

Three Colors, One Europe

Any exploration of Kieslowski's magnificent trilogy, the Trois Couleurs, must begin with its intriguing prequel, The Double Life of Veronique (1991), in many ways the experimental test flight of the Airbus-sized assemblage to come. Just as the 1984 No End marked the end of the Solidarity epics of the 1970s and the rise of the video forms which would culminate in the Decalogue, so too will DLV mark the midway point between the progressive neo-nationalism or Velvet aesthetics of the late 1980s, and the multinational Euroculture of the 1990s. Faced with the impossibility of reconciling the content of the Eastern nostalgia film with the stylized forms of the Western thriller, Kieslowski will critique both, by focusing the camera on the Soviet wine being poured from the bottle of IMF-administered neoliberalism, something which needs to be put into the context of the savage marketization of post-Cold War Eastern Europe.

OECD economists estimate that roughly 20-25% of the former Eastern bloc economy simply vaporized from 1991-94, one of the largest peacetime economic collapses in world history. Though some of this was due to the closure of redundant military factories, obviously a good thing, most of it was not. Instead of a careful, patient restructuring, the ex-nomenklatura imposed a crude, violent market Bolshevism (in Boris Kagarlitsky's memorable phrase) on societies which had never before been exposed to full-scale market competition. The upshot was that many quite competitive and well-run Eastern firms were annihilated, unable to cope with collapsing domestic demand, a massive influx of foreign imports, and a lack of domestic financing mechanisms. Instead of being elevated to the lower reaches of the First World, the countries of Eastern Europe suddenly found themselves cast into the upper reaches of the Third World.

Two little-noticed political events shielded Eastern Europe from the full force of the neoliberal wrecking-ball. The first was the resistance, however enfeebled or weakened, of domestic states to the dictates of the IMF. Though Poland was one of the first countries to adopt shock therapy in 1990, it was also the first country to junk the basic tenets of neoliberalism, by reimposing tariffs and duties on imports, issuing large amounts of debt to bail out domestic industries, preserving much of its welfare state (especially pensions, a move which deeply scandalized the IMF's partner-in-crime, the

World Bank),¹ and renegotiating its enormous hard currency debt with the countries of the European Union on more favorable terms. The other countries of the Eastern bloc gradually followed suit, halting the generalized economic collapse.

The second event was the formidable resistance of Western European unions, civic groups and political parties to Maastricht monetarism, a.k.a. the neoliberal project of slashing public budgets and welfare programs as preparation for the single European currency. After the signing the Maastricht Treaty of monetary unification in 1992, interest rates throughout Europe rose to sky-high levels until 1995, in what amounted to a repeat of the America's Volckerite austerity of 1981-84. But whereas the 1980s witnessed the crippling of the US labor movement and the transformation of the Democratic Party from the party of the New Deal into the party of Wall Street, the European countries ferociously resisted the neoliberal onslaught. The first great moment of resistance was signaled by the 1995 rail strikes in France, which shut Paris down and smashed an obnoxious plan to slash state pensions; this was followed by massive protests in Belgium in 1996, a country-wide university student strike in Germany in 1997, the fall of Conservative governments across the length and breadth of Europe in 1998, and the first coordinated multinational protests against neoliberalism in Millau, France and Prague, the Czech Republic in 2000. During the latter half of the 1990s, popular protest not only forced the European Central Bank (the equivalent of the US Federal Reserve) to drastically lower interest rates to sustainable levels, but accelerated the development of a whole series of multinational institutions, ranging from the publicly-owned European Investment Bank to EU-wide environmental regulations, and from a long-term investment program in Eastern Europe to sophisticated industrial policies in the information, electronics and telecom sectors.²

These twin vectors of resistance – progressive neo-nationalism in the East and progressive multinationalism in the West – are symbolically mirrored in DLV's peculiar doppelgänger, played by Irène Jacob in a spell-binding double role as Veronika (a gifted young singer in Warsaw, afflicted with a weak heart) and Veronique (a Parisian ex-singer turned musical instructor). The first part of the film focuses on Veronika's decision to pursue a singing career, even if it means risking her health; tragically, she collapses and dies in the middle of her orchestral debut. The second part shows Veronique becoming

romantically involved with a mysterious puppeteer, and then slowly realizing her link with her mysterious double, after Veronika's demise. This is a fairly transparent allegory of the fate of two eminently neo-national forms, i.e. the orchestra and the puppet theater, respectively. Both are displaced by tropes of extended aesthetic reproduction, or what amounts to the space of recorded media and the space of studio production. This is relayed by DLV's two most distinctive visual motifs, namely close shots of the characters' eyes on the one hand, and the microcosm of an eyeball-sized refractive glass or crystal ball on the other (the logical successors of the gaze of the doppelganger and the translucent lamp-globes of the Decalogue). Kieslowski ingeniously works the first motif directly into DLV's bravura opening sequence, where one set of eyes (Veronika) seems to peer out onto a shot of Warsaw by night, while another pair of eyes (Veronique) gazes upon a sunshine-drenched park somewhere in Paris; the second materializes during a crucial scene where Veronique is traveling by train across the countryside, and catches sight of the passing scenery through a glass ball.

What is missing, on the other hand, are the reciprocal exchanges between subjective glances and objective fields of vision which electrified key scenes of the Decalogue. Ironically, DLV's greatest strength – its finely-wrought scriptwriting, which weaves the strands of two national identities into one – is also its greatest weakness, for the simple reason that the trope of the doppelganger can no longer mediate between the levels of the neo-national and the multinational. Whereas the Euro-doppelgangers of the Decalogue flickered at the edge of the screen like ghosts from the future, gleaming with the luster of a retrospective temporality (that is to say, a utopian multinational labor-time), DLV offers a kind of proto-European ghost story, in which an Eastern bloc temporality continues to haunt a Western European cultural space. Put another way, DLV revolutionizes the form of the video subject, by successfully gender-bending the doppelganger, but cannot provide an effective micropolitical content for such.

This contradiction is easiest to grasp in the most openly political moment of the film: this is the Warsaw street protest which erupts in the vicinity of Veronique's tour bus. For a brief moment, the visual forms of Western tourism crackle with the energies of Eastern insurrection, in a manner similar to Heiner Müller's Hamletmachine. These energies are just as quickly recontained, however, by the nostalgia narrative (the blurred

photograph) and, still later, by an patently regressive gender ideology (Veronique is seduced by an older man, in what is clearly an unequal relationship; symptomatically, the film will conclude with her return to her father's estate in the countryside). This is in striking contrast to the closest Western European equivalent to DLV, namely Caro and Jeunet's 1991 Delicatessen. This stylish, visually dazzling post-nuclear adventure tale leverages a revolutionary micropolitics (vegetarian eco-guerillas facing off against cannibalistic entrepreneurs) against the stock materials of the American sci-fi spectacular and French existential noir, creating the first genuine Eurothriller. To be sure, Caro and Jeunet had one crucial advantage as filmmakers which Kieslowski and his compatriots could not hope to match: as Belgian citizens, they had direct access to the vast symbolic capital of a bilingual, bicultural and bicameral state, busily reinventing itself as the executive center of the EU.³ Given that the science-fiction film is informed, as Fredric Jameson put it, by a kind of nostalgia for the present, then there is a sense in which DLV is nostalgic for the multinational Europe of the future.⁴

To construct multinational narratives requires, however, more than simply welding the superstructures of two extant neo-nationalisms together. With typical perspicacity, Kieslowski will reach all the way back to the most revolutionary nationalism of them all – that of the French Revolution – in order to repudiate the orthodox neoliberal mantra, i.e. that not only has history ended, but that anyone who dares to question the plundering of the planet for the benefit of a tiny, rapacious and unaccountable stock-owning elite is obviously either a misguided Luddite or a dangerous Stalinist (or, as in the case of the mythical “anarchists” constructed by the US media to explain away the Seattle anti-WTO protests, a ludicrous admixture of both). On the contrary, the Trois Couleurs will show that while a certain Cold War prehistory is over, quite another history has just begun: the pragmatic realization of 1789's clarion call for liberty, equality and fraternity. To write this history, Kieslowski would create a new and multinational division of aesthetic labor, by relying on his long-time counterparts, co-writer Krzysztof Piesiewicz and composer Zbigniew Preisner, for the scripting and musical innovations to flesh out his own visual innovations (Piesiewicz in fact came up with the original idea of three films based on the three colors of the French flag, with each color representing a specific revolutionary theme, while Preisner would push his

scores for the Decalogue in a new direction). Kieslowski would not only artfully tap a range of Swiss and French producers and media firms for financing and distribution, he would also unveil the astonishing talents of Juliet Binoche and Julie Delpy, and showcase those of Zbigniew Zamachowski, Jean-Louis Trintignant and Irène Jacob, to create the greatest Eurovideo works of the early 1990s.

