

Krzysztof Kieślowski's film props in the triptych "Three Colours"

ABSTRACT. Wojciech Otto, *Krzysztof Kieślowski's film props in the triptych "Three Colours"*. "Images" vol. XXIV, no. 33, Poznań 2018. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. Pp. 73–85. ISSN 1731–450X. DOI 10.14746/i.2018.33.07.

Krzysztof Kieślowski employed film properties in a creative way in his *Three Colours* (*Trois couleurs*, 1993–94) trilogy. They play various roles in *Blue* (*Bleu*, 1993), *White* (*Blanc*, 1993) and *Red* (*Rouge*, 1994): they make the presented world more probable, co-create images of heroes, build dramaturgy and convey symbolic content. Such a treatment of film props is shaped by the director's film style and creates a specific cinematic atmosphere.

KEYWORDS: Krzysztof Kieślowski, film properties, *Three Colours* trilogy

"A prop is an object which, apart from its associated illustrative function, also has a specific, instrumental function"[1], notes Andrzej Tadeusz Kijowski. In this sense, a prop is, on the one hand, a source of reflection on and a concretisation of reality; on the other, it is a multifaceted creation of it. The functions of a prop in a film can be manifested and realised in many ways. These functions often tell more about the character than the dialogue spoken: they indicate his or her relationship to the environment, initiate or enable action in space, and illustrate emotional states. The prop is a co-creator of the filmic world, making screen spaces probable, characterising them, and giving them a particular historical, social and cultural shape.[2] As a significant and repeatable component of a conventionalised genre structure, it is also an important element of a film's genology.[3] A prop's individual elements and their application in a film can be used to describe the specific style of a filmmaker when used it consciously and consistently to realise ideological and aesthetic goals. A prop is also potentially a component of the poetics of a work, from its primary visual functions (set design) and role in a film's drama, to its use as a complex stylistic device (symbol, metaphor).

All of the above functions can be realised in the works of a given director, and to a certain extent define his or her style. Quentin

[1] A.T. Kijowski, "Poetyka rekwizytu", [in:] idem, *Chwył teatralny*, Gdańsk 2000, p. 18.

[2] These include for example studies on popular culture – K. Rogowska, "Oblicza popkultury: gadżet we współczesnym kinie amerykańskim", [in:] *Rzecz w kulturze*, eds. B. Pawłowska-Jądrzyk, D. Dąbrowska, Warszawa 2016, pp. 193– 2015.

[3] See for example: G. Stachówna, "Listy Cyrana, chustka Desdemony i róża upiorna opery, czyli filmowa rekwizytornia romansowa", "Kwartalnik Filmowy" 2011, no. 74.

Tarantino or David Lynch's cinematic output can easily be interpreted in such a way, as can Krzysztof Kieślowski's. What some have called "contemplative cinema", with its extensive symbolism and unhurried narration, offers enormous possibilities for organising the screen space with meaningful props. They function both on their own and as placed in various contexts and combinations with other objects, and are often a main source of meaning. Synthetically speaking, it can be safely stated that the entire work of the author of the *Blind Chance* (*Przypadek*, 1981, prem. 1987), both his documentaries and features, is subject to such an interpretation, but this oeuvre is so diverse and complex that it would require a separate, extremely extensive study. In Kieślowski's cinematic output, however, one can easily point to two larger, autonomous entities, thematically separated and linked by an overriding main idea: the television series *The Decalogue* (*Dekalog*, 1988–89) and the triptych *Three Colours* (*Trois couleurs*, 1993–94). Both implement a coherent aesthetic concept, and in both there is an element that is superimposed over all the parts and that indicates the direction for the interpretation of particular works. In the first case, it is a collection of canonical moral commands originating from the Christian religion; in the second case, the point of reference is constituted by the colours of the French flag, symbolised by the ideals of the revolution of 1789: freedom, equality, and brotherhood. These following considerations, however, will be devoted entirely to the *Three Colours* triptych.

