the cinema of KRZYSZTOF KIEŚLOWSKI

variations on destiny and chance

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CHAPTER FOUR

Entomological Observations and Metaphysics in Decalogue

> *Decalogue* is an attempt to narrate ten stories about ten or twenty individuals who – caught in a struggle precisely because of these and not other circumstances which are fictitious but which could occur in every life – suddenly realise that they're going round and round in circles, that they are not achieving what they want.
>
> – Krzysztof Kieślowski[1]

> We wanted to go beyond Polish iconography to get rid of that unbearable polonocentrism: the constant weeping, the paraded pain and the conviction that we are the centre of the universe.
>
> – Krzysztof Piesiewicz[2]

Decalogue, a ten-part series of loosely connected television films, offers a pessimistic picture of a harsh world in which moral choices must be made against the pressure of politics and economics. In spite of its apparent religious connotations, *Decalogue* is not only an exploration of religious or metaphysical issues but also an acute analysis of the mental condition of Polish

society before 1989. The bulk of the action takes place in the same drab Warsaw apartment building complex, the Ursynów housing estate, built in the late 1970s. The ugliness and greyness of the dehumanised urban setting dominate the filmic landscape, together with close-ups of the people who endure these harsh conditions. Kieślowski's 'entomological observations' of desperate and unhappy characters inhabiting the unfriendly space give *Decalogue* the feeling of a documentary film.

Prior to the *Decalogue* series, Warsaw tenement blocks by and large did not provide the scenery for existential television dramas. These places were, after all, symbols of development in an underdeveloped country, symbols of the communal way of life. Given that representatives of all strata of society lived there, and that numerous people wanted to move there (and could not because of the shortage of apartments), it comes as no surprise that this was the setting for success stories about social advancement: films about migration from villages and small towns to the capital city. From the popular 1965 television series, *Wojna domowa* (*Civil War*, fifteen episodes), to the mid-1970s production, *The Forty-Year-Old*, both directed by Jerzy Gruza, this was also the setting for light comedies that often, in a thinly veiled manner, poked fun at the absurdities of the Polish People's Republic. Beginning in the 1980s, living in standardised apartments like Ursynów was no longer associated with success but necessity. For example, Stanisław Bareja's television series, *Alternatywy 4* (*Alternative Street, No. 4*, 1983, premiere in 1986/87, nine episodes), is a satirical portrait of the inhabitants of one apartment block also situated, interestingly enough, at the Ursynów housing estate.

The idea for a series of films based on the Ten Commandments originated around 1982 and 1983. Christopher Garbowski writes that scriptwriter Krzysztof Piesiewicz

> was in part inspired by a Gothic altarpiece in the National Museum in Warsaw displaying the Ten Commandments in ten different scenes. In the altarpiece, the scenes are placed symmetrically. One might detect a similar symmetry in the *Decalogue* series when you consider the fact that after the first five episodes the style and tempo are somewhat different; there is also a framework of violence in the first and fifth episode which mark that part of the series apart.[3]

As Kieślowski mentioned on several occasions, he initially wanted to finish the script with Piesiewicz, give it to younger film directors and supervise the whole project through his Tor film studio. Eventually, he became emotionally involved with the project and decided to direct it for Polish television. The

carefully planned shooting took eleven months in 1987 and 1988. Limitations – a small budget, relatively short episodes (approximately 56 minutes) and production time constraints – mark the *Decalogue* series. To lower the costs, Kieślowski frequently worked on more than one film simultaneously, enabling various cinematographers to use the same locations during one day. To recover costs, he also decided to produce extended versions of two parts of *Decalogue* to be shown in cinema theatres. Kieślowski himself selected part 5 of *Decalogue*, leaving the second choice for the Polish Ministry of Culture. The ministry selected part 6 and funded both productions. The theatrical version of *Decalogue 5*: *A Short Film About Killing*, premiered in Polish cinemas in March of 1988; the theatrical version of *Decalogue 6*: *A Short Film About Love*, appeared later in the same year, in October. The *Decalogue* series was shown on Polish Television in the winter of 1988 and 1989.

Despite their earlier harsh treatment of *No End*, the majority of Polish film critics praised Kieślowski's new work; successful screenings abroad of the two *Short Films* certainly helped the reception of Kieślowski's films at home. For example, *A Short Film About Killing* received the FIPRESCI Award and the Jury Prize at the 1988 Cannes Film Festival, and also earned the Best European Film Award ('Felix') in 1988. *A Short Film About Love* was honoured with the Special Jury Award, the FIPRESCI award and the Catholic Jury Prize at the 1988 Film Festival in San Sebastian. The television series *Decalogue* was also shown on the big screen abroad and received yet another FIPRESCI award and the 'Youth and Cinema' Prize at the 1989 Venice Film Festival and Catholic Jury Prize at the 1989 Film Festival in San Sebastian, among others.

International recognition aside, the Polish premiere of *A Short Film About Killing* coincided with a heated debate in Poland about capital punishment. At the annual 1988 Festival of Polish Films in Gdańsk, the two *Short Films* received the Grand Prix ('Golden Lions of Gdańsk'). *A Short Film About Love*, in particular, received critical acclaim and numerous awards in Gdańsk: Best Script Award for Kieślowski and Piesiewicz, Best Actress Award for Grażyna Szapołowska, Best Supporting Actress for Stefania Iwińska and Best Cinematography for Witold Adamek. In the following year, the two leading actors of *A Short Film About Love*, Grażyna Szapołowska and Olaf Lubaszenko, were voted the best Polish actors in a popular plebiscite of the cinema weekly *Film*.[4]

When Kieślowski and Piesiewicz started their work on *Decalogue*, Polish cinema was dominated by safe literary adaptations such as *Nad Niemnem* (*On the Niemen River*, 1987), directed by Zbigniew Kuźmiński, and intimate psychological dramas such as *A Woman with a Hat*, directed by Stanisław Różewicz. The mid-1980s were also characterised by the growing role of

popular cinema, both locally-produced films and imported action cinema watched mostly on video format. The success of *Decalogue* and its two big screen versions also came during a period marked by the release of several films produced during and immediately after the Solidarity period and promptly shelved by the communist authorities. Films such as Janusz Zaorski's *The Mother of Kings*, Jerzy Domaradzki's *Wielki Bieg* (*The Big Run*, 1981) and Kieślowski's own *Blind Chance* were released in 1987; television films such as Robert Gliński's *Niedzielne igraszki* (*Sunday Pranks*, 1983), Leszek Wosiewicz's *The Vigil of 1981*, and Wiesław Saniewski's *Wolny strzelec* (*The Freelancer*, 1981) had their premieres in 1988. Also in 1988, the authorities released Agnieszka Holland's powerful *A Woman Alone*. With the addition of the paramount film of the early 1980s, Ryszard Bugajski's *The Interrogation*, released one year later, these temporarily dislodged films formed the most visible group around 1988.

The release of Kieślowski's ten television films referring to the Biblical Ten Commandments in a communist-bloc country by a director who considered himself agnostic may be seen as an anomaly. Despite the strength of the Polish Catholic Church, Krzysztof Zanussi became virtually the only Polish film-maker in the 1980s producing films that could be labelled 'Christian' or 'religious'. His filmic biography of the 'Polish Pope', *From a Far Country: Pope John Paul II* (1981) and a hagiography of the saint Maksymilian Kolbe, *Życie za życie* (*Life for Life*, 1990), may serve as the best examples. Katarzyna Jabłońska is perhaps right in saying that '*Decalogue* is an exceptional challenge to Polish Catholicism. To be sure, it is a polemic with false, superficial religiosity. It is also a provocation directed against a certain religious infantilism, against treating religion as an escape from responsibility for one's own life and for the life of others.'[5] Scriptwriter Piesiewicz admits that 'in 1985 the very idea of dealing with the Decalogue was already a certain provocation, almost a manifesto because it was clear that we wanted to focus on a real human being in real circumstances, situations and conflicts. We wanted to completely detach ourselves from that very general way of describing the world, from the relationship between "the political world and the human being", or "the political person and the world".'[6]

The political climate in Poland during the last years of communist rule contributes to the final shape of *Decalogue*, but the long-lasting economic, political and moral crisis, gloomy prospects for the future and the resulting mass emigration of Poles are deliberately subdued in Kieślowski's series. He intentionally ignores certain everyday aspects of life that dominated the reality in Poland in the late 1980s: politics, social rituals and images of day-by-day hardship (for example food rationing, queues). Disenchanted with politics,

Kieślowski attempts to depict 'individuals in difficult situations'[7] instead of explicitly political issues and situations familiar from numerous television productions. In the introduction to the English edition of *Decalogue* Kieślowski writes: 'The films should be influenced by the individual Commandments to the same degree that the Commandments influence our daily lives. We are aware that no philosophy or ideology had ever challenged the fundamental tenets of the Commandments during their several thousand years of existence, yet they are nevertheless transgressed on a routine basis.'[8] In Kieślowski's series, the biblical Commandments are not illustrated but are, rather, referred to in ten anecdotes, each with two or three leading characters. Also the setting is by and large limited to the same Ursynów housing estate. Although each part of the series usually refers to one single commandment, sometimes a film may refer to more than one commandment; occasionally, its reference is not clear at all (such as *Decalogue 6*).