White

Equality in commodity societies has always been a dicey proposition. No two subjects are exactly alike, no two firms pursue precisely the same strategies, and no two markets ever function in quite the same way; at the same time, market societies function on the basis of equivalencies, the exact reproduction of goods and services, and the precise calculation of values in common denominators. The contradiction is already apparent in the first scene of White, when we see a long shot of an enormous luggage case moving sluggishly down an airport conveyor belt, its battered wooden surface in flagrant contrast to the form-fitting, Samsonite hulls of its peers. This objective contradiction has its subjective equivalent in the form of Polish émigré Karol Karol (“Charlie Charlie” in Polish, a deliberate homage to Charlie Chaplin), who stumbles ingloriously through the legal machinery of a divorce hearing in a French courthouse. One of the unexpected pleasures of White, indeed, is watching comic actor Zbigniew Zamachowski (who played the rock singer, Artur, in the final episode of the Decalogue) rise to the challenge of Kieslowski’s scintillating frames, by filling in each scene with the most subtle gestural comedy. The comic tone is the gentle corrective to Karol’s downwards spiral, as he is dumped by his French wife, Dominique; publicly humiliated during the divorce hearing, by being forced to admit he could not consummate the marriage; has his bank assets frozen and his livelihood taken away; and ends up as a homeless bum living out of a subway station. The scene where he tries to draw money from an ATM is absolutely priceless, simply because it registers such a complex set of ambivalences so compassionately, and with such an economy of means: this is the simple act of laboriously punching in his passcode, keystroke after unfamiliar keystroke. When the machine eats his bankcard, Karol’s woebegone expression registers the heartbreak of

every naïve Eastern European consumer who ever believed in the glittering hype of the West, only to end up being fleeced.

But the color white signifies more than just the bleakness of winter and indigence; it is also, surprisingly, the color of openness, of contingency and unexpected possibility. The sky Karol gazes into above the courthouse is the color of a blank sheet of paper waiting to be written upon; if reality brusquely intervenes, in the form of a bird which craps on Karol's jacket, there is still the daub of a white handkerchief to help repair the damage. Something similar happens in the courtroom sequence when Dominique openly repudiates Karol, a painful moment offset by a flashback of their wedding; this is shot in muted, diminished tones, hinting at a latent reservoir of affection between the two, rather like the glint of water beneath the frozen surface of a lake. Even the moment when Karol is shivering on a park bench, broke and homeless, is illuminated by the sight of an old woman, bent double with age, trying valiantly to deposit a bottle in an enormous green recycling bin. This is an explicit quotation from DLV which will recur in every episode of the Trois Couleurs, each time with a slightly different twist; here, of course, it is the irony of a down-and-out Eastern European suddenly finding common cause with another group the marketplace has symbolically consigned to the trash, namely the elderly.

It is no accident that all of these moments are tied to explicitly neo-national spaces, ranging from the national juridical system of the court to the church where the wedding takes place, all the way to the urban recycling service. Interestingly, Karol's last attempt to win Dominique over with conventional means is also the last moment of this trope, or what can be defined as bankrupt, neutralized or otherwise powerless neo-national bodies confronted with alluring but inaccessible bodies of multinational consumption. This is the moment when Dominique tries one last time to make love to Karol; alas, despite her best efforts, he still cannot perform. Finally he asks:

Karol: "Come to Poland with me."

Dominique: "I'll never go with you. I'll win every trial. The divorce, property settlement..."

Dismounts from him: "You never understood a thing."

Karol: "I understand."

Dominique: *with increasing bitterness:* "No. If I say I love you, you don't understand. And if I say I hate you, you still don't understand. You don't understand that I want you, that I need you. Do you understand? Do you understand? No. Do I scare you?" *Seizes hold of him:* "Do I scare you?"

Karol: "I don't know."

Dominique: “You don’t know. Watch this now. Take a good look.” *She snaps the lighter in his face, then sets fire to the shop’s curtains.* “You were out for revenge. You set the place on fire. That’s what happened. Soon every cop in Paris will be after you.” *He rushes out.*

The gesture is telling: the libidinal energy missing from their relationship is clearly displaced elsewhere, onto the urban stalking drama or revenge thriller, narratives which Kieslowski will refunction for his own, non-violent purposes. What replaces the bankrupted domestic space signified by the trashing of the curtain is, logically enough, the video frame itself, stripped down to its most basic elements: this is the moment when Karol, destitute and wandering about Paris, is mesmerized by a cheap plaster bust in a shopping arcade (a French maiden, uncannily reminiscent of Dominique). Karol’s face is framed by the prominent foreground of the shop-window, whose translucent space is the canny double negation of the official statues and canonized public images of the Eastern European regimes, as well as the commercial displays of the Western European mall: the mask of the state is repudiated as well as its secret double, the mask of the market.

This moment also marks the turning-point of Karol’s fortunes, as he begins the slow, painful transformation from an expropriated consumer into an autonomous cultural producer. At first, he ekes out a living by playing Polish folk tunes on a comb in a subway station; later, a fellow Pole, Mikolaj (pronounced “mee-koh-lie”), happens to recognize the tune as he is passing by, and strikes up a conversation. After they start drinking together, we learn that the comb has a double meaning: Karol’s battered luggage case contains diplomas, awarded in various Eastern European cities during his career as a topnotch hair-dresser, i.e. a devalued species of Eastern bloc symbolic capital. Just as the comb will return at key points in the narrative to come, so too will the folk tune recur a number of times, thanks to Preisner’s sensitive, mournful sound-track. Mikolaj’s main skill, on the other hand, is his photographic memory, which he puts to good use in bridge games. Later, when the two start planning to return to Poland, an allegorical pigeon suddenly flies into the subway station and lands right in front of him. The pigeon is the premier symbol of transience or fleeting reconciliation in John Woo’s three great Hong Kong thrillers, and it is no accident that Mikolaj suddenly offers Karol a job straight out of the Woo playbook, i.e. a contract to kill someone who wants to commit suicide.

But where Woo fused the most advanced visual innovations of the Hollywood blockbuster with the narrative machinery of the martial arts or *wuxia* epics, on the grounds of the video forms pioneered by the Nintendo and anime classics of the late 1980s, Kieslowski will retrofit the stylistic palette of the Francophone existential thriller with the subversive tactilities of Svankmajer's animated fables, in the context of the European telecommunications network. This is the moment Karol calls Dominique from a public payphone, his face framed by the rounded, transparent plastic bubble of the booth; he hears her say, "Just in time" and then moan into the phone, apparently in the middle of a sexual encounter. In the hands of any other director, this could easily have become a crude burlesque of the phone sex industry; but Kieslowski wants us to understand that it is only by directly confronting the humiliation and frustration of being manipulated by the consumer culture that we can transcend such. Karol channels his anger at being betrayed into the ability to *act*: he slams the phone down, manages to wrest a 2-franc coin refund from a surly train attendant, and then decides to smuggle himself back to Poland inside of his battered trunk.

This is also the moment that the simmering class tensions visible at the end of Decalogue break out into open violence. At the Warsaw airport, a gang of luggage thieves introduces Karol to the realities of primitive accumulation, by carrying off his case to a local garbage dump in the mistaken belief it contains something valuable. To their dismay, Karol and his plaster bust tumble out of the case; they quickly note that the statue is worthless, and that his clothes are Russian, i.e. not even worth the trouble of stealing. But when one of them snatches the only money he has (the same 2-franc coin), he lunges at the thief ferociously, grabbing back the coin and then defending himself with his scissors, the first time he has ever shown such gumption. Though they quickly overwhelm him with sheer numbers, beating him senseless and tossing him down a slag pit, he wins a significant victory: amidst a scenic background of snowy fields, leaden skies and circling flocks of scavenging birds, he struggles to his feet, bloodied but unbowed, still holding his coin.

