

Mirror Images in "The Double Life of Véronique"

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Abstract: Krzysztof Kieślowski was a world-class French director of Polish descendant whose early documentaries had a strong realistic style, and his later work, represented by the *Red, White, and Blue Trilogy*, showed a strong personal style and philosophical thinking of human beings. *The Double Life of Véronique* is his transition work, essential in the shift from Poland to the West. The use of mirrors as imagery and the mirror-parallel structure of the two women's stories become an essential way to express the core of the film. This paper will analyze the film's audio-visual language and mirror expressions, starting from the mirror and the mirror-parallel structure, to reveal how Kieślowski uses virtual images and metaphors to express the universal experience of women as subjectivity in the film—using Jacques Lacan's mirror stage to illustrate how Weronika and Véronique establish their subjectivity. Also, Krzysztof Kieślowski created several layers of mirror relationships, all of which apply to the crystal of time of Gilles Deleuze's theory.

Keywords: Gilles Deleuze, Krzysztof Kieślowski, Mirror Stages, Mirror Images

1. Introduction

Krzysztof Kieślowski's career had two significant turning points: from documentary to narrative, from Poland to France. This article will analyze the film in Kieślowski's second big turning point, *The Double Life of Véronique*, the critical film for Kieślowski shifting from *Decalogue* to the *Trilogy*. Retaining the use of images such as windows, glass globes, and mirrors in *Przypadek* (1981) and *Bexkonca* (1984), Kieślowski constructed the subject inner world with connotations. The stylized cinematic language, such as flashbacks and filters, had been repeatedly applied to the subsequent films, becoming Kieślowski's visual hallmarks and even more pronounced in the subsequent *Red, White, and Blue Trilogy*.

The Double Life of Véronique is a film based on a female perspective and female perception. The film subverted the Hollywood cinema model of women as objects and challenged the lack of women status by psychoanalysis that has long dominated film analysis. Kieślowski intended to find ways to express women's delicate perceptions through reflection. "They used to criticize me terribly in Poland, saying I portrayed women as one-dimensional characters, that I didn't understand the essence of womanhood. It's true that in my first films, the women were never the main characters" [1]. When Kieślowski wanted to make a film about female characters who feel things more keenly, have more accurate intuitions, and value perception from a female perspective. *The Double Life of Véronique* fundamentally affirms that female experience can represent universal human experience, which is revolutionary from a feminist perspective.

Since many mysteries exist in *The Double Life of Véronique*, many film scholars are passionate about shedding light on the dual structures and the double life of Véronique/Weronika. Marek Haltof believed that the stylistic elements of later Kieślowski can undoubtedly be found in his earlier narrative films [2]. Many film researchers focus on filtering and acoustics in *The Double Life of Véronique*. Jonathan Romney argued that visual filtering using a yellow-green filter created a benign and autumnal glow tone. Change of filtering witnessed the two heroines' experiences. While equally important to visual and music themes, mirror as image and mirror-parallel structure are the primary keys to interpreting the film [3]. Emma Wilson, highlighting the mirrors as the image, followed Vincent Amiel in linking Kieślowski's filmmaking to Deleuze's theory, which this paper will further illustrate through the relationship between actual and virtual images [4]. Annette Insdorf, in her book *Kieślowski, Double Lives, Second Chances*, contended that Véronique learns from Weronika and avoids dying of singing. In Chapter 5, she analyzed *The Double Life of Véronique* and pointed out the film's mirror functions [5]. Jonathan Romney illustrated that Kieślowski's film encourages viewers to process a nebulous and numinous world, along with the sensitive and emotional spirit [3]. The most pronounced feature is self-reflexivity. Kieślowski used a series of pairs to match two different lives of Véronique/Weronika, including threads, heart problems, hoodles, and music talents.

The first third of *The Véronique's Double Life* describes the life of Polish Weronika; two-thirds of the film smoothly turns to the story of French Véronique. What *The Double Life of Véronique* fascinates the writer is not just the film of women but also the use of imagery of mirrors and glass, especially how the director creates subjectivity through virtual images of mirrors. The writer contends that Kieślowski created a mirror-parallel pattern to present the story; therefore, it is necessary to go through the lens of mirrors to interpret the film. In the film, the director extensively used reflections from mirrors and glass to make the space in the shot more affluent and more enigmatic. Using the mirror as a metaphor and imagery completes Véronique/Weronika's subjectivity.

