

# Blue Imagery in the Film *Three Colors: Blue*

**Kun Geng**

*School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland  
snowy52168@163.com*

**Abstract:** This paper will take Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski's famous film *Three Colors: Blue* as the core of the text, and based on it, we will analyze how the director's use of the blue color, an element that runs through the whole film, shrouds the mental world of the protagonist Julie. This makes blue, a figurative element, become a carrier of complex consciousness. In this paper, we will specifically list the artistic techniques used to express the character's imagery in the film, and interpret the protagonist Julie's sadness and relief from different perspectives in terms of narrative text, spiritual journey, etc., so as to explain the director's exploration of the intense and antagonistic emotions of human beings.

**Keywords:** Krzysztof Kieslowski Film; Film Imagery; *Three Colors: Blue*

## 1. Introduction

*Three Colors: Blue* (Trois couleurs: Bleu, Krzysztof Kieslowski, 1993) is an excellent example of the humanism of Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski's many works. "This is the first film of a trilogy (*Three Colours Blue*, *Three Colours White* (Trois couleurs: Blanc, Krzysztof Kieslowski, 1994), *Three Colours Red* (Trois couleurs: Rouge, Krzysztof Kieslowski, 1994) representing the French flag and the ideals of the French Revolution: liberty, fraternity, and equality."<sup>[1]</sup>In this film, Julie (Juliet Binoche) suffers a traumatic loss in her life, and the loss of a loved one gives rise to a personal blue mood of melancholy and consequent quiet sadness. And the freedom that the color blue represents in a broader sense becomes a siege that separates her from the individuals of society as she tries to free herself from her suffering.

The freedom represented by the colour blue in the broad sense of the word becomes, ironically, a siege that blocks her from society. The director has given the colour blue a unique spirituality to the character through the subtlety of the individual's life in modern society and the imagery of the colour blue in the content of the images, allowing Julie to communicate, linger and confront the blue memories associated with her in a world of calm and silence. The interplay of social responsibility and complete financial freedom with the nostalgia for a better life and the unrequited feelings for her loved ones is a sharp contradiction that locks her in a prison within herself. As the title of the film makes clear, blue is a pervasive element throughout the film. It is the underlying colour tone of the film, not only as a prominent visual image, but also as a vehicle for all of Julie's emotional incarnations, expressing her imaginative emotions in a figurative form. Through the different meanings conveyed by the figurative and imaginative elements of blue in the film and the corresponding artistic expressions that are unique to the director, this paper focuses on the slow and painful process of Julie's quest for self-release, which means how the soul goes from the grief of confinement to a new life with a new individual, which is undoubtedly a regaining of freedom and thus an expression of director Krzysztof Kieslowski's reflections on the dialectic and complexity of freed.

## 2. Blue Imagery in The Figurative World

Compared with most genre films, *Three Colours: Blue* lacks a strong dramatic conflict and interlocking narrative logic. Instead, it is a subtle audio-visual language and aptly constructed lines that set the tone for the emotions of the protagonist in a seemingly dull story progression. The plot is simple: the main character is devastated by the loss of her famous musician husband and daughter in a car crash, and is unable to break free from her attachment to her memories, but by chance she discovers the infidelity of the man she once loved, and in her own search for the truth she is able to let go of the past and regain the meaning of her own existence. From this moment on, the film depicts the interior of Julie's mind and her experience, as she comes to terms with her trauma. The world of images created by the director in the wake of Julie's trauma serves as a vehicle for the director's own abstraction, reflecting Krzysztof Kieslowski's patient reflection on the individuality of life in society and his deep and dialectical

exploration of the theme of freedom. The colour blue is an obvious visual element from the title, a clear colour of tone, and in relation to the emotional expression of the film, *Blue* focuses on Julie's mute and detached despair after the death of her husband and child. It is also true that it fits into the perceived range of cultural expressions of the color tradition and the frequent and repeated use of blue figuratively in the film also allows the blue undertones to very strongly set the tone of the heroine's slow and painful life in the post-disaster world, revealing the importance of the colour and her melancholic and cold inner world. So, in some ways, although Krzysztof Kieslowski expressed in a 1995 interview with film scholar named Paul Coates that he did not deliberately push blue into the widely known meaning of sadness or freedom, because it seems to me to be a question of the partnership with the be a question of the partnership with the viewer, the possibility of opening a dialogue. The cultural meaning implied by blue should be undefined, as once the viewer is given preconceived values on behalf of the director, the expansion and complexity of the value of the image is cut off at a superficial level of consciousness, leaving no space for free and autonomous artistic reverie, nor for the pleasure and self-realisation of watching the film. The director's use of blue figurative imagery is, to some extent, heavily links to the general imagery, but a purely direct understanding of the spiritual meaning associated with it is contrary to Krzysztof Kieslowski's artistic philosophy, as he presents the emotional dimension and complicates its cultural meaning in a more direct way on a more advanced level. The blue figurative image is used as a medium of imagery rather than as a vehicle or symbol, it is figurative but not concrete, and its role is to help the director create imagery rather than to convey much more specific information. The free and open and ambiguous blue figuration constructs and evokes 'a symbolic, simulated world of deathly clarity and stability', with the symbolic representing the emotion of blue. The symbolic, simulated world represents the unclosed world of artistic influence constructed by the director, while the clarity and stability comes from the combination of the director's extreme personal artistic style and subtle artistic treatment, which brings to the image the precise value of what it means to be free. Although blue does symbolise freedom in the sense of the tricolour flag, the director does not close the word freedom to its simplest meaning by placing many figurative elements in the film in a seemingly insignificant way, using a sincere restoration of the world of emotions and an uncertain and ambiguous display of details to convey and understand the true freedom within oneself, which has many different definitions in a variety of ways. The symbolic, simulated world represents the unclosed world of artistic influence constructed by the director, while the clarity and stability comes from the combination of the director's extreme personal artistic style and subtle artistic treatment, which brings to the image the precise value of what it means to be free. [2] Although blue does symbolise freedom in the sense of the tricolour flag, the director does not close the word freedom to its lowest meaning by placing many figurative elements in the film in a seemingly insignificant way. At the meantime, these elements' sincere restoration of the emotional world and the display of uncertain, ambiguous details convey the true freedom within oneself, which is defined in many different ways in a broader sense.

