Of Elephants and Toothaches

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Each of the films in Krzysztof Kieślowski’s *Decalogue* calls into question the certitude implicit in the word “commandment.” As a result, the relation of each film to the biblical commandment is often ambiguous and has been the source of disagreement and discussion among critics. Kieślowski himself insisted that he did not intend to teach a lesson or set forth a moral point of view in these films. Rather, his aim was to start a conversation with the spectator. As he explained: “I am someone who does not know. . . . Someone who searches. I like to observe the fragments of life and I like films that examine a small segment of life, without knowing how it began or how it will end.”

In this essay I will explore the formal elements the filmmaker uses in *Two* and *Eight* to establish his dialogue with the spectator, and consider how meanings are suggested through *mise-en-scène*, through patterns of close-ups and long shots, through editing and lighting, through the configuration of filmic space, and through unusually constructed soundtracks.

In an interview given after completing the *Trois couleurs* trilogy, Kieślowski noted that “there were a lot of connections between the films of the *Decalogue,*” and added that these were far more numerous and more
important than those between the films of the trilogy. There are indeed many links among these ten films which are all shot in the same large, gray housing complex in Warsaw. Characters reappear from film to film, often in walk-on roles reminiscent of the recurrent characters in Honoré de Balzac’s *Comédie humaine*. Many of the protagonists are highly educated professional people: doctors, professors, musicians, scientists. Questions of the role of religion in everyday life are raised and issues of family relations and education often play a central role with a particular focus on the lives of children. One of the most interesting links, both thematic and formal, is the role of a nameless, silent “witness,” played by the actor Artur Barciś, whom we see in almost all the films. His appearances are brief and his look intense and indecipherable. His diegetic role varies from film to film. Annette Insdorf likens him to characters in Wim Wenders’s *Wings of Desire* who are “pure ‘gaze,’ able . . . to record human folly and suffering but unable to alter the course of the lives they witness.” According to Kieślowski, “he has no influence on the action but he leads the characters to think about what they are doing. He is an engine for thought. His intense gaze on the characters leads them to question themselves.” As we shall see, his role is also a powerful device to engage the spectator in the action of the film.

*Two* and *Eight* present an additional interesting thematic link. Among the ethical problems to be discussed by a Polish professor’s students in *Eight* is the dilemma faced by a woman whose husband is in all likelihood dying. She is pregnant, though not by her husband, and her decision as to whether she should have an abortion depends on whether her husband lives or dies. This is also the story of *Two*. “For me time is very important,” Kieślowski told an interviewer in 1991. “What I call discourse, the way of telling a tale, evolves in time. Camera, montage, actors, music, are the means of telling the tale, the discourse.” Depending on montage and the other elements of film language, the “same” story can be told in many different ways. This is an issue of particular interest to Kieślowski, and nowhere in *The Decalogue* is this impact of formal cinematographic constituents on meaning more striking than in a comparative analysis of the often abstract visual style of *Two* with the almost documentary quality of *Eight*.

A grave yet theoretical philosophical problem in the ethics class in *Eight* is presented in *Two* as a pressing, living, practical, and deeply emotional decision which has to be made not only by the woman, Dorota (Krystyna Janda), but also by the old doctor (Aleksander Bardini) who treats her dying husband (Olgierd Łukaszewicz), and whom Dorota confronts directly for advice. Ethical and religious issues, as well as questions of the relation
of language and truth, underlie the conversations between these two protagonists, but they are never explicitly articulated. They are reflected in the poetic visual style of the film. Moral ambiguities are suggested in the structuring of space and time, the use of camera movement and close-ups as well as the gestures of the characters: Dorota’s unrest and nervousness, the doctor’s weariness. The film is a brilliant illustration of Kieślowski’s mastery of montage and his special brand of realism where the invisible is invoked and the unfathomable attained through minute scrutiny of material reality.

The opening shot of *Two* focuses on the grim, colorless reality of the gray buildings of the housing project. In the foreground, a custodian, raking leaves, finds a dead rabbit. He looks up, and the camera follows his eyes with a long tilt (vertical tracking shot) up the side of the building to an enclosed terrace. The camera enters the apartment and reveals the ordinary, everyday life of an old man who tends to a plant, uncovers a bird cage, turns on the radio, and puts several pots of water to heat on the stove. The doorbell sounds, interrupting the English-language broadcast. Before opening the door, the old man faces the camera, and we catch a first glimpse, in close-up, of his weary face, which will become a visual motif in the film. The rabbit is not his, he tells the custodian, turning to feed the caged bird. The dead rabbit provides entry into the building and into the story, *in medias res*. This is the first of several instances in the film where the tracking camera allows unfettered movement through space, often skipping over expository information.

