

Grieving, Therapy, Cinema and Kies'lowski's *Trois Couleurs: Bleu* (France, 1993)

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This paper commences by describing the relationship between psychotherapy, the grieving process and a specific set of recurring themes in the cinemas of the Western world. That work sets the frame for an analysis of *Trois Couleurs: Bleu* in the context of Kies'lowski's ambitions for his later films.

A principal factor linking psychotherapy, grieving and *Blue* (as with many other films) is the liminal space of the imagination within which their shared concern with loss is activated. Murray Stein describes liminal space as a cultural-psychological interstitial field that predominates during periods of change in an individual's life cycle. It links the old and new fixed identities between which the person is in transit.<sup>1</sup> Such a liminal state holds the potential to nurture an imaginal environment in which redemption from grief may be found. In part this is effective because the cinema creates a powerful dialectic between what it projects mechanically (sound and image) and what is perceived (emotionally charged darkness and light). As a modern technological and imaginal space that has an extraordinary capacity to articulate the imagination, cinema creates a psychic borderline area – a field with both the means and space to entice the psyche into discovering new life. The familiar physical world dissolves, engendering sensitivity to the realm of the imagination. Spectators become immersed in the viewing, drawn further in by the archetypal images that films typically present.

Archetypal symbols of this type penetrate the emotions at a deep level and give the cinema its power to bypass the conscious state without stultifying it. This matters because the ego must be awake if it is to undergo change in its relations to the Self. Notwithstanding this caveat, immersion in the film-viewing process distracts the ego so that it disengages from its usual function as the primary filter of awareness. Spectators are freed from their usual inhibitions and take the opportunity to project disowned parts of the self onto the screen. That enables them both consciously and unconsciously to connect to their emotional lives what the screen presents them with as it reflects their own projections back at them. Cinema is thus, as we shall see, an important agent for the stimulation of inward growth and the process of individuation, having

the capacity to provide viewers with a transformative intellectual and psychic experience in which self-discovery can occur.<sup>ii</sup>

The large screen functions in this manner as a psychologically mirroring reflector of fictional images that are simultaneously present and absent. Images are present in the sense that they involve conscious experience (as opposed to the fantasy images arising from the unconscious in dreams). They are absent in the sense that everything is a recorded representation.<sup>iii</sup> Within the affect-charged psychological realm that cinema sustains, self-reflection occurs and the meaningfulness of the experience can be assigned. In the darkened auditorium, the threshold of consciousness is lowered, opening the way to an encounter behind the curtain of the phenomenal world. When the boundary between the seen and the unseen is loosened, spectators may, as we have said, be drawn into a realm populated by images that interact with and reflect aspects of the present state of their *personal* psyche. Ultimately it can facilitate growth, transformation, and a maturing of the individual's total personality.

However, film theatres are designed to foster shared experience and become, as the auditorium lights go down, a *temenos* or sacred enclosure. They create the social and cultural conditions necessary to shared remembering of forgotten or misplaced memories. Thus spectators may also be afforded *transpersonal* experiences which sometimes allow them to encounter the numinous. As a liminal space or container, the cinema functions as the centring source of images. It helps intensify the emotional experiences that films can provoke and assists their digestion. Thus as a medium of images (both visual and aural), cinema is able to bring us back to our own and the culture's psychological depths.<sup>iv</sup>

Entry into this subtle imaginal realm presupposes a willingness to explore the unknown in a way at once creative and new. And working in this realm distinguishes depth psychology from other psychologies. The work is shaped by the belief that transformation is virtually impossible unless urged by strong affect. Knowledge alone does not suffice to promote change: real understanding is acquired through the synthesis and digestion of the feelings that accompany cognition. Psychological shifts seldom occur other than when affect meets the assimilation of new insights.<sup>v</sup> Furthermore, as Marie-Louise von Franz wrote, 'this psychic growth cannot be brought about by a conscious effort of will power, but happens involuntarily and naturally...'.<sup>vi</sup>

In the cinema spectators are more open to being moved emotionally than in their daily lives. In the movie theatre they do not need to defend themselves against other unwanted emotions such as the shameful feeling of exposure that they might have to contend with when revealing themselves in a real relationship. Thus film allows viewers more freely to surrender themselves to their present feelings.<sup>vii</sup> Indeed, it seems that audiences have an appetite for the kinds of stimulus that may put them in the way of psychic change. John Beebe has observed that cinema and psychoanalysis have grown up concurrently, close siblings nurtured on a common zeitgeist, and sharing a common drive to explore and realise the psyche.<sup>viii</sup>

As Jung was radically optimistic about the healing possibilities of the self, so audiences seem to approach films, like Dorothy and her friends off to see the Wizard, with the expectation of a miracle, an extraordinary effect upon one's state of mind. Often enough this hope is disappointed, and yet there are films which induce an unexpected new consciousness in many who view them... [This] may be why film viewing and criticism have become such important activities within our culture: in addition to wanting to be entertained, the mass audience is in constant pursuit, as if on a religious quest, of the transformative film.<sup>ix</sup>

The goal of transformation is individuation, the process of psychic growth which occurs independently of the ego's will. Phyllis Kenevan has discerned three ways in which, when it happens, a person's individuation may proceed. It may occur unconsciously; or it may progress through self-motivated, conscious reflection; alternatively guidance from a trained analyst may lead the growth of self-awareness.<sup>x</sup> For our part, we endorse Beebe's opinion that another way should be identified since film has the capability to function as an active mirroring guide with potential therapeutic value for spectators. That appears to be the case whether or not those spectators who experience one or a number of films as such a stimulus consciously realise the therapeutic effect they have had.

For their part, depth psychotherapists recognise the unavoidable condition of human suffering as serving potentially the higher principle of transformation. Suffering which has been metabolised and integrated holds the possibility of consciously expediting a person's individuation if he or she is psychologically and spiritually prepared. The process of grieving,

no less than other forms of anguish, can spur individuation. Greg Mogenson says, ‘the more precisely we imagine our losses, the more psychological we become’.<sup>xi</sup>

From the imaginal point of view, the end of life is not the end of soul. The images continue. Deep inside the grief of the bereaved, the dead are at work, making themselves into religion and culture, imagining themselves into soul.<sup>xii</sup>

The imaginal, then, has the capability to dislodge the suffering in grief from the intolerable solid state located in the personality and the body, into a psychological space which has no location, but is deeply connected to the Self and other. As we shall discover in our analysis of *Three Colours: Blue*, grieving, when properly observed so that it works a transformation in the mourner’s personality, is an intensely creative process.<sup>xiii</sup> Like any other creative process it is anything but rational; and in order to engage the psyche it must conjure up curiosity and openness. That, as we have mentioned, is a process which films (none more than the one to be discussed here) can sponsor most effectively.

