while Irene is still a girl, really—at least in this film she’s a girl. Later when it all started to fall into place, I realized that it’s a film about a girl and not a young woman.

The male lead in *The Double Life of Véronique* was to be played by the Italian director Nanni Moretti. I like him and his films very much. He’s masculine yet very delicate. He’s not an actor and only plays leading roles in his own films. But here, strangely enough, he agreed very willingly. I met him long before shooting started, and I think we had a good meeting. we arranged the dates and the kind of jacket he was to wear in the film, which, incidentally, was his own jacket. We talked about more important things too. But then I got bad news from Paris. Nanni couldn’t do the film. He was ill. He’d be replaced by Philippe Volter, a French actor whom I’d liked in Gerard Corbiau’s *The Music Teacher*. It was very good of him, considering that I wanted Moretti. ...

When we were looking for a profession for our heroine, a profession, passion, or whatever—a world for her—we remembered *Decalogue 9* and the girl who appeared on the screen for half a minute or a minute. It’s a shame she was only there for such a short time, because it was a fine role, a fine character in general. But there wasn’t any reason for her to appear any longer because the film was about something else. So she only appeared as a sort of window, as a contingency for the main character. But since we’d already invented the character, she already existed, and it was easy to transfer her desire to do something, her desire to sing. She’s conditioned by her illness because sickness sets limitations on her and she can’t do what she really wants, although hypothetically she can, because she sings beautifully. So we

introduced this into *Véronique* as the heroine’s profession, as her passion.

Véronique is a film about music, too, in principle. Or about singing, let’s say. Everything was very carefully written down in the screenplay. Where the music would go, what the music would be like, what the concert would be like, the nature of it and so on. All this was carefully described, but the fact that it was described didn’t really change anything, because a composer has to come along in the end and make something of what’s been written in a literary language. How can you describe music? That it’s beautiful, for example, sublime? That it’s memorable? That it’s mysterious? You can write all this down, but the composer’s got to come along and find the notes. Then the musicians have to come along and play these notes. And all this, in the end, has to remind you of what was written down in literary language. And Zbigniew Preisner simply did it wonderfully.



Preisner is an exceptional composer, in that he’s interested in working on a film right from the beginning and not just seeing the finished version and then thinking about how to illustrate it with music. That’s the rule, right? You show the composed your film and then he fills in the gaps with music. But he can have a different approach. He can think about the music right from the start, about its dramatic function, about the way it

should say something that’s not there in the picture. You can describe something that perhaps isn’t there on the actual screen but that, together with the music, starts to exist. It’s interesting—drawing out something that doesn’t exist in the picture alone or in the music alone. Combining the two, a certain meaning, a certain value, something that also determines a certain atmosphere, suddenly begins to exist. The Americans shove music in from beginning to end.

I always dreamed of making a film where a symphony orchestra would play. The first time I managed it was with *Blind Chance*. I hired Wojciech Kilar. Before that, I usually used ready-made music. The music in *From a Night Porter’s Point of View* [1977] was from [Krzysztof] Zanussi’s film *Illumination*. Very beautiful. But the music had already been written, and I simply took it and used it to illustrate my film. So, the first time I managed to get an orchestra together for for *Blind Chance*. The next film I made was with Preisner. That was *No End*, and since then we’ve always worked together. We have just made *Three Colors* together. The first of these three films, *Blue*, is exceptionally musical, even more so than *Véronique*.

We used some of Dante's poetry as lyrics to the music in *The Double Life of Véronique*. That wasn't my idea; it was Preisner's idea. The words have nothing to do with the subject. They're sung in old Italian, and even the Italians probably can't understand them. But it was important for Preisner to know what the music he was writing was about, what the words really meant, because he had a translation. And what those words meant, what the text was about, probably inspired him to write the music. We thought a lot about the music. For Preisner, instrumentation is just as important as the melody. But the sound of the old Italian is also beautiful. The French bought fifty thousand copies of the disc.