The *Decalogue* series introduces undistinguished characters, mostly intelligent professionals dwarfed by an oppressive political system. The viewer watches them in situations that require immediate and vital decisions and is introduced to their moral dilemmas. The serious, dark, almost depressing tone of the majority of the *Decalogue* films prompted some critics to discuss it in terms of some mysterious East-Central European malady. For example, Tim Pulleine writes that Kieślowski's perception of the world is saturated with 'East European sinisterness'.[9] Even if one agrees with this comment – suggesting that the characters in *Decalogue* are themselves the products of specific East-Central European historical, political and cultural circumstances – one also has to notice that they face universal, truly Bergmanesque dilemmas. Kieślowski himself admired some of Bergman's films, *The Silence* (1963) in particular.[10] (Interestingly, in his 1995 interview, trumpeted as 'the last one', Bergman listed *Decalogue* as one of the five contemporary films that he 'most benefited from'.) The open structure of *Decalogue* invites the viewer to interpret the actions of Kieślowski's protagonists, to follow their struggles with destiny in an abundance of chance encounters, symbols, allusions, ambiguity, deliberate slow pace, laconic dialogue and a number of recurring motifs (such as the bottle of milk: sipped, frozen, spilled and delivered).

Decalogue was produced with the involvement of Kieślowski's regular composer since *No End*, Zbigniew Presiner, and nine leading Polish cinematographers (Piotr Sobociński worked on two parts, *2* and *9*). Kieślowski assembled a diverse group of cinematographers known for their different aesthetic and working styles. The group included the very experienced Wiesław Zdort (b. 1931), who started his career during the Polish School period and worked as a camera operator in 1958 on such Polish classic

films as Andrzej Munk's *Eroica* and Andrzej Wajda's *Popiół i diament* (*Ashes and Diamonds*). His later career is associated with directors such as Kazimierz Kutz and Barbara Sass (his wife). However, the majority of cinematographers working on *Decalogue* belong to Kieślowski's generation: Krzysztof Pakulski (b. 1948), Sławomir Idziak (b. 1945), Witold Adamek (b. 1945), Edward Kłosiński (b. 1943) and Andrzej Jaroszewicz (b. 1938). But Kieślowski also worked with newly emerging cinematographers such as Dariusz Kuc (b. 1951), Piotr Sobociński (1958–2001) and Jacek Bławut (b. 1950), the latter also a director of acclaimed documentary films. On the set of *Decalogue*, the director granted them a lot of freedom to experiment. He tells Danusia Stok: 'I've never given lighting cameramen as much freedom as I did in *Decalogue* … I counted on the competence, on the energy which results from freedom.'[11] Kieślowski's approach toward shooting resulted in slightly different visual styles in the various parts of *Decalogue*. These range from hand-held camera and the extensive use of filters (especially in *Decalogue 5* and *A Short Film About Killing*, photographed by Sławomir Idziak) to 'plain', functional photography (for example by Dariusz Kuc in *Decalogue 7* and by Jacek Bławut in *Decalogue 10*). Kieślowski's authorial signature aside, *Decalogue* also owes its stylistic coherence to Ewa Smal – the young editor who was recommended to Kieślowski by his long-time collaborator, editor Lidia Zonn.[12]

The production of such an ambitious project also had to involve a number of known Polish actors. Several of them appeared in earlier films by Kieślowski: Bogusław Linda, Aleksander Bardini, Jerzy Stuhr, Grażyna Szapołowska and Tadeusz Łomnicki, among others. Kieślowski also cast a group of actors whose names and best-remembered performances are associated with leading Polish directors, including Krystyna Janda and Daniel Olbrychski (Andrzej Wajda), Maja Komorowska (Krzysztof Zanussi), Olgierd Łukaszewicz (Wajda and Kazimierz Kutz). Often he relies on young emerging actors – the stars of the new Polish cinema such as Mirosław Baka, Zbigniew Zamachowski and Olaf Lubaszenko, or theatrical actors, rarely seen in Polish films, such as Anna Polony.

Among Kieślowskian actors there is also Artur Barciś, previously seen in *No End* in the role of the imprisoned striking worker Dariusz Stach. He appears in episodic yet extremely important roles in almost all parts of the *Decalogue* series, with the exception of parts *7* and *10*. Like the ghost of lawyer Zyro in *No End*, the character played by Barciś is the silent witness to events in other people's lives. Kieślowski comments on his role: 'I introduced the character whom some called "the angel" and whom the taxi-drivers when they brought him in to the set called "the devil". But in screenplays he was always described as a "young man".'[13] Wiesław Zdort, the cinematographer

of *Decalogue 1*, reveals that during his first conversations with Kieślowski, they labeled the mysterious character 'the Angel of Fate'. Furthermore, he reveals that it was he who suggested that the Angel of Fate should reappear in other parts of *Decalogue*.[14] Actor Barciś admits in an interview with Tadeusz Sobolewski that he did not receive any specific acting instructions from Kieślowski regarding the character.[15]

The enigmatic angel-like character appears in some decisive scenes of *Decalogue*, during moments in which the fates of the protagonists are determined. The Angel of Fate glues the series together and adds an almost metaphysical dimension. He is portrayed as a person sitting at the campfire near the fatal pond in *Decalogue 1*, as a hospital worker in *Decalogue 2*, as a driver of a tram that nearly crashes into the protagonist's car in *Decalogue 3*, as a sportsman kayaking on the Vistula river and then carrying the kayak on his back when the female protagonist is about to decide her fate in *Decalogue 4*, as an inspector surveying the road and a painter in the prison in *Decalogue 5*, as an elegant man in a white suit in *Decalogue 6*, as a student listening to the protagonist's lecture in *Decalogue 8* and as a cyclist who observes the protagonist's attempted suicide in *Decalogue 9*. The editing often suggests that the Angel of Fate is aware of the complexity of a character's action. He silently warns about the consequences of a character's deed without directly interfering; sometimes he disapproves certain actions and feels sorry for what is happening.

Decalogue 1: I am the Lord; Thou shalt not have other gods before me

The first part of the *Decalogue* series sets the tone for the following films. It opens with a shot of a frozen pond; the camera glides over a thin layer of ice towards a mysterious man dressed in a heavy sheepskin coat sitting near the pond behind a campfire. The camera pauses for a moment in front of him and he looks straight into it. The director then cuts to an image of an older woman whom the viewer later learns is Irena (Maja Komorowska) standing on the street and watching a group of young boys, among them her nephew Paweł, running in slow motion on a television screen that is on display in a store's window. When the screen freezes with a close up image of Paweł, the viewer realises that Irena is crying. Her tears are mirrored by those of the strange man near the pond whose image follows that of Irena. This ambiguous opening suggests that perhaps the events presented later in the film are an extended flashback.

The story of *Decalogue 1* revolves around the relationship between a caring and understanding father – university professor Krzysztof (played by theatre director Henryk Baranowski) – and his gifted ten-year-old son Paweł (Wojciech

Klata)[16]. Krzysztof is a strong believer in science and logic; unlike his religious sister Irena, who helps him take care of Paweł during the (unexplained) absence of the mother, he is an agnostic, convinced that everything can be counted and measured. With his son, who is equally passionate about science and computers, Krzysztof calculates the thickness of the ice on the nearby pond before Paweł can make use of his Christmas gift – a pair of skates. Despite his careful calculations, the ice inexplicably breaks and Paweł drowns.[17]

Ominous signs of things to come and strange premonitions build the atmosphere of the film from its opening scene: the mysterious man sitting at the fateful pond as if waiting for the inevitable; a dead dog, probably frozen to death, found by Paweł; a frozen bottle of milk, and milk that turns sour; and a computer that switches itself on inexplicably. The most important menacing sign parallels the tragedy on ice: when Krzysztof is working at home, a bottle of ink breaks and blue ink gushes over his scientific papers placed on the table. The ink bottle cracks and this inexplicable, irrational incident stuns Krzysztof. When he later washes his hands in the bathroom and stares into the mirror, he senses something dire and beyond his comprehension. At that very moment he can hear sirens and, later, from his window he watches fire trucks heading towards the pond.

Despite its story about 'crime and punishment', Kieślowski's film is not a straightforward illustration of the thesis that the God of the Old Testament punishes those who put knowledge over faith or who worship false 'gods' (science/computer in the film). *Decalogue 1* does not offer a simple clash of 'rational science' versus 'irrational religion'. The father, as if not trusting his own calculations, checks the ice the night before the fatal accident to make sure that it is safe, and in doing so, he is confronted with the warning look of the Angel of Fate during his vigil near the pond. In another scene, when the computer inexplicably turns itself on, it flashes the sign 'I am ready' in English, and behaves as if it has a life on its own. In her analysis of *Decalogue 1*, Lisa Di Bartolomeo argues that 'the film is at one level a battle over Paweł's soul; he is enthralled by the power of technology, the lure of epistemology rather than mystification … Paweł must lose his life rather than lose his soul'.[18] The 'battle for Paweł's soul' between his father and aunt Irena plays a prominent role in the film. 'It's a form of words of farewell. There is no soul', claims Krzysztof, the advocate of science and computers, who expresses his belief in technological advances best during his lecture on 'the intelligent computers' having their own 'personality'. (His son observes the lecture.) Irena, on the other hand, explains to Paweł that for his father 'measurement could be applied to everything … Your father's way of life may seem more reasonable, but it doesn't rule out God.'