On the surface, Krzysztof Kies’lowski’s output as a director was diverse. In the 1970s he made documentaries, focusing on Polish political and social life under Communist rule. Later he concentrated on feature films which took the lives of plausibly characterised individuals as their subjects. In his own mind, however, it is apparent that, even as it evolved, his work was all of a piece in its central concern. As he said in interviews toward the end of his life, ‘the inner life – unlike public life – is the only thing that interests me’.<sup>xiv</sup> However, as he had observed on an earlier occasion,

‘The inner life of a human being... is the hardest thing to film. Even though I know that it can’t be filmed however hard I try, the simple fact is that I’m taking this direction to get as close to this as my skill allows.’ ‘The goal is to capture what lies within us, but there’s no way of filming it. You can only get nearer to it.’

(Kies’lowski in Stok, 1993: 194)<sup>xv</sup>

In his films, the inner life is intensely dynamic, revealing (to quote Janina Falkowska) ‘strong emotions that seem about to burst through the surface of the elegantly composed images’.<sup>xvi</sup> Furthermore, although the emotions themselves are easily recognised, their causes, meanings

and implications (for both the narratives and the aesthetics that frame them) are by no means always simple to understand. They can, indeed, be mysterious.

‘...within the framework of the film, ... these mysteries often involve very small things or things that are inexplicable... They are often very tiny, insignificant things. But I think that there is a point at which all these trifling matters, all these little mysteries, come together like droplets of mercury to form a larger question about the meaning of life, about our presence here...’

‘I think it has very clear existential connotations – that it is purely and simply the mystery we actually face every day. The mystery of life, of death, of what follows death, what preceded life: the general mystery of our presence in the world at this particular time, in this particular social, political, personal and familial context, and any other context you might think of.’<sup>xvii</sup>

Although Kiesłowski insisted that his films had no religious connotations, he would have had in mind Poland’s dominant Catholicism. When religion is considered as an aspect of the quest for inner understanding, however, it cannot be denied that his films engage with the numinous.

One other thematic feature of Kiesłowski’s films must be remarked on, namely the impact of chance on his characters’ lives. The significance of the topic is obvious in that he made a film entitled *Blind Chance*. Completed in 1981, it was banned in Poland by the Communist authorities of that era, (for reasons that the storyline makes obvious) and not released until 1986. Yvonne Ng reports that it develops three versions of one man’s life, each of which opens with the hero running to catch a train. In the first Witek, a medical student, gets on the train, meets a Communist, and is inspired by him to join the Party. In the second version, Witek misses the train and is arrested for scuffling with railway staff. Once in jail, he meets a member of the Opposition, becomes an activist on the other side of the political divide and thereafter is baptised as a Catholic. As the third version of his life commences, Witek misses his train again but meets a fellow medical student with whom he falls in love. They marry, and he lives a fulfilled, apolitical life as husband, father and doctor, until the plane in which he is travelling to a conference explodes, killing all onboard.<sup>xviii</sup> Although there are points of contact between Witek’s three lives, the radical differences between them are a consequence of blind chance. Ng argues that in Kiesłowski’s films it is not chance itself but how individuals react to the

accidents of fate that defines them.<sup>xix</sup> Falkowska finds that the protagonists in the Trilogy also have their lives shaped by blind chance. But she reaches a different conclusion, believing that they are at fate's mercy, their willpower and intended actions suspended or rendered irrelevant. For this critic, the last films make a powerful political statement by describing 'man's helplessness in view of history and fate'.<sup>xx</sup> But she is mistaken in her judgement that the protagonists are shown to be helpless. For while human fate cannot be escaped in that everyone must die (c.f. the Zeebrugge ferry disaster that ends *Red*), how the characters behave before death – the personal choices that they make – distinguishes them. This is why the contest between Julie and her frozen apathy matters; it gives significance to the contrast between the depressive sadism of Dominique and the vitality of Karol in *White*; and in *Red* it is the burden of the central conflict between Judge Kern's sick, destructive pessimism and the hopefulness of Valentine.

The plot outline of *Three Colours: Blue* is simple. It opens with a terrible car crash which only Julie (Juliette Binoche) survives while her husband and child perish. The accident is not the driver's fault but the result of blind chance. We can easily imagine alternative versions of Julie's life had the car not developed a mechanical failure. She might have lived the remainder of her days happily married, helping her husband in his work as a composer and bringing up their daughter. Alternatively she might have had to discover that her husband has taken a mistress and deal with that betrayal. But chance shapes Julie's fate and leaves her no choice but to cope (or fail to do so) with her loss of family. She tries to find refuge from her desperate pain through suicide, sex, abandoning her home and possessions, destroying the manuscript of her husband's last composition and withdrawing anonymously into a world where she knows nobody. Ultimately all these attempts at self-abnegation fail. Chance events such as exchanges (however unwelcome) with her new neighbors break into her isolation. The determination of an old friend to rescue her eventually proves more than she can resist. And (most important of all) the needs and appetites of her psyche cannot indefinitely be suppressed. All these things intervene, reawaken her frozen psyche and in the end bring her back into the world reconciled to the prospect of new life. But although the plot trajectory is simple, complexity abides in its detail. Indeed it abounds with the kinds of rich mystery which interest Kies'lowski so deeply.

As mentioned, *Blue* opens with a car crash; but merely stating that fact says nothing about the horror of the accident. From the opening moment, the thunder of tires on tarmac fills the ears.