The prop in a supporting function

Depending on the function which a prop is to perform in a given take, scene or film, it can have the task of concretising and making probable the screen reality or function as a multi-dimensional creation of it. The simplest and perhaps most obvious ways to use a prop in a film is to subordinate it to a supporting function, aimed at facilitating the actions of the characters, and specifically, the actions performed by them in a specific space. Such a use of props is a natural consequence of realising a mimetic function in a film, the essence of which is to reflect upon the non-screen reality. In Kieślowski's triptych, this is e.g. the hand mower used by the gardener pruning a hedge (*Blue* [*Bleu*, 1993]), the binoculars through which Karol observes things in hiding, the funeral ceremony at the cemetery (*White* [*Blanc*, 1993]), or the pencil with which the old judge addresses the envelope (*Red* [*Rouge*, 1994]).

The "supporting" tasks of a prop also include the fact that by appearing on screen, it helps the viewer orient himself in time and space or identify a character who at first glance is for some reason difficult to recognise. In *White* this is the case in front of Mikolaj's house, when he drives up with a Christmas tree loaded onto the roof rack, gets out of the car and takes the gift boxes out of it. The viewer gets a clear signal that in the world of the film Christmas time has come, and hence, there has been a significant time shift between the last scene and what is happening on screen. This is quite a simple procedure – the Christmas tree and gifts are associated by everybody in the same way. This message is

strengthened by the fact that the action is taking place in winter (snow on the roofs and on the street). In turn, in *Red* we are dealing with the identification of a character through an object (device) associated with him or her. In the scene where Auguste is watching his girlfriend Karin through the window, the screen shows only the computer monitor, on which weather maps are visible (the camera from Auguste's point of view). From the course of earlier events, we know that Karin is involved in weather forecasting. In the next take, after moving to the other window, the hero sees a couple making love, but is unable to recognise their faces, as are the viewers. They have even less knowledge than the hero, because Karin's apartment appears in the film for the first time; Auguste knows whose home it is, but the viewers can only conclude this from the monitor with the weather maps on the desktop and from the desperate facial expressions of the man who has just learned he has been betrayed. Measures of this type are not uncommon in cinema, but they sometimes give the director trouble telling the film's story. In order to avoid intrusive repetitions and information about everything in dialogues, they design the world presented with the intention of including as much information as possible about the film space-time and the characters within it. This is accompanied by a desire to build a certain atmosphere of mystery and not show everything directly in order to intensify the viewer's perception and association processes.

Another dimension and importance is attributed to those scenes in which the prop becomes the central object, establishing and organising the action. In a sense, it still has a supporting function, this time in the film dramaturgy; nevertheless, its role and meaning are much larger and more important. It usually acts as a catalyst for action, allowing the viewer both to orient oneself in the story and to organise individual plots and motifs.

This prop function is convincingly realised in the film *White* in at least two cases. After a dramatic breakup with his wife (Dominique), the film's protagonist (Karol) returns from France to Poland, hidden in a large suitcase, in which he has kept all his belongings. Earlier his wife had broken off all contact with him because of his sexual impotence. Deprived of a livelihood and a roof over his head, he at first survived by playing the comb at a Paris underground station, but when he has the opportunity to return to Poland, he uses an unusual prop: his suitcase. In this extraordinary escapade, he is helped by Mikolaj, a compatriot whom he had met in the underground and with whom he has been connected by an authentic friendship. The hero's use of the suitcase as a means of transport plays an important role on at least several levels of the film's diegesis. First, it is quite attractive for the viewer; secondly, it solves, at least for a time, the protagonist's problems in an original way; and thirdly, it opens up a new chapter in his adventures. It can be said that as a film prop the suitcase was used by the director to build the work's dramatic structure. Karol's unconven-

Building the dramaturgy

tional return to the country is the turning point in the film's story. The aforementioned suitcase has also become one of the personal attributes of the main character. It momentarily gave him shelter and rescued him from oppression, but he also kept his most valuable possessions in it: his hairdressing diplomas and a plaster bust of a woman who reminds him of his wife, which he brought with him from Paris to Warsaw as his only luggage. He finally reaches his family home with this suitcase, and eventually parts with it, symbolically breaking with his past.[4]