The boyfriend Alexandre's profession came about by pure chance because we had no idea what profession to give him. But one of us, I can't remember whether it was Krzysztof Piesiewicz or myself, had seen a fragment of a puppet

show on television that was fascinating. It was only about thirty seconds long, maybe a minute. I'd come into some room or other, or he'd come into a room, and saw a fragment of this show, maybe two or three years before writing *Véronique*, and forgotten about it; but the moment we needed it, the incident came back to us. We started to figure out what show it was, how come it had been on Polish television. And it turned out that Jim Henson, who'd invented the Muppets, had made a television series about puppeteers who create their own puppet theaters, and one of the people whom he'd interviewed and of whose performance he'd shown some fragments was Bruce Schwartz. I asked production to find all the cassettes for me. I went through them, and the best was Bruce Schwartz.

We phoned Bruce Schwartz, and it turned out that he wasn't working with puppets anymore, because he couldn't make a living out of them. He was forty-seven. What has this moronic world we live in come to? A man who's the best in the world at his profession can't make a living out of it, because this profession only consists of moving puppets. He had to give it up and now hangs paintings. But when I told him all this he said, all right, he'd read the script, and if he considered it something worth returning to the profession for, he'd come back. We sent him the script, he read it and agreed.

We'd written that there'd be a puppet show, a ballerina breaks her leg, something like that. And what happened? Bruce Schwartz already had a puppet ballerina. He makes the puppets himself. He had all the puppets we needed. He suggested a story with a butterfly in it, because he had a puppet butterfly.

Schwartz came and joined us. He made one more puppet, of Irene Jacob, of course, because we needed that for the last scene; that is, he made two puppets of her. Production has kept one of them, because the contract stipulated that Schwartz would take one and production would keep the other. Then he came and joined us at the shoot. Well, all he had to do was pull those dolls

out, and we immediately realized what had already been so obvious when we'd seen that video.

He animated those dolls, and immediately, within the space of a second, a whole new world appeared. He's exceptional in that, unlike most puppeteers who usually hide their hands in gloves, or use strings, sticks or whatever, he does the opposite: he shows you his hands. And, after a second or two, you forget those hands exist, because the doll lives its own life, even though you see his enormous paws all the time. Yet you don't notice them; you only see the dancing, the puppet dancing beautifully. That was something that I thought was absolutely necessary. That Alexandre's hands should be there, too, the hands of someone who's manipulating something.

It was extremely moving. We shot this sequence in Clermont-Ferrand, in a school, and the whole point of the scene was that this was simply a show hired by the school from a traveling puppeteer who moves from town to town with his little theater. The whole school comes to the show. "It's a problem," said Schwartz, because I've never performed for children in my life. I've always done this show for adults. I'm terribly nervous and apprehensive." He's an exceptionally sensitive and delicate man, this Bruce Schwartz. He'd always performed to tiny audiences of thirty or forty people. We brought in about two hundred children, and the whole event took place in an enormous sports hall. He was convinced that nothing would come of it. Well, of course, it turned out that the children understood him a hundred times better than the adults.

We shot the show several times, because first we had to film the audience, then the stage, then the stage a little closer, then the details, then close-ups of the audience, and so on. so it all lasted quite a long time. We did the first show with a documentary camera, concentrating on the children's reactions, so the camera was only on the children. We tried to pick faces that expressed something. There were some beautiful reactions. Beautiful. I had to cut them out later on, because the scene wouldn't take it, couldn't be that long. Wonderful material. Very beautiful faces and wonderful reactions. When we finished shooting that, there was a break. The children immediately surrounded him, and I saw a happy man. At that moment Bruce Schwartz was really absolutely happy. He'd come back to his profession after many years, suffering enormous stage fright and afraid that children wouldn't understand him at all, that children weren't interested in this sort of thing any more, that they were only interested in computers and Barbie dolls, and suddenly it turned out that this romantic, delicate story, about a certain tragic ballerina, had moved the children immensely. Some of them started to cry. For half an hour those children asked Schwartz all sort of questions—technical questions, artistic questions. They also told him what they'd understood of the story, because the story didn't use words. The performance was much longer than it appears on-screen and lasted about ten minutes. (There are only three minutes on-screen.) They understood absolutely everything. Everything he'd wanted them to and even more. Suddenly I saw a truly happy man.

They're very gratifying, moments like these. The man was meant to come, animate his puppets, and leave. But that's not the point. The point is that he came and suddenly rediscovered a past, a joy or happiness that he'd once had in the past and that he'd lost. He thought it would never come back, but with our film it returned for a while. That's terribly important.