The long opening take (which commences only after that ceaseless roar has transfixed the audience) is from a camera mounted beneath the body of the vehicle as it speeds down an *autoroute*. Another long take in the same blue-grey dusk, a medium close shot, shows a child's hand sticking out of a passenger window sporting a candy wrapping – a pretty indigo foil that the wind snatches away. We cut to a sequence in red as the car hurtles through a long tunnel. The traffic's speed smears the passing lights across the screen while the child in the back seat watches. Beyond the tunnel, the car stops by the roadside and the girl runs behind bushes for a comfort break. While her father gets out from behind the wheel to stretch his legs, we cut back to the underside of the vehicle where brake fluid drips unnoticed from a pipe. Something is happening underneath that the family is unaware of. It is analogous to psychic leakage from the unconscious into a reality which is unmapped *terra incognita*. The adults are anxious to move on and the girl is called back into the car.

Another child's hand, this an adolescent boy's, plays *bilboquet* (cup and ball). The sound of a horn draws his eyes to where the automobile, headlights on now, rushes out of fog and past the field in which he stands. A moment of ironic synchronicity: the boy has no sooner placed the ball in his game of chance when a fearful screeching turns him round. In the distance, the car has run off the road and smashes into a tree; a dog streaks out from the wreckage and the woman cries out. A beach ball drops from a door flung open by the impact and blows away across farmland. We cut to a tight shot of the adolescent's feet running, and then to an extreme wide shot of the landscape. The boy stumbles across the field, tossing his skateboard aside as he labours over ploughed ridges toward the accident. After a long moment, the scene fades to black.

The build up toward the crash pulls the audience into an uncomfortable mental frame. Factors in play include the unexpected camera angles, the oppressive intensity of travel noise and the exaggerated reds and blues in the two opening sequences. Adding to these is the selection of moments made strange by their seeming disconnection from any storyline, together with the omission of the familiar conventions of story-telling in the first act such as the introduction of character motivation. All these devices dislocate spectators from the action, a dislocation which anticipates how the sole survivor of the wreck will respond when she regains consciousness in hospital.

The dislocation heightens the impact of everything because we have to strive to find significance in what we are shown. The rhetoric of these opening sequences (the intense colours, the flickering of foil, the escape from the wrecked car of an intact beach ball – relic of the dead child’s happiness) thrusts spectators toward the margins of representation. It offers them a place where expressionistically the boundaries of the familiar physical world dissolve and precipitate sensitive viewers into the realm of the imagination – both their own and that of the injured survivor. What follows confirms that Kies’lowski intends his viewers to stay in that liminal realm, the psychological interstitial space where Julie lies in crisis.

After the crash, imagery returns with a cut to bloodless pink. A feather ruffles: a woman is breathing. In extreme close shot, her bloodshot pupil fills with the reflection of a doctor who informs her that her husband and daughter have died in the accident. As Emma Wilson observes, the total isolation of her eye in extreme close up while it looks at what we see suggests that Kies’lowski wants us to realize that we are looking through the membrane of this woman’s consciousness which he has placed between the viewer and the events of the narration. We fade back to black – another expressionistic rhetorical device. Whenever Julie’s overwhelmed mind blanks out, our vision too is suddenly curtailed.<sup>xxi</sup>

Julie smashes a plate glass window in a hospital corridor and startles the ward nurse. The shattered glass presents a metaphor for Julie’s crazed mind and fragmented interior self. When something has not yet moved into a psychological process, we concretize the feelings through enactment. While the nurse phones for help, Julie slips unseen into the dispensary and stuffs a handful of tablets into her mouth. But she cannot bring herself to swallow and spits them out, apologizing explicitly to the sympathetic nurse for breaking the glass, and implicitly for her having to witness the attempted suicide. The nurse says gently that the glass can be replaced – thus communicating her deep understanding of grief by silently acknowledging what cannot be replaced. The desperate, blind need to follow her family into extinction, to materialize, so to speak, the vacuum in her being, has driven Julie’s attempt to kill herself. Her utter despair is the first explosion of grief but also, since she finds herself incapable of causing her own death, her first accommodation to life. The very act of hurling through the window a jug of water (analogous to the container of her own emotions) is an attempt not only to externalise her depression but to get rid of what she has no capacity to hold on to. Wilson says that, although we do not see any images of Julie’s memories or imaginings, her emotions are explored



externally in both editing and *mise-en-scène*. The breaking pane of glass is a case in point. It opens a series of spatial metaphors where glass, blank walls, whiteness and the emptiness of the clinic allow us to enter the newly emptied out spaces of Julie's mind.<sup>xxii</sup> The negotiation of space between humans is a familiar function of intimacy: excessive proximity suffocates, too great a distance abandons. Here, however, the omnipresence of absence is suffocating Julie.

A man approaches Julie's bed and places a miniature television set within view. She cannot respond to his inquiries other than to check that the funeral is about to be broadcast. Later she watches the public mourning for her husband, led by an orator and an orchestra. Patrice de Courcy (Hugues Quester) had been an admired composer whose sudden death has left unfinished a Concert to celebrate European unification. His death is the public, collective loss. Speaking of their daughter, Anna, the orator refers only to her age – which he gets wrong. Anna is Julie's private loss which no one feels as keenly as she. On the television set, white sound and snow rasp out the signal.

Eventually (we are never vouchsafed any indication how much time has passed between scenes – an expressive device which correlates with the timelessness of grief), Julie's search for escape from the crucifying torment of consciousness begins to alter. This happens when the underlying vigour of her body forces convalescence on her, however reluctantly; but her physical recovery is not matched by that of her mind. When a journalist doorstops her, seeking information about Patrice's work, Julie turns her away angrily because the other woman has an agenda – to produce a documentary proving that Julie wrote Patrice's music. Julie is in the depths of mourning dipping into the well of her internal resources. Whereas the compassionate nurse mirrors her anguish, facilitating her grieving process, the journalist by imposing her own agenda leaves Julie cold. The grieving process requires quiet space for solitary introversion in which the individual may digest the gravity of the loss.

Loss and creating a large enough 'container' to bear the suffering are continuing, explicit themes in *Bleu*. A 'container' is the psychological term used to describe the internal vessel that holds our emotional life. But this is not the entire ambit of the film's themes. It had not been the journalist's intrusion that awakened Julie from the easy chair but the opening bars of the Concert for the Unification of Europe – the triumphant music (composed for the film by Zbigniew Preisner) resounding not in the hospital but in her head and ours. As its opening

notes pour out, the natural colours of the scene become deeply suffused in blue. How can this irruption into consciousness be comprehended? Julie is not an agent in its production. On the contrary, the music is a bolt from the blue, spontaneously disrupting her catatonic state; but arguably for her as for the audience, it is also something else.