In the film *Three Colours: Blue*, the colour blue is first figurative and then tragic in its freedom, throughout the slow and painful process of Julie's search for herself. Blue is also the emotional bridge between Julie's figurative and figurative in the film, serving as a carrier for the Krzysztof Kieslowski's intention to express his deep concern for the fate of the individual and his reflection on the lack of freedom. Without a doubt, the film's theme is the search for freedom: 'In *Blue*, liberty becomes a tragic notion', and its tragic nature derives from the dialectic between freedom and captivity. In Krzysztof Kieslowski's artistic aesthetic, this two concepts are never in an antagonistic relationship, but rather in an intertwined relationship, where any kind of freedom brings with it a corresponding isolation and self-imposed imprisonment, and any kind of self-imposed imprisonment also implies the possession of freedom in some sense. Krzysztof Kieslowski's artistic aesthetics, which is specifically mapped into the film *Three Colours: Blue*, implies that Julie gains social freedom but falls into a prison of memories.

In the film's opening scene of the crash, a blue haze covers the car. Such scene-setting reveals the movie's tone to be a thick, somber blue, the color blue being a metaphor for bitterness and dreariness from the perspective of a bystander.[3]

The main character Julie loses her husband and daughter, and is thus freed from the social aspects of motherhood and wifhood. She aspires to freedom from everything: Now I have only one thing to do. Nothing. I don't want any belongings, any memories. No friends, no love. Those are all traps. Although she achieves a complete liberation in the sense of social responsibility, it is her self-initiated and profound attachment to good memories that becomes her inescapable bond, her silence, her isolation and rejection of all contact with the outside world, locking her into a self-imposed prison, hoping only for a tragic liberation. Indeed, it is the human and the human soul that Krzysztof Kieslowski clearly loved to explore. Another group of exploration of the inner soul of human beings is the film's freedom of self-relieving and falling back into the cage of doubt of love. Julie falls into a sadness of life coming to an end after

losing the love of her life, and her self-torture of loss and mourning is expressed through her calm but exhaustive escape, trying to release, trying to be free. But swallowing pills to commit suicide, selling the home where she once lived happily, living in anonymity, all these are ineffective and unmeaningful struggles to get rid of past memories and the cage of herself and countless negative attempts to be free, but in the end, she cannot be truly free. Until the end of the film when she accepted the assistant who loves her, she seems to have found the track of her life and the meaning of existence, tears also timely and rare, once again out, although in that painful and long time, the blue melancholy indifferent expression always coiled most of her moments. The director has a delicate design in the film about tears, when Julie returned to the house where she used to live, she heard the old nanny of the family is crying in the corner, because for this unfortunate befall in Julie's life, she felt sad.

Tears in most cases represent the direct feeling of sadness, but here, Julie without a single tear shed and the old nanny sobbing uncontrollably form a sharp and dramatic contrast, which does not mean that Julie is not sad, but rather because after experiencing great trauma, sadness does not exist in the most simple and direct way, nor can it be expressed and resolved in an external way. It is these fragmented metaphorical details in the film that, through the director's organic interspersing and splicing, externalize Julie's real state of mind under the blue tone of grief, and the cold face of her social image at this time also makes the sorrow coiled in the character's heart sublimate and advance emotional expression.

Therefore, the tears at the end of the film are silently given a more advanced and complex meaning after the previous paving. When at the end of Julie's life she regains the return of love and liberation, tears are no longer synonymous with sadness, but a symbol of relief and liberation from her past life, and a meaning of freedom that director Krzysztof Kieslowski has shown us.