Decalogue 1 is the only film in the series that contains several direct references to religion, religious education, the 'Polish Pope' and discussions about the nature of God. For example, to explain the existence of God, Irena hugs her nephew and asks: 'What do you feel now?' 'I love you', replies Paweł. 'He is in that', concludes his aunt. Compared to other films in the series, the religious, metaphysical nature of *Decalogue 1* is also stressed by the more significant role of the angel-like character, 'the keeper of the ice' as cinematographer Wiesław Zdort also names him,[19] who appears six times in the film. The final sequence enhances the religious meaning of the film. After the loss of his son, Krzysztof goes to a nearby church, still under construction, and in frustration purposely destroys the makeshift altar with the icon of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa (*Matka Boska Częstochowska*) in the centre. The falling candles leave hot wax on the icon; the dripping wax forms a few 'tears' on the Madonna's face and she looks as if she is crying. Krzysztof tries to calm down by pressing a piece of the frozen holy water, in the shape of the Host, onto his forehead.[20]

The film ends with the image of Paweł, previously seen in the opening sequence, running towards the camera in extreme slow motion. The screen almost freezes, thus almost immortalising the boy, transferring him to another realm, the realm of human memory. The final scene is related to an earlier conversation between Paweł and his father, when the boy raises the issue of death after finding the dead dog. 'So what is left?' he asks, to which his father responds: 'What a person has achieved, the memory of that person. The memory is important. The memory that someone moved in a certain way, or that they were kind. You remember their face, their smile, that a tooth was missing.' Like Filip in *Camera Buff*, capturing a glimpse of his friend's mother soon before her death, the accidental footage taken by a television crew during the visit to Paweł's school extends our failing memory. It preserves the smile on Paweł's face and his moment of happiness.

Cinematographer Wiesław Zdort's elaborate use of the colours blue and green, discussed by Lisa Di Bartolomeo,[21] makes this film one of the most stylistically significant in the series. The combination of blue and green, perhaps symbolically a juxtaposition of the spiritual and the material, also organises the film on the visual level. Blue, the dominant colour in *Decalogue 1*, is associated with television images of Paweł running in slow motion towards the camera, interiors of the nearby church and Paweł's flat, the bluish light given by the reflector operated by the firemen searching the pond, and the whole night scenery near the pond. The colour green features particularly in the scenes with the computer; the green light of its screen is reflected on the boy's face, possibly signalling an attempt to conquer the

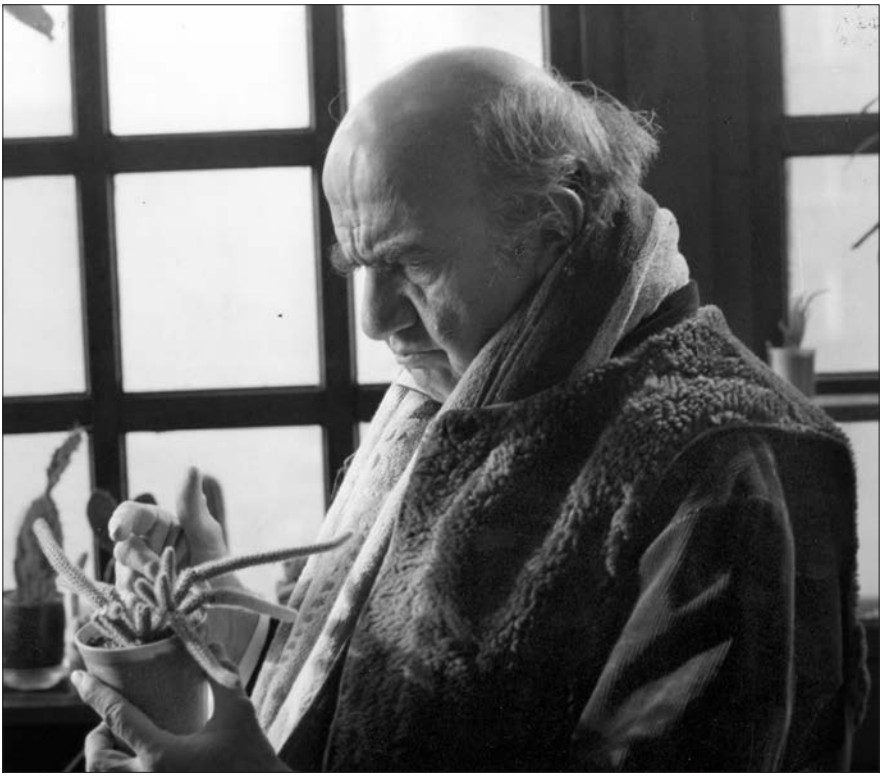
boy's soul. Perhaps without exaggeration, Slavoj Žižek argues that 'the computer here is mystified into an almost Stephen-Kingesque status of the Green Evil Object'.[22]

Decalogue 2: Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain

Part *2* of the *Decalogue* series, which takes place in a setting familiar from many melodramas – a hospital – tells a story of love, infidelity, mortality and miracles. Kieślowski narrates the story of Dorota (Krystyna Janda), a violinist in a symphony orchestra, whose dilemma is whether to terminate her early pregnancy. While her husband Andrzej (Olgierd Łukaszewicz) is dying of cancer in the hospital, she is pregnant by another man, her lover-musician who never appears on-screen but who leaves her recorded messages (the voice of Piotr Fronczewski). In order to decide, Dorota requests the opinion of the chief surgeon (Aleksander Bardini) taking care of her husband, who also lives in the same apartment building. Her decision concerning the abortion hinges on her husband's chances of survival: she does not want to keep the baby if her husband remains alive.

The tone of the first meeting between the doctor and Dorota foretells future discussions. 'Do you remember me?' asks Dorota. 'Yes, you ran over my dog two years ago', responds the old surgeon. Later, disappointed with the doctor's attitude, she tells him, 'It's a pity that I didn't run over you.' Constantly pressured by Dorota, the doctor refuses to help her, saying he 'is reluctant to give verdicts'. From years of experience he has learned that 'some live who should have died; some die without known causes.' He also advises the impatient Dorota, waiting for her scheduled abortion, that 'all you can do is wait'. Later, however, when she announces that the abortion will be performed in an hour, he tells her that her husband is going to die and, as a result, she keeps the baby. Despite the dark prognosis, her husband Andrzej inexplicably recovers. In the last scene, with happiness emanating from his tired face, he thanks the doctor for his miraculous recovery and proudly announces that he is going to have a child. 'Do you know what it is to have a child?' he asks the doctor. 'I do', answers the surgeon.

The main characters in part *2*, the old surgeon and the female violinist, are hardly sympathetic. The embittered surgeon is lonely and removed from other people. His only close contact seems to be with the cleaning lady who once a week takes care of his modest apartment. He tells her in instalments about the plight of his family who perished in a Warsaw building bombed during World War Two. His grief is immense, but private. Expecting a guest, he turns the black-and-white family picture displayed in his living room toward the wall.



Aleksander Bardini as the chief surgeon in *Decalogue 2* (1988)

The tragic death of the doctor's family results not only in his withdrawal from social life but also in his decision to save another child's life, since he knows 'what it is to have a child'. The surgeon's loneliness is visually paralleled by the 'loneliness of cactuses' which he carefully grows in his provisional greenhouse built on the balcony.

Dorota, played by Janda, has a number of psychological characteristics associated with Janda's earlier performance in Wajda's *Man of Marble*: she is independent, aggressive, adamant, a tense chain-smoker. Her dilemmas are externalised: before taking a decisive step, she meticulously destroys the only green plant in her flat; in another scene she deliberately smashes a cup of tea (portrayed in slow motion). Dorota's comparatively privileged material status is established by her metallic Volkswagen Beetle, the expensive stereo equipment in her apartment and the passport that indicates her frequent travels abroad and, therefore, access to hard currency and consumer goods. Although her husband's profession is not stated in the film, according to Polish folk wisdom, he 'ought to be' a scientist, maybe a physicist, since his pastime is mountain climbing.

The doctor and Dorota interfere with God's domain, both try to 'play God' and attempt to decide somebody else's fate: Dorota the fate of her unborn child, and the doctor the fate of Dorota's husband and the baby. Asked by Dorota whether he believes in God, the surgeon answers: 'I have a God; there's only enough of him for me.' 'A private God?' – wonders Dorota – 'Then ask him for absolution.' The Angel of Fate appears twice in the film, as a medical orderly in the hospital. He is present when a medical test shows that Andrzej's disease is spreading beyond control and also when Dorota tells her unconscious (perhaps only sleeping) husband that she loves him.

Edward Kłosiński's camera captures elusive images of early spring coming to the Warsaw suburb. The focus however is on the mental landscape of the film's protagonists. For example, when Andrzej's health deteriorates, he looks resignedly at his hospital room and notices water slowly dripping from a pipe and paint peeling from the ceiling. His decaying physical condition parallels the decay of his surroundings. Later, when he is on the road to recovery, he observes (in extreme close-up) a wasp trying to get out of a glass with strawberry compote given to him by Dorota.