Theoretically, you'd still experience the scene in the same way if I'd shot it without the children, but in actual fact it's

not true. All the small details, maybe the whole atmosphere, the feeling of the scene in general, hangs on things such as the simple fact that Bruce Schwartz was happy that day because his audience had understood him.

I imagine Véronique doesn't spend her life with Alexandre. At the end, you see her crying. She's crying when he suddenly reads her his book, and the way she looks at him isn't in the least bit loving, because, in effect, he's used her life. He's used what he knows about her for his own purposes. I think she's much wiser at the end of the film than at the beginning. Alexandre's made her aware that something else exists, that the other Weronika did exist. He's the one who found the photograph. Véronique didn't even notice it among the dozens of photographs she had. He's the one who noticed it, and perhaps he understood what she couldn't understand herself. He understood, then used it. And the moment he used it, she understood that he probably wasn't the man for whom she was waiting so desperately, because the moment this came out into the open, something she possessed, something that was so terribly intimate as long as it wasn't disclosed, was automatically, or almost automatically, used. And when it was used, it stopped being hers; it was no longer mysterious. It was no longer personal. It had become a public secret.

Of course, we shot a whole lot of scenes showing that she has a heart condition, but I thought that these were, more or less, in proportion, that this was the right number of allusions. We didn't need any more. We know Véronique's got a heart condition, and the shoelace alludes to this. The point is that when your heart stops, the line on the EKG monitor goes straight, and suddenly she realizes what it means. She lets it go. I think that was Slawek's idea [Slawomir Idziak]. So Irene got the idea, for example, that as the Polish Weronika she'd keep on having problems with her shoelaces. And she did. Later on, I cut out those incidents, because it all became too long. But it was an excellent idea. Those are exactly the sort of things that get the imagination working, and it doesn't matter whether they appear on-screen later or not. They simply show that we're all thinking together. And Irene thought up this idea of constantly having problems with her shoelaces. The first thing she does when she has a heart attack is to untie her shoelace, not clutch at her heart. When she falls into a puddle of water when she's running, her shoelaces immediately become undone.

Véronique's constantly faced with the choice of whether or not to take the same road as the Polish Weronika, whether to give in to the artistic instinct and the tension intrinsic in art or to give in to love and all that it involves. That basically, is her choice.

Initially, I came to Paris while filming *The Double Life of Véronique*. We were shooting, so it was en route, as it were. I shot in Poland and then in Clermont-Ferrand. Then I came to Paris. It was simply another film location, nothing more, and then, gradually, the filming came to an end. I stayed on because I had to do the editing here, work, and finish the film. I was busy working all the time. I didn't have time to live. I don't have enough time—or curiosity—for that certain something that once made me roam around, observe, look, watch. I don't think I have enough patience, either. I've come to know what I could know, and what I didn't, I'm probably too old to know. I don't know the French language, for example, and won't ever know it. I know English a little, but I learned English for fifteen years, although the way I

speak it, it sounds as if I've been learning it for three months. I've got an obvious lack of talent for languages....

We used one fairly basic filter in *Véronique*—a golden yellow one. Thanks to it, the world of *Véronique* is complete. It's whole. You can recognize it. Filters give uniformity, and that's very important. The fact that Slawek used filters for exteriors in *Véronique* isn't all that important, but it is extremely important in *A Short Film about Killing* [1987], where, because of the filters, because of that different, very cold color, the world becomes far crueler than it really is and Warsaw even more disgusting. The same principle applies to *Véronique*, but with the opposite effect. Here the world appears far more beautiful than it really is. Most people think that the world in *Véronique* is portrayed with warmth; this warmth comes from the actress, of course, and the staging, but also from the dominant color, namely, this shade of gold.

I always have to bear in mind people who treat the world normally. The film's meant for everybody. If I need to say something, make something understood, or give some sort of indication, then I have to use all sorts of devices relating to dramatization, actors, and also filters. The whole problem lay in choosing these appropriate devices. Maybe there are people who are annoyed by the filters. It's very possible, but on the whole, they certainly help to express what the film's about....

Of course I thought about the audience all the time when making *Véronique*, so that I even made a different ending for the Americans, because I thought you have to meet them halfway, even if it means renouncing your own point of view.