### 3. Expression of Consciousness in the Figurative Gaze

Julie, in her specific story, is a woman who has built all her expectations and values in life on her family, and her tender past is bound to be the ultimate motivation to sustain her through the happy years of the past, so when the catastrophic trauma comes, extreme grief is inevitable. In the aftermath of the trauma, it is understandable that the character is motivated by a desire to recuperate from the trauma and say goodbye to the past. In the days following the loss of spiritual support, in silence and solitude, Julie does appear cold, without affect, destructive of her attachments, withdrawn from all living warm reality. This is a manifestation of the externalisation of her spiritual world and a kind of impasse, stasis, or paralysis in her deep heart. Because of a longing for the past and an escape from it, Julie is caught in a chaotic contradiction, a fragile and struggling mind, dominated and closed by negative emotions, unable to break free from her emotional chains, her destiny.

Julie dips the originally intact sugar cube into the overflowing coffee, and from the beginning to the end of the sugar dyeing process, the camera remains focused on this point of view, recording the entire process. The director has said that this shot was deliberate and that he had worked on it with precision and even rigorous calculation and preparation. In this seemingly boring footage, the director does not include additional information beyond what is shown to complement the character's pain as we know it, but it is through the seemingly insignificant and unremarkable things that serve as a vehicle for Julie's state of mind at the moment. It is the fact that she is so silent as to focus only on this cube of sugar that expresses her character's situation of isolation and rejection of new things: she still wants to escape, to escape the attachment and infinite attachment to the memories of the past in her mind. The use of detail in the visual world to convey the deeper feelings of the characters is a frequent and skillful use of Krzysztof Kieslowski's artistic expression in this film, such as the almost destructive tearing down of a blue chandelier that belonged to the past while tidying up the house, only to hang it solemnly in the new home. By drawing the contradictory nature of Julie's behaviour, the character's dilemma of internal struggle and her attempts to escape but also her attachment to the situation are suggested; Or the scene with the young mice in the house, where, perhaps out of maternal glow or natural kindness, she looks with tenderness and reluctance, but because she can't stand the noise all night, she resolutely puts the cat in the mouse's den. These subtleties, brought to the viewer's attention through the slow progression of the images, effectively and superbly convey Julie's psychological state and changes. There are many more figurative gazes like this, which are based on patient observation of everyday life without the need for flashy dialogue, and which are designed to portray the characters' emotions in a subtle audio-visual language. Throughout the film, Julie's destiny is to break free from the shackles of her past, as she struggles to say goodbye to it and find meaning for herself in the future. When she awakens from her coma after the accident, her acts of suicide, mourning and escape are all symbolic of the reality of her own world, which is deeply affected by her past. The self-deception can only lead to false and negative

freedom, and the dream of healing that she creates for herself, which seems to isolate all individual connections, can be ruthlessly pierced in countless random moments, as Julie's mother once told her One cannot have nothing. The moment she realizes the reality and tries to die, the audience is aware of her determination to be attached to the past. She is already trapped in the wrong place, in a labyrinth of life, where she cannot find an escape, pervaded by the blue of melancholy, without self, without freedom, without happiness.

#### 4. Conclusions

At the end of the film, Julie makes the choice to start her life anew, no longer rejecting and isolating herself from everything, gradually embracing love, accepting friendship and returning to life in a more comfortable atmosphere, on the right path to finding her own meaning. Although Krzysztof Kieslowski certainly is not explicit about whether cure, health, love is the outcome. The director leaves an ambiguous closing shot at the end, as well as spiritual communication to the audiences, and it is precisely this deliberate design and communication that reflect the director's own definition of freedom. Julie, aware of her inability to escape the prison of self and unable to sever all ties, is an incredibly ambivalent character, and her freedom is complex and antagonistic. Returning to the film, Krzysztof Kieslowski shows us the narrative and artistic potential of the colour blue as a carrier for imagery in his highly personal and creative imagery, using clever design to draw the colour into the world of the image and make it an integral part of the process of the heroine's life. Throughout the narrative, blue is activated from its most traditional definition, not only as a vector of opposites at different stages, but also as a multi-layered semantic representation of freedom, ambivalence, sadness and other emotions and desires intertwined in Julie's inner storm of intentions; beneath the cold and calm exterior, Julie also hides her attachment to and memories of those blue figurines from her past. These deep and independent feelings originate from the pain and despair in her life, and these fluid, intense and opposing changes of feeling are rooted in an inner obsession with the freedom she understands. The director intends to show us that freedom and bondage coexist, that freedom takes undefined forms, like the blue in the film that is not fixed, and that bondage is the price of freedom, and that it is only free when the spirit no longer serves as support.

#### References

- [1] Kehr, D. (1994). *Kieslowski's trilogy: Blue, white, red. Film Comment, (30), 10-21.*
- [2] Yun Duoer. (2004). *Three colors of France: Blue, White and red -- French films come to China. Friends of Science, (11), 1-10.*
- [3] Ge Yuqing. (2006). *The Fusion of artistic conception and Audience's Aesthetic Intention in Chinese Films. Literature and Arts Review, 2006, (04), 25-35.*