Decalogue 3: Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy

The next part of *Decalogue* describes a failed attempt to revive an old, adulterous love affair that ended three years earlier. Ewa (Maria Pakulnis, who previously appeared in *No End* as Darek's wife) interrupts the Christmas Eve of her former lover, Janusz (Daniel Olbrychski), on the pretext of searching for her missing husband Edward. Janusz lies to his wife (Joanna Szczepkowska) telling her that his taxi has been stolen and he disappears with Ewa into the night. They drive together through the almost surreal, deserted city to a hospital, a morgue, an alcoholics' centre and a train station in search of Edward. In the morning Ewa reveals to her reluctant driver and helper that he unknowingly saved her life. Afraid to be alone on Christmas Eve ('It is difficult to be alone on a night like this'), she would have killed herself without his help. After a night full of bitter talk, lies and crude attempts at rekindling the lost love, Janusz returns to his wife on the morning of Christmas Day and promises her not to see Ewa again.

The third part of *Decalogue* refers to the commandment about keeping the Sabbath day holy. The film's action is set on Christmas Eve, a special day in predominantly Roman Catholic Poland, and depicts a number of traditional rituals. The opening scene introduces Janusz dressed as Santa Claus (Polish *Święty Mikołaj*), leaving his taxi in front of the apartment building, and during the most important family gathering in Poland – Christmas Eve Supper –

delivering gifts to his children. The viewer then observes Janusz and his family during the Midnight Mass (*Pasterka*) in a Church where he exchanges discreet glances with Ewa. The presence of decorated Christmas trees and the singing of traditional Polish Christmas carols emphasise the spirit of that holy period.[23] Despite the setting and a story revolving around the religious event, *Decalogue 3* nonetheless has little to do with a typical Christmas tale. Ironically, the first carolling, which is heard over the credits with the panoramic view of Warsaw after dark, is done by a drunk carrying a Christmas tree who reappears twice in the film. He aimlessly wanders the streets, visibly lost, and laments, 'Where is my home?' Later, he ends up in a sobering-up station where a sadistic male nurse waters him with a hosepipe in the presence of Ewa and Janusz. Like the drunk trying to get home, the main characters also seem to be 'lost' – their religiosity is superficial and their unhappiness (despite the 'joy of Christmas') is engraved on their faces. Commenting on the references to Polish reality, Annette Insdorf writes: 'On this holy night in Poland, compassion seems to be in short supply.'[24]

The desperate, suicidal woman, doubly estranged on Christmas Eve (which is also her nameday), finds a compliant but increasingly irritated man with whom she tries to survive the night. Ewa (Eve) performs the role of the classic temptress. Accusing Janusz of revealing their affair to her husband in order to end it, she manipulates him and expresses her profound frustration and anger: 'I wish it was him, or you,' she says in the morgue after looking at the mutilated body of an accident victim. 'How often I've pictured your faces crushed by truck wheels.' The game she plays with Janusz results in a life-threatening situation when their car barely avoids a collision with an oncoming city tram driven by the Angel of Fate.

Paul Coates observes that *Decalogue 3* places its viewer as a detective 'furnishing clues (often objects in close-up, weighed in the palm that stands for the pondering mind), but also precluding identification with the people for whom they are significant, and knowledge of quite what they might signify for them'.[25] Piotr Sobociński's expressive camera also voyeuristically intrudes on characters. For example, Janusz's family, living on the main floor, is observed during the Santa Claus visit by the camera placed outside the window to represent the look of Krzysztof, the grief-stricken father from *Decalogue 1* who lives in the same building. He peeks through the window at Janusz's family like another grieving character, Ewa, who in a later scene glances from outside before interrupting Janusz's family having champagne after the Midnight Mass. The colour red – mostly red-light reflections on the protagonists' faces – and blue – the colour of the night – dominate the film. The night setting of the action explains the prevalence of dark images, mostly

images of characters emerging from darkness, with their faces partly hidden in shadows.

The film shares some similarities with Kieślowski's earliest television narrative work, *Pedestrian Subway*: the story about the impossibility of recovering an old love, the night setting and the parting in early morning. Another scene, which takes place at the desolate Warsaw Central Railway Station, may remind the viewer of Kieślowski's 1980 documentary *Station*. Apart (obviously) from the setting, *Decalogue 3* features a scene that structures *Station* – an image of a security camera monitoring the station, from which the director cuts to an image of an empty surveillance room. In charge of the station's surveillance is a young woman played by Dorota Stalińska, an actress known for her portrayal of dynamic, sturdy women in the films of Barbara Sass, such as *Bez miłości* (*Without Love*, 1980) and *Krzyk* (*The Shout*, 1983). Also, as in some of Kieślowski's other films, making bets plays a decisive role in the characters' life. For example, Ewa reveals to Janusz: 'Do you know the game, if a man comes around the corner, it means luck, but a woman means bad luck … I played it today. I thought that if I could get through the night with you until seven in the morning … then everything will be fine.' Later she adds: 'When I was driving to the church, I saw a boy. He escaped from the hospital in his pyjamas. They caught him.'

Among several leading Polish actors appearing in *Decalogue* is Daniel Olbrychski (b. 1945), the emblem of Polish cinema of the late 1960s and early 1970s, an actor associated with several masterpieces directed by Andrzej Wajda in particular. After the introduction of martial law in 1981, he rarely appeared on Polish screens acting instead in foreign films directed by Claude Lelouch, Vojtech Jasny and Margarethe von Trotta, among others.

Decalogue 4: Honour thy father and thy mother

Decalogue 4 examines a father-daughter relationship that turns into an incestuous game. Kieślowski narrates a story about a twenty-year-old acting student Anka (Adrianna Biedrzyńska) who, during her father Michał's (Janusz Gajos) absence from home, discovers an envelope with the inscription 'to be opened after my death'. Intrigued, she opens the envelope only to find inside another one marked 'for my daughter Anka', and left by her mother who died five days after giving birth. Without opening the original letter, Anka invents its content and recites it to her father after his return from a business trip. Anka's version of the letter states that Michał is not her biological father, thus opening for Anka the possibility of playing a game of sexual advances with him. In the new situation, she suspends the family ties and attempts to define

the relationship with Michał anew. Instead of following the commandment and 'honouring her father', she shows (though perhaps she is only acting since, after all, she is an aspiring actress) desire for her father and tries to seduce him. Although Michał categorically rejects her incestuous actions, he also gradually begins to question his own fatherhood: 'I never knew for sure, but I always suspected' – he admits to his daughter. In the end, fearing that Michał may leave her, Anka confesses to her deed of forging the letter and they decide to burn it, preferring not to learn its true content. The ending of the film restores the status quo. Annette Insdorf, however, rightly observes that 'the added irony is that her ultimate way of truly honouring the father is to disobey the mother – by destroying her precious letter'.[26]

According to Francis J. Rigney, the film offers 'a story for Freudians: an acted-out (literally) naked Oedipus – more precisely, Electra – complex'.[27] In one of the seminal scenes, Anka reveals to Michał: 'When I first went to a bed with a man, I somehow felt unfaithful. It was you. I am constantly searching for someone. Yet when I'm touched, I think of your hands. Close to a man, I'm not with him at all. How should I address you now?' 'I don't know', responds Michał. In another scene, Anka is unable to stay focused during the drama class and perform a love scene from *Romeo and Juliet* with her fellow student and boyfriend, Jarek. When an older drama instructor (played by the well-known theatrical actor and director Adam Hanuszkiewicz) suddenly takes over the Romeo part, she performs it exquisitely.

Several small realistically observed details contribute to the film's tense atmosphere and its delicate discussion of the incest taboo. For example, the story begins on Easter Monday, during the so-called *śmigus dyngus* – a traditional Polish custom of dousing women. Some innocent morning play abruptly stops when Michał looks at his wet daughter and retreats in confusion. In a later scene, when Anka checks her eyesight, the sarcastic female eye-doctor gives her the letters forming the word in English 'FATHER' ('I check intelligence at the same time', she says, suspecting that Anka guesses rather than reads the letters). The performances of Janusz Gajos, one the most acclaimed actors in Poland, and Adrianna Biedrzyńska, a talented young actress, both highly praised by Polish critics, made this film a believable experience.

Some characters from other parts of the series appear in this episode as well. The old doctor from part *2* and the taxi driver from part *5* appear briefly during the elevator scene. The Angel of Fate makes two appearances during the film's decisive moments. Madly kayaking on the Vistula River toward the bank where Anka considers opening her mother's letter, he looks shrewdly at her when she is about to open the letter. When he passes by her, carrying

the kayak on his back, she changes her mind and decides to leave the letter unopened. Artur Barciś's character also reappears toward the end of the film, once again with the kayak which he carries toward an apartment building, when Anka admits to her father that she lied about the content of the letter.

