

Krzysztof Kieślowski INTERVIEWS

Edited by Renata Bernard and Steven Woodward



Glowing in the Dark

Tony Rayns / 1994

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This interview was originally included in a larger critical article defending Kiesłowski and the Three Colors trilogy, but was conducted before Rayns had seen the final film, Red. He frames the interview by noting that many critics and journalists were interpreting Kiesłowski's public statements (about his retirement, for instance) and interview answers as cynical and sarcastic, but that he believes that this is a mishearing of Kiesłowski's irony, "a key weapon in the armory of all East European intellectuals in the communist years."

Tony Rayns: Why a trilogy? Why isn't one film enough?

Krzysztof Kiesłowski: Because it makes everything more interesting. Differing points of view are inherently more interesting than one point of view. Since I don't have any answers but do know how to pose questions, it suits me to leave the door open to varying possibilities. I realized this some years ago. I don't want to pose as a relativist, because I'm not one, but I have to admit that there's an element of relativism in play here.

TR: Is *White* in some sense a parody of the other films in the trilogy, in the way that *Decalogue 10* parodied aspects of that series?

KK: You could see it that way. But I think *Red* is different in tone. It's hard to put a handle on it.

TR: Isn't the "liberté-égalité-fraternité" theme a pretext, just as the Ten Commandments were for *Decalogue*?

KK: Yes, exclusively that.

TR: So you don't lie awake at night worrying about such themes?

KK: No, but I did spend a lot of time thinking about them.

TR: How seriously do you discuss these things with your co-writer Krzysztof Piesiewicz?

KK: We crack a lot of jokes. We talk about cars, about women. The conclusion we came to about equality is that nobody really wants it. Karol in *White* doesn't want equality, he wants to be *better* than others.

TR: Did anyone pressure you to make the three parts of the trilogy in different countries?

KK: No, I did it this way because I wanted to. The issues these films raise are deeply rooted in European traditions, so it was natural to spread them around Europe. The production company helped us decide where to shoot, but nobody forced us.

TR: This isn't a case like *The Double Life of Véronique*, where there's a material relationship between the financing and the structure of the story?

KK: Actually, that film didn't need to be a co-production between Poland and France. You could imagine it done with one girl living in Kraków and the other in Gdańsk. I didn't frame the story of *Véronique* that way because of the financial background to the production; the subject itself was something close to my heart.

TR: But the way you finally made the film did reflect the financing?

KK: For sure. But this trilogy is a rather different case. I don't think these storylines are as original as the one in *Véronique*, and anyway, these are mainly French films.

TR: You have a strong sense of humor, but there isn't much evidence of it in serious films like *Véronique* and *Blue*.

KK: It's true that I have a certain sense of . . . irony. Sometimes you have to laugh, but I think it's worth trying to be serious from time to time. It's difficult to do both at the same time, but I hope that *White* strikes the odd lyrical note. For example, the character Mikołaj, who wants to die—he's kind of serious.

TR: What's the song Karol plays on the comb in the *Métro*?

KK: A pre-war Polish song, every Pole knows it. It's stupid and sentimental; we sing it when we drink. It goes: "This is our last Sunday, tomorrow we part forever. . . ." We become very sentimental when we drink.

TR: *White* offers a fairly scathing picture of post-communist Poland.

KK: Only in the background. But yes, that's the way it is now—unfortunately.

TR: You still live in Poland?

KK: Yes. I see it with a certain bitterness. I'm not against Polish entrepreneurialism, but people now care for nothing but money. I don't know what happened to us.

TR: Do people in Poland resent the fact that you're working abroad?

KK: Patriots do, yes. Normal people, I hope don't.

TR: Who are these patriots? Do they have any power?

KK: Nationalists, fascists, call them what you like. They're a crazy minority, but they shout loudly enough to be heard. They have newspapers, and access to television.

TR: Last year in Poland, I found a widespread desire to come to terms with the past—for example, the treatment of the Jews. But the election result suggested a nostalgia for the "security" of the communist period. . . .

KK: What you say is evident, but I don't think it's just. For me, it wasn't that the Left won, it was that the Right lost. That's not the same thing. There's no nostalgia for the Left. After forty-five years of being told what was good and what was bad, Polish people have had enough of it. They don't want someone else telling them the same story, even if the meanings are reversed. What happened was that they threw out the Right and the Church.

TR: Do you see a way forward for Poland?

KK: I think we have to die first, all of us. Eventually there will be new people with new ideas. It's not just a generational change, it's a matter of changing a way of thinking that has been inculcated for forty-five years. I can't see it taking less than two generations. Decades of Marxist education have left Poland unable to think in normal human terms. We can only think in terms of Left and Right.

TR: You've said you won't make any more films. So how come I've seen the outline for a film you've written for the BFI's "Century of Cinema" series?

KK: That's just a short film for television. I promised to do it some time ago, so it's just a matter of fulfilling a promise. But the financial side of it hasn't been sorted out yet; I hope they won't find the money, so I won't be obliged to do it.

TR: Why do you want to stop making films?

KK: I don't have enough patience for it any more. I didn't realize it, but it suddenly dawned on me: I've run out of patience. And patience is a fundamental requirement in this line of work.

TR: Does the situation in Poland have anything to do with it?

KK: No, I've just become old. I want to live normally. I've had no normal life for the past twenty years, and I want to go back to having one.

TR: Are you rich? Don't you need to work?

KK: Not that rich, but I don't need many things. I have enough to live . . . peacefully.

TR: How will you fill your days?

KK: There are many books I haven't read. Or books that I've read four times and want to read three times more.

TR: You'll be missed.

KK: Don't worry, someone else will come along.