2. Mirrors & Glass' Function in the Film

Mirrors have been historically correlated to the development of human society and reflections of self-images. Mark Pendergrass's *The History of Mirrors* argued that humans first used polished obsidian formed by volcanic eruptions as the earliest artificial mirrors. Early in human history, the calm water of lakes, mirror-like surfaces with reflective qualities, became a metaphor linked to the symbol of human culture [6]. In *Mirror: A History*, Sabine Melchior-Bonnet also suggested that the human being established subjectivity by looking at the image in the mirror, confirming shape, image, and identity [7].

Masterpieces had been applied to mirrors by great artists to extend the space in art history. Convex mirror reflection revealed the backs of the newlyweds in *The Arnolfini Portrait*, and Jan Van Eyck incorporated himself into the mirror as a witness. *Las Meninas* was analyzed in the first chapter of Foucault's *The Order of Things*, where Velasquez was painting in front of a mirror. The viewer's gazes wandered through *Las Meninas*, constituting the interactions between the viewer's and the painter's. "The mirror that gazes and is gazed at suggests this purely interactive effect"[8].

Psychoanalysis had a significant influence on film study. Film theorists like Christian Metz and Jean-Louis Baudry took the mirror and reality analogy. Cinema became the new mirror image through cinematic machinery, where the camera serves as a coherent and omnipotent Ego for the viewers. The camera's presence gives the spectators a feeling of mirroring the image on the screen and giving them the power to see. Therefore, the movie screen is a mirror of the spectators.

Mirrors in films are common objects because they serve as props appearing in life and enrich the language of cinema through reflections. Panning cameras can create space, whereas a stable scene divided up by mirrors builds a multiple and extensive space for perception. The mirror image extends

in length. The mirror's reflection expresses the figure's complexity of the inner world. The mirror image reveals an imaginary world, prompting people to seek beyond the surface and explore deeply.

In *The Double Life of Véronique*, Kieślowski sets up scenes with mirrors indoors and window glass, a substitute for mirrors outdoors. Window glass contains a broader meaning compared with a mirror. The audience can not only see the reflected side through the mirrors, while the glass reflects deeper and broader external space, showing a more complex space.

When Weronika talks to her father, her face is gentle and glossy due to the green light, and the darker side mirror reflects her shadow. Weronika says that she has a strange feeling; she feels that she is not alone. The mirror matches her lines since the two figures (Weronika and her shadow) form actual and virtual image. According to Gilles Deleuze's theory, the cycle of the mirror is an exchange: the mirror image is virtual for the actual character reflected in, but the mirror image only leaves a simple potential for the character and pushes it to the outside. Mirror, being a crystal, demonstrates more than reality. Meaning of images in the mirror and Weronika herself generates an infinite circle. When the spectators' eyes wander between the two, people would be satisfied with the dual chances and double life that Kieślowski wants to express.

Mirrors are typical interior decorations in homes, and the appearance of mirrors should represent authenticity. In the Weronika aunt's house, when Weronika comes to Krakow to talk to her friends on the telephone, Weronika whistles for a while. Here, Kieślowski uses a medium and close shot. The lens of the camera replaces the eyes of the spectators, and the distance of the lens also means the distance between the audience and the person being photographed. The medium and close shots show how close Weronika and her friends are. Weronika sits next to the mirror and repeats her name on the telephone. The Telephone and pronunciation of the name are essential elements connecting Véronique and Weronika.

Glass illustrates the alienation of the image in its self-construction. Glass is the best substitute for mirrors because mirrors are not common outdoors. After meeting puppeteer Alexandre Fabbri at the gate in Paris, Véronique feels annoyed because Alexandre relentlessly coaxes her feelings and she escapes away from him. Véronique hides in a small staircase with diamond-shaped multicolored glass on the door. Kieślowski places the character in a narrow space to express her discomfort with complex emotions and desires. The scene that Véronique looks out through the glass is similar to Detective Ferguson stalking Madeleine in *Vertigo* (1958) and peeping at Madeleine behind the curtain. However, Hitchcock's voyeuristic shot is clear and complete, whereas Véronique's gaze is divided by glass, representing fear and anger. The pattern on the door frame narrows the scene of Alexandre, and the colorful glass on Véronique's face implies the multiple emotional conflicts within her at this moment.