Julie's return to the family's home, strong again in body, once more focuses only on key disjointed fragments as if recorded by a violated consciousness. She goes upstairs to a blue room, which she has ordered her staff to clear completely; but a small chandelier has been left. She snatches angrily at the crystals with which it is strung and a handful comes away. They are the deep translucent blue already a familiar motif. Downstairs Julie finds the housekeeper weeping. She asks her, 'Why are you crying?' and the old woman responds, 'Because you are not.' In order to function and make decisions, Julie has in effect split off her sorrow. Splitting is a primitive defence against unwanted feelings, an unconscious process in which what the individual finds acceptable is divided from the unacceptable, as in Melanie Klein's theoretical cleavage of the good and bad breasts. As Julie perseveres to maintain some semblance of ego strength in order to survive and absorb the psychic trauma, the housekeeper embodies her split-off, grieving self. By this time, the audience cannot have missed that Julie is a poised and intelligent woman; but the stoic exterior protects a rage that in its raw state is too dangerous to touch. Nevertheless changes in her psychological condition continue whether she likes it or not, and her failed attempt at evacuation of memory has been willed rather than involuntary.

After glancing cursorily at folios of the incomplete composition of the Concert, she squats at the top of the stairs and does not move when voices below announce the arrival of two men. As she sits there, blue-white glints refracted by the crystals in her hand play across her forehead. Their colder tone hints at her chilly state of heart. Later, when the man who visited her in hospital (now known to be a professor of music) comes up the stairs, her blank glare sends him away. When she does go down, it is to give instructions to her attorney to sell the house with all its contents, and to arrange lifelong care for her mother and the domestic staff. She declines to take anything herself, whether mementoes or proceeds of the sale. It is an act that illustrates the analyst's dictum that old psychological structures must be shifted in order to make space for the new.

Alone in the house, she picks out the opening melody of the Concert, reworking what looks

like a first draft sheet as she goes. But while she follows the music in her mind, her hand plays with the prop that supports the lid of the grand piano. It crashes down, narrowly missing her hand. Julie is locked in an ambivalent state of mind – part wanting to die, part to live. A high degree of ambivalence, according to Freud, is a special peculiarity of neurotic people. Her *left* hand (that of the unconscious) has invited, then dodged self-harm. Meanwhile the *right*, is holding onto the music, the part of her that wants to live. She has to slam the lid down because she is not yet capable of assimilating the feelings that the music causes to well up. It is a reminder that recovery from grief (like recovery from ill health) is a process in which reversals are inescapable.

Julie retrieves from a *rédactrice* the handwritten music sheets of the Concert scored for chorus and orchestra and trashes them. Still determined to finalise her separation from the past, she telephones the music professor Olivier (Benoit Régent). She has guessed that he loves her and invites him to join her in the house from which everything has been taken but a mattress. Is the pale blue light shining on her face his projection on her of his muse – his anima or soul? Or does it imply the coldness of her obsessive compulsion masked by sweetness? Probably both. In the morning she wakens him and thanks him for the kindness he has shown her in making love; but she tells him quietly that he now knows she has the physical properties of every other woman and therefore will not miss her. Her self-description figures herself as a soft machine with interesting cavities, but nothing more. In effect, she is telling both him and herself that love is a matter of physical doing and that it is a delusion to think of being in love as anything more.

Gentle and affectionate though she has been, it is not hard to see that curing Olivier of his passion was not Julie's motivation for seducing him in the remnants of the marital bed. It can be better understood as not only a deliberate act of infidelity to her husband's memory but also as moved by her unconscious desire to cure herself. According to Freud, the testing of reality by the bereaved having shown that the loved object no longer exists, requires that all the libido shall forthwith be withdrawn from its attachment to this object.<sup>xxiii</sup> Although they know it to be irrational, bereaved partners often feel that they have been betrayed by the death of their lover. To this extent her night with Olivier is Julie's revenge against her husband. Given what we have already seen, it will also be a deliberate attempt to renounce the memory of Patrice's physical presence – and hence another step intended to sever her from him. Having tried to

exorcise both her late husband and Olivier (by organising what the latter must think and feel), Julie walks away from the house for the last time. Yet the agony written on her face shows that she has failed to dull the pain. Nor does scraping her knuckles along the wall of the lane help. It is another effort to bring the pain from the internal out to the external. The pattern of rejection and self-harm repeats itself here; but this time does so only after she has engaged in what in her own mind appears to be a pseudo-adulterous seduction. Still crazy, she enacts a repetitious compulsion, an ungovernable process originating in the unconscious. She has placed herself in a distressing situation that repeats an old experience without recognising that she is doing so.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Julie emerges from the underground into the streets of Paris. Suddenly the vivid greens, oranges and reds of an open-air fruit market and the cheerful racket of street life invigorate these sequences. She locates an estate agent and rents an empty flat, her one pre-condition being that children not be permitted in the building. A pleasant pale green light filters through into the entry windows, and the living room has a wall of glass through which the afternoon tints the room in a soft pink tone. But the only thing Julie has brought from her old home is the chandelier with its chains of blue, and she immediately hangs it in the middle of this room. Beyond the memory of Anna, she appears to be obsessed also by what the translucent blue suggests – meanings that she cannot grasp in the way she can touch the crystals. This serves as a transitional object that comforts and holds her together while grieving for the old life to which she cannot now return. As such it resembles the child's teddy bear, a familiar and reassuring concrete symbol that gives him or her something solid to hold and help tolerate separation from his or her love object/caregiver.

With Julie's move to the flat there begins a time when she cannot always shield herself from life. She prefers solitude and becomes an habitué of a café the furnishings and décor of which bathe her in warm russets. The shadows turning across the crockery mark the hours' tranquil passing. Nevertheless, the world begins to intrude rudely on Julie and cracks open the carapace within which she has barricaded herself. The adolescent who witnessed the crash makes contact through her doctor wanting to return a cross and chain that he took from the wreck. He offers, perhaps to ease a bad conscience, to tell what he saw, but Julie stops him abruptly. The screen crashes to black briefly before she dismisses him with the necklace. Antoine (Yann Tregouet) has sought to give her back what she has lost, but her losses cannot

be redeemed. Her insistence that he keep the necklace tells him wordlessly that what he has seen and done must be his cross to bear.