The second situation concerns a short scene that takes place in front of Mikolaj's house. After a conversation, the men part. Karol returns to his car and opens the door, but after a second of hesitation, he closes it again and watches an incident taking place in his neighbourhood. Some men are carrying out a coffin from a nearby house and putting it into a hearse. The protagonist watches them with real curiosity, then pauses to think something over, as if he is working out a plan for the future. Subsequent events confirm this fact. Part of the funeral rite, of which the coffin and the hearse are important elements, inspires the hero to organise an unusual intrigue, simulating his own death, which in turn would lead to the arrest and conviction of his wife. In this way, he takes revenge for the humiliation and unfaithfulness he has suffered. As in the first case, the prop becomes the nodal object of the world presented, organising the film's subsequent events, pushing the action forward and enriching the on-screen story with new, attractive plot motifs.

The action of the third part of the triptych, *Red*, was subject to similar dramatic measures. The twists of action, plot and subplots in the screenplay often involve props. The fates of the main characters – Valentine Dussaut, a young model, and Joseph Kern, a retired judge – intersect as the result of a car accident. The woman driving the car is fumbling with the radio, oblivious to what is happening on the road, and as a result, hits a dog belonging to the judge. She finds the judge's address on the collar of the animal, and in the next scenes initiates her first meeting with the man. The radio and collar therefore contain a dramatic charge, causing a clear twist of action which results in a crossing of the fates of Valentine and Joseph. The next stage of their relationship is built by another, and probably the most important, prop in the film: a device used to eavesdrop on telephone conversations. It is used by the retired judge to invigilate his neighbours. To a certain extent, this prop characterises the hero, so it performs not only dramatic functions, but at the same time it is skilfully used by the director to initiate new plots and to stimulate their development. The eavesdropped neighbours include a drug dealer[5], a father with homosexual tendencies, and a couple in love, Karin and Auguste, whose history will become a parallel of the judge's fate.

[4] The first sign of abandoning the past in the hero's life was when he threw away the hairdressing diplomas at the Paris underground station.

[5] In one of the scenes Valentine will call this man, threatening him with death. She is a great opponent of drugs because her brother is addicted to them.

The remaining props fulfilling dramaturgical functions were used in a completely different way in *Red*. The simplest example is the daily newspaper that appears several times on the screen. In the first sense, it is an ordinary source of information about the characters and the course of events, but in the longer term, it initiates subsequent turns in the action. It is in the newspaper where Valentine finds out about the troubles suffered by Marc, her drug addict brother, and in response to this, she asks him to visit their mother to keep up appearances; she also reads in the newspaper that the judge has been charged with unlawfully eavesdropping on his neighbours, and in the next scene visits him at home to explain that she was not the one who denounced him. Also, in the film's finale, there is news in the newspaper about the crash of the ferry on board which were the main characters of the triptych *Three Colours*. The newspaper was taken out of the mailbox by Joseph in the morning, and immediately after reading it, he turns on the television to find out more about the tragic incident. Such a turn of action allows the director to stage the moving finale of the film and the entire triptych.

In other fragments, props perform dynamising and retarding functions. For example, during a conversation between Valentine and the judge on his birthday, there is first a delay/suspension in the action, then a kind of relief in the tension. At some point, Joseph talks about a sailor who he acquitted 35 years earlier, stating: "This was one of my most serious cases. Later I realised that I had made a mistake. He had been guilty". There is a nagging darkness in the room, one can hardly see the characters. The man leans towards a lamp standing on a table and presses the switch, a flash appears and the bulb goes out. The judge unscrews it and replaces it with a bulb removed from the ceiling lamp. During the exchange, he stops his story for a moment and returns to it only when he is sitting back in his chair. This keeps the viewer in a state of uncertainty and anticipation, mixed with curiosity about the future fate of the sailor. After a while, the conversation takes on an informal character. Valentine makes a toast to judge's health, the atmosphere relaxes, and the tension falls. Suddenly, a large stone breaks the window and falls into the room; at Joseph's request, the woman puts it on the piano next to five other stones. This event actuates the action, increases the dramaturgy, and establishes the intensity and negative character of the relationship between the retired judge and his neighbours. In a short time, therefore, there is a clear progression of tension, the source of which is an original use of a prop.

