



THE THREE COLOURS TRILOGY

Three Colours: Blue (Trois couleurs: Bleu)

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Director: Krzysztof Kieslowski

©/Production Companies: MK2 Productions, CEO Productions, France 3 Cinéma, CAB Productions, Zespół Filmowy 'Tor'

With the participation of: Canal+

Supported by: Eurimages Conseil de l'Europe

With the participation of:

Centre national de la cinématographie

Presented by: Marin Karmitz

Production Manager: Yvon Crenn

Unit Managers/Administration: Caroline Lassa, Aline Corneille, Anne Guillemard, Olivier Bulteau, Jean Talvat, Nicolas Tempier, Gisèle Vuillaume, Dominique Lefevre

1st Assistant Director: Emmanuel Finkiel

2nd Assistant Directors: Julie Bertucelli, Stéphane Libiot, François Azria, Emmanuela Demarchi

Assistant to the Director: Stan Latek

Script Supervisor: Geneviève Dufour

CASTING: Margot Capelier

Screenplay: Krzysztof Piesiewicz, Krzysztof Kieslowski

Screenplay Collaborators: Agnieszka Holland, Edward Zebrowski, Sławomir Idziak

Director of Photography: Sławomir Idziak

Assistant Operators: Henryk Jedynek, Muriel Coulin

Second Camera: Piotr Jaxa

Grips: Albert Vasseur, Alain Dreze

Lighting: Hans Meier, Ernst Brunner, Alain Dondin

Stills: Piotr Jaxa

Editor: Jacques Witta

Assistant Editors: Michele D'Attoma, Aïlo Auguste, Catherine Cormon, Urszula Lesiak

Art Director: Claude Lenoir

Set Decorators: Marie-Claire Quin, Jean-Pierre Delettre, Christian Aubenque, Julien Poitou-Weber, Lionel Acat

Props: Michel Charvaz

Costumes: Virginie Viard, Naima Lagrange

Make-up/Hairdressers: Valérie Tranier, Jean-Pierre Caminade

Titles/Opticals: Ercidan

Music: Zbigniew Preisner

Music Performed by: Warsaw Sinfonia, Philharmonic Choir of Silesia

Soprano: Elżbieta Towarnika

Flute: Jacek Ostaszewski

Piano: Konrad Mastyło

Orchestra Director: Wojciech Michniewski

Choir Master: Jan Wojtacha

Executive Music Producer: Halina Laciak

Music Engineer: Rafał Paczkowski

Assistant Music Engineer: Leszek Kaminski

Sound Recordists: Brigitte Taillandier, Pascal Colomb

Sound Mixer: William Flageollet

Sound Editors: Claire Bez, Bertrand Lenclos, Jean-Claude Laureux

Sound Effects: Jean-Pierre Lelong, Mario Melchiorri, Vincent Arnardi

Press Representative: Eva Simonet

Cast:

Juliette Binoche (*Julie Vignon de Courcy*)

Benoît Régent (*Olivier*)

Florence Pernel (*Sandrine*)

Charlotte Véry (*Lucille*)

Hélène Vincent (*journalist*)

Philippe Volter (*estate agent*)

Claude Duneton (*doctor*)

Three Colours: Blue is part of a trilogy which bands together three films, *Blue*, *White* and *Red* – the colours of the French flag – under the loose headings Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, and can be seen in some ways as Kieslowski the Pole coming to terms with becoming, so to speak, a French filmmaker under the auspices of French producer Marin Karmitz. *Blue's* relationship to the concept of liberty is deeply ironic here, since Kieslowski, as we shall see, regards absolute freedom and love as opposites.

Schooled in the virtues of neorealist visual storytelling, sumptuously photographed in 35mm colour and impeccably pared down to its vital essences, *Blue* devotes the vast bulk of its screen time to gazing at Juliette Binoche, an actress of great talent and beauty, as she goes about doing remarkably everyday things. But the film is far from an enraptured hymn to graceful looks and elegant posturing. It's savage irony and remarkable austerity that hold sway.

The story begins with a car crash in which Julie de Courcy (Binoche), though only injured herself, loses her famous composer husband and her child Anna. Failing at suicide, she decides to erase the traces of her marriage and withdraw from the world. Though she has everyone's sympathy, Julie does her best to push everyone away. 'You've changed,' says a music journalist. 'You were never so abrasive or unpleasant. What happened?' 'Don't you know?' responds Julie. 'We had a car crash. My daughter was killed. So was my husband.'

