

Kieślowski Revisited (& Re-watched)

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Piotr Pławuszewski: Forgive me for beginning with a question that may sound banal, but throughout all those years when Krzysztof Kieślowski either appeared in our conversations or was a pretext for our joint activities, I never asked you one question: do you remember your first meeting with the director's work? Was it a trip to the cinema or rather a TV screen and on it, for example, a part of *The Decalogue* (*Dekalog*) when it had its premiere? I ask because the answer probably marks the beginning of the road which has now led us to work on this monographic issue of "Images". And this does not sound banal.

Mikołaj Jazdon: This first meeting was one that actually never took place. In the high school I attended at the end of the 1980s my Polish teacher ran a film club. One day she announced we were going to see a film by Krzysztof Kieślowski which shows three versions of the life of the main character. Unfortunately, she failed to get a copy of the film and a few years passed until I finally saw *Blind Chance* (*Przypadek*). However, the description of the plot intrigued me, and although originally I did not see the film, I returned to it in my thoughts, and I wondered what it was like. I recalled that story recently when I was reading the scripts of the documentaries that Kieślowski never managed to make and which are held in the archives in Sokołowsko. They have never been shot, but their suggestive descriptions, facts written down by Kieślowski, stir the imagination, so that they can be seen in some way with its eyes. The article by Tadeusz Lubelski in this issue of "Images", which points to the hidden relationship between *First Love* (*Pierwsza miłość*) and *Camera Buff* (*Amator*), reminded me that I had watched both of these films for the first time from a 16 mm projector at a screening at the AWA Amateur Film Club in Poznań. The story of Filip Mosh was obligatory for those who were starting their adventure with amateur film. I did not think then that five years later I would make the documentary *The Last Meeting with Krzysztof Kieślowski* (*Ostatnie spotkanie z Krzysztofem Kieślowskim*) under the aegis of AWA – three weeks before the death of the director. And what was your first meeting with the films by this author?

Piotr Pławuszewski: So it wasn't *The Decalogue*, interesting. *Camera Buff* – I might have guessed having known about your adventure with amateur cinema. I envy you the episode connected with *Blind Chance*. This is the story of a film that you began to imagine and sort out in your head before you actually saw it all on the screen. Unfortunately, I did not experience a similar impulse at school at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. TV was more important in this context. As a teenager, I watched *The Calm (Spokój)* in the late 1990s, to this day my favourite feature film by Krzysztof Kieślowski, and, if I remember correctly, it was my first meeting with him. Some specific images have remained in my memory since that screening: a man with a cement bag, foreign stickers on a motorcycle and the hero quickly eating lunch in a cafeteria. But the impression that recurs most often, which can be traced between the lines in the article by prof. J. Kickasola (who describes his journey through the housing estate immortalised in *The Decalogue*), is that this filmed world is so incredibly tangible and stimulates the senses. A few years later, at university, an analogous feeling returned, but with increased force, because I started to watch Kieślowski's documentaries title by title. I will never forget the cinema screening of *From a Night Porter's Point of View (Z punktu widzenia nocnego portiera)* – the red letters of the title board plus the initial bars of Wojciech Kilar's music gave me a shiver of anxiety, the intensity of which was not repeated even by *A Short Film About Killing (Krótki film o zabijaniu)*. And you, Mikołaj, if you were to sum up the director's cinema in one chosen frame, which work would it come from (and why)?

Mikołaj Jazdon: It would be difficult for me to choose only one frame, but as you were asking about this, I pictured an image from *Seven Women of Different Ages (Siedem kobiet w różnym wieku)*, a short documentary that tells the life story of a ballet dancer through seven scenes with different artists who are at different stages of their life and creativity. Whenever I watch this film, the Monday scene moves me (the film is divided into seven sequences assigned to the days of the week, showing subsequent chapters in the ballerina's life) – the image of a tired, breathless dancer. She is still young but her best time – the Sunday of stage triumphs – is already behind her. Years of experience, acquired skills and hard work seem to mean little to the changes that time has brought about in her body, making it unable to meet the high demands of the art she has devoted her life to. You are right, however, that Kieślowski's cinema is not only about films as separate, complete units, but it is also about individual scenes, shots, frames that can attract attention, speak as if outside the film. Just like the image of a string of rushing horses that one of the characters of *The Calm* is astonished to watch on the TV screen, not knowing why they suddenly show up there, without any announcement, during a break in broadcasting a programme. When I was reading the articles by Paul Coates, Francesca Parmeggiani and Marek Lis, on the following pages of this issue, I thought that not only can we refer individual films by Kieślowski to