I play on pure emotions in *Véronique*, because it's a film about emotions and nothing else. There's no action in it. If I make a film about emotions then obviously I play on them. People also told me that I was playing on emotions in *A Short Film about Killing*, because both the murder and then the hanging scene last for such a long time. Of course I'm playing on emotions. What else should I play on? What else is there other than emotions? What is important? Only that. I play on them so that people should hate or love my characters. I play on them so that people should sympathize with them. I play on them so that people should want my characters to win if they're playing a good game.

I think that if you go to the cinema, you want to give in to emotions. But I'm not saying that everybody has to like *Véronique*. On the contrary, I think it's a film for a limited group of people. I don't mean an age group or a social group, but a group of people who are sensitive to the sort of emotions shown in the film. And such people can be found among the intelligentsia, among workers, among the unemployed, among students and among old-age pensioners. I don't think it's a film for the elite, by any means, unless we call sensitive people elite.

"Through the Looking Glass" by Jonathan Romney

When Krzysztof Kieslowski's *The Double Life of Véronique* was first screened in Cannes, in 1991, the critical reception was rapturous. Georgia Brown in the *Village Voice* declared "Anything I say about [the film] is merely a labored minuet danced around my own ecstatic response." Nigel Andrews of the *Financial Times* commented, "I believe we are being hypnotized in *The Double Life of Véronique*...How else to explain the ability of a French-Polish film with a nonsensical plot premise...to enthrall and enchant us like no other European film in recent history?" As Andrews enthusiastically but warily suggests, Kieslowski's film

has the capacity to mesmerize. It invites analysis, yet it also encourages us, in its creation of a nebulous, numinous world, to bypass critical inquiry and to respond on a sensual, emotional, or even—if we are so inclined—spiritual level.

The Double Life of Véronique is remarkable for sustaining a delicate combination of simplicity and unfathomable complexity—or at least the impression of such complexity. Kieslowski defined the film's subject matter to interviewer Danusia Stok thus: "The realm of superstitions, fortune-telling, presentiments, intuition, dreams, all this is the inner life of a human being, and all this is the hardest thing to film." But he recognized the riskiness of the undertaking: this story, he commented elsewhere, "deals with things you can't name. If you do, they seem trivial and stupid." Put simply, the film explores this premise: two young women, one French, one Polish, are for all intents and purposes one and the same, and yet irreducibly different. The narrative is also, of course, an ingenious response to a professional challenge: how can a Polish director best face the demands of a European coproduction to be shot in his own country and in France?

The narrative, as it develops, is anything but simple. Weronika, the young Polish woman, is by chance—after singing impromptu at a friend's rehearsal—offered an audition and ultimately a solo part in a concert. Suffering from heart problems, she dies in midrecital, shortly after seeing her doppelgänger in a Krakow square. That double is the French music teacher Véronique; immediately after the death of Weronika, of whose existence she has no inkling, Véronique experiences an uncanny sense of grief and solitude and consequently quits her other career as a singer. She later falls in love with a puppeteer, Alexandre, whose image she sees in a mirror when he is performing at her school.

Véronique receives an anonymous phone call—which fascinates rather than threatens her—during which she hears a snatch of the music that Weronika was singing when she died and that she herself is teaching at school. She also receives a number of mysterious packages, including a cassette of a sound collage. Playing detective, Véronique traces the tape to Paris's Gare Saint-Lazare, where she finds Alexandre waiting for her. He tells her that the tape was part of an experiment for a novel: he wanted to know whether it was psychologically plausible for a woman to follow such a trail. Offended, Véronique walks out; but he follows her and they become lovers.

The plot, at least in the French section, seems at once enigmatic—elliptical, even opaque—and contrived. The film, it's worth noting, does not represent nearly as much of a break with Kieslowski's Polish features as it might initially have seemed. While the visual stylization and the European setting are new, the film continues a thread of what might be seen as mysticism, or alternatively as quasi-mystical narrative manipulation, in the director's work. In *Blind Chance* (1981), three possible outcomes of a banal incident lead a man's life in three entirely separate directions. In the otherwise seemingly naturalistic *No End* (1984)—co-written with Krzysztof Piesiewicz, collaborator on Kieslowski's subsequent fictions, *Véronique* included—a woman receives visitations from her dead husband. And the ten-part *Decalogue* (1988), based on the Ten Commandments, contemplates fate and the interconnectedness of human lives in a harshly realistic setting.