The functions of a prop in a film are not limited only to building dramaturgy, deconstructing space-time, and making the presented world probable. Both important and frequent is their use to create a movie character and define his or her relationship to the surrounding reality. The screen image of the character consists of many elements, from the costume and characterisation, through gesticulation, facial expressions, behavior and action, to symbolic measures. A prop can

**Around the film
character**

play a role in any of these elements, co-creating both the external image and the psychological portrait of the character.

As a part of a set or costume, a prop co-creates the scenery of the take^[6], but it achieves its status and significance only when it performs some function in the course of the action. This applies to many items appearing on the screen, for example, the items of clothing a character takes off, puts on or uses for some specific purpose; they can also be components of the set, used by the actor in different ways (e.g. a shotgun hanging on the wall that becomes a weapon in a crime, a carpet that is used to wrap a corpse, or flowers in a vase that are given to a loved one). In Kieślowski's triptych, the objects surrounding the characters tell a lot about them. The judge from *Red* walks with a cane, awkwardly spills water from the kettle, and "snaps" the braces on his pants with satisfaction, stating: "It's such a nice sound". Karol from *White*, in turn, plays well-known melodies on a comb, stores his hairdressing diplomas in a suitcase, and uses an expired ATM card. After a downturn, they both undergo a transformation, which is again reflected in props. The judge returns to life due to his activity, and befriends a young model (he "buys" a TV set, gives Valentine a bottle of pear Calvados), while Karol succeeds in business (he comes to a meeting with a real estate agent carrying a leather briefcase typical of a businessman). His transformation is also evidenced by a two-franc coin which he brings from France to his family home. It is very important to him. He received it from an underground worker in exchange for the one that had not been returned by a pay telephone after an interrupted connection with Dominique, when he learned that his ex-wife was making love to another man. This two-franc coin keeps recurring throughout the film: it is the only coin he has in his pocket after returning to Poland, he spins it on the table when making an important decision (Mikolaj's murder), and finally he throws it into the coffin with his alleged corpse, symbolically sealing his own transformation. A similar function is performed by the comb, which is Karol's basic, material attribute. First of all, it shows what job he has – he is a talented hairdresser; second, like the coin, it symbolises the metamorphosis he has undergone in his life, both in his appearance (he combs his hard back) and in his worldview and material status (playing the comb in the underground, then again while renting an office); and third, in a metaphorical sense it represents a certain inferiority complex he felt in relation to his ex-wife due to his impotence and with which he fought all his life. It is clearly presented in the scene in which Karol is reminiscing about their wedding. The director uses slow motion, suggesting retrospective images from the hero's memories, and juxtaposes them with a shot of Karol's face, who looks like he is "watching" these events through the comb in front of his eyes. Sometimes an expressive prop points to a character's domi-

[6] D. Bordwell, K. Thompson, *Film Art. Sztuka filmowa. Wprowadzenie*, trans. B. Rosińska, Warszawa 2010, pp. 134–136.

nant feature, one associated, for example, with his or her character or everyday existence. Mikolaj in *White* shows off, for example, by playing a card trick that testifies to his extraordinary intelligence and memory, Julie (*Blue*), on the other hand, keeps ordering the same items in the cafe: coffee and ice cream, which she consumes in an unusual way.

The use of props in specific situations makes up the character in a general sense, but it also reveals much about his or her relations with the surroundings (other characters) and about his or her emotional state at a given moment. This applies to both the leading and supporting or episodic characters. The positive or negative emotions accompanying their interactions are usually expressed in words, dialogues and monologues. However, when a director decides to use props instead of words, the action becomes more dynamic, and the interpersonal relationships take on a material shape and translate into concrete actions. For example, the characters in *Three Colours* give presents for various reasons: Lucille hands Julie a bouquet of white oxeye daisies (to thank her for saving her from eviction), the judge gives Valentine a bottle of Calvados (in sympathy), and Karin presents Auguste with a fountain pen (on the occasion of passing his judge's exams). One can point out other, similar gestures that make use of props. The protagonist in *Blue* expresses her attitude to those around her primarily through objects. After she has slept with Olivier, she brings him a cup of coffee to bed, and she puts a flute case under the head of the musician sleeping on the street. In a sense, they both become important to her.