Blue treats Julie as someone trying desperately to brush off hurtful connections. She soon finds, however, that no matter how many cobweb strands she removes, near-invisible remnants trail around with her. Hers is an unusual kind of extreme grief expressed in a need to clear the entire past out of her mind, as if to continue any part of what would corrupt what it had meant to her. This stringent, otherworldly idealism is constantly tested by arbitrarily cruel, kind and ironic interruptions in the form of apparently chance meetings with journalists, her husband's colleagues, new neighbours, a would-be lover, a street musician, a pregnant mouse and the witness to the car crash. But her emphatic behaviour also presents the viewer with the unexpected – for instance, her sudden summoning of her husband's partner Olivier to have sex with her when she realises he's in love with her, done seemingly in the hope that once he's fucked her, he'll realise how ordinary she is and let her go.

The way *Blue* treats its first 15 minutes is part of what makes it so unique to cinema and to its own time. A comparison between the fullness of the script and what ended up in the final edit is illustrative of Kieslowski's absolutist approach to his craft. In the finished film, a great deal of exposition and description gets condensed almost wordlessly into telling images.

Kieslowski and his writer Krzysztof Piesiewicz have a difficult trick to pull off whereby it's the things that Julie is renouncing – and we can't help thinking here about the Catholic tradition of renouncing worldly things in order to be closer to the spiritual – that help us to fill in who she has been. There's an irony

Hugues Quester (*Patrice*)
Emmanuele Riva (*mother*)
Florence Vignon (*copyist*)
Jacek Ostaszewski (*flautist*)
Yann Trégouet (*Antoine*)
Isabelle Sadoyan (*servant*)
Daniel Martin (*downstairs neighbour*)
Catherine Théroutenne (*neighbour*)
Alain Ollivier (*lawyer*)
Pierre Forget (*gardener*)
Philippe Manesse
Idit Cebula
Jacques Disses
Yves Penay
Arno Chevrier
Stanislas Nordey
Michel Lisowski (*interpreter*)
Philippe Morier-Genoud (*judge*)
Julie Delpy (*Dominique Vidal*)
Zbigniew Zamachowski, (*Karol*)
Alain Decaux
France-Switzerland-Poland 1993©
98 mins

A Curzon release

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in getting to know a character just at the point when she wants no one to know any more: it's like raiding someone's garbage can.

Our introduction to Julie is mediated through images that respond to her state of mind. Bizarre perspectives, Dutch tilts and abrupt changes of scale abound. And by planting all this material on screen uncontextualised by voiceover or much dialogue, *Blue* presumes, rightly, that the viewer has the sensitivity and intelligence to infer everything. This trust in the audience is one of the things that makes *Blue* such a 90s film, because it recognises the sophistication in image-reading that most of us, as denizens of the late 20th century, possess.

Blue concentrates much of its effort on depicting a woman determined to be an enigma – an intelligent woman who, for most of the film, has little interest in living men – and portrays her with a uniquely visually and aurally dependent aesthetic born of documentary but fulfilled in almost abstract compositions. The film is put together with ruthless felicity yet is as bleak and harrowing as a fateful film should be. Politically it captures many of the ironies of the freedom espoused by the 'me' generation, yet it never patronises either its characters or its audiences. On an allegorical level it could also be about Europe's futile attempt to wipe the memory of its fractious history – otherwise why the trilogy? Who knows?

Blue is very much an auteurist film in the old-fashioned sense in that it represents the work of six craftspeople at the top of their form, many of whom had worked together before. There's Kieslowski himself, screenwriter Krzysztof Piesiewicz (who started working with Kieslowski on *No End*, 1984, and went on to *Dekalog*, 1988, and *The Double Life of Véronique*, 1991), composer Zbigniew Preisner (who worked on the same films), cinematographer Slawomir Idziak (who joined the regular team for *Dekalog*), sound recordist Jean-Claude Laureux (a favourite of Louis Malle) and lastly Juliette Binoche, whose performance, in a career of strict, intelligent underplaying, may be her most subtle ever.

If cinema as art is still alive, it will be in a large part due to filmmakers like Kieslowski who know the whole history of their craft and yet revived their means and methods constantly, however modest the scale.

Nick James, *Sight and Sound*, April 2002