Decalogue 5 and A Short Film About Killing: Thou shalt not kill

Paradoxically, the semi-documentary aspect of *Decalogue* is evident above all in the most stylised part of the series, *Decalogue 5*, and its extended theatrical version, *A Short Film About Killing*. The film tells the story of a young drifter, Jacek Lazar (Mirosław Baka), who commits a callous and brutal murder of a taxi driver, Waldemar Rekowski (Jan Tesarz), and despite the spirited defence by a young lawyer, Piotr Balicki (Krzysztof Globisz), he is sentenced to death for his crime and hanged. Kieślowski once tersely described the film as 'a story about a young boy who kills a taxi driver and then the law kills the boy'.[28]

Although *Decalogue 5* and *A Short Film About Killing* depict the same story, their emphasis and rhythm differ somewhat. Instead of simply cutting the big screen version to 57 minutes of the television episode, Kieślowski adds new scenes and rearranges others in the process of montage, thus slightly changing the film's perspective. As Charles Eidsvik perceptively writes: '*Decalogue 5* is essentially an argument about the senseless cruelty of both a crime and capital punishment as a form of retribution, whereas *A Short Film About Killing* is not only a critique of capital punishment, but also a spectacle of human rubbish, cruelty and despair, an outcry against ugliness in both its moral and its aesthetic dimensions.'[29]

The television version introduces the main three characters in the manner characteristic of several of Kieślowski's films – through their reflections in mirrors or glass. The film opens with a mirror image in medium close-up of lawyer Balicki as he prepares for his final bar examination. In voice-over he comments on the fact that the Biblical law, 'an eye for an eye', does not prevent the proliferation of crime: 'The law should not imitate nature, the law should improve nature. People invented the law to govern their relationships. The law determined who we are and how we live. We either observe it, or break it. People are free; their freedom is limited only by the freedom of others. Punishment means revenge, in particular when it aims to harm, but it does not prevent crime. For whom does the law avenge? The innocent? Do the innocent make the rules?' These comments may also serve as the motto for the entire film.

Decalogue 5 and *A Short Film About Killing* present three distinct viewpoints. Kieślowski crosscuts between the sociopathic murderer, the taxi

driver who later becomes his victim and the idealistic lawyer whose first case is defending the killer. *A Short Film About Killing*, which is almost 25 minutes longer, begins however with a brief description of repulsive urban decay. The images of a dead rat in a puddle and a black cat hanged on a clotheshorse set the tone for the entire film. Kieślowski moves rather quickly from one horrifying death sequence to another, both portrayed in a semi-documentary manner. He leaves out two parts that customarily play the most crucial role in the majority of mainstream films: the search for the killer and the courtroom drama. The viewer only learns that Piotr Balicki delivered a great speech against capital punishment ('the best against capital punishment I've heard in years', the Judge tells him privately), but to no avail.

Customarily for him, Kieślowski brings into focus small gritty realistic details. He stresses the graphic, dreadful aspect of both the murder of the taxi driver and the 'killing' authorised by the state. The long sequence during which the taxi driver is killed leaves nothing to the imagination. It is a premeditated murder; Jacek asks for directions to the taxi stand, cuts a cord he has brought with him in a café and puts it around his hand in preparation for the murder. He strangles his victim, beats him with an iron bar and finally smashes his head with a large stone. Despite the taxi driver's frantic attempts to attract somebody's attention with a car horn, nobody ever notices the crime, let alone comes to help. Kieślowski intercuts shots of the vicious murder with the images of a painfully slow cyclist, an equally unhurriedly passing cargo train and the image of a horse that turns his head towards the crime scene. In so doing, as Tadeusz Sobolewski fittingly writes, Kieślowski is able to capture 'fate in action'.[30] Another critic, Christopher Garbowski, in his important study on *Decalogue*, discusses the religious relevance of the murder scene: 'In the face of the cabdriver victim, who has been stranded and clubbed on the head with an iron bar, we seem to see the face of the crucified Jesus with blood streaming down his face as if from a crown of thorns. The victim appears to look at the murderer as if to forgive him. After the deed, the slayer eats the victim's food, just as the soldiers cast lots for Christ's clothes.'[31] Furthermore, argues Garbowski, Jacek is later placed on death row, which is located in the underground, in 'a man-made hell', where the lawyer Balicki 'reaches out to a human being'.[32]

By depicting the execution of Jacek also with all the terrifying details, Kieślowski almost equates the two killings. His chilling depiction of the meticulous preparations for the execution, particularly the scene with the chief executioner dispassionately taking care of business, only foretells future events. The five-minute execution sequence is a frightening spectacle, magnified by the confusion and clumsiness of the whole process: the inept militia-

men surrounding Jacek and trying to hold him, the piercing shouting of the assistant to the executioner, Jacek's desperate last-minute resistance and the disturbing shot of the hanged Jacek from underneath the trapdoor, among others. Both 'killing sequences' are longer in the theatrical version, which also contains some graphic material, perhaps unsuitable for television viewers. This includes Jacek repeatedly hitting the lying taxi driver with a stone and the image of the hanged Jacek with his bodily fluids dripping into a plastic container that is placed below him.

Like the gloomy events portrayed in the film, the capital city of Warsaw, where the film is set, is depicted as a repellent, depressing place: grey, brutal and peopled by alienated characters. Almost every scene involving the taxi driver and, in particular, the psychotic drifter Jacek, is set in inhospitable, bitter surroundings. Jacek wanders around this town that is marked by violence on the streets, brutal relationships between people and an atmosphere of impending doom. According to Paul Coates, Jacek 'stalks Warsaw like an edgy, existential angel of doom'.[33] The greenish filters used by cinematographer Sławomir Idziak not only dehumanise and distort the images of Warsaw but also leave some diffused colours in the centre of the frame. Interestingly, parts of the film are set in the most picturesque parts of Warsaw such as the Old Town's Main Square, the King's Castle and the Castle Square. Idziak's known

Mirosław Baka (in the middle) as Jacek in Warsaw's Old Town Square in *A Short Film About Killing* (1988)

The killing of the taxi driver: Mirosław Baka (left) and Jan Tesarz in *A Short Film About Killing* (1988)

predilection for hand-held camera also enables him to achieve an excruciating tension as he follows the daily routines of the film's protagonists.

In this fatalistic film the characters are portrayed very nearly as the victims of their environment. Without any specific reason Jacek throws a stone from a bridge onto a highway, causing an accident. Also, without being provoked, he attacks a man in a public toilet and shoves him to the floor; he splashes coffee dregs at the café's window; he spits into his cup of coffee before returning it; and he chases away pigeons and is cursed by the old woman who feeds them. The final melodramatic scene before the execution reveals, however, a slightly different, more humane side of the supposedly heartless killer, as he talks with his lawyer. Referring to a mysterious black-and-white first communion photograph that he wanted earlier to enlarge, Jacek tells the story about his 12-year-old sister Marysia, killed five years ago by a drunken tractor driver with whom Jacek was drinking before the accident. He also expresses his wish to be buried next to his father and his little sister. If things were different, he concludes to the lawyer, 'perhaps I wouldn't be here today'. Kieślowski depicts the taxi driver in a similar manner. On the one hand, the driver displays several unsympathetic features. He has no respect for the passengers who are patiently waiting for him to finish washing his car, plays nasty tricks and clumsily tries to pick up Beata, a young assistant in the vegetable kiosk. On the other, however, he calls to his handicapped wife during the killing scene

and earlier gives half of his sandwich to a homeless dog. Jacek, another rough-living 'dog' that roams the hellish streets of Warsaw, will devour the other half after the murder.

Mostly due to its length, *A Short Film About Killing* contains a number of scenes that are not present in the television version which fill out the characters' psychology. For example, *Decalogue 5* focuses only on the professional life of the lawyer, eliminating affectionate scenes with his fiancée, and thus making him a more one-dimensional character. Destiny and chance meetings between the three characters organise the first part of the theatrical version in particular. The three narratives and three simultaneous actions are set during a single day. The killer is in search of a victim, the future victim unknowingly moves closer to his destiny by turning down several fares before deciding to take his future killer and the sensitive lawyer gears up for his first real case. Their paths cross. For example, the lawyer and his girlfriend celebrate the passing of his final examination, sitting in the same café where Jacek meticulously plans his murder. In another scene, from the taxi driver's point of view, the camera portrays the lawyer driving a motor scooter, stopping in front of him at the intersection, and proudly shouting to another driver that he has just passed his lawyer's exams. When the camera cuts to a close-up shot of the taxi driver, it shows his disapproval of the whole situation. The theatrical version also reveals the link between Jacek and his girlfriend Beata, the shop assistant who, with a mounting horror, recognises the stolen car that belonged to the taxi driver.

The semi-documentary nature of Kieślowski's film is also magnified by the use of actors not widely known in Poland prior to this film. For Mirosław Baka (b. 1963), the role of Jacek was his third screen appearance and his first major role (he graduated from acting school in 1989). Another actor, Krzysztof Globisz (b. 1957), although he appeared earlier in Andrzej Wajda's *Danton*, had been primarily an accomplished theatrical actor, since 1981 associated with *Teatr Stary* in Kraków. The experienced Jan Tesarz (b. 1935) in the role of the taxi driver started his filmic career in 1966 and has been credited with a number of supporting roles and episodes in television and mainstream films, among them the role of the father-in-law of the accused Solidarity activist in *No End*.