An important role in the character's on-screen creation is also played by takes depicting his or her existence in a given moment (health, reactions, emotions, etc.) and more complex functions concerning his or her psyche (goals, feelings, dreams, worldview). In Kieślowski's triptych, this means of imaging often triggers deeper connotations with symbolic traits. In *Blue* Julie deeply experiences a period of mourning after the tragic death of her husband and daughter. Her condition immediately after the accident is meaningfully delineated by a scene in which the heroine is lying in a hospital bed. In the frame with a substantial close-up only a small feather being moved slightly by the heroine's breathing is visible. This is a visual sign that the woman has survived the accident but that her life is hanging by a thread and is almost invisible. In a subsequent scene, the heroine tries to cope with her memories and pain after losing her daughter. In her handbag, she finds a lollipop wrapped in blue cellophane, she unwraps it and eats it greedily, then throws the stick into the fire. In this symbolic gesture, she breaks with the past and tries to work through, or "digest" her suffering.[7]

The sphere of the characters' feelings and emotions is so rich and complex that it finds visual representation in other settings as well. The word, as a rule, plays a secondary role in these, while the

[7] In the scene of the accident, the daughter is playing with the same cellophane, holding it in the wind, outside the window of the car.

object (prop) is the main medium. Valentine sleeps with her fiancé Michel's jacket because she misses him tremendously. Similarly, Olivier, the hero of *Blue*, buys a mattress that belonged to Julie because he loves her and wants to be as close as possible to her. Julie's mother watches TV all the time, and the television screen shows broadcasts of extreme sports: bungee jumps and the stunts of a tightrope walker. Elderly and suffering from Alzheimer's disease, she does not recognise her own daughter, and confuses her with her sister. She states: "I do not need anything, I have a TV set. I can see the whole world". The juxtaposition of the mother's image with those on the TV emphasises her loneliness and the minimalism of existence. By means of contrast, it brings to the fore the passivity of her life attitude in comparison with the risky and adrenaline-ridden images of extreme sports. The first two examples can be considered concrete metonymic systems because there is a specific relationship between the prop and the person to which it relates. In the third example, the heroine is characterised by the accompanying object, and the combination can be regarded as a metaphor.

Deeply instead of broadly

In the 1980s, just after martial law, Kiesłowski, searching for a recipe for describing the contemporary reality, proposed the slogan "deeply, instead of broadly", the sense of which was based on exploring the human psyche, and detailed analysis of the feelings and emotional states of the characters by means of an extensive symbolic layer in a film. This was achieved in practice through a leisurely, even contemplative, narrative, the use of close film sets, and a deepening of the problems and messages of the film through the use of various stylistic means, above all, metaphors and symbols. An important role in this aesthetics was played by the film prop.

In the case of the *Three Colours* triptych, the first associations naturally concern the titles of the individual parts and their symbolic meaning. As mentioned earlier, these refer to the colours of the French flag and to the corresponding concepts of freedom, equality and brotherhood. Each part of the triptych is a kind of creative travesty of a given idea, which is reflected in both the story and the aesthetics of the individual films. The director refers to these indirectly, often in a veiled and metaphorical way, thereby broadening the interpretative field of the work. According to the colour included in the title, he builds, together with the camera operator, the films' visual layer, filling the frame with elements of a specific colour and using specially selected lighting. These are most often fragments of sets, costumes, and props. In *Red*, viewers' attention is mainly drawn by the décor of the theater and the bowling alley, which is saturated with bright red, but there are also props in red: a dog's collar, Auguste's car, a lifeguard's jacket on the ferry, and of course, a giant billboard with the image of Valentine. In *Blue*, the most memorable objects are the unnaturally blue swimming pool and a chandelier made up of many blue glass trinkets. In *White*, the light is used creatively. The characters are illuminated with intense white counter light,

for example, in the scene of the planned murder in the underground or during an unsuccessful intercourse between Karol and Dominique in the hairdressing salon. When there are close-ups of human faces, they are usually covered by side light, giving them a dirty white colour. Both types of light co-create the image of one of the most important props in this film: a plaster bust resembling the figure of Dominique.