This moment deftly replaces the juridical body of the diplomas, those species of devalued Eastern European symbolic capital, with three new corporealities: the first is clearly that of Karol's own body, henceforth the site of an entrepreneurial subject. The

second is the statue which Karol painstakingly glues back together, symbolizing the utopian tactility of the beloved. The third and, in some ways, the most interesting of all is that of currency itself: as any numismatist would know, French coins in the 1990s were imprinted with the slogan “liberty, equality, fraternity” (Kieslowski’s close-ups of the coin always show this side, mostly because the obverse of the 2-franc coin shows a female peasant sowing wheat, i.e. a national-allegorical image already upstaged by Dominique). The most visible clash of the multinational and neo-national occurs when Karol finally returns to his brother’s hair-dressing salon, whose blinking sign (“Karol”) contrasts sharply with the shabby, half-painted exterior of the building (“You bought a neon sign,” says Karol in surprise; “This is Europe now,” responds his brother guilelessly). Appropriately enough, the brother is played by Jerzy Stuhl, the same actor who played his fictional brother in D10, and there is certainly a sense in which White begins precisely where the Decalogue left off, i.e. the moment when expropriation turns into resistance. This is confirmed by a later scene by the river, when Karol almost tosses the coin into the flowing current; he stops himself, though, when the coin seems to stick to his palm as if by some magnetic attraction, suggesting a transmutation of tactile narratives into ones of accumulation.

Karol’s first move will be to leverage the multinational signifier of the neon sign, a.k.a. his marquee reputation as a hair-dresser. Since he is still immensely popular with his customers, he begins to accumulate funds of his own. Later, to earn extra money, he shows up at the local neighborhood money-changer who unofficially converts Polish zloty into hard currency and says, “I’d like to get into the money business.” The latter sizes him up and gives him a job as a security guard, telling him he’s heard good things about him from one of his customers (“You’re inconspicuous. That’s good.”) Armed with a sidearm which only fires tear-gas, he quickly turns out to be anything but inconspicuous, tugging at his belt, stalking the sidewalk, eyeing passersby coldly, and in general taking on role of the heavy in record time.

His position as a bodyguard later gives him an unexpected opportunity: while pretending to be snoozing during a meeting between his boss and a fellow gangster, he overhears them saying that Ikea and Hartwig, two leading EU firms, are going to build warehouses in a rural neighborhood. Naturally the gangster and his boss plan to buy up

the land and re-sell it at a markup, but Karol surreptitiously beats them to the punch. In one noteworthy scene, Karol is furiously lobbying an emaciated, elderly peasant (played superbly by Jerzy Nowak) to sign off on the sale, using a wad of hard currency as bait:

Farmer: *reluctant*: "It must be a good piece of land."

Karol: *waves his hands up in despair*: "Move in with your son!"

Farmer: "I wanted to."

Karol: "Then do it! Buy a car, a TV."

Farmer: "What for? I never watch it. Always the same crap." *Karol ostentatiously slaps the wad of dollar bills in his hands; farmer eyes the bills with fascination.* "Or else... I could bury the money, put it in a little jar."

Karol: "Sure!"

Farmer: "That would be nice."

Karol: "1,000 dollars down. 4,000 more when we close the deal." *Farmer takes pen, ponders for a moment, finally signs. Karol sighs with relief, and prepares to leave.*

Karol: "I have to go."

Farmer: "What?"

Karol: "It's the last train."

Farmer: *genuinely worried*: "You're wandering around at night? You'll get mugged. They'll steal your briefcase. Sleep here, there's a bed upstairs." *Solemnly*: "It's your bed now."

Few other directors could so sensitively record what was irrevocably lost in Eastern Europe's posthaste rush towards the Euromarket, namely that patient solidarity of place so ably described by Raymond Williams, while simultaneously holding fast to the utopia of free and fair exchange: the only ones who stand to lose money from the deal, after all, will be the scheming gangsters and the EU firms intent on exploiting the East for cheap labor. Karol ends up staying the night, and the next morning, while the farmer marks off the exact dimensions of his property, there is a shot of Karol slicking back his hair using a pane of glass as a mirror (the glass is part of a religious icon of the Virgin Mary and infant Jesus). This not just an inventive citation of the comb to mark Karol's transformation into a wheeling, dealing entrepreneur, it is also an astonishingly acute identification of Eastern Europe's geopolitical position, midway between the EU's high-tech service-economy and Russia's energy and raw materials economy: literally, as the transacting window between the two.

This moment, the speculative turn of the global semi-periphery, suggests nothing so much as the feverish real estate and stock market speculations of Hong Kong, and it is striking that Kieslowski should choose this moment to once again cite the Woo

blockbuster: still searching for funds, Karol finally catches up with Mikolaj, who reminds him that the grisly offer he made in Paris still stands. This time around, Karol agrees to take the job, a moment highlighted by another suggestive close-up of the 2-franc coin, this time spinning wildly on a table-top to land slogan-side up: hard currency is literally being set into motion, i.e. speculated upon. Later, in an obscure nook of the Warsaw subway, Karol meets his intended victim, who turns out to be none other than Mikolaj himself:

Karol: "He change his mind?"

Mikolaj: *bluntly*: "No. It's me." *Karol looks away*: "Does it make a difference?"

Karol: "No. But it's you."

Mikolaj: "How?"

Karol: *showing him the gun*: "These days you can buy anything."

Mikolaj: *slowly*: "The envelope is in my pocket. Take it afterwards. Go on." *Karol is motionless. Finally Mikolaj pulls gun against his chest.*

Karol: "Are you sure?" *Mikolaj nods silently, closes his eyes. Firing of gun reverberates in our ears. Slow-motion shot of Mikolaj falling, gently, into Karol's arms; film accelerates to its normal speed. Mikolaj slowly opens his eyes, still not quite believing he's still alive.*

Karol: *near tears, opening gun-chamber and showing bullets*: "That was a blank. The next one is real. Are you sure? Are you sure?"

Mikolaj: *ashen*: "Not anymore."

Karol: *sinks down in relief*: "Tell me why." *Silence.* "Mikolaj, we all know pain."

Mikolaj: "Yes, but I wanted less of it." *Takes out envelope*: "The deal stands." *Whacks him playfully with envelope.* "Take it. You've earned it."

Karol: "I did earn it. But consider it a loan."

This wondrous evocation of the marketplace of credit neither censors the violence of the market competition (here, the physical annihilation of bodies) nor represses the genuinely utopian moment inherent in even the most debased speculation, namely the aesthetics of play (i.e. the moment when the two slide joyously over an icy pond, laughing and shouting), but asks us to grasp both moments simultaneously in the context of that strange new thing, the luminous winter skies of downtown Warsaw. Instead of the dreary plaster monotones we saw earlier, this sky seems to subtly radiate every color in the rainbow, glowing like spring sunshine.

These two motifs – fragile bodies of speculation, and compensatory, luminous spaces of play – will reappear again and again throughout the rest of the film, ranging from the moment where the gangsters find out what Karol is up to and threaten to kill him (they back off once he informs them he has an airtight will, which leaves his

property to the Church; they have no choice but to buy the land at his terms) to a later scene where Karol and Mikolaj, now business partners, rent a business office in downtown Warsaw with a gorgeous view of the city center (the city is shrouded in a glowing white mist). To commemorate the moment, Karol even plays the same folk-tune he once played in the Parisian subway on his comb, bringing a smile to Mikolaj's face. Both themes converge in his carefully-devised scheme to entrap Dominique, by faking his death and writing a will which leaves her his not inconsiderable fortune, thus ensuring she will come to Poland for the funeral. Since they need a physical body to fool the authorities, they resort to a black market "Russian import", i.e. an anonymous Russian victim of a railway accident whose head was crushed, making identification impossible. This is a striking reference to the economic food chain of Eurocapitalism, i.e. the exchange of Russian raw materials for Eastern European semi-processed goods for EU high-tech services; significantly, Karol tosses the 2-franc coin into the coffin along with the body, i.e. "banks" the global speculation, which now symbolically links the EU to the Europeriphery.

Last but not least, Kieslowski ritually acknowledges his debt to the Hong Kong films, by mentioning a plane ticket to Hong Kong which Karol never uses; instead, he spies on Dominique at the funeral with a pair of opera glasses (a significant motif from D6) and then nearly gives her a heart attack by showing up in her hotel bed. This time around, he speaks reasonably fluent French, and knows just what to say and what to do to satisfy her, as they finally consummate their non-marriage. It is here, where one would expect the credits to roll, that Kieslowski provides one last wrinkle in the story: Karol takes off the next morning and allows the police to arrest her under suspicion of foul play in her husband's death. In shock, she has a flashback back to their wedding, begins to realize what happened and wisely chooses to keep quiet and play along with the charade. Two final references clinch the narrative link between D10 and White. First, the arresting officer is played by Cezary Harasimowicz, who also played the strangely sympathetic detective in D10. Second, Karol's brother tells him that the lawyer said, there's light at the end of the tunnel (a reference to the lyric at the end of D10, "you are the only light in your tunnel"). This suggests that the concluding scene, where Karol and Dominique view each other through the bars of her holding-cell (he has his opera glasses, and she

pantomimes the idea of the two of them flying off together for a honeymoon through the window) is more than just the symbolic reconciliation of the lover with the beloved. Rather, each has finally become the other's juridical equal, under the ambiguous gaze of state authorities who are no longer the jailors of their subject populations, but not yet the wards of a benevolent welfare state, either.