As in other parts of the *Decalogue* series, familiar characters reappear in this part as well. Dorota and her husband Andrzej from *Decalogue 2* try to get a cab near their apartment complex but are treated badly by the taxi driver. Also the mysterious character that unifies the whole series, the Angel of Fate, makes two appearances. First he appears as a land surveyor who stands on the road and stops the taxi with Jacek during the fateful ride. As in parts *1*

The death sentence: *A Short Film About Killing* (1988)

and *4* of the series, the film's editing suggests that the Angel of Fate warns the protagonist by looking at him disapprovingly. Later in the film the mysterious young man appears once again, this time as a worker carrying a ladder in the prison where Jacek is held before the execution.

Decalogue 6 and A Short Film About Love: Thou shalt not commit adultery

Decalogue 6 and *A Short Film About Love* introduce a story of peeping Tomek, voyeurism, stalking, lust and sexual humiliation. They examine the unhealthy obsession of a 19-year-old postal clerk, Tomek (Olaf Lubaszenko), with an attractive older woman, artist-weaver Magda (Grażyna Szapołowska), who lives in the apartment building opposite his. The disturbed youth, an orphan staying with the mother of his friend serving in the Polish contingent of the UN forces in Syria, is consumed by his love for Magda. He steals a telescope from a school, sets his alarm clock for 8:30 – the time when she usually returns home and spies on her every evening from his bedroom. Gradually, he begins to meddle in her life. He makes phone calls, tampers with her mail, sends her phoney notifications about money orders, gets a job delivering milk to be closer to her and calls a gas emergency number to report a fake gas leak in her apartment in order to interrupt her sexual encounter with

another man. Tomek clearly idealises and objectifies his fantasy woman living on the other side of the square. His infatuation with Magda leads him to admit his activities, to reveal his love for her. Perhaps out of curiosity, Magda agrees to an innocent 'ice cream date' with Tomek in a café where he confesses to his other deeds. She takes him home, plays sexual games with him and makes him ejaculate prematurely. Humiliated, Tomek escapes and tries to commit suicide by slashing his wrists. Consumed by guilt, Magda desperately tries to contact him and watches his apartment with a pair of opera glasses. The film reverses the watcher/watched roles. Now this is Magda trying to contact Tomek who, unknown to her, is recovering in the hospital and will later be protected by his landlady who has witnessed their 'love-making' scene through the telescope. The television version ends with Tomek's laconic 'I'm not peeping at you anymore' to Magda, when she visits him later at the post office.

A Short Film About Love slightly changes the rhythm of *Decalogue 6* by introducing scenes that develop the characters' psychology, for example, that depict Tomek's relationship with his caring, mother-like landlady (Stefania Iwińska) and by adding the framing story that places the bulk of the film in a flashback. This narrative frame, inspired by the lead actress Szapołowska's comment concerning the audiences' need for a conventional story,[34] opens and ends with an image of Magda in Tomek's room. While he is asleep after

Stefania Iwińska (Tomek's landlady) and Olaf Lubaszenko (right) as Tomek in *A Short Film About Love* (1988)

his return from the hospital, she looks through his telescope at her apartment, imagines herself and Tomek talking to each other and reflects on their relationship. Unlike the closed ending of the television film, the expanded theatrical version offers a typical Kieślowskian 'happy ending' that suggests the possibility of a future relationship between Tomek and Magda. As Charles Eidsvik aptly writes, this framing story 'effectively makes the film a story of transgression, pain and a kind of spiritual reconciliation, whereas the *Decalogue 6* story, like most of the other episodes, is a story of transgression and its consequences'.[35]

The action of *Decalogue 6* is essentially confined to two apartments, the square that separates them and the nearby housing-estate post office. Kieślowski comments on the extensive use of subjective shots in the following way: 'We watch from the point of view of the person who is loving and not the person who is loved. The loved one is merely in shreds, an object.'[36] Thus, the events in two-thirds of the film are represented through Tomek's eyes: the voyeuristic shots of Magda in her apartment, the fragmented images of her apartment and the sporadic action on the staircase and the tenement square. The landlady, the only 'objective observer' (although she treats Tomek as a surrogate son), briefly watches him and Magda through the telescope she has just discovered in his room. The last segment of the film belongs to Magda – the previous object of voyeuristic actions. She tries to contact Tomek, spies on him, watches his window through binoculars and visits the post office where he works.

Relying on a long lens (300mm and 500mm lenses), Witold Adamek's camera carefully replicates the perspective of a person watching. Both the theme of voyeurism as well as the dependence on point-of-view long-shots from the perspective of a peeping Tom bring to mind several classic films such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) and Patrice Leconte's *Monsieur Hire* (1988), to name only two. The extensive use of the colour red anticipates to a certain degree the *Three Colours* trilogy: the red cover of Tomek's telescope, Magda's bed cover and telephone, the colour that surrounds them in the corridor when Tomek invites her out to a café for an ice cream. The colour blue serves as the colour of the night as well as the colour that dominates the interior of Tomek's room. Accomplished producer, cinematographer, scriptwriter and director Adamek contributes greatly to the final look of the film. Known chiefly for his contribution as cinematographer to some seminal Polish films of the 1980s, including *The Mother of Kings* and *Custody*, Adamek moved in the late 1990s into directing films, with productions such as *Poniedziałek* (*Monday*, 1998) and *Wtorek* (*Tuesday*, 2001), depicting the darker aspects of the Polish capitalist reality in both a realistic and humorous way.

Critics usually read *Decalogue 6* as a love story, as a narrative about an obsessive, unrequited and destructive love, and Preisner's romantic music clearly emphasises this aspect of the film. Kieślowski modifies the clichéd story about a mature woman who performs the role of sexual educator for a much younger man. Instead of playing with paired opposites such as experience versus innocence and cynicism versus naïvety, he portrays the encounter of two lost souls, two isolated, miserable characters. For Tomek, Magda exists solely as a fantasy object that he fills with his dreams and yearnings. He does not know that Magda is incapable of returning the kind of love he is longing for. 'Why are you peeping at me?' she asks. 'Because I love you. I love you. It's true.' 'And what do you want?' 'Nothing' Tomek replies. For the worldly and promiscuous Magda there is no such thing as love in the abstract, it is expressed physically. 'That's all love comes down to', she tells him after his involuntary climax. Tomek, however, is convinced that, as his landlady put it, 'girls only pretend to be casual, but in fact they need tenderness'.

Despite the persuasiveness of the aforementioned line of argument, I tend, however, to agree with Slavoj Žižek who proposes that Kieślowski's film is not 'a film about love', but 'A Short Film About Self-Killing'. According to Žižek, this film should be viewed 'against the background of "slasher" films, in which a Peeping Tom male character stalks and harasses a woman who traumatises him, finally attacking her with a knife: *Decalogue 6* is a kind of introverted "slasher" in which the man, instead of striking at the woman, turns his murderous rage against himself'.[37] Another psychoanalytically-oriented scholar, Francis J. Rigney, likewise notes that Tomek's attempted suicide can be explained as '"sadism" towards one's self – really a desire to kill her'.[38]

Artur Barciś' character, the Angel of Fate, is seen on the tenement square as an elegant young man wearing light-coloured clothes and carrying luggage. He appears for the first time when Tomek blissfully runs home hauling his milk handcart and almost bumps into him, overjoyed after Magda agreed for an 'ice cream date'. Later, the Angel of Fate watches Tomek running home, humiliated after his sexual experience with Magda. Also, a character from part 9, Roman, makes his brief appearance as the man with a bike who lives in Magda's building. (An observant viewer may also notice Kieślowski's brief cameo appearance: when Magda enters the post office in the hope of seeing Tomek, she sees a man wearing a black leather jacket – Kieślowski with his back to the camera – standing in front of Tomek's closed station.)

Kieślowski once again (after *No End*) relies on the performance of one of Poland's most popular actresses in the 1980s, Grażyna Szapołowska. Readers of the popular Polish weekly *Film* voted Szapołowska and her screen partner, Olaf Lubaszenko (b. 1968), the best Polish actors in 1988. Lubaszenko, who

also worked as Kieślowski's assistant on *Decalogue 1*, *2*, *3*, and *10*, started his career as a child actor in a television series *Życie Kamila Kuranta* (*The Life of Kamil Kurant*, 1982). He appeared in several mainstream films in 1987 and 1988 and furthered his popularity at the beginning of the 1990s acting in films directed by Władysław Pasikowski such as *Kroll* or *The Pigs*. In the late 1990s he also began a career as a film director with *Sztos* (*The Sting*, 1997) and several painfully popular, teenage-oriented films such *Chłopaki nie płaczą* (*Boys Don't Cry*, 2000) and *Poranek kojota* (*The Morning of Coyote*, 2001).