One night, fighting in the street beneath her apartment wakes her. The victim of the attack runs into her tenement stairwell and hammers on her door, desperately begging for help. Immobilised by terror, Julie is unable to respond. When the rumpus has died down she does venture out to peep over the banisters. A gust of wind slams her door and she is locked out. Just as she cannot offer help, she is incapable of asking for it. She sits out on the stairs overnight, frozen in icy blue, locked out of any meaningful relationships by her inability to allow herself the painful experience of connection. Ultimately this misadventure forces her to make contact with some of her fellow tenants – some friendly, others less so. One neighbour solicits her help in evicting from the tenement a woman whom she says is a prostitute. Julie declines, saying that it's not her problem. In her detachment, she accidentally ensures that the young woman accused cannot be abandoned on the street. Lucille (Charlotte Very) promptly befriends her.

In counterpoint to these sequences, in others she swims in a pool saturated in deepest ultramarine light. The trails of water that spill lusciously from her strong arms resemble the chandelier's crystals. In fact, refractions of blue light and fragments of the Concert have encroached into several of the episodes in her new existence. But just as she is pulling herself vigorously up out of the swimming pool the music not only engulfs her, but progresses beyond the sections that we have heard before. The great size of the pool, containing the healing qualities of the womb's amniotic fluid, provides the metaphorical space to contain the enormity of her loss. New bars of music spontaneously rush in on her – an indication that she has digested a little more of the trauma. Instantly, she regresses back into the water, floating like a corpse. The moment represents the forward and backward motion of the grieving process, anything but a linear progress. (Both Freud and Jung insisted that psychic realities do not follow laws of time.) Julie has long since been physically restored, so when the dead claim her through the music, it is her soul not her body that is possessed.

Julie is sitting in sunlight on a bench when a stooped old lady hobbles by on high-heel shoes to recycle a bottle in a green bin. Only with the greatest difficulty can she reach the aperture and even then she cannot get the bottle to drop before we cut away. The incident allows the

spectator to draw the analogy with Julie's emotional circumstances and the near impossibility of recycling grief so deep.

As the titles of the trilogy anticipate, Kies'lowski constructs image clusters as a means of expressively, sometimes symbolically pointing toward meanings that are in play even though they may escape both the diegetic societal register and easy verbal labelling. The colour blue has indelible associations in western culture with grief, with cold and, by extension, with the nearness of death – all associations that are inescapable here. Pure colour is potent and conveys an energy resembling that of archetypal images. Also like archetypal images, colours have a spectrum of potential associations some standing in opposition to others. Blue, as the refracted glimmers playing on Julie's temple remind us, also has strong links with clear, azure skies and water; by extension therefore with healing, inspiration, and hence the spirit. That particular chain of symbolic associations links graphically but also mysteriously in various narrative directions to the foil in Anna's hand / wind/ breath/ pneuma/ the feather on Julie's hospital pillow/ life – and, through the specific conjunction that Kies'lowski creates, to music.

A street musician (Jacek Ostaszewski) plays opposite Julie's café and soothes her reveries over coffee. He looks like a tramp who makes the street his home; and on one occasion, seeing him asleep on the pavement, she fears he may be unwell. In fact he is contentedly drunk. When Julie helpfully pushes the flute case toward him for a pillow, he mumbles, "You always have to hold onto something." The instrument is equivalent to her chandelier – a transitional object that endows him with some sense of connection. The instrument case (as a kind of mothering pillow) also carries her own projection since she too is *psychically* homeless and in need of comfort.

One day (out of the blue?) Olivier finds her in the café after searching across Paris. They are exchanging a few stilted phrases (all that Julie's instinctive *froideur* seems to allow), when the flautist arrives at his stand. He has been brought there in a chauffeur-driven limousine by an elegant woman who embraces him before going on her way. Julie (who is doing her best to ignore Olivier as if hoping he might disappear) has her eyes fixed in bewilderment on this scene, when the musician starts to play a melody like the Concert. Julie and Olivier share a furtive moment of recognition before the latter slips away.<sup>xxv</sup>

Indeed, she hardly notices Olivier's departure because her attention is wholly focused on the melody. But when she asks the musician where he learnt it, he replies that he likes to invent tunes. One possibility is that he heard the motif when the public funeral was telecast and is aggrandising himself with a small lie. The shimmering uncertainty surrounding his nature gives him the qualities of a trickster – a crucial archetypal figure who triggers transformation by shaking and unsettling the old order of the psyche. It ties in with his trickster nature that the music found by both the flautist and Patrice de Courcy (which complements the repeated invasions of blue light) was so to speak 'in the air' – where it most certainly now hovers for both his widow and Olivier. In other words something in the collective unconscious has been contacted which for the first time is leading Julie beyond the personal.

More fragments follow. The discovery of mice in the flat transfixes Julie with fear. She is unable to kill them herself because the nest holds a mother with its newborn litter. Instead, drawn by a sudden need, she visits her mother (Emmanuelle Riva) in the luxurious care home where she lives. The reunion between parent and child is bizarre. As a victim of dementia, the old woman cannot hold in mind that her visitor is her daughter and not her long-dead sister. Yet many of the things that she recalls about the latter – for example that Marie-France is dead – apply metaphorically to Julie. Reflections and refraction of images within the room and beyond the windows add to the sense that the encounter between mother and daughter is not firmly registered in the objective world of daily events but hovers somewhere near a world of the dead. And the old woman's attention keeps drifting back to her preferred window, the television set which she says opens onto the whole world. At the moment it shows men, one of them an ancient fellow, throwing themselves into the void on the end of bungee ropes – a reckless challenge to feel the exhilaration of life. Yet the endless flow of television images seems to soothe her mother. Perhaps they fill her mind and keep at bay the terror of the unknown. Meanwhile, because Julie has nothing left after the death of the two people whom she loved so dearly, she says that she intends to have nothing in the future. Anything else – memories, possessions, friendship or love – is a trap. In other words, she intends to continue as one of the living dead who populate this scene. Thus mother and daughter are held in the same psychological space between life and death.