Blue

Freedom isn't always a word for nothing left to lose; sometimes it can signify worlds yet to win. Blue opens, literally and figuratively, behind the wheel of a luxury car, its cold blue technological surfaces (relayed by a tire spinning in our field of vision, and a hand waving a blue foil package like a flag from a partly-opened window) framing the interior shot of a little girl, yawning sleepily in the back seat. Kieslowski was a great fan of Andrei Tarkovsky, and there is a sense in which this scene quotes the superhighway intermezzo in Solaris, i.e. the close-up of the scientist's young son in the back seat of the car. But where Tarkovsky's sci-fi classic complemented actual footage of an early 1970s Japanese highway with a jarring sound-track, thereby transforming the mundane American commute into the phantasmagoria of the Soviet space epic, no such transparently neo-national registers are available here (not even the marque of the car – an Alfa-Romeo – is clearly visible). Instead, our attention wanders from the car's computerized hum and dull metal surfaces to the luminous, well-nigh psychedelic streamers of light racing across the rain-swept windshield (the reflections of traffic lights, cars and shop-signs). Kieslowski makes another subtle reference to the mist-shrouded depths of the Solaris ocean, when we see a young teenager by the side of the road playing in a thick dawn mist with a children's toy, trying to land a wooden ball attached to a string on top of a stick (arguably, the suggestive rewriting of the teardrop pendant of D6). When he finally succeeds, a car crash alerts us to the catastrophe which sets the plot in motion.

Probably the single most memorable shot of Blue is the subsequent close-up of Julie's eye, magnified to the point that we can see the tiny image of a nurse reflected in her pupil. The latter tells Julie (played by Juliet Binoche, who delivers the performance of

a lifetime) she is the sole survivor of the crash, and that her young daughter, Anna, and her husband at the wheel, Patrice, were killed instantly. This extraordinary close-up of an eye which stubbornly refuses to break into tears has its objective counterpart in the hospital window which Julie smashes in a tragicomic suicide attempt, trying to get at a stash of sleeping pills. Not only does the nurse catch her, but Julie discovers, to her chagrin, that her neck is so swollen from the accident that she couldn't have swallowed anything, anyway. Knowing of her loss, the nurse forgives her, and somewhat later, Olivier, one of her husband's co-workers, arrives with a portable color Philips LCD-TV, enabling her to watch the funeral of her husband and daughter. Two small details warn us that absolutely none of this is accidental: first, the nurse's medical station has a computer, plus the classic Kieslowski motif of two semi-spherical lamps, suggesting a place of image-production. Second, the funeral broadcast tells us Patrice was writing a work for the European Commission called "Song for the Unification of Europe". We hear the first bars of this latter in one of Julie's meditative moments, when an orchestral wave of sound overwhelms her and the screen fades to black. When she gradually returns to consciousness, her surroundings are soaked in liquid blue light (the phantasmic space of multinational image-consumption).

If Blue seems in some ways the most densely self-referential and image-conscious episode of the Trois Couleurs, this is due at least in part to the complexities of its production. Whereas White and Red were written exclusively by Kieslowski and Piesiewicz, the script for Blue had the additional input of Agnieszka Holland, Edward Zebrowski, and cinematographer Slavomir Idziak. The fact that these extra cooks enriched rather than spoiled the broth is testament to Kieslowski's rigorous sense of formal symmetry, never more apparent than in the visual tropes decorating the chalet. The objective motifs of the luminous glass or plastic beads of the children's mobile in the Blue Room, the blue light which plays on Julie's face when she briefly sheds tears at one point, and the mysterious blue folder Olivier hurriedly spirits away (containing musical scores and a suspicious photograph of an unknown woman) all have their subjective counterpart in the close shot of Julie silhouetted in front of a fire, unwrapping a candy in a blue wrapper similar to the one we saw tossed out a window at the very beginning of Blue. At first she nibbles at the candy, then starts to bite down harder and harder, and

finally devours it wholesale. What gives the scene immense power is the fact that she never shows the grief, rage and guilt which is the burden of survivorhood directly, but channels such into the somatic register of *taste* (later variations of this will include the ice cream Julie orders at a café, a close shot of a lump of sugar dissolving in coffee, etc.). This is, in fact, the moment of a powerful micropolitical revolution, which cancels out a whole set of virulently patriarchal gender roles. This is most evident when she calls Olivier on a sudden impulse, abruptly asks him if he loves her when she knows full well he has secretly adored her for years, and seduces him in what we assume is a fit of terrible loneliness:

Olivier arrives, soaked in the rain. She is waiting on the mattress.

Julie: "Take off your clothes." He starts unbuttoning his shirt. "The rest, too." *She undresses. Just before they kiss: "They took everything. Only the mattress is left." They kiss. Scene shifts to the next morning. He awakens on mattress.*

Julie: *fully-dressed*: "I appreciate what you did for me. But you see, I'm like any other woman. I sweat, I cough. I have cavities. You won't miss me. You understand that now. Shut the door when you leave." *She leaves. He hurriedly pulls on a pair of pants and rushes to the window, calling for her, but she ignores him. Later, there is an excruciating shot of her trailing her knuckles across a bare stone wall, until they bleed; she holds up her knuckles to her mouth.*

This is more than just the understandable attempt to run from her past, echoed by her decision to sell the chalet and to destroy whatever musical scores she can get her hands on. It is also the first step towards reclaiming her identity. In a subsequent scene, she will reassume her maiden name, Julie Vignon, and move to an anonymous apartment in Paris. Our first glimpse of her new home reveals a giant circular mirror and slatted wooden partitions dividing the living room from the bathroom, primordial symbols of a televisual subjectivity and the objective frames which house such. Symbolically, the first possession she installs is the mobile, its blue crystals trailing down in great streamers like frozen tears.

This suggests that the real theme of Blue is not so much grieving for the past, but the much more complicated task of mourning for the future. Our first hint of this is the eerie, haunting melody she hears from a mendicant flute-player sitting in the street across from her favorite café, a clear reference to the Decalogue's sparkling sound-track. Looking down, Julie suddenly becomes aware of the play of sunlight across her coffee cup. This anticipates a later moment, namely the familiar quotation of the old woman,

bent double with age, trying valiantly to deposit a bottle in the recycling bin. Though we hear the same high, thin flute music, Julie does not see her; instead, her eyes are closed, her face lit by radiant spring sunshine. Both themes – the video gaze which cannot yet see itself, and the musical moment which cannot yet develop through time – will recur in the swimming pool scenes. Here, the contrast between the marine-blue lights suffusing Julie’s features and the slow fades marking Preisner’s magisterial orchestration subtly shifts our attention away from Julie’s swimsuit-clad body, and towards the much more interesting surface of the water itself, never more than centimeters away from the camera, which we begin to watch anxiously for signs of Julie’s literal and figurative resurfacing. The sheer superabundance of water-related images in Blue suggests, indeed, that the pool is very much the symbolic incarnation of the single European marketplace, whose veneer of streamlined athleticism is the flip side of a carnivorous sink-or-swim ethos. This has its ritual echo in the subplot of the baby mice Julie discovers in her closet (unable to kill them herself, she borrows her landlord’s cat to eat them up). Much later, at the side of the pool, she confesses what she has done to Lucille, her accidental friend, who compassionately hugs her, and sets off to clean up the closet herself. The scene concludes with a sudden, noisy flood of little children in the background, outfitted in bright orange water-wings, who splash joyfully into the pool behind Julie, an explicitly utopian reference to Brecht’s those-born-afterwards, a.k.a. the children of the euro.

Probably the greatest single subjective expression of the energies unleashed by this marketplace is the moment when Olivier finally tracks down Julie at her café. We see a striking close-up of Julie’s reflection in the bowl of a spoon, swinging gently inside of a beer bottle on her table, the canny reappropriation of the metallic surface of Karol’s allegorical 2-franc coin:

Olivier: “I searched everywhere.”

Julie: *unnerved*: “And?”

Olivier: “I found you.”

Julie: “Noone knows where I live. Noone.”

Olivier: “It took a few months. Then I got lucky. My cleaning lady’s daughter saw you in the area. I’ve come here ever since.”

Julie: *suspicious*: “You’re spying on me?”