Decalogue 7: Thou shalt not steal

The Seventh Commandment is referred to in the story of a young student, Majka (Maja Barełkowska), who kidnaps her own daughter Ania. 'Can you steal something that is yours?' asks Majka, providing a literal, perhaps too literal, indication of the film's main concern. The six-year-old Ania, who is brought up by her grandmother, Ewa (Anna Polony), is convinced that Ewa is her real mother and Majka her older sister. Unbeknownst to Ewa, Majka snatches Ania during a performance for children and travels with her to a nearby village to see the child's father, Wojtek (Bogusław Linda), whom Majka has not seen for six years. When she was sixteen and a high school student, Wojtek – her Polish teacher – got her pregnant. In order to avoid the scandal, Majka gave birth in a different town and her mother, the school's principal Ewa, later legally claimed the child as her own. Desperate Majka now tries to reclaim her child, to free herself from her controlling mother and migrate with her daughter to Canada. However, she needs Ewa's official permission. Despite Majka's frantic efforts, she is betrayed by her ex-lover and tracked down by Ewa. In the final scene, afraid that she is losing Ania for the second time, Majka hurriedly boards a local train. Torn between the two struggling women, Ania watches her mother – Majka – disappear, possibly forever.

The young Ania, the true victim, becomes an object during the struggle between a mature possessive woman and her neurotic daughter who wants to hurt her mother as much as she wants the child. Ewa, who showed little love and patience to her young daughter Majka, and later was unable to have more children due to some complications at Majka's birth, now does not want to share Ania even with her biological mother. Like several preceding parts of *Decalogue*, part *7* also tells the story of strong women who manipulate and control their men. Alicja Helman writes that,

> even where femininity appears more authentic and complete, finding fulfilment in its material calling, Kieślowski discerns nothing more than

> the unrelenting clash of two egoisms, as Majka and her mother battle like tigresses. What prevails here is less high emotions than unadorned, naked animal instinct. The director seems to suggest that woman's every face is terrifying after a fashion. Woman in love, woman as mother, disappointed mother, woman alone: each is a dangerous entity, following an incomprehensible 'female' logic, governed by an unfettered element that overwhelms and flabbergasts the men.[39]

Male characters in *Decalogue 7* are portrayed as passive and weak, at the mercy of the unruly women. Władysław Kowalski, who appears as Ewa's compliant husband Stefan, will almost repeat his role as a caring father in Kieślowski's next film, *The Double Life of Véronique*. Surprisingly, the emblematic actor of Polish cinema in the 1990s, Bogusław Linda, known chiefly for action films 'with an American accent', offers an unremarkable performance in the role of Wojtek. Interestingly, in a 1995 film *Tato* (*Daddy*), directed by Maciej Ślesicki and much-discussed in Poland, Linda is cast as a father in yet another struggle for a child during a bitter divorce case. *Daddy*, however, goes further with its characterisation and portrays an almost misogynist landscape with female characters bordering on caricatures.

To some extent, the visual style of *Decalogue 7* is different, with only the opening scene stylistically close to other parts of *Decalogue*. The camera portrays a familiar apartment building from a low angle and its images are accompanied by a piercing cry of a child. Kieślowski then cuts to the images of Majka terminating her studies and getting her passport with the intention of going to Canada. After the 'kidnapping' of Ania, Dariusz Kuc's camera moves beyond the Warsaw housing estate to a nearby village where Wojtek makes his living sewing teddy bears. (In the late 1980s this was certainly a more profitable job than teaching Polish in a secondary school.) The bulk of the film's action is thus removed from the typical *Decalogue* setting, resulting in the film's brighter tone.

I am in agreement with several critics who point out that *Decalogue 7* is one of the weaker parts of the series, too close to numerous television soap operas. Perhaps Paul Coates is right when saying that the abundance of characters is partly to blame for this film's problems.[40] Perhaps this has also to do with the sharp, 'soapish' polarities between the characters: disciplinarian mother, passive father, obedient ex-lover and depressed daughter. To make matters worse, the film also implies a one-time romantic relationship between Ewa and Wojtek. She tells him 'You haven't much luck with us' and addresses him using his diminutive name 'Wojteczek'. Wojtek also addresses Ewa with her first name (which is unusual in the Polish context, and suggests at least

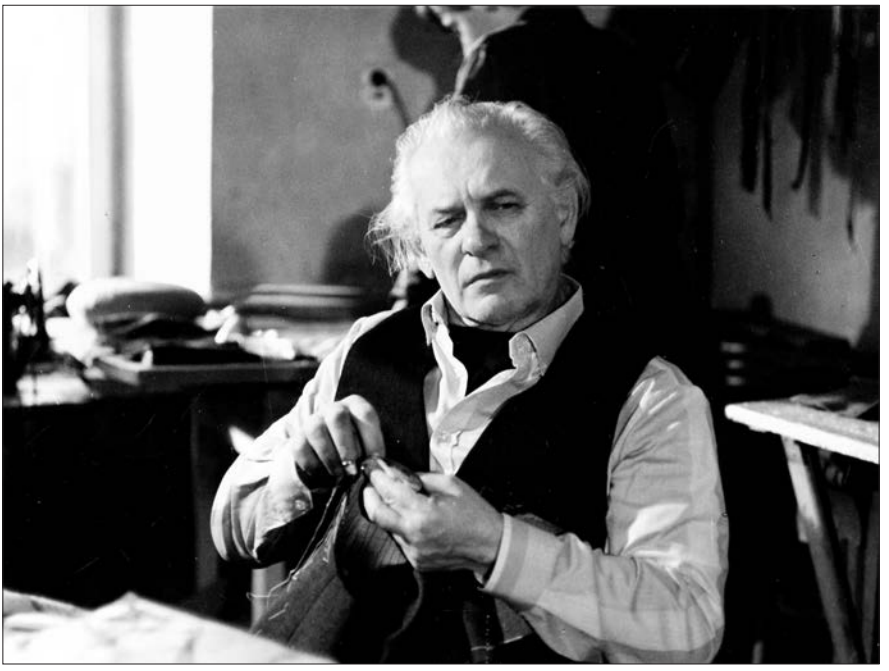
friendship), and is afraid that Ewa could have told Majka 'everything'. The unconvincing story of *Decalogue 7* also does not incorporate an appearance by the Angel of Fate, although he appears in the published script and Artur Barciś is credited at the end of the film. Like the spirit of the best parts of *Decalogue*, the footage with the Angel of Fate never makes it to the final version of the film.

Decalogue 8: Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour

The eighth entry in *Decalogue* contributes to a discussion on Polish-Jewish relations. Unlike the other parts of *Decalogue*, this morality tale returns to the past and deals with a sense of guilt and the complexities of history.

The story introduces an older professor of ethics at the University of Warsaw, Zofia (Maria Kościałkowska), who is visited by Holocaust survivor Elżbieta (Teresa Marczewska), a New York-based translator of her works. Although they met earlier abroad, only now does Elżbieta reveal the story of her survival. During World War Two, Zofia and her husband refused to shelter her, then a six-year-old Jewish girl who escaped from the Warsaw ghetto to search for sanctuary on the safer side of the wall. 'The false witness they were about to commit consciously was incompatible with their principles', Elżbieta says bitterly. Luckily for her, she was able to stay with other Poles with whom she moved to America after the war. Knowing that the child survived helps Zofia rid herself of the burden of the past. She comments that 'there is nothing more important than the life of a child'.

Zofia is also offered a chance to explain the complexities of the wartime situation and the real reasons for not taking care of Elżbieta. As she explains, her family was active in the Polish underground army, AK (Home Army), and her husband was an officer in one of the most important sections of that army, *Kedyw* (*Kierownictwo Dywersji* – The Command of Diversion) that targeted collaborators and high-profile Gestapo and SS officers, and successfully freed several prisoners. The Gestapo tried to infiltrate the organisation. Information that the man who brought the child to Zofia was a suspected collaborator, and the fear that it might gravely endanger the Polish resistance, prevented Zofia from offering a hideout to Elżbieta. The person unjustly suspected of collaborating with the Nazis and almost executed for a crime he never committed, the tailor (Tadeusz Łomnicki) whom Elżbieta later visits, prefers not to talk about this painful past. In the last scene of the film, from his shop he watches Zofia and Elżbieta on the street, talking to each other, but he cannot share their sense of closeness. The window bars physically and symbolically separate him from the two women.



Tadeusz Łomnicki (as the tailor) in *Decalogue 8* (1988)

In Polish films about the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations, Jewish characters are portrayed almost exclusively as figures emerging from the past.[41] These films usually offer either nostalgic pictures that stress the multinational character of pre-1945 Poland or a wartime nightmare everybody wants to forget. For example, in the mid-1980s the following films had been released: Jerzy Kawalerowicz's *Austeria* (1983), Waldemar Dziki's *Kartka z podróży* (*Postcard from the Journey*, 1984), Stefan Szlachtycz's *Tragarz puchu* (*A Down Carrier*, 1984), Jerzy Hoffman's *Wedle wyroków twoich* (*According to the Decrees of Providence*, 1984), Juliusz Janicki's *Nie było słońca tej wiosny* (*There Was No Sun That Spring*, 1984) and Wojciech Żółtowski's *W cieniu nienawiści (In the Shadow of Hatred*, 1986). Kieślowski's contribution to the 'cinema of the Holocaust' was produced after the television screening of Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), which stirred a heated debate in Poland due to its partial emphasis on anti-Semitic traits in Polish society. Kieślowski's film was also released after the publication of Jan Błoński's influential essay, 'The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto', which appeared in January of 1987 in the Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*.[42]

Błoński's text, which deals with repressed national memories and discusses whether Poles can be blamed for their indifference during the war, is very close to the spirit of Kieślowski's film. Unlike other Polish films about the

Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations, *Decalogue 8* is set in the present and focuses on the confrontation with the dark and intricate past. Elżbieta visits Poland for the first time since the war ('People don't like witnesses of their humiliation', she reveals to Zofia), bringing back not only memories but also a possibility for reconciliation. The opening scene, shown over the credits, signals this preoccupation with national and personal memory. It introduces a young girl and a man walking together through a labyrinth of old houses. Andrzej Jaroszewicz's camera captures the close-up shots of their hands. Preisner's music, which later reappears throughout the film, adds to the murky and melancholy tone of this opening and refers to the situation in occupied Warsaw. This sharply contrasts with the bright scenery of the subsequent scene which is set in a blossoming park where Zofia is jogging.