Accumulating elements of the same colour in the frame reminds the viewer of the overarching idea contained in the film; it also becomes a recognisable stylistic sign, creating a certain visual aura of the work. However, that is not all. Extracted from the set or the light, these props also carry additional content and meanings. The blue chandelier in the film evokes everything the heroine associates with the past. This is the only item she took with her from her family home to her new flat. It is a memento of her tragically deceased husband and daughter, but also of a peculiar stigma of the past from which she wants to definitively cut herself off. She gradually erases all traces of the past in her life: she sells her house, breaks contacts with people, and even destroys her husband's compositions. The chandelier thus becomes a material link between her previous life before the tragic accident and her present life; in a sense, it helps Julie to work through a period of mourning. This is shown in a subtle way in a scene in which gleams of sunlight reflected from the blue chandelier glass fall on the heroine's face. Similar functions are performed by the plaster bust of a woman that Karol takes to Poland. This prop is a kind of personification of Dominique, although the association does not result directly from their similarity, but only from certain features of the appearance of both figures, associated with the pallor, delicacy, and the fragility of the facial features of both. It is clear to the viewer that the plaster bust is the material equivalent of Dominique. The way in which Karol handles it testifies to the feelings he has for his ex-wife. He still loves her very much, and solemnly glues all the parts of the plaster statue together when he calls Dominique. The bust also clearly emerges from the background and acts as a symbolic complement to this relationship in a scene in which Karol kisses the figurine on the lips with affection. In *Red*, the symbolism of colour is the most extensive. This is visible both in visual details and in the primary motifs. For example, when after betraying his girlfriend, Auguste speeds in a red jeep through the streets of the city, a slot machine (a so-called one-armed bandit) appears in the shot for a fraction of a second: it has three red cherries signifying the main prize. Such a combination may suggest an allusion to the well-known saying "unlucky at cards, lucky in love"[8] – and vice versa. The huge (8 by 20 metres) billboard with Valentine's face on a red background has a much larger and more significant meaning. It appears after the photo session (Valentine is a model) on one of the tenements and

[8] Of course, the cards are broadly understood here – as a form of gambling, similarly to games of skill.

clearly stands out against the grey background of the city. This unusual portrait towers over the city, creating the impression of the strength, size, and vitality of the heroine. Both Auguste driving the car and the judge going to the theater for a fashion show turn their attention to it. In the film's finale, however, during a storm with heavy rain, the billboard is being rolled up by workers and falls to the ground. After this take, groundbreaking events follow. First is a short symbolic scene anticipating tragic events: on a billiards table there is a glass of tea with a wire loop next to it, a draught comes and the tea spills over the table with a bang. The subsequent takes show the judge, who puts a collar (of course red) on a puppy, then takes a newspaper out of the mailbox and finds out about the ferry crash. The continuation of the accident report is shown on the television screen in his home. The live broadcast shows that the main characters from the *Three Colours* triptych are among the seven survivors: Julie, Karol, Dominique, Olivier, Auguste, and, of course, Valentine. Her face, depicted in profile, is held up in the frame against the background of the red jacket of a rescue worker, and then the camera zooms in until the composition begins to look like the giant billboard with the image of Valentine. At the end, there is only a few seconds' cut in shot with a close-up of the slightly smiling judge's face with a tear running down it, and then a return to the previous take.

This unusually symbolic finale to the film has a carefully thought-out design, and props play an important role. It contains the message of the final part, but also of the entire triptych. The ideas of the French Revolution – freedom, equality, and brotherhood – refer, of course, to the history of this country, and perhaps even to the civilisational legacy of European culture, but in individual terms they build an identity and philosophical and existential discourse, referring to intimate spheres of human existence and basic interpersonal relationships. Freedom, in this case, means being set free from the past and from suffering; equality is understood as a certain balance between good and evil, love and hatred, the happiness and unhappiness that we come across in life; brotherhood, in turn, implies a specific affinity in people's fates, the cyclicity and repeatability of certain histories and events, and a certain rhythm of human existence, limited by the caesuras of life and death, of beginnings and ends. And thus, in the take presenting the folding of the billboard, the end of something is clearly marked, while putting the collar on the puppy initiates something completely opposite. Valentine was almost killed in the ferry crash, and this tragic end is anticipated by the scene of the billboard being rolling up; however, she is as if re-born, which is shown by the cinematic trick of holding up her face against the red lifeguard's jacket. In addition, some unknown, superior force watches over the fate of all the characters: in *Red* it is represented by the retired judge who stoically watches people, who listens, looks, and is present but does not interfere in the world. The report from the ferry crash brings a gentle smile to his face, but it also forces tears. Maybe these are tears of happiness or of compassion, or maybe they