3. Véronique/Weronika: Mirror-Parallel Structure

Véronique and Weronika have the same appearance and similar family backgrounds. Their mothers influenced them, even though mothers died young. Also, both of them have close relationships with their fathers. They share the same musical talents and heart problems.

Véronique/Weronika is a pair of mirror-parallel relationships. The mirror is not an entity; two figures constitute a set of connections. Jacques Lacan's mirror stage and subject could interpret the phenomenon. Lacan stated that infants aged 6-18 months are in the mirror stage. When an infant sees himself/herself in the mirror, the subjective consciousness gradually forms through the sight of "I" in the mirror. They discover a resemblance to their mirror image and experience the integration of fragmented feelings into a holistic vision. Being held in an adult's arms, the infant confirms his subjectivity and the existence of others. Once the infant identifies the mirror image, the subject will be assimilated by the image in the mirror. Because human subjectivity is formed between the dialectics of assimilation and alienation, the human subject is a mirror subject, resulting in the

opposition and unity of the authentic self and the self in the mirror. The subject no longer be determined by the subject's consciousness but by the others. That is intersubjectivity [9].

The subject of both Véronique/Weronika is independent and unified. Weronika decides to pursue her music dream, although singing jeopardizes her life. Véronique changes her mind and becomes a music teacher without a reason. To some extent, intersubjectivity intervenes in their life paths. Both Véronique and Weronika have the intuition to feel the presence of another, and they are mirrors of each other. The mirror exists when Weronika sees Véronique in the Krakow square; at the same time, it exists in Véronique's epiphany when she sees the photo in the hotel in Paris.

Christian Metz analyzed Lacan's mirror theory: "Thus, the film is like the mirror. But it differs from the primordial mirror in one essential point: although, as in the latter, everything may come to be projected, there is one thing and one thing only that is never reflected in it: the spectator's own body. In a certain emplacement, the mirror suddenly becomes clear glass"[10]. That is to say, the remarkable thing about Véronique/Weronika's mirror relationship in the film includes spectators' line of gaze. The film's gaze, equal to the lens of camera, puts the spectators in the position of the subject.

Véronique/Weronika mirror-parallel relationship establishes various connections in the film, which requires the spectators' witness. The audiences observe following mirror parallels. Firstly, Véronique decides to give up her singing career for no apparent reason and becomes a music teacher, while she has no idea about the impact that Weronika's death had on her. Secondly, before Weronika attends the last performance, she looks in the mirror and draws eyeliner with a silver ring. When Véronique is in a hotel in Paris, she also uses a silver ring to fiddle with her lower eyelashes. Thirdly, both Véronique and Weronika have a habit of biting their fingers and wearing headphones. Fourthly, when Weronika sings, she habitually wraps the cotton thread around her fingers. The thread also symbolizes "life hanging by a thread." The light spots of sunlight and a mirror leads Véronique to search for shoelaces. She holds the shoelaces and compares them with her electrocardiogram, corresponding to Weronika's "life hanging by a thread." Lastly, Véronique and Weronika dream about each other's lives.

Another set of mirror relationships is Alexandre's marionettes and Véronique/Weronika. Véronique was mesmerized by Alexandre when she watches Alexandre perform a puppet show in the elementary school. He conducts a tale of metamorphoses. A ballerina dies in the middle of the performance and transforms into a butterfly. Véronique observes Alexandre in a mirror next to the stage; the character's experience is identical to Weronika's, even though Véronique is unaware of this. Alexandre's subsequent play represents the mirror-parallel relationship of Véronique/Weronika in the film. Near the end of the film, there is a sequence of shots as Véronique walks through the corridor of Alexandre's apartment and enters his studio, where Alexandre is working on his puppets. When Véronique asks why there are two identical dolls, Alexandre answers that he needs two because he usually breaks down during performances. He also tells Véronique his story of two girls born on different continents who are identical but do not know each other; one will learn from the experience of the other. Alexandre names the story "The Double Life of...". Alexandre's puppetry creates another set of mirror parallel relationship, reflecting Véronique/Weronika mirror parallel. Citing Plato's cave allegory, Alexandre's puppets are shadow images of Véronique/Weronika in the cave. Alexandre turns the two characters with subjectivity into puppets, into objects. Therefore, Véronique leaves in silence.