Although her mother continues to mistake her for Marie-France, an irony of the scene is that Julie appears to have come to check a memory of her own childhood, namely whether she was afraid of mice. After the old woman has confirmed it, Julie makes her mind up, borrows a neighbour's cat and puts it in with the pests. This small domestic crisis is significant because, although unforeseeably, it cracks open the stout shield she has put up against emotion. The horrible clash between her terror of mice and the knowledge that she is murdering them torments her. Worse, the guilt she suffers as a survivor for continuing to live resurfaces and intensifies her feelings. She dashes headlong from the apartment to cleanse her conflicted feelings in the pool.

For the first time since the crash, her feelings are out of control and therefore she has to accept help when it is offered. Lucille notices her despair, comes to her and embraces her – the first physical contact the widowed Julie has experienced since quitting her old home. The young woman's warmth gives Julie the courage to reveal the shattering impact of her phobia; and Lucille comforts her with the reassurance that it is normal both to fear and exterminate unwanted mice. She takes it upon herself to clean up Julie's flat.

Kies'lowski cuts direct from this scene of Julie's despair in the pool to a panicky phone call from Lucille waking her in the middle of the night. The obligations of friendship have re-entered Julie's life and will bring unforeseen psychological consequences. Julie responds reluctantly to Lucille's urgent appeal for help and finds her new friend preparing to perform for the customers in a sex show. Contrary to the stereotypical expectations of a decorous member of the professional middle classes such as Julie, Lucille unabashedly enjoys her work. Indeed, while accounting for her crisis to Julie she gently masturbates her stage partner to ready him for their performance, a casual physical service with no emotional content.<sup>xxvi</sup> Symptomatically, she never wears knickers (whereas Julie would surely always do so). However, she has called Julie in panic on seeing her father among the voyeurs in the audience. Although he has left in the meantime, it is evident that she has a powerful father complex that holds the imago of 'the authority'. Whatever the past history between Lucille and her father, she lives out her unhealthy sexuality in unconscious reaction to this authority imago – and his unexpected presence in the sex club has confronted her with taboo material inherent in the complex.



These signs indicate that Lucille functions as Julie's shadow. Both share attachment and abandonment issues but function, so to speak, from opposite sides of the pole. They live out their sexuality in very different manners – a metaphor for their dissimilar psychological make-up and contrasting relationships with the animus. Lucille lives unconsciously and unprotected as a shadow figure, constantly exposed to dangerous situations. Julie lives in such a protected way she is unable to take any risks – yet it is risks that ultimately promote growth. Julie's recourse to celibacy contrasts with Lucille's sexual availability and fear of sleeping alone. In contrast, Julie, prior to meeting Lucille, has been locked in a manic defence, unwilling to allow herself to depend on anyone. Although there is no implication that Julie is drawn toward imitating her friend, this midnight encounter at the sex club immediately presages the reawakening of Eros as one of the irresistible forces that will return her to life. The erotic ambience is designed to stir longings in the club's customers. Since sex is the most primitive way in which we connect, it cannot but begin to awaken something in Julie.

As with so much in the grieving process, the return of sexual knowledge to Julie's life happens in a painful way. While they are talking, Lucille glances at a television screen and, of all things, notices footage of Julie. The program – about Patrice's life and work – transfixes the astonished widow. She discovers two things from it and suspects a third. First, a copy of the manuscript of the Concert has survived her attempt to destroy it. Second, Olivier is trying to complete it, though he does not know whether he will succeed. Finally, photographs she has not seen before show Patrice with a young woman unknown to Julie. The emotional impact of these linked revelations amounts to a *bouleversement*, a turning upside down of Julie's carefully ordered universe. She pursues Olivier along a street (matching her fury, a scarlet fire engine flashes past in the background) and rages at him as having no right to take over the music. She has not, however, anticipated his riposte – that he has done it to stir her out of *accidie*. The tornado of angry passions gripping her collapses when she perceives that Olivier has read her rightly. She accepts his invitation to hear what he has written and swiftly becomes engaged in the work, drawing to Olivier's attention things that Patrice had in mind which the other man did not know. It is a fundamental turning point for Julie.

The epiphany into which (moved by his love) Olivier has inveigled her amounts to more than a discovery of her own split-off emotions. It encompasses also the moment in which she

simultaneously buries and resurrects her dead husband. The revelation of his infidelity through a relationship that has lasted for years unavoidably shows her that she has been grieving for an incomplete mental image of the man. Although the physical man is dead, she cannot ignore, given that her image of him has altered so radically, that something in herself is waking.

The fact that a portion of libido remains committed to an object long after that object has ceased to exist in the world of “really real reality” may mean that something else is going on. Perhaps, the energy is changing its form and being utilized in another way. Perhaps, the bereaved widow brooding over the image of her dead husband is making him into a part of her inner life, a part of her soul... From the point of view of “reality,” of course, her husband has become extinct. From the point of view of the imagination, however, he is now eternal... The very man with whom she once explored life, or rather, his imago, is now initiating her into the imaginal.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Closely associated with this breakthrough, Julie’s attitude to the Concert transforms. Hitherto she has tried simultaneously to destroy it and at the same time hold onto it tenaciously (since it visits her head in every emotional crisis) as her own secret possession. Now she recognises Olivier is right to say that the people who loved Patrice’s work have a claim on his music (not to mention its intended inspirational political role). In terms of her own inner life, the Concert has been the one imaginal residue of her marriage, constantly forcing through her grief’s agonies. What is more, unlike her imago of Patrice, it has not become stuck or reified in unchanging form. Rather the great chords have extended their range through the weeks of mourning. She starts to take a leading part in developing the music that, through its vital participation in her inner life, has proven itself unquestionably to be her legacy from Patrice. All of this signifies, indeed is predicated on, an opening out of Julie’s soul as her imaginal life begins to flourish once again. Music as soul is the only true, limitless container for the enormity of her grief.

Julie still has to deal with the pain that her husband’s infidelity has inflicted on her. She tracks down his lover (Florence Pernel) and discovers that she had been much more than a plaything for Patrice and was loved by him. Since his death, the young lawyer has discovered that she is carrying his child. Deeply distressed, Julie flees to her mother but, seeing through the French

windows that the old woman is preoccupied as usual with her television (it is showing, appositely to Julie's case, someone performing a high-wire balancing act), she turns away without entering. Her personal mother can no longer help her find her way. Instead she must look for the archetypal, collective mother who can nurture her back to life. Like the tightrope walker on screen, Julie focuses forward, struggling to keep her psychological balance. But as she leaves through the nursing home gardens, we see nurses and patients framed in the dusk by the pergola as if in boxes or a painter's still pictures. Tactfully, Kieslowski hints at the impossibility of breaking out – but breaking out of what? It is a theme with which the film deals in its finale.