What vanishes in *Véronique*, however, is the explicit political dimension. As a documentarian since the mid-1960s, Kieslowski had exhaustively explored the concrete realities of

Communist Poland, but in the early 1990s he declared a total lack of interest in Polish politics. Significantly, when a demonstration takes place in Krakow square, Weronika, sunk in her own thoughts, walks in the opposite direction of the crowd.

Kieslowski, too, is thinking about other things: like Weronika, he is literally facing west.

As his dual heroine, Kieslowski cast Irene Jacob, a largely unknown twenty-four-year-old Swiss actress he had noticed in a small part in Louis Malle's *Au revoir les enfants*; she would later play the lead in Kieslowski's final film, *Red* (1994), the conclusion of his *Three Colors* trilogy. Partly because she is associated in the viewer's mind with no previous role, partly because she is on-screen throughout, Jacob comes to be so totally identified with Weronika/Véronique that it is impossible to imagine anyone else in the part. Intensely focused on Jacob,

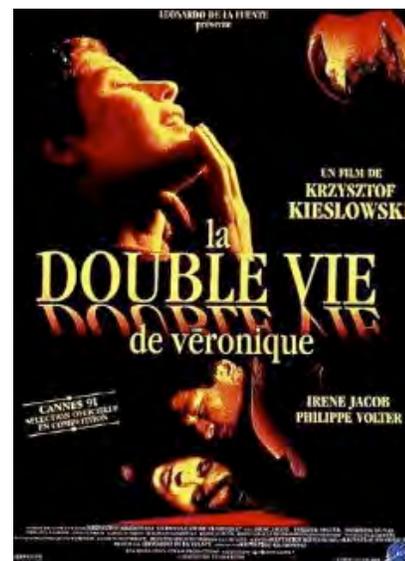
Véronique looks like one of those films designed expressly to make us fall in love with its star—an intention felt from the very first close-ups of Weronika, in the rain, staying behind to sing alone as the choir disperses around her, her face radiant with delight. This shot defines

Weronika both as a spiritual being and as a woman susceptible to earthly ecstasy; her embrace with her boyfriend, Antek, directly afterward seems an

extension of this moment. That capacity of Weronika marks Véronique, too, as an acutely feeling organism, a woman susceptible to grief, liable to fall in love, and seeming to feel only the thinnest membrane separating her from the sensuous world. Although there are moments when Weronika/Véronique seems prone to a cloying chirpiness—arising partly from Weronika's dubbing into Polish—Jacob displays a vibrancy and sustained alertness that energize the screen. Her performance won her the best actress award in Cannes.

As emotional beings, Weronika and Véronique are at once sexual and desexualized. Both women are sexually active, yet their truly intense ecstasies come in nonsexual situations: few cinematic images of female pleasure are as pronounced as Weronika's face in the rain, or as that swooping camera movement over Véronique when she gets up after reading on her bed. Such images make the two women appear less like adults than like presexual children, subject to the authority, influence, and manipulation of older men: Alexandre the puppeteer, two beloved fathers, Weronika's venerable conductor. And both women, like Jacob, literally come under the authority of the father figure who is Kieslowski himself—making both the actress and her twin characters disturbingly akin to the Véronique puppets seen at the end of the film.

One of the film's most compelling aspects is its explicit self-reflexivity, of which the marionettes are the most extreme and, it must be said, most arch manifestation. The two women at



different points twist threads around their fingers: Véronique stretches one over a printout of her EKG result, as if tracing an equivalence between her and Weronika's life lines. Alexandre has also written a story about a thread, and reels Véronique in on a thread of intrigue, sending her a tape that is effectively a sonic script, or a score, for their eventual meeting.

Equally self-reflexive is the film's visual theme of containment and filtering. The film's opening image is of sky and earth reversed, seen by Weronika and a child, held upside down by her mother. Later, the adult Weronika sees the world inverted in a transparent ball in which stars float; in the same scene, her train window distorts the landscape outside, seeming to open it up in small folds. Kieslowski and director of photography Slawomir Idziak consistently use a yellow-green filter that fills the world with a seemingly benign, autumnal glow. Kieslowski claimed that this choice of color was a matter of visual contrast, determined by the dominant gray of the film's locations, Krakow and Clermont-Ferrand. Yet overall, the golden filtering transcends any obvious motivation. The brief credit sequence shows a prefiguration of Weronika in the Krakow square, as if the moment were suspended outside time, captured in a distorting lens. Later, when Véronique receives the mysterious phone call, we see a reprise of Weronika's death, an image dimly seen through an amorphous body of red-brown light or liquid, as if preserved in an amniotic haze. While most events in the film are witnessed or experienced by one or the other of the two heroines, here we can not be sure who sees these images, or what the filter is that they pass through. At such moments, the film's precarious realism collapses, and a sense of the mystical or metaphorical imposes itself.