4. Recollection Image, Virtual Image and Time Image

For Deleuze, the value of cinema lies in the editing of images; their movement drives the force that inspires the constant re-growth of ideas and extends the continuation of the rhizome. In *Cinema II: The Time-Image* as an extension of the pure optical and sound image, the recollection-image is reflected in the movie in "flashbacks" and "memory scenes" [11]. The refined visual and sound image

follows the second form of recognition in Bergson's theory, attentive recognition. Unlike the motion image, the pure optical and sound image does not present habitual motion as a way of presentation but instead shows the object in itself and extends the relations of deeper layers of reality. The pure optical and sound image is rich, thus generating an infinite circularity of the actual and virtual.

The Double Life of Véronique teems with recollection images, and pure optical and sound images offer spectators a lens to understand the film. The opening provides a key to interpreting the relationship between Véronique and Weronika using two sequence shots of young children. A set of aerial shots of the sky accompanies by Weronika's mom's sound, suggesting this is a winter night around Christmas Eve. The episode is reversed up and down, revealing that this is the perspective of two-year-old Weronika looking up at the sky through the huddle that shows up several times. Another sequence of shots is zoomed in with a magnifying glass to create a close-up shot of the eyes of two-year-old Véronique, whose mother taught her to observe leaves in the spring. Time is the measurable thing that perceives the subject, and this set of shots reveals the temporal relationship of winter before spring. Chronological order also applies to a hint that Weronika's life is timed before Véronique's life. Spectators will soon discover that the opening is the recollection of Weronika/Véronique, which forks two similar but not identical lives. The initial recollection images provide mirror-like imagery and make a preview and foreshadowing for the film because they enhance the viewers' psychological causality. The opening recollection images constitute an experience of subjectivity, that is, of temporality and spirituality.

"The relation of the actual image to recollection-images can be seen in the flashback. This is precisely a closed circuit which goes from the present to the past" [11]. Reinforcing the flashback renders spectators to enhance their memory, pointing out an internal mark that happened in the past. What makes Weronika/Véronique special is that the use of flashback imposes the intertwining on the two heroines. For instance, when Veronique receives an anonymous call, Weronika's singing voice appears. The following shots are Véronique's point-of-view shots of Weronika's final performance leading to her death, which appears ambiguous and blurred under a red filter. The mirror parallel between Weronika/Véronique is meant to be shown to the audience and deepen the true feelings of each other in an unknowable situation. The use of flashback shots makes the mirror-parallel self-reflexive relationship more explicit.

The mirror images reflect the mirrored world. However, what Deleuze calls a crystal delivers by pure optical and sound images, through the lens of depth, reflecting into a cycle of coexistence and exchange and revealing an extended meaning. The spectators can see the inversion of different worlds in the crystal and the choice of a double life. On the train, when Weronika is on her way to Krakow, she takes out the huddle. A totally upside-down world is reflected on the glass sphere; the image, completed reality, exhibits the outside landscape. The reflection is illuminated on the windows of the train, and the glass in the outdoor space imprints the silhouettes and the changing world, extending the image and contrasting the idea of the inverted glass sphere and suggesting that there is another upside-down world.

Kieślowski also recreates the dreams more than once in the film. At the very beginning, Weronika dreams of Véronique running. The interior mirror complements the virtual image; Weronika wakes up from a dream that is not her experience, though spectators know that this is Véronique's experience. In order to present the intertwined fates of the Weronika/Véronique, Kieślowski allows the memory to break towards their respective worlds, emerging the different subjects of Weronika/Véronique in the mirror-parallel seams.

Deleuze's theory of crystals of time is consistent with the flow of time in Kieślowski's film, and Deleuze analyzes the convergence process of virtual images and reality influences. Virtual images contain actual images and outside consciousness. By contrast with recollection images, actual and virtual images construct crystals of time in a circular process. "What we see through the pane of in

the crystal is time, in its double movement of making presents pass, replacing one by the next while going towards the future, but also of preserving all the past, dropping it into an obscure depth" [11].