Julie calls on Olivier, and they work with gathering enthusiasm on the Concert. She suggests alterations in the instrumentation that Olivier has proposed and the music comes to life majestically on the sound track. Meanwhile Slawomir Idziak, the director of photography, racks off focus so that Olivier's room becomes a warm, oceanic blur. As the two characters move around in long shot it is not unlike the ultrasound image of the child in the womb that we shall see in the coda. It is also the first time that the film has blanked out to suggest the diminution of Julie's consciousness other than in anguish. This is the redemptive moment in which conscious control gives way to creative indirection of the id – and after this moment everything changes.

Julie offers Patrice's mistress the family house and her husband's name for the coming child. Julie's face reveals that the conversation with the other woman is not easy for her, with the painful recognition that they each had their own separate relationship with Patrice. Yet her gesture reflects an expansion of herself rather than the contracting instinct that comes from loss. At the end of the conversation, the young woman reaches out to Julie and tells her, "I'm sorry." It is a redemptive moment of clarification, an acknowledgement of what belongs and what no longer belongs to each of them.

Ownership also momentarily becomes an issue on the night when Julie finishes the Concert and telephones to invite Olivier to collect the manuscript. Unexpectedly he refuses, saying that the music can either be his – a little heavy and awkward – or hers. But the public would have to know. Accepting this, Julie rings off. But a few moments later she calls back. We may guess that in the interim she has felt his loving sacrifice in renouncing any claim to his

contribution. Perhaps too she remembers the many other indications of his feelings. She calls back to check that she is right. Olivier assures her of his love (with touching respect, they still use the formal 'vous' form of address rather than the intimate 'tu'), and with tears in her eyes she rolls up the manuscript and goes to him. As she leaves, the Concert resumes at its culmination, on which she has been working. The camera cranes up past Anna's lamp: Julie's exit (quitting her solitary existence) is suffused with both the familiar blue (now a glimmer of hope) and the chorale that brings the music to its climax.

The Concert was originally credited to Patrice alone, but following the combination of Olivier's work with Julie's inspiration, it 'belongs' to all three. However, ownership at this stage of Julie's grieving process is no longer relevant. By releasing her claim on her dead 'love possessions,' Julie has discovered a destiny beyond her tears. In order to regain life, the kind of psychological and emotional shift we are witnessing in her must occur, and her acceptance of death has killed off the illusion of possession.

The coda to the film moves beyond this one woman's adaptation to her pain and encompasses something majestic in scale. First, it confronts spectators with puzzling uncertainties at the very moment they anticipate relishing the straightforward resolution of Julie's anguish in the ritual of the lovers' union. Julie and Olivier do indeed make love, but in her supple delight she rubs her face awkwardly against a pane (pain?) of glass through which we see her. Even if it concerned nothing but this image, the scene would be abstracted from the world the lovers inhabit. The tight framing of Julie's face delays, until the camera slowly moves, our seeing that it is pushed against the bedroom window. Therefore the image is perceived as if it were almost detached from the storyline, an emblem of her long travail. The pressure of her head against the glass at the moment of her ecstasy brings to mind the constraints that inevitably impinge on everyone. We either confront these constraints and grow or, to protect against them, develop a defence that makes us contract, potentially inhibiting growth.

The finale of the Concert, however, widens the perspective from the moment that Julie leaves her apartment so that the frame of reference far exceeds the predicament of this one individual. It sets the well known words from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, "Though I speak with the tongues of angels, if I have not love, I am become as hollow brass." Even in today's secular society these words instantly move beyond the mundane and take in the sacramental.

The camera cranes quietly outside the window and superimposes reflections that make it seem *as if* the lovers are both in bed and underwater. Then what look like grass roots descend from the top of the frame and press down on the image of the couple. With Olivier scarcely visible, Julie, her sexual passion undiminished, is simultaneously seen *as if* in her grave. What C.G. Jung termed the *coniunctio oppositorum* – the meeting of opposites – here allows the audience a view of the psyche in its fully rounded potential, adapted to both life and death, attaining a depth of insight with clarity that surpasses consciousness. Still young enough to conceive new life, Julie’s ecstatic vitality in the arms of her lover is locked in conjunction with her mortality.

This is the first of a series of vignettes of the characters that, accompanied by Paul’s words, impress on us a vision of the characters’ spiritual nature, deeper than consciousness. “And though I have enough faith to move the highest mountains, if I have not love, I am nothing.” The vast scale of both the music and the text make it impossible to ignore that more than the love of one man and one woman is involved. Here the specific characters whom we have got to know through the duration of the film now take on a generalising function as illustrations of recurring human predicaments. Although the words “for now we see through a glass darkly” (Corinthians 1, 13: 12) are not heard, the way the vignettes are framed surely brings them into play. We are in the realm of mysteries.

The glass panes seen in many of the vignettes suggest firstly, the constraints that film and television screens place on insight. Secondly, they form a transparent barrier between the outer world of observers and the inner world of the observed. The glass reminds us that we all live in these two worlds and that those we observe can only be perceived or comprehended in a refracted manner.

Out of blackness comes a dream image of Antoine being awakened by an alarm clock in the blue middle of the night. He touches the cross around his neck that had been Julie’s before the crash. (“Love is patient, love is kind. It bears all things.”) This is his moment of moral awakening when the full realisation of what he has seen and done (as both witness to violent death and remorseful thief) falls on his shoulders. It is the burden he has henceforth to carry – his cross – and yet another indication that suffering is a transcendent function.

We pan off into blackness. (“Love never fails; for prophecies shall fail.”) then pan on to triple

reflections of Julie's mother sitting absently in front of her television screen. ("Tongues shall cease, knowledge shall wither away.") The old woman closes her eyes – pre-echoing her death – and a nurse runs to her from the garden. ("Love never fails.") There follows a glimpse of Lucille in the strip club where she gazes into the dark. We pan once again out of blackness onto Patrice's lover and an ultrasound picture of her baby, near term and full of energy in the womb. ("And now shall abide faith, hope, love; but the greatest of these three is love.")