Kieslowski denied that there were any metaphors in his films: "For me, a bottle of milk is simply a bottle of milk; when it spills, it means milk's been spilled. Nothing more." Yet he also confessed that he aspired to those moments when a film manages to escape from literalism. If *Véronique* spurs us to search for meaning in a maze of fragmentary significations, it is perhaps because Kieslowski made the film in just such a spirit of pursuit, quite simply in the sense of teasing out narrative shape. By Kieslowski's estimation, he and editor Jacques Witta prepared some twenty rough cuts of *Véronique*, some more narratively transparent, others considerably more opaque. One version, for example, concentrated more on the subplot—vestigial in the finished film—in which Véronique agrees to play co-respondent in friend's divorce hearing. In another version, this intrigue disappeared completely. Kieslowski even considered preparing multiple versions of the film—one for every screen it played on. Finally, the *Véronique* we have is one among a multitude of possible versions. It is this incompleteness, this sense of the provisional and arbitrary, that finally ensures the film's sense of mystery and saves it from the sometimes oppressive weight of narrative authority that finally overburdens *Three Colors*.

Kieslowski inarguably achieved his desired escape from literalism in *Véronique* and *Three Colors*. Yet in the long run, cinema culture in the nineties proved to be more receptive to literalism than to any suggestion of metaphysical resonance. Significantly, Kieslowski's final film, *Red*, widely expected to receive the Palme d'or in Cannes in 1994, was trumped by Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*, a film structured similarly to the *Three Colors* trilogy but in which the play of interlinked destinies was proudly exposed as a gratuitous effect of narrative game-playing. This moment might be seen as nineties' cinephilia's turn away from the poetic-art-cinema tradition exemplified by Kieslowski's last films. Indeed, despite the reverence accorded

Kieslowski toward the end of his career and since his death, in 1996, his later work appears to have had surprisingly little direct influence—notwithstanding two unremarkable attempts by Tom Tykwer and Danis Tanovic to film parts of another planned Kieslowski-Piesiewicz trilogy, *Heaven* and *Hell*, respectively. Kieslowski's nearest inheritors, arguably, are the Mexican team of Alejandro Gonzales Inarritu and Guillermo Arriaga, notably in *21 Grams*, a mosaic narrative that explicitly speculates on the nature of the soul.

History may have sidelined *The Double Life of Véronique*, but that is not to say the film has not lasted. In its teasing fragmentary nature, it may well outlast the *Three Colors* trilogy, with its somber attempt at a definitive encapsulation of the human predicament at the end of the European twentieth century. *Véronique* retains the kind of mystery that subsists when the search for meaning and shape is pursued with the seriousness and pleasure of game playing. It is the sense of pervasive trompe d'oeil, of the conjurer's—rather than the puppeteer's—art, that makes *Véronique* endure as a spellbinding experience, as well as a perplexing one.

"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 pit 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 Véronique* (1991), Véronique 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. There is a material feature of Kieslowski's films that supports this: his use of filters. As described in the director's own words, in the book *Kieslowski on Kieslowski*, regarding *A Short Film about Killing* (1987): “The city and its surroundings are shown in a specific way. The lighting cameraman...use filters, which he'd made specially. Green filters so that the color in the film is specifically greenish. Green is supposed to be the color of spring, the color of hope, but if you put a green filter on the camera, the world becomes much crueler, duller, and emptier.”

Charles Eidsvik, in *Lucid Dreams: The Films of Krzysztof Kieslowski*, writes that the director used filters in *A Short Film about Killing* “as a kind of mask, darkening parts of the image that Kieslowski...did not wish to show.” This procedure isn't used as part of the formulaic depiction of a dream or a vision but in shots rendering gray everyday reality, directly evoking the gnostic notion of the universe as created imperfect and, as such, not yet fully constituted. The closest one can get to this look in reality is, perhaps, the countryside in extreme places like Iceland, or in the Land of Fire, the southernmost tip of South America; patches of grass and wild hedges are intersected by barren raw earth or gravel with cracks out of which sulfuric steam and fire gush, as if the pre-ontological primordial Chaos is still able to penetrate the cracks of the imperfectly formed reality.