Weronika's point-of-view shots seeing Véronique in the Krakow square complete the crystal image's temporal depth. The glass in the car forms a set of crystals of actual and virtual images, which connects the two-way flow of time. Depth of field is important to the cinematic representation of time. As Weronika walks towards the center of the Krakow square, young people run in the opposite direction of her. Running, as an action that responds to the movement of time, figuratively represents running from the past present to the present, and then out of the frame foreshadowing running to the future present. Weronika's running in the opposite direction of their movement reverses the flow of time. The camera is set behind Weronika, with Weronika's back in the foreground and the French tour group's bus in the background; the viewers are still not aware precisely what Weronika is looking at. It is not until the cut from the distance to the close-up of Weronika's gaze, followed Véronique's movement at the door of the bus. The viewer realizes that Weronika is looking at someone who looks exactly like her. As Véronique gets into the car and continues to move in the car, Weronika's gaze follows after Véronique. The crowd behind Weronika continues to run in the opposite direction; the conflict shows that the present in the virtual images escapes towards the past present. The actual images of the moment are about to become the virtual images in the subsequent shots. The camera is evidence of Véronique's existence in the future through photographs. The bus drives around slowly, it is an important moment since flow of time back to its supposed to be when the bus turns around in the Krakow square. Cohesion time becomes normal when Weronika chases a few steps and the camera moves backward. The crowd in the background finally moves from back to front, which means time returns to its narrative. Both the final moment when Véronique recognizes that this is another Weronika through the photographs and what happened in the Krakow square creates a closed loop in time, which generates a crystal of time in the film.

"What the crystals reveal or show is the hidden basis of time; that is to say, time divides itself in two tendencies: the present, which is becoming the past, and the past, which is being preserved. Time causes the present to pass, while at the same time, there is the preservation of the past"[11]. Literally and visually, the metaphor of the hoodle is almost identical to Deleuze's concept of crystal image. The crystal image becomes the core of the visual signifier as the actual image, and the potential influence crystallizes into a tiny puncture. When Véronique and Alexandre get to know each other in a hotel in Paris, Alexandre finds the other hoodle in Véronique's bag. The two hoodles form another temporal loop, and actual images become virtual images when the hoodle is taken out. Time does not unfold linearly in Kieślowski's movie; the camera unfolds a facet in the movement of time, and pure audio-visual language connects the memory-image and virtual images, rendering the whole film become a crystal of time. The appearance and environment of the time crystal in the movie give it the ability to grow infinitely, and the film is constructed as a polygonal mirror, a lens. Encountering the audience's gaze, the image regains its fullness of experience between split refractions.

5. Conclusion

The Double Life of Véronique completed the transformation from realistic narrative expression to the spiritual, transcendental, and abstract style, and later initiated the *Red, White, and Blue Trilogy*. Kieślowski moved away from political narratives in this period, thus turning to the choices of individual lives and a priori experiences.

The film tells the story of two women. Kieślowski uses the mirror-parallel relationship to form multiple sets of mirror relationships. The first set is a mirror relationship of two identical-looking women who do not know each other but can somehow perceive each other. Kieślowski uses the camera language, including mirror, glass, and hoodle, to construct virtual images and actual images, making the film as a circularity. Moreover, spectators' gaze interactions complement the mirror-

parallel structure of *Véronique/Weronika*. Since audience witness how the *Véronique/Weronika* mirror parallel relationship develops, watching the film establishes a mirror between the sight and the movie screen. Lastly, Alexandre's puppets in his studio represents the mirror-parallel relationship of *Véronique/Weronika*. By analyzing the mirror-parallel relationship, this film uses the mirror memory cycle, to begin with finding self-knowledge with women as a universal experience.

Using lots of metaphors, Kieślowski shows how the time and memory divide into two subjects. Analyzed by citing Deleuze's theory of crystals of time, the film makes actual images and virtual images intertwined, just like the fates of *Véronique/Weronika*. The circular time building by metaphors regains its fullness of experience from splited reflections, which allows people to have extensive interpretations.

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