Zofia is portrayed as a successful Polish academic, revered by students and translated into English. Her past complements this picture – during the war she was a member of the Home Army and rescued several Jews. Nevertheless, like the painting on the wall of her room that never hangs straight, the spotless picture of Zofia's life reveals one major stain that cannot be easily fixed. The person, who during the war gave false witness against the tailor, changed her life and others' lives.

Despite its examination of Polish morality and the discourse on memory and forgiveness, *Decalogue 8* belongs to the weaker parts of the series. It seems too didactic and does not go beyond conventional wisdom with its emphasis on the 'complexities of the past'. Kieślowski does make use of the Angel of Fate, who is seen at Zofia's lecture sitting among other students. During Elżbieta's story of survival, his close-up is crosscut with that of Zofia, thus suggesting the link between the two, and his knowledge that the story, which other students do not relate to their professor of ethics, really concerns her. Kieślowski also links this film with *Decalogue 10* by introducing Zofia's neighbour (Bronisław Pawlik), a passionate stamp collector who, according to Zofia, shows her postal stamps 'the way people show photographs of their grandchildren or children'. His death will bring his two sons together and, ironically, also will bring his sons closer to him and his stamp-collecting passion. In another reference, *Decalogue 8* also introduces a story within a story that alludes to *Decalogue 2* – one of Zofia's students summarises Dorota's dilemma.

Decalogue 9: Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife

Sometimes called 'A short film about jealousy', *Decalogue 9* focuses on the marital crisis of two Warsaw professionals in their mid-1930s. In the first

sequence, the once-promiscuous cardiologist Roman (Piotr Machalica) learns from his medical colleague about his untreatable impotence. His wife Hanka (Ewa Błaszczyk), who works as a ticketing agent at the airport, tries to console him. Roman, however, encourages his wife to take a lover, unaware that she is already having an affair with physics student Mariusz (Jan Jankowski), which she wants to end. When Roman's suspicion is awakened, he not only begins to listen in on his wife's telephone conversations but also makes spare keys to her mother's flat where the lovers meet, and spies on them from a closet. When Hanka discovers him there after parting with her lover, it surprisingly brings the couple closer together despite her initial anger and their mutual humiliation. Later, however, when Hanka goes skiing in Zakopane, the student secretly follows her. Realising that her husband is probably aware of Mariusz's travel to Zakopane and afraid that this may jeopardise their reunion, she takes the first bus home without even changing out of her skiing gear.

Like a number of Kieślowski's films, *Decalogue 9* ends 'happily'. Roman recovers in the hospital in a body cast after attempting suicide by jumping over a ramp on a bike. Terrified after reading Roman's suicide note, Hanka awaits the worst but, instead, she receives Roman's phone call from the hospital. Ironically, Hanka's infidelity cements the union, a union of souls rather than bodies ('Love is in one's heart, not between one's legs', she had told him earlier). Francis J. Rigney asks why Roman is permanently impotent and answers thus: 'Perhaps because the film is set in Poland; in the USA, such an outcome is medically less likely. Anyhow, accepting this base as more than a "movie-type" illness; on it was built a structure of lust, lies and suspicion.'[43]

The film's editing and photography by Piotr Sobociński suggest an almost metaphysical connection between the two main characters. The crosscutting between the faces of Hanka and Roman links them almost telepathically, reminding us of such classics as F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922). For example, during the first scene Hanka wakes up from a bad dream, says 'Romek,' and her image reflected in a bedroom mirror is crosscut with that of Roman sitting in his friend Mikołaj's (Jerzy Trela) medical office. The subsequent cutting from one character to another reinforces this connection. Sobociński's camera also captures signs of the marital breakdown by showing the couple together yet psychologically distant, such as during the elevator ride to their apartment when either Roman's or Hanka's face is lighted. As in other parts of the *Decalogue* series, mirror images and reflections fill the screen and small objects play an important role. For example, Roman's car's glove compartment opens without any reason revealing a physics notebook that belongs to Hanka's lover. As usual in Kieślowski's cinema, telephones seem to take on a life on their own – often they determine the protagonists' fate. The accumulation

Ewa Błaszczyk as Hanka in *Decalogue 9* (1988)

of such detailed observations, 'charged with dramatic significance', prompts Annette Insdorf to proclaim *Decalogue 9* 'the most Hitchcockian' part of the series.[44]

The discourse on voyeurism, spying, impotence, jealousy and eavesdropping which permeates *Decalogue 9* heralds Kieślowski's *Three Colours* trilogy. Likewise, the side-story about Roman's patient, a young female singer

in love with Van den Budenmayer's music, who has to undergo an operation on her heart to be able to sing, announces the thematic preoccupation of *The Double Life of Véronique*. Like the majority of other parts of the *Decalogue* series, episode *9* also centres on two characters, well played by Ewa Błaszczyk and Piotr Machalica. Kieślowski casts Błaszczyk against her type. She earned critical praise for her roles as tough women in Wiesław Saniewski's *Custody*, István Szabo's *Hanussen* (1988) and Leszek Wosiewicz's *Kornblumenblau* (1989). Interestingly, in 1989 her screen partner Machalica appeared in Jacek Bromski's erotic comedy, *Sztuka kochania* (*The Art of Love*), in the role of a known and well-published sex therapist who experiences sexual problems.

The Angel of Fate appears twice in the film. He is seen for the first time when Roman drives home after the appointment with Mikołaj and, in desperation, Roman almost causes an accident. The angel-like character passes by on a bike and carefully looks at him behind the wheel. Barciś' character reappears toward the end of the film when Roman tries to commit suicide. Still on his bike, he observes Roman pedaling towards the end of a highway overpass, which is under construction, and plunging into the ground. Then he looks at the unconscious man and leaves the scene, as if to get help.

Decalogue 10: Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods

The *Decalogue* series ends on a different note, with a black comedy, a satire on human obsession, greed and egoism. Part *10* tells the story of two brothers, Jerzy (Jerzy Stuhr) and Artur (Zbigniew Zamachowski) who, after two years of not seeing each other, meet at the funeral of their father, who was introduced in part *8* as Zofia's stamp-collecting neighbour who proudly showed her a series of three German stamps from 1931. (The pseudonym 'Root' that appears on his coffin along with his name suggests that, like Zofia, he belonged to the Home Army during World War Two.) While searching his modest apartment, the brothers learn more about their father's stamp-collecting passion ('our misery, mother's wasted life, poor food, lack of money', comments Jerzy), find out that they have inherited a priceless stamp collection and later gradually develop the same venomous obsession with stamps as their father. Repeating their father's path, they sacrifice their careers, family life (in Jerzy's case) and even Jerzy's kidney to get a precious Austrian Rose Mercury stamp from 1851 which is missing from their collection.

During Jerzy's operation, however, when Artur is busy entertaining a willing nurse who recognised him as a celebrity, the stamp collection is stolen. In a display of parallel editing, Kieślowski crosscuts the images of the operating room, Artur and the nurse and the stamp collection being stolen

from their father's apartment. The brothers suspect each other, but in the last scene their future priorities are clear. Each of them buys independently an identical new series of stamps at the post office (sold by Tomek from part *6*), and they discuss their purchase in the tiny flat that belonged to their father.

The obsession with things that the majority of people may consider trivial takes over the protagonists' lives. Looking at the collection left by his father, Artur wonders, 'Where does it come from, this urge to have something'. In the course of time the viewer learns that the words spoken at the father's funeral by the chairman of the philatelic society perhaps also apply to Jerzy and Artur, 'His family, his professional life and perhaps his emotions he sacrificed for a noble passion.' The two brothers continue the work of the father they hardly knew; as the same chairman tells them later, 'it would be a crime to dissipate somebody's life'. They turn the modest flat into a small fortress by adding to already existing steel-plated doors and nailed-up windows, bars, a sound alarm and a Great Dane.

Kieślowski depicts the origins of the 'urge to have something' in an uncharacteristic manner. Unlike *Decalogue 10*, his earlier films almost never venture into the realm of satire or black comedy, although the communist reality portrayed in his films often, as if by accident, reveals the system's grotesque and preposterous dimension carefully hidden behind the sombre façade. The pair of actors, Stuhr and Zamachowski, whose vibrant performances enhance this part of *Decalogue*, appear later, also as brothers, in another black comedy, *Three Colours: White*. Visually, perhaps, *Decalogue 10* is not as refined as other parts of the *Decalogue* series. Jacek Bławut's functional photography is at the service of the story; the colour symbolism, unusual framing and distorting camera lenses are not essential in this satire filled with black humour.