Olivier: “No, I miss you.” *She sighs, looks away.* “You ran away?” *She shakes her head no.* “From me?” *Shakes her head no again, then stares out the window; the flutist is there, his*

instrument has just been returned to him by a wealthy-looking woman in a chauffeured car. He starts to play. They both turn to listen.

Julie: "Do you hear what he's playing?"

Olivier: "It sounds like..."

Julie: "Yes."

Olivier: *finally understands*: "I've seen you. Maybe that will do for now. I'll try."

The Eurocurrency accedes to the mediatic Euro-speculation. The price paid for this advance is, of course, the expropriation of the labor of media-workers, whose bodies, images and off-screen lives all become grist for the culture-industrial mill. Kieslowski's most sustained and cutting critique of the commercial mass media is undoubtedly the strip club sequence with Lucille, a free-spirited woman who works in the local sex industry. Lucille befriended Julie after the latter refused to sign a tenants' petition authorizing her expulsion from the apartment complex ("But she's a slut!" says one of the tenants; "That's not my problem," counters Julie drily, proving that Adorno's notion of radical non-participation is sometimes the most effective form of solidarity of all). Lucille will call Julie late one night from the strip club where Lucille works, obviously distraught and in need of a shoulder to cry on.

Ironically, this is the one moment where we see the stereotypical glowing shot of Paris by night, its lights sparkling in the distance, a glorious vision which soon reveals itself to be the cruelest of deceptions once we reach the interior of the strip club. On Lucille's right, through a barred grille, a giant screen TV plays porno films, while the background behind her is soaked in ugly reds and violent purples; meanwhile one of the male strippers asks her to get him ready, i.e. erect. Unthinkingly she mechanically begins to massage his jockstrap while she tells Julie her story:

Lucille: "After I changed, I came here for a moment. I looked around the audience for no reason. In the middle, in the first row, I saw my father." *The male stripper has compassion for her, and in a moment of tenderness touches her face with a single finger and leaves.* "He seemed tired. He was nodding off. He kept staring at the girl's ass." *Slow pan from her to Julie; we see a revolving floorshow of two naked women below, the gleam of multiple TV monitors in the bar, and a large TV set flickering far off in a separate lounge, above the floorshow.* "The shithead who let you in wouldn't make him leave. If you pay, you can peep. Get it?" *Julie nods. Reverse pan back to Lucille.* "I didn't know who I could count on. I was desperate. I didn't know who to talk to. So I called you."

Julie: "And your father?"

Lucille: "Ten minutes ago he looked at his watch and left. I realized the last train to Montpellier is at 11:45." *For the first time, we see Lucille on the left and Julie to the right simultaneously, in the same field of vision; the revolving floor show and the giant screen TV continue as before.*

Julie: "Lucille, why do you do this?"

Lucille: "Because I like to. I think everyone likes to." *Smiles.* "Julie, you saved my life."

Julie: "I didn't do a thing."

Lucille: "I asked you to come and you came. Same thing."

The really shocking insight here, of course, is that in late capitalism we are *all* Lucille. Put another way, the only real obscenity on display at the strip club are the television sets which relay entire worlds of commodities and commodified bodies to the viewer. Like any other capitalist institution, the media business offers the phantasm of never-ending vistas of use-value while delivering only shoddy, damaged parodies of such; it has no real concern for what it produces or how its wares are consumed, so long as it turns a profit; and it tosses its hired help into the trash when they are no longer capable of producing surplus-value. The year 2000 website of the Disney corporation sums it up perfectly: Disney's mission as a firm is to "maximize shareholder value" – i.e. to enrich a tiny, wealthy elite, as opposed to unimportant details such as entertaining its customers, creating works of art of substance and quality, or providing decent conditions for its workers (true to its word, Disney awarded its CEO, Michael Eisner, half a billion dollars of stock options at the height of the Wall Street bubble).⁵

Kieslowski adamantly insists, however, that we ought not to confuse the media biz with the media culture per se. Resisting the predations of the former means holding fast to the utopian promise of the latter, a moment neatly symbolized when Lucille suddenly recognizes Julie on the giant TV we saw in the lounge. Julie turns and watches a reporter interviewing Olivier, who says that the European Council asked him to finish the score begun by her husband (the piece was supposed to be played just once in twelve European cities). The TV then shows the photos of the unknown woman in the mysterious blue folder Olivier spirited away earlier, but now Julie is at last in a position to "read" this video surface: Patrice was having an affair.

Kieslowski's acute sense of narrative symmetry pays enormous dividends here, by mobilizing the narrative theme of retroactivity at a point where we least expect it. Clearly, one of the reasons for Julie's anguish was that, deep down, she suspected the affair all along, and blamed herself for her suspicions; the night she spent with Olivier

was thus her unconscious revenge on the husband who first betrayed her, and then left her forever. Most conventional melodramas would immediately script a tearful confrontation between the two women, followed by a more or less trite reconciliation, to the greater glory of Patrice's status as the Mitterand of the musical world. Instead, Kieslowski pulls the rug from underneath our feet, by deftly turning the multinational content of the doppelganger against its own neo-national form: Sandrine, Patrice's lover, works as a jurist in exactly the same Parisian court we saw in White!

Not only do we catch cameo glimpses of Karol Karol and Dominique in the background, but Julie accidentally stumbles into their divorce hearing (a guard ushers her out, a scene reprised from White). Most of all, Julie learns that Sandrine is pregnant with a child Patrice never knew about. Meanwhile the theme of the doppelganger returns in the form of the medallion which Sandrine wears about her neck, an exact replica of the one Julie gave away earlier in the story to the young teenage boy who witnessed the accident ("He loved you," says Julie to Sandrine, more as a statement of fact than as a question; "He loved me," repeats the latter sadly). This gift-giving is crucial: it signifies that Julie is slowly becoming her *own* doppelganger, i.e. has moved away from simply taking care of herself, and can now take care of others. Interestingly, whereas the medallion is associated with memory, or the gift of time, Julie's later gift is associated with space: she not only forgives Sandrine, but makes the chalet available to her as a place to raise the child.

This is extremely significant, because the theme of a utopian or redemptive reproductivity has been surreptitiously linked over and over again to quite another set of visual registers, namely the annotated script of the musical score. We are given a number of unmistakable hints that Julie was more than just Patrice's creative muse: she quickly takes charge of the composition, adds in the crucial flute melody, and inserts the concluding theme from the mythical Van den Budenmayer ("You know how much he [Patrice] loved him," says Julie, in a delightful tongue-in-cheek moment). Olivier's insistence that she take the credit for writing the piece is thus more than just simple honesty: it is the culmination of the entire narrative, the moment when multinational form yields a genuinely multinational content. This is confirmed by the assistant who confesses to Julie that she secretly copied the scores the latter thought she had destroyed

and sent them to Strasbourg, the picturesque French city on the Rhine which just happens to be the headquarters of the European Parliament. If Sandrine is therefore something like the symbolic locus of the *acquis communautaire* (body of EC law) of Maastricht-era Europe, rife with the embryonic multinationalisms of the future, then Julie evidently incarnates the postnational media superstars of the EU – e.g. Spain’s Almodovar, Belgium’s Caro and Jeunet, Germany’s Tykwer, the Czech Republic’s Svankmajer, and of course Poland’s Kieslowski (this would also explain the narrative significance of Julie’s mother, who is afflicted with Alzheimer’s and who watches endless amounts of television, a fairly transparent allegory of the slow decline of a certain neo-national media culture).

The finale of Blue commemorates the birth of this new European subject in the form of a six-minute rolling pan devoid of dialogue, accompanied by Preisner’s orchestral theme music and interspersed by lengthy moments of darkness. As Julie rolls up the completed score, the chorale fills the sound-track, while the blue crystals of the mobile begin to blur into a shapeless blue mass in the foreground. Later, we see a curious shot of her making love with Olivier, her face pressed against a window-pane, their bodies lit as if they were underwater. The camera cuts to the teenager who still has Julie’s medallion waking up, his ringing alarm clock meshing smoothly with the sound-track; his room is decorated what seem to be giant film posters. The next scene shows various reflections of Julie’s mother in glass surfaces, before we see a direct shot of her gently closing her eyes; a nurse suddenly rushes up in the hallway behind her, indicating that she has just passed away. These three references to the stereotypical romance movie, the cinematic poster, and the television serial, respectively, are then set into motion towards their postmodern analogues. First, the romance movie gives way to a pan of Lucille staring childlike into space, her face half in darkness, the floor-show still in full operation behind her: the space of video production. Second, the poster gives way to an ultrasound scan of Sandrine’s child – the space of some future video corporeality, or what amounts to the Information Age update of the Starchild in Kubrick’s 2001. Last but not least, the serial gives way to an ultra-close shot of Olivier’s eye, with the shadowy image of Julie’s naked form floating in his pupil: the space of video consumption.