After the next black space we find an extreme close up of Julie's eye that mirrors her awakening in hospital after the crash. Now light is visible in the pupil. Through the black experience of anguish, light is shed upon the unconscious – again the transcendent function of suffering. To love truly requires letting go, forgiving those who have betrayed us. The grieving experience has forever changed the way Julie sees and lives. The final shot is a close up of her behind the windowpane, which now reflects the dawn sky. In this quiet moment, she is at last able to weep. As part of the love she feels, grief as well as erotic passion has established its right of way.

Not firmly anchored in either narrative time or space, this cluster of vignettes has a visionary quality that is hard to deny. But whose vision is it? Self-evidently Kies'lowski has the first claim. He had announced he would retire after completing the Trilogy, and it stands, therefore, as his artistic testament. Then, since the characters appear to be abstracted from their daily lives to some degree and contemplating their fates, it involves them too. Finally, the vision is also the audience's, an assessment corroborated by the rich and various emotional impact of the coda. Spectators may feel joy, relief, compassion, dread of loss and isolation, the fear of death.

Although isolation is constantly emphasised in these vignettes by long moments when the screen is dark, the totality of what is represented amounts to another *coniunctio oppositorum*. The antithesis of isolation is inclusion; and if the Concert for Unification is to have meaning, then Paul's words with their emphasis on love must be taken into the reckoning. The chorus sing the Greek word for love "agape." It refers to the sacramental communion feast of the Lord's supper, and thence indirectly to transcending (or transpersonal) love. Zbigniew Preisner's music soars, lifting the emotions to appropriately high intensity. As Toh Hai Leong says, at the end the Concert "rises and drowns the audience in a wave of climaxes and anti-

climaxes,...” a demonstration of what Buddhists call fate or destiny at work.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Throughout the trilogy, art takes the place of religion, revealing the sacred in humanity. In *Blue*, Kies'łowski's consummately realised narrative, character development and aesthetics have the capability to trigger waves of affect and feeling. They inseminate a quasi-religious sense and function as a mirroring guide with therapeutic value for spectators' own sufferings. So the on-screen characters and the audience in front of the screen are connected both in the imaginal and deeper still, beneath the arena of consciousness, at the archetypal source of those images.

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<sup>i</sup> Murray Stein, "Liminality," *San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal*, Autumn 1980, 21 cited in Joanna Dovalis, "Cinema and Psyche: Individuation and the Postmodern Hero's Journey," Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2003, 99.

<sup>ii</sup> Joanna Dovalis, "Cinema and Psyche: Individuation and the Postmodern Hero's Journey," Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2003, 1-4.

<sup>iii</sup> "Cinema and Psyche," 1.

<sup>iv</sup> "Cinema and Psyche," 2-4.

<sup>v</sup> "Cinema and Psyche," 5.

<sup>vi</sup> Marie-Louise Von Franz, "The Process of Individuation," in *Man and His Symbols*, Carl G. Jung *et al* (eds.), London, Picador, 1964 [1978], 164.

<sup>vii</sup> "Cinema and Psyche," 5.

<sup>viii</sup> John Beebe, "Jungian Illumination of Film," *Psychoanalytic Review*, 83, 4, August 1996, 579.

<sup>ix</sup> "Jungian Illumination of Film," 582.

<sup>x</sup> Phyllis B. Kenevan, *Paths of individuation in literature and film: A Jungian approach*, Lanham MD, Lexington Books, 1999, 14

<sup>xi</sup> Greg Mogenson, *Greeting The Angels: An Imaginal View of the Mourning Process*, Amityville NY, Baywood Publishing, 1992, xi-xii.

<sup>xii</sup> *Greeting The Angels*, xi.

<sup>xiii</sup> *Greeting The Angels*, xii.

<sup>xiv</sup> Krzysztof Kies'łowski, "The inner life is the only thing that interests me," in *Lucid Dreams: The Films of Krzysztof Kies'łowski*, (ed.) Paul Coates, Trowbridge, Flicks Books, 1999, 162.

<sup>xv</sup> Krzysztof Kies'łowski, in Danusia Stok (ed. and trans.) *Kies'łowski on Kies'łowski*, London, Faber and Faber, 1993, 194.

<sup>xvi</sup> Janina Falkowska, "The Double Life of Véronique and Three Colours: an escape from politics?" in *Lucid Dreams*, 137.

<sup>xvii</sup> "The Double Life of Véronique," 167.

<sup>xviii</sup> Yvonne Ng, "Fate and Choice in Kies'łowski's *Blind Chance*," *Kinema*, 24, Fall 2005, 68-77.

<sup>xix</sup> "Fate and Choice," 78-81.

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<sup>xx</sup> “*The Double Life of Véronique*,” 157.

<sup>xxi</sup> Emma Wilson, *Memory and Survival: The French Cinema of Krzysztof Kies'lowski*, Oxford, Legenda, 2000, 50.

<sup>xxii</sup> *Memory and Survival*, 52.

<sup>xxiii</sup> *Greeting The Angels*, 19.

<sup>xxiv</sup> J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1973, 78.

<sup>xxv</sup> From a Jungian perspective, Olivier occupies the position of her animus figure, the male imago in her psyche. When the contrasexual archetypes (as animus and anima are known) are active (or constellated), they present a person with aspects of his or her psyche culturally associated with people of the other sex. The archetype has great power and can lead an individual to discover the Self (Ann Belford Ulanov and Barry Ulanov, *Transforming Sexuality: The Archetypal World of Anima and Animus*, London, Shambhala, 1994, 123-31). Olivier's love for Julie makes it clear that he is projecting onto her his intensely constellated anima. However, Julie's animus is not at present sufficiently constellated in her mind for her to project it onto anyone.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Women who are attracted to these environments can only feel their sense of power through their physical sexuality since their lack of integration inhibits them from feeling empowered psychologically. Shadow material usually seeks stimulation in unhealthy ways, witness Lucille's attraction to danger.

<sup>xxvii</sup> *Greeting The Angels*, 20.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Toh Hai Leong, “Krzysztof Kies'lowski's ‘Trois Couleurs’ Trilogy: The Auteur's Preoccupation with (missed) chances and (missed) connections,” *Kinema* (Spring 1996) <http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca/tohgp961.htm> accessed 30 October 2005.