Kieslowski's universe is a gnostic universe, a not-yet-fully-constituted universe created by a perverse and confused, idiotic God who screwed up the work of Creation, producing an imperfect world, and then keeps trying to save whatever can be saved by repeated new attempts—we are all “Children of a Lesser God.” Although they may appear to belong to the premodern space, such gnostic speculations often serve as the theological foundation of the postmodern exploration of alternative realities and cybergames—as in the New Age “cybergnosticism.” In mainstream Hollywood, this uncanny in-between dimension is clearly discernible in what is arguably the most effective scene in Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Alien: Resurrection*—the cloned Ripley

(Sigourney Weaver) enters the laboratory room in which the previous seven aborted attempts to clone her are on display. Here she encounters the ontologically failed, defective versions of herself, up to the almost successful version, with her own face but with some of her limbs distorted so that they resemble the limbs of the Alien Thing. This creature asks Ripley to kill her, and, in an outburst of violent rage, Ripley effectively destroys the entire horror exhibition.

This unfinished character of reality grounds our freedom of choice: it depends on us which version will prevail. For Kieslowski, this choice is ultimately the choice between “calm life” and “vocation.” In *The Double Life of Véronique*, the Polish Weronika chooses her vocation, that of a singer, ignoring her heart failure, and meets early death as a result of it (as in E.T. A. Hoffman's tale of Antonia, who also chooses singing and pays for her choice with death), while the French Véronique betrays her vocation and chooses a quiet, satisfied life. Véronique is thus melancholic and reflective, in contrast to Weronika's direct enthusiasm for the Cause; to put it in Friedrich Schiller's terms, she is sentimental, in contrast to Weronika's naivete. It is not simply that Véronique profits from her awareness of the suicidal character of Weronika's choice but also that she accomplishes the act of ethical betrayal by abandoning singing, her true vocation. The presence of this tragic choice is what can prevent us from reducing *Véronique* to a New Age tale of spiritual self-discovery. As the title says, we have the double life of (one) Véronique. That is, the same person is allowed to redeem (or lose?) herself by being given another chance and repeating the fatal choice.

The idea of the time-space continuum (time as the fourth dimension of space) in modern physics means, among other things, that a certain event (the encounter of multiple particles) can be much more elegantly and convincingly explained if we posit that only one particle travels forward and backward in time. This logic involves the static space-time picture described by Einstein: events do not unfold with the flow of time but present themselves complete, and in this total picture, movements backward and forward in time are as usual as movements backward and forward in space. The illusion that there is a “glow” of time results from our narrow awareness, which allows us to perceive only a tiny strip of the total space-time continuum. Is no something similar going on in the alternative narratives? Beneath ordinary reality there is another, shadowy, pre-ontological realm of virtualities in which the same person travels forth and back, “testing” different scenarios: Véronique electron crashes (dies), then travels back in time and does it again, this time surviving.

So in *The Double Life of Véronique*, perhaps, we are not dealing with the “mystery” of the communication between two Véroniques in the large square in Krakow, where a Solidarity demonstration is taking place. This episode is rendered in a vertiginous circular shot reminiscent of the famous 360-degree shot from Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. Afterward, when the French Véronique is introduced, we can understand Polish Weronika's perplexity as arising from an obscure awareness that she was about to have an impossible encounter with her double (later, we see a photo of her taken at that moment by Véronique). The camera's circular movement, then, can be read as signaling the danger of the “end of the world,” like the standard scene from science-fiction films about the alternative realities, in which the passage from one to another universe takes the shape of a terrifying primordial vortex threatening to swallow all consistent reality. The camera's movement thus signals that we are on the verge of the vortex in which different realities mix, that this

vortex is already exerting its influence: if we take one step further—that is to say, if the two Véroniques were actually to confront and recognize each other—reality would disintegrate because such an encounter of a person with her double, with herself in another time-space dimension, is precluded by the very fundamental structure of the universe.