The very last shot, appropriately enough, rewrites the concluding shot of White, discarding the stage prop of the opera glasses in favor of the window-pane in front of Julie's face. Tears of release, tears of joy, and tears of sorrow streak her face, and when the window-pane in front of her gradually begins to brighten, signaling the approach of dawn, we see Julie's sorrow give way to something like the faintest hint of a smile: the technological space of the car at the very beginning of Blue has at last acceded to the dawning possibility of a genuinely European home.

Red

To paraphrase Clint Eastwood, every life-form has to know its limitations. In Red, the life-form in question is that interesting new species, *Homo Europaicus*, and its habitat is the globe-spanning demesne of the EU media culture. What marks Red as the revolutionary summit of the Trois Couleurs, the work which transforms the global speculations of White and the multinational freedoms of Blue into something altogether new, is not simply its dazzling array of video techniques, the subtlety of its framing techniques, or its incomparable color-palette. Rather, it is also its rigorous formal symmetry, which never fails to endow this objective visual splendor with its corresponding subjective depth. To use an informatic metaphor, if White is Eastern Europe's dialup connection to the EU, and if Blue is the unauthorized hack through this connection into the memory banks of the Eurostate, then Red is something like the freeware operating system which makes all of these things possible. This isn't to say, of course, that Kieslowski is to Eurovideo precisely what Finnish programmer Linus Torvalds is to Linux, the freeware PC operating system, but simply to note that the deepest impulses of the freeware movement – emergent forms of multinational solidarity among code-producers and consumers, and the creation of what amounts to a global electronic commons – harmonize with Red's quest for a new type of fraternity, capable of encompassing all of Europe.

One of Kieslowski's crucial moves here is to replace the urban backdrops of Warsaw and Paris with the idyllic neighborhoods and landscapes of Geneva. In retrospect, one would be hard-pressed to find a better location for a meditation on the

process of European unification than multilingual, multicultural Switzerland, whose studied neutrality vis-à-vis the institutions of the European Union is part and parcel of its economic role as the financial core of Eurocapitalism. The geopolitical space of postmodern Switzerland will have its counterpart in the arena of set design, as the apartments, subways and cafes of White and Blue accede to a series of mediatic spaces (among other things, the billboard; the fashion-show catwalk; the theater; the record store; and, most interesting of all, Judge Kern's house – an interior which is really an exterior). All this is rehearsed by Red's breath-taking opening sequence, which follows the wiring of a telephone cord from someone's desk (prominently decorated with Valentine's photo) and plunges into the local trunkline, rocketing through dizzying bundles of complex wiring underneath the English channel, and dissolving into an oceanic stream of criss-crossing conversations, slowly rising in pitch, until the shot resolves into the red beep of a busy signal. This intriguing juxtaposition of the existential photograph, the split-screen psychedelic sequence of 2001, and the telecommunicatory tropes of Delicatessen is more than just the portrait of a Europe which has its wires literally and figuratively crossed. As we learn somewhat later, the caller is Valentine's obnoxious (and soon-to-be-dumped) boyfriend, Michel, suggesting that Kieslowski is bracketing the past and future antipodes of the Eurostate: the semi-periphery of Great Britain, its once-mighty industrial base decimated by foreign competition and domestic Thatcherism, and the global metropole of Switzerland, banking metropolis for the entire planet.⁶

Valentine is not quite, however, the sentimental heart of Euroconsumerism her name would appear to suggest. Played to sublime perfection by Irène Jacob, she is crucially linked to her curious shadow or reflexive partner, Auguste, a young law student studying for his exams. In scene after scene, Auguste and Valentine will pass by, overlook or otherwise just miss each other, sometimes by fractions of a second, each somehow complementing and completing the other in an intricate interplay of multinational form and content. The last traces of the trope of the doppelganger disappear at this point, replaced by an art of visual symmetry or framing formally emancipated from its cinematic roots, which proceeds to develop two new registers: the multinational space of the EU's mass media, and the juridical forms and micropolitical identities

associated with such. Our first hint of this is an intriguing shot of her resting for a moment after a long, tiring day as a fashion model; she is framed by her clenched fists against her temples, the reflections of the hotel and car headlights bouncing off the window. When she finally opens her hands, Kieslowski cuts to a medium-distance shot of her in her car, framed by the revolving door of the hotel.

The mediatic references continue to pile up fast and furious as she unknowingly roars past Auguste in the street and, distracted by the static on her car radio at the same moment he is distracted by his fallen textbooks, accidentally runs over the dog of a retired judge, Joseph Kern. Strangely enough, the judge (played by Jean-Louis Trintignant, in a performance so good it defies description) does not seem to care about his dog, Rita, devoting himself solely to a mysterious electronics apparatus studded with blinking lights (“If I ran over your daughter, would you be so indifferent?” she asks, shocked; he replies, “I have no daughter, Mademoiselle. Go away.”) Yet she manages to pique his curiosity; he watches her depart from the window, the first of a whole series of shots where he is framed by windows. This, of course, is just the first of a series of memorable run-ins between the two, which will generate the most prodigious narrative energies out of deceptively simple materials.

The same windowing motif is visible at the veterinarian’s office, where a bright red door nicely counterpoints the see-through glass operating room (the canny rewriting of the hospital station and Sandrine’s pregnancy in Blue). As it turns out, Rita is pregnant, and so Valentine takes her home to recover, unwilling to turn her over to the unsympathetic judge. During her convalescence, two new mediatic spaces make their first appearance. First, a lurid newspaper story showing Valentine’s brother, Marc, shooting up in a heroin den; and second, the lead shot of Valentine for an advertising campaign, a curious profile shot where she poses with an unhappy or distressed expression against a red background. Mass journalism and the billboard poster will both return at several crucial moments in the future, and it is no accident that Kieslowski should choose this moment to begin his mediatic revolution. Our first hint of this is the moment that Valentine takes Rita’s leash off, naively assuming she is well-trained enough that she won’t run away. Rita takes off immediately, darting into a local church (a subtle quotation of the bridal sequence in White) before vanishing. Distraught, Valentine rushes

off to Kern's house to tell him the bad news, only to discover to her relief that Rita found her way back home by herself. In the subsequent conversation with Kern, all the mediatic categories we saw earlier begin to fall into place:

Valentine: "What about Rita?"

Kern: "She's a very intelligent dog. Really. Take her."

Valentine: "You don't want her?"

Kern: "I want nothing."

Valentine: "Then stop breathing."

Kern: *quite seriously*: "A good idea."

Valentine: *now curious, starts to follow him in, hesitates, finally knocks on the window; no response, finally says*: "You don't breathe anymore?" *Goes inside, hears voices; some sort of lovers' dialogue between two men. It's coming from the electronic equipment. Kern appears suddenly behind her. She turns down the volume in disgust.* "What are you doing?"

Kern: "I'm spying."

Valentine: "What?"

Kern: "I'm listening to my neighbors' phone calls. You cut it off just as it was getting interesting." *Sits down.* "You don't find it entertaining?"

Valentine: "It's disgusting."

Kern: "Yes. And what's more, it's illegal. Your 30 francs." *She takes the money from the table; the bills cover the image on a record-cover we later learn is Van den Budenmayer, and turns to leave.* "One minute, Mademoiselle. You're convinced that you're right, eh?"

Valentine: "Yes."

Kern: "Then why don't you do something?" *He points with a remote control behind his back, turning the volume back on. Valentine just looks at him, pityingly.*

Curiously, voyeurism is not really the central issue here. In fact, Kern immediately challenges her to tell the neighbor that he is being spied upon, going so far as to give her directions to get there. When Valentine arrives at the man's house and is ushered in by his unsuspecting wife, however, she sees their young daughter listening in gleefully on the telephone to her father's lascivious conversation, obviously relishing every second, and cannot bring herself to interfere any further. This is a significant reference to the media-savvy Nintendo kids, i.e. the information generation who are no longer shocked by anything, and who regard the xenophobic nationalisms, patriarchal family structures and gender roles of Cold War Europe as the ludicrous anachronisms they indeed are. Kieslowski subtly seals the reference, by paying homage to McGoochan's The Prisoner in the form of Kern's house number (six) and the mediatic puns on remote controls and studio production generally (i.e. Valentine and Kern are reprising the battles between No. 6 and No. 2). There are also two Central European references worth mentioning here:

first, “Kern” literally means “kernel” or “core” in German, the irony being that Kern feels completely burnt out and emptied after his years on the bench, i.e. is an absent core. Second, the reference to spying refers not simply to the grim legacy of the Eastern European secret police, but also to their equally obnoxious Western European counterparts, who routinely conduct espionage and wire-tapping operations on their own citizens (the disparaging Swiss term for this latter is “der Schnueffelstaat”, i.e. the sniffing or bloodhound state).