are an expression of concern for people. If this is a picture of God, it is certainly not the God of the Old Testament, whose main attributes are power and omnipotence, but a more human one, full of empathy and understanding for human imperfections.

Kieślowski tells his stories, as he himself said, like fairy tales about people, told in a way typical of him. There is a lot of symbolism and non-obvious associations. Particular parts of the triptych overlap on various levels, creating a coherent language of artistic expression. In addition to the meaningful ending of *Red*, the characters of an old man and an old woman trying to throw a bottle into a garbage bin are such a motif. Such characters appear in all three parts, and in each of them act as a metaphorical commentary on the superior idea of a given film and the fate of the main character. In *Blue*, a hunched old woman is trying unsuccessfully to throw a bottle into a container, and Julie does not notice her at all – she is sitting on a nearby bench, basking in the sun. In *White* a similar role is played by an old man who is pushing a bottle into a container while Karol looks at him intently but does not react; in *Red*, there once again appears the figure of an old woman trying to throw a bottle into a container, and when she is unable to cope with this action, Valentine helps her. In the first case, this situation practically does not concern the main character – she is free, perhaps fighting for her freedom and does not pay attention to the world around her; in the second case, this scene symbolically determines the equality between the old man and Karol – they are both lonely and equally helpless in life; it is only in the third installment that there is genuine interaction between the characters – Valentine helps the old lady, proving the idea of brotherhood between people, that is, of mutual help in a moment need.

The props "scattered" here and there play symbolic roles in Kieślowski's films or they transmit additional content, giving the effect of "going deep into" something, that is, a conscious and in-depth penetration of the essence of a given thing or phenomenon. This involves not only the sphere of great ideas or the message of the film. The prop in its symbolic or metaphorical function fulfills specific tasks in subplots, but provides a supplement, reinforcement or commentary to the ongoing action or issues raised. The best example of this is the abundance of props in *Red*, the main message of which is the idea of brotherhood.[9] This is realised, of course, through the symbolism of colours. But equally important is the brotherhood of human fate that links the characters of Valentine, Joseph and Auguste. The first configuration, connecting the

[9] Measures of this type are also present in the remaining parts of the triptych, e.g. in *Blue* there is a characteristic toy as a prop – a stick and a ball on a string, with which a young boy is playing by the roadside just before the car accident. After a few unsuccessful attempts, he finally manages to put the ball on the stick. There is a moment of joy, then a loud roar is heard, which signals the accident. In

this scene, the director is trying to smuggle a certain general truth about the world – that the overriding principle which organises it is balance: good and evil, happiness and unhappiness, life and death, etc. In this case, the boy has some success (in a metaphorical sense), showing off his dexterity, while someone else is defeated (the accident and death of people close to him).

young model and the retired judge, seems obvious. The characters have developed a real sympathy for each other, but their fates take them in different directions at the end of the film. Valentine is trying to make a life with Michel, although their relationship for a long time has been based mainly on phone calls (again a prop is used) during which the man plays out jealous scenes. Many facts indicate that this relationship may not survive the trial of distance and time. Only after talking with the judge in the theater, is the heroine seemingly convinced about her future. An important role in this scene is played by props: two plastic cups of coffee. The director first shows them in close-up, when they are standing side by side on the piano, evenly filled with coffee; in the next take, he initiates a dialogue between the characters – they both are already holding their cups. Joseph finally confesses a secret which has become the source of his frustration and misfortunes: his wife betrayed him many years ago, and he has not been able to get his life together since then. During the conversation, Valentine at some point crushes the cup in her hand, while the judge puts his intact on the note-stand next to him. In this symbolic gesture, the woman breaks the brotherhood between her own fate and the history of the judge's life, as evidenced by subsequent events – the ferry trip and unexpected rescue.