The topic of choice between alternate realities in Kieslowski's narrative is clearly allegorical: it contains a reference to Kieslowski himself. Was not his choice that of the Polish Weronika—aware of his heart condition, he chose vocation and then effectively died of heart failure. Kieslowski's fate is prefigured already in his *Camera Buff* (1979), the portrait of a man who forsakes the happy family life in order to observe and register reality through the distance of the screen frame. In the final scene of the film when his wife is leaving him for good, the hero turns the camera on himself and his wife, capturing on film her departure: even in this traumatic intimate moment, he does not get fully involved but persists in his observing attitude—the ultimate proof that he truly elevated filming into his ethical Cause...*Camera Buff* finds its counterpoint in *The Calm* (1976), about the destiny of Antek, who has just been released from prison. All he wants are the simple things in life: work, somewhere clean to sleep, something to eat, a wife, a television, and peace. Caught in criminal manipulations at his new workplace, he ends up being beaten by his colleagues and, at the film's end, just mutters, "Calm...calm." The hero of *The Calm* is not alone: even Valentine, the heroine of *Red*, claims that all she wants is to live in peace, without any excessive professional ambitions.

Kieslowski advocates neither the moralistic dismissal of Life on behalf of Vocation nor the cheap wisdom of preferring simple Life over Vocation. Exemplary of this complexity is *The Scar* (1976), the story of an honest Communist cadre who comes to a small provincial town to construct a new chemical factory. He wants to make local people happier and bring progress to the town; however, the factory not only causes ecological problems and undermines traditional ways of life, it also conflicts with the short-term interests of the townspeople. Disillusioned, he gives up his post...The problem here is that of the Good—who knows what is Good for others, who can impose *his* Good on others? Although the cadre succeeds socially (the factory is built), he is aware that he failed ethically. We see here why Freud was skeptical toward the ethical motto "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The problem with it is not that it is too idealistic, overestimating the ethical capacity of man; Freud's point is rather that if one takes into account the basic perversion of human desire, then the very application of this motto leads to strange results—one certainly wouldn't want a masochist to follow this precept.

The same complexity marked Kieslowski's personal choice: after finishing *Red*, the last part of his *Three Colors*

trilogy, he retired to the countryside to spend his remaining days fishing and reading—in short, to realize the fantasy of a quiet life, redeemed of the burden of Vocation. However, in a tragic way, he lost on both counts: the choice "vocation or quiet life" proved false, it was already too late, so that after choosing peace and retirement, he died. Or does his sudden death signal that the retirement into a quiet country life was a false issue, a fantasy screen effectively functioning as a metaphor for death—that, for Kieslowski, the only way to survive was to continue filming, even if this were to mean constantly courting death? Did Kieslowski not, at least from our retroactive view, die at the proper moment? Although premature, his death—like those of Alexander the Great and Mozart—seemed to occur precisely when his opus was rounded up, the ultimate case of the miraculous coincidences around which his films turn. It's as if his fatal heart attack were a free act, a staged death, striking at the right time—just after he announced that he would no longer be making films.

Should we, then, read Véronique's second (unethical) choice as a new version of the traditional sublime reversal found, for instance, in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*? When, at his birth, Pip is designated a "man of great expectations," everybody perceives this as the forecast of his worldly success; however, at the novel's end, when he abandons London's false glamour and returns to his modest childhood community, we become aware that he did live up to the forecast that marked his life—it is only by finding strength to leave behind the vain thrill of London's high society that he authenticates the notion of being a "man of great expectations." And what if it's the same with Véronique's second choice—there are things more important than singing, like the simple human goodness radiated by Véronique.

There is, however, a price to be paid for this retreat. When and why, exactly does Véronique return to her father in order to find a safe haven of calm? After her puppeteer lover stages for her the (unconscious) choice that structured her life, in the guise of two marionettes. So what is Véronique retreating from when she abandons her lover? She perceives this staging as a domineering intrusion, while it is actually the very obverse: the staging of her ultimate, unbearable FREEDOM. In other words, what is so traumatic for her in the puppeteer's performance is not that she sees herself reduced to puppet whose strings are pulled by the hidden hand of Destiny but that she is confronted with the fundamental unconscious choice by means of which every one of us has to choose her or his existential project. Her escape from the puppeteer, back to the safe haven under the wings of her father, is her escape from freedom.

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