When Valentine finally returns to Kern’s house, Kieslowski will at last fuse the materials of the Central European state apparatus and the Western European espionage thriller into something new: what might be termed the Nintendo frame, consisting of multiple, overlapping windows of information complemented by a central player-icon. This is relayed by a stupendous horizontal tracking shot of Kern walking past an intricate collocation of multiple door frames, mirrors, and glass surfaces, forming at least six or seven discontinuous, overlapping rectangular shapes. The camera subsequently reverses the direction of the pan, allowing us to see these shapes all over again, resulting in twelve full seconds of supercondensed visual space, which hints at its corresponding content only somewhat later:

Kern: “Let me tell you. It doesn’t matter whether I spy or not, or whether you tell them or not. But sooner or later, he’ll jump out of a window, or she’ll find out about everything. Someone will tell their daughter and it will be living hell. But what can we do about it? Why are you so quiet? Does this remind you of something?”

Valentine: “Yes.”

Kern: “What? Say it.”

Valentine: “A boy I know.”

Kern: “A boy you know who... found out his mother was a whore?”

Valentine: “Who learned... he’s not his father’s son. He was fifteen.” *Kern looks away.* “That man’s daughter... she knows too.”

Kern: “Stay a minute.”

Valentine: “Why?”

Kern: “There is a beautiful light.” *The weather news goes on the air; room brightens, floor shines gloriously with reflected sunlight.* “I know the weather all over Europe.”

This is another reference to the allegorical weather-reports and giant balloons of The Prisoner, as the space of the production studio is conjoined to a utopian moment of multinational temporality. At the same time, the video frame begins to radiate with a

properly micropolitical set of energies: when we overhear a conversation between Auguste and his girlfriend, Kern tells Valentine that the young man hasn't met the right woman yet (when she asks how he knows this, he replies, he can see them from his window). Later, he points through a window at a neighbor of his, talking on a radio set made in Japan which uses a special frequency his equipment can't pick up. The neighbor is also one of the biggest heroin dealers in Geneva, and most likely one of her addicted brother's suppliers. Like some telecom Mephistopheles, Kern calls the neighbor up and hands her the phone; unthinkingly she says to the dealer, "You deserve to die" and hangs up, whereupon they watch the dealer scurry back inside, fearful for his life. Over and over again, Kern tries to show her the worst in human beings, and just as tenaciously, she insists on their best. When at last he zeroes in for the kill, getting her to confess that the boy she mentioned previously was her brother, she ripostes devastatingly that *he* doesn't even know that Rita happens to be pregnant. The shaft hits home: for the first time, we see his face tremble.

As if to signal Kern's impending change of heart, the glorious sunset over Lake Lemman framing Valentine as she drives away is reflected in her rearview mirror, hinting at the arrival of an internal subjectivity which matches the external splendor of the scene. Kieslowski provides us with two more clues: first, the café near Valentine's apartment is named Chez Joseph (neatly echoing Kern's first name). Secondly, Valentine and Auguste happen to go to the same bowling alley one night, and there is a terrific vertical shot of Valentine's bright red bowling ball rolling down the aisle, past red-lined gutters and a red-striped far wall; this is followed by a rapid horizontal pan to the left, revealing an abandoned pack of Marlboros and a shattered beer glass at another table, a subtle hint that Auguste and his girlfriend are not getting along. Both clues are retrospective, i.e. not only do we not realize their true meaning until much later, but the visual symbols in question – red lighting and smashed glass – will continue acquire fresh layers of symbolic meaning until the very end of the narrative.

At this point, Kieslowski introduces an unexpectedly Eastern European motif to the storyline: this is the theme song of the Decalogue, which Kern plays on his stereo before he decides to write his self-incriminating confession to the authorities. This soundtrack returns in a later scene, where Auguste and his girlfriend, temporarily reconciled,

listen to Van den Budenmayer from the listening booth of a music store; after they leave, the camera pans onto Valentine, who is listening to the same album at another booth. It is at this point that she sees the newspaper story about Kern being convicted of spying on his neighbors. Worried he will think she informed on him, she immediately pays him a visit, whereupon he reassures her that he decided to turn himself in. His flashback of the moment is highlighted by a wondrous horizontal pan, a reverse tracking shot which wheels back to another room, showing two giant glass vats lying shattered on a worktable. While Rita contentedly nurses her newborn litter, he suddenly begins to reminisce about his life as a judge, recalling that he tried a sailor some 35 years ago and acquitted him. Even though he did his own investigation and discovered the defendant was guilty, the sailor settled down and lived a peaceful, productive, law-abiding life thereafter (“If I had to go to court, are there still judges like you?” she asks; “You won’t go to court. Justice doesn’t deal with the innocent,” he replies). Suddenly a stone crashes through the window, a parting shot from one of his outraged neighbors. It is the sixth one today, he observes stoically, as she sweeps up the shards:

Valentine: “You’re not afraid?”

Kern: *thoughtful*: “I wonder what I’d do in their place. The same thing.”

Valentine: “You’d throw stones?”

Kern: “In their place? Of course. And that goes for everyone I judged.” *She slowly approaches him*. “Given their lives, I would steal, I’d kill, I’d lie. Of course I would. All that because I wasn’t in their shoes, but mine.”

Valentine: “Is there someone you love?”

Kern: *framed by window*: “No.”

Valentine: “Have you ever loved?”

Kern: “Yesterday I dreamt... I dreamt of you. You were 40 or 50 years old, and you were happy.”

Valentine: “Do your dreams come true?”

Kern: “It’s been years since I dreamt of something wonderful.”

Here at last the strands of the various subplots begin to converge, at the exact moment that Kern sheds the mask of a retired judge, revealing his true role as a kind of video Prospero, wielding unfathomable mediatic powers. Not only does he make the crucial suggestion that Valentine visit England by ferry instead of by plane, a moment explicitly foregrounded in terms of her destiny,⁷ but his very trial, so we are told, unwittingly triggered the inevitable break-up between August and his girlfriend. These mediatic

powers do not operate by casting spells over subjects or otherwise influencing events; rather, they signify the breaking of the baleful enchantment or spell of prehistory, which prevents subjects from recognizing their true situation and thus changing their own history.

The breaking of the spell is coded in two ways: in terms of the smashing of glass surfaces or objects, and in terms of meteorological signifiers. The first culminates in the concluding shot of Red, when Kern gently smiles at us through the open, smashed window, content at last, the Prospero who has broken his video staff and made over the magic of the Trois Couleurs into a benediction and blessing upon the children of the Euro. We catch our first glimpse of the second when August discovers his girlfriend's infidelity by climbing onto her balcony and peeking into her room; he first has to inch past an office illuminated by the radar image of a giant storm-system on a computer screen, or what amounts to a premonitory Web signifier. The thunderstorm which follows Valentine's fashion show, and the tempest which disrupts Valentine's planned meeting with Michel (a meeting which, as we gathered from their last conversation, was going to signal the end of their fast-disintegrating relationship anyway) are variations on the same theme.

It's interesting that Kieslowski takes care to shy away from the formal machinery of the culture industry at this point, by emphasizing the terrible emptiness at the heart of the commercial retailing of images. Valentine is never more alone than in the exquisitely-photographed scenes when she walks down the catwalk at the fashion show, the center of attention in a packed theater, and never more fraternal than when she finally meets Kern in the space of the empty theater:

Valentine: "I'm leaving tomorrow. I wanted to say goodbye."

Kern: "Goodbye."

Valentine: "I'd like you to tell me in detail the dream you had."

Kern: "You were 50 years old, and you were happy."

Valentine: "In this dream... was there someone else?"

Kern: "There was."

Valentine: "Who?"

Kern: "You woke up... and you smiled at someone next to you. I don't know who."

Valentine: "That's what will happen? In 25 or 30 years?"

Kern: "Yes."

Valentine: *trembling*: "What else do you know? Who are you?"

Kern: "A retired judge."

Valentine: "I feel something important is happening around me. And it scares me."

Kern: *reaches out and clasps her hands in his.* "Is that better?"

They leave the stage, and as Kern continues to reminisce about the past, the questioner slowly turns into the questioned:

Kern: "One day, during the intermission, the elastic holding my books broke. One of them, a big one..." *the camera pans down from a high position and falls rapidly to the floor, acting out his description:* "fell down somewhere around here. It was just before my exams. I ran down immediately. The book had opened to a certain page. I read a few sentences. It was the question they asked during the exams."