The second configuration concerns the characters of Joseph and Auguste. The brotherhood between the fates of these characters is expressed in large part by props. The director advances his thesis by analogies between facts from their lives: they were both judges, they both have been betrayed by women whom they loved very much, and they both have been deeply affected by that. Additional hints about their unusual relationship are hidden in the form of props. Two of these seem the most important. The first are the books from which the young lawyer prepares for his examinations. In a repeat of what once happened to Joseph, one of them falls out onto the street and opens up to a passage about which the examiner questioned him. The second is a CD with music by Van den Budenmayer.^[10] Valentine notices it in the judge's house and intends to buy it from a music store, but the last copy has been bought by Auguste and his girlfriend. It turns out that they both like the same music. Therefore, taking into account all the director's hints above, the characters of both men seem to be very closely related. Of course, this is not a family relationship, but more of a kinship of souls, a brotherhood between people and their fates.

Finally, worth mentioning and considering are two characteristic props from *Red* that do not refer directly to the main idea of the film, but which provide a tangible image of Kiesłowski's creative method in the context of his use of film props.

Both come from the overarching premise that the consideration of important matters and problems should not be limited to verbal mes-

[10] Van den Budenmayer is the artistic pseudonym of Zbigniew Preisner, the author of music for Kiesłowski's triptych *Three Colours*.

sages, i.e. monologues and film dialogues. Kieślowski skillfully introduces props into the world presented, each time creating an impression that they are an integral part of the film's story, sometimes closely related to the course of the action, sometimes in the form of a visual or sound (or both) element with some symbolic meaning. Such is the function of the slot machine (one-armed bandit) that Valentine often uses. When she wins, somehow *a rebours*, she is sad and anxious because it heralds an unpleasant event or an unfavorable combination of circumstances. As in the case of Auguste's story, it is the realization of the maxim "unlucky at cards, lucky in love" and vice versa. In this particular situation, there is even more to it – "lucky at cards (gambling), unlucky in life". This is confirmed when the woman finds out from the newspaper about the problems of her drug addict brother. This plot, however, has its continuation. After the machine has indicated three cherries, Valentine collects the money she has won, returns home and throws it into a large jar, almost entirely filled with coins. This scene tells a lot about the heroine's life so far. Given her huge collection of coins, it can be concluded that the woman has won many times at this game, and most importantly, as a consequence of these winnings – she has suffered a lot in her life.

Another non-verbal message, based on the symbolic associations of images that include film props, is evident in the scene at the bowling alley to which Valentine goes with her friends. The camera records two throws by the young model; then to the sounds of calm, ambient music, it makes a panoramic move to the left, passing by red chairs and tables until it stops at one of them. In the frame, there appears a chipped glass containing some drink, a burnt cigarette, and a crumpled pack of Marlboros. The frame is still for a few seconds, directing the viewer's attention to some unspecified, mysterious event involving these "meaningful" props, one associated with some personal tragedy or unpleasant impressions. The situation is explained a few scenes later when the viewer learns about the breakup of Auguste and Karin, with the implicitly evoked scene concerning their quarrel or parting.

The use of props in both examples reduces the verbal code to a minimum, and through understatement and the ambiguity of the message, the attention and interest of the viewer are increased. As in many other cases, here film props serve as a tool for Krzysztof Kieślowski's expressing subtle and timeless truths about the world and people, and for shaping his creative expression and the authorial style of his artistic statement.

Bordwell D., Thompson K., *Film Art. Sztuka filmowa. Wprowadzenie*, trans. B. Rościńska, Warszawa 2010

Kijowski A.T., "Poetyka rekwizytu", [in:] idem, *Chwył teatralny*, Gdańsk 2000

Rogowska K., "Oblicza popkultury: gadżet we współczesnym kinie amerykańskim", [in:] *Rzecz w kulturze*, eds. B. Pawłowska-Jądrzyk, D. Dąbrowska, Warszawa 2016

Stachówna G., "Listy Cyrana, chustka Desdemony i róża upiora opery, czyli filmowa rekwizytornia romansowa", "Kwartalnik Filmowy" 2011, no. 74

Bibliography