those by other masters and show how they enter into a dialogue, but we can also do this with individual scenes from the works by the Polish director. Every time I watch *Three Colours. Blue* (*Trzy kolory. Niebieski*) I am moved by the moment when Julie, a young widow who has lost her husband and daughter in a car accident, seeks relief in the cool solitude of the city swimming pool and is suddenly surprised in this refuge by a group of children jumping into the water. What is she thinking and feeling when she sees this scene, which probably reminds her of recent moments spent (as we can guess) with her daughter, who she herself might have taught to swim? This image evokes in my memory a fragment from Philip Kaufman's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, an adaptation of the novel by Milan Kundera, in which the same actress, Juliette Binoche, is swimming in the pool of a provincial spa in Czechoslovakia. It is there that Tomas, her future lover and husband, notices her for the first time. You could relate these two scenes to yet another one, from the film by Michael Haneke *Code Unknown*, which is somewhat announced on the poster that shows the head of Juliette Binoche rising above the surface of the pool water. This entering of Kiesłowski's films (here: individual images created in them by the Polish director) into a dialogue with other works and artists is in my opinion a very important dimension of his works. And "dialogue" is a key word here. Despite the passage of time, these works still provoke discussion, viewers from subsequent generations enter into a dialogue with Kiesłowski's art not because he is a respected classic film-maker to be watched by cinephiles, but because he is a partner whose films pose questions that are so important in our times. Or maybe I'm wrong? Maybe I'm going too far in this statement?

Piotr Pławuszewski: I probably won't be very original when I agree with you. But I would add one more dimension to the dialogue you mentioned, namely the master-student relationship. We have at least three texts about this in this issue of "Images": two of them (by Krystian Przybylski and Franciszek Dąg) focus on short student films by Iwona Siekierzyńska and Gilles Renard, who were looked after (no doubt: from the position of "a master") by Krzysztof Kiesłowski; the third text reverses this relationship – because when Andrzej Sapija writes about Kazimierz Karabasz, he also reflects on one of the most important teachers of cinema who the protagonist of our monographic publication encountered. You certainly remember this quote: Kiesłowski asks Karabasz: "Do you really think about the fact that one day someone watching your film will realise what we looked like, lived like? What we thought, said, coped with?" And although they are very cautious in their predictions, we know today how many viewers of their works still give affirmative answers to these questions. I remember, Mikołaj, all our trips together to Sokołowsko, to the Hommage à Kiesłowski festival. It may sound strange, but we probably travelled several times to this tiny village in south-western Poland, and not primarily because of the films. It has always been more important to meet the people who either

co-operated with Kieślowski (and were able to talk about that time in an insightful and interesting way) or at a certain stage in life encountered his cinema as viewers (for me the archetype of such a character is one of the heroines of *100 Years at the Cinema* [*100 lat w kinie*], directed by Paweł Łoziński, the one who explains with emotion in her voice why the film *Blind Chance* became so important for her). These meetings resulted in conversations, and these conversations in the conviction that the sense of Kieślowski's films is complemented by the exchange of views after a screening. Someone might say: this filmography has been complete for many years, everything has been told and written about it. Well, as a matter of fact, what does "everything" mean? When we were sitting for many months, you and me, on the compilation of nearly a thousand photographs related to Kieślowski in various aspects of his life (from childhood, through his studies, to his film sets) which was going to become a part of the huge virtual Europeana library, every now and then I spoke words to myself: I had no idea he was doing it... The photos taken by Piotr Jaxa during the shooting of *Three Colours* are an endless source of photographed conversations, gestures, emotions and situations in front of and behind the camera. I mention all this because it's just another brick, which, as I see it, has eventually led us to work together on this issue of "Images". There have been too many experiences and conversations over the years not to try to adequately comment on them. I will ask you a final, non-rhetorical question: do you think we have succeeded?

Mikołaj Jazdon: I think so. By reading the articles we have collected in this volume you can expand your view of Krzysztof Kieślowski's work. It shows that his films are still present in a vivid, intense reception and not only as esteemed classics of cinema, but as films that are important for us here and now. There are many more traces of this, and this does not concern only books, articles or films devoted to Kieślowski or those inspired by his work. I will mention here just one of them which we have also included in our issue: Iza Szewczyk and her posters from the series *Dodecalogue* (*Dodekalog*). They are a trace of reading and commenting on Kieślowski's cinema in a special way. They are worth taking a closer look at...