Valentine: "Getting out of the house did you good."

Kern: "I had to recharge the battery. It was dead." *Crashing sound of storm slamming windows open and shut.*

Valentine: "The storm." *Long pan past ranks of velvet armchairs, in the distance she is closing the windows; flowing white curtains fly all about her. Somewhat later, they are seated, drinking coffee from a dispenser; behind him are the lecterns for the orchestra pit, behind her are rows of shelves.*

Kern: "Terrible coffee."

Valentine: "I was wondering why you mentioned that sailor."

Kern: "Do you know why?"

Valentine: "Yes." *She crumples plastic cup in her hands.* "Because you didn't want to tell me something more important. About the woman that you loved." *He nods, suddenly looking frail.* "She betrayed you." *He nods again.* "She betrayed you, and you never understood why. And you kept on loving her."

Kern: *in a whisper:* "How do you know all this?"

Valentine: "It wasn't hard to guess."

The woman in question was a law student just like him, who ran off with someone else, just like Auguste; he ran into her lover years later, as a defendant in a trial involving corrupt building practices, and although he didn't want to take the case, he eventually took it, found the defendant guilty on the weight of the evidence, and then took early retirement. Their conversation is interrupted by Kieslowski's usual comic note, when a janitor tells them he's closing up and then chases after the maid, grumbling about the flooding the storm is causing. Before he drives off from the parking lot, he gives her a bottle of pear brandy as a gift, and she in turn asks for one of Rita's puppies, so she can raise a dog. Inspecting her bright red ferry ticket for a moment with a mischievous gleam in his eye, he rolls up the window and they press their hands briefly against each side of the car window, a touching moment of solidarity as he glides off into the night. The next

scene shows the familiar quotation of an old woman struggling to deposit her bottle in the recycling bin, only this time Valentine rushes up to help her, and what is more, now we finally understand why.

Yet the conclusion of Red has one final enigma worth pondering: this is not so much the mighty storm which breaks out as the ferry departs for England, the rain symbolically battering down Valentine's billboard poster as it is taken down in preparation for a new ad campaign, but the subsequent rescue of the passengers. Kern watches the TV coverage of the overturned ferry, the newscaster informing us that there were hundreds of victims, before reading a roll call of the meager list of survivors. As the names are recited, each is given a final close-up: Julie Vignon, Karol Karol, Dominique Vidal, Olivier Benoit, Auguste Bruner, and, last but not least, Valentine Dussaut. The final image of Valentine, soaked to the skin and wrapped in a blanket, is exactly the same as the pose she struck so long ago for the billboard. Their video-assisted escape is not just from a physical storm, but from that far more destructive thing called forgetfulness; the storm, in short, of History.

Footnotes

1. Here is the World Bank's official take on Poland's fledgling welfare state: "Contrary to expectations, the welfare state has increased rather than diminished during the economic transition in Poland. This increase is largely accounted for by the staggering growth of cash social transfers, especially pensions. These cash transfers partly reflect the costs of developing a social safety net, but primarily consist of increasingly generous pension benefits and widespread early retirement. In contrast, expenditures on social services such as education and health care have suffered during the transition. As a result, consumption by social security recipients has taken precedence over investment in human capital." Jan Rutkowski. Welfare and the Labor Market in Poland: Social Policy during Economic Transition. World Bank Technical Paper No. 417: Social Challenges of Transition Series. Washington, DC: 1998, The World Bank (x). The entire report is a fine example of how the World Bank's own data flagrantly contradicts its dogmatic neoliberal ideology. This alleged spending spree is a statistical mirage, created entirely by increased early retirement and widespread unemployment. In point of fact, education and health spending were cut because of fiscal orthodoxy, i.e. the privatization of previously free, state-run services, at the explicit behest of the World Bank and the IMF. The theory was that the free market would pick up the slack; the reality was that Polish capital preferred to invest in overseas securities rather than Polish schools and hospitals. Rutkowski himself concedes that pensions "...take most pensioners out of poverty" (Ibid. x) and that "The rapid increase in the number of pensioners was in a way a transitional phenomenon, and its impact will dissipate over time" (Ibid. 15). Poland ran relatively small budget deficits in the early 1990s and has kept itself on an even fiscal keel since then, meaning that there is no crisis. Elsewhere, Rutkowski tries to fudge the issue by claiming: "Early retirement appealed to workers for two reasons: first, early retirement became less costly to workers. Those who accepted early retirement did not lose much of their pension since the existing formula does not sufficiently penalize early retirement (especially given the large increase in the retirement rate)." (Ibid. 14). The median retirement age for Polish men is 59. Rutkowski neglects to inform us that the average life-span for Polish males is only 66. The message is clear: work 'em till they drop, and then toss 'em into the garbage.

2. For an overview of the EU's industrial policies, see the Eureka website at <<http://www3.eureka.be/Home/>> and the European Investment Bank, at <<http://www.eib.org>>. Note that EIB has rapidly become the largest single investor in Eastern Europe, funding a variety of projects in the education, public transport and environmental sectors, as well as providing seed capital and managerial know-how for a variety of small and medium-size businesses, all at superlow interest rates with generous repayment periods. Total annual funding for Eastern Europe is slated to increase from 4 billion to 8 billion euro during the 2001-2007 period. Below are the figures on EIB loans in 1999 to selected countries, expressed as a percent of total GDP and as a percent of total domestic investment (based on GDP data from the OECD's National Accounts, and investment rates from the World Bank's Year 2000 World Development Report and Eurostat). Note that the figures for the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland are comparatively low, due to the fact that these countries recovered earlier than their neighbors, and have been able to tap EU capital markets on their own.

Country	EIB Loans 1999 (€million)	Loans as % GDP	Loans as % Total Investment
Latvia	98	1.72%	8.58%
Romania	396	1.22%	8.11%
Slovenia	375	2.01%	8.04%
Bulgaria	120	1.12%	6.97%
Lithuania	84	0.91%	3.79%

Slovakia	270	1.46%	3.75%
Estonia	35	0.74%	2.63%
Czech Rep.	270	0.55%	1.82%
Hungary	170	0.38%	1.27%
Poland	347	0.24%	0.85%

3. Brussels is home to over 20,000 civil servants, 160 embassies, 2,000 non-governmental organizations, headquarters for over 2,000 multinational firms, and the site of one of the largest conference industries in the world. For further details, see: Cris Shore. Building Europe: The Cultural Politics of European Integration. NY: Routledge, 2000 (156).

4. Fredric Jameson. "Nostalgia for the Present," South Atlantic Quarterly. 88:2 (1989).

5. The full statement reads: "Disney's overriding objective is to create shareholder value by continuing to be the world's premier entertainment company from a creative, strategic, and financial standpoint." <<http://disney.go.com/investors/index.html?clk=1006726>>

6. The European Union is actually the largest single creditor to the global economy. Japanese banks play an indispensable role in the Pacific Rim region, and US banks remain well-represented in Latin America, but globally speaking, European banks far outweigh and outclass both. The Bank of International Settlements (BIS), an advisory body comprised of leading figures from the major central banks and financial firms of the world, has the following figures for consolidated international claims of the major banks on individual countries, taken from the pages of its annual report, available in PDF format at <<http://www.bis.org>>. Note that debt data is in billions of US dollars, circa year-end 1999.

Debtor Region	Total debt	Amount owed to:			
		European banks	N. American banks	Japanese banks	Other banks
Asia & Pacific	304.0	48.9%	9.0%	21.5%	20.6%
Latin America	277.1	62.0%	26.0%	4.1%	7.9%
Middle East/Africa	126.2	69.9%	11.4%	4.9%	13.8%
Europe	169.9	77.8%	6.4%	2.5%	13.3%
<i>Total</i>	<i>877.2</i>	<i>61.7%</i>	<i>14.2%</i>	<i>10.0%</i>	<i>14.2%</i>

7. The dialogue here truly sparkles:

Valentine: "In one week I'm going to England. I'm abandoning my mother and my brother. Every day he gets a little worse. I shouldn't leave."

Kern: "Leave. It's your destiny. You can't live your brother's life for him."

Valentine: "I love him. If only I could do something."

Kern: "You can. Be."

Valentine: "What do you mean?"

Kern: "That's all: be." *Roar of a plane overhead.* "Do you like flying?"

Valentine: "No."

Kern: "Then take the ferry."

Valentine: "I've never taken one."

Kern: "It's less expensive and healthier."

Valentine: "That's a good idea." *They take a sip of the pear brandy.*