After another brief scene in the apartment, we see the old man walking down the hallway, toward the camera; he nods to an attractive woman standing in the hallway, seemingly waiting for something. After he leaves, she throws her cigarette on the floor, and the camera focuses on her shoe putting out the cigarette. It is the first of many close shots of cigarettes and the first example of the technique Kieślowski uses to transform the banal into a visual motif through often unexpected repetition of close-ups.

When the old man returns, the blond woman is still standing in the hallway, smoking. She comes to his door, introduces herself as Dorota Geller, and tells him that her husband is a patient on his ward at the hospital. She stands in the doorway, not entering the apartment, and, after a brief but tense conversation, leaves. The camera, now in her apartment, cuts to the close-up of a telephone answering machine, and then tilts up the wall over photographs of mountains and mountain climbers. On the soundtrack, we hear the recorded voice of a woman leaving a message for Dorota. The
camera then focuses on a medium shot of Dorota standing alone and isolated among the attractive modern furnishings of her apartment.

The camera cuts back to the doctor’s apartment, where it pauses on a photograph of a young woman and two small children. We briefly listen to a conversation between the doctor and his housekeeper, and the camera pauses on the doctor’s face before cutting to Dorota in the hall and another cut to Dorota in her apartment. She turns on recorded classical music, looks out the window through the horizontal slats of a blind, and begins tearing the leaves off a plant standing on the window sill; she cannot break the stem, and the camera holds briefly on the plant, which seemingly refuses to die.

Her gesture underscores the difference in temperament between Dorota and the doctor. He nurtures his plant, while she—in apparent frustration—tries to destroy hers. There is also a striking contrast between their two apartments. The doctor’s apartment, with its traditional furnishings and family photographs, seems to reflect a solitary, old-fashioned life committed to work, while Dorota’s reflects a youthful modern style: white walls hung with large abstract-looking photographs, a telephone answering machine, clean-lined furniture. The young woman’s contemporary taste is also reflected in her fashionable clothing and hairstyles, and her constant smoking. Casting the star Krystyna Janda in the role gives Dorota an added aura of seductiveness and glamour.

These elements of *mise-en-scène*, including in particular the photographs we are shown in the two apartments, reflect not only aesthetic differences in décor and life style but also seem to suggest additional diegetic information not otherwise articulated. They function as texts within the text of the film which, as Yuri Lotman suggests, can transmit information, intensify and accentuate meaning. These incorporated texts as well as the detached voices entering the space of the story via the telephone and the answering machine serve as mirrors and reflections. The voices reframe Dorota’s dilemma by allowing others to briefly become part of the text of her story. The photographs, which reflect her husband’s interest in mountaineering, visually frame Dorota’s dilemma. For the doctor, the photograph of his family frames the quandary that results from the intersection of his professional responsibility and his personal sense of loss.

When Dorota visits the doctor’s apartment and fully explains her situation—she is pregnant, and loves both her husband and her lover, the father of the unborn child—the dialogue is shot in alternating close-ups of Dorota and the doctor. When he says that he really does not know the
prognosis for her husband, she nervously tries to put out her cigarette in a matchbox. The camera focuses on the flare of the small fire she creates. Dorota asks the doctor if he believes in God, and he replies that it is a very personal God, only for him. After she leaves, he covers the bird’s cage and looks at the picture of the young woman and the children. The camera pauses in a lengthy close-up of the photograph, which occupies the full screen.

Background information about Dorota’s life is revealed by suggestion or indirection in several short sequences. We learn that her husband is a mountain climber when a colleague waits in the hallway in front of her apartment to return mountaineering equipment. A little later, during a brief scene in a café, we learn that her lover is a musician, on tour in a foreign country. The camera often lingers on Dorota, silent and alone; the objects around her, shown in close-up—the plant, the cigarettes, the glass of tea she slowly pushes off a table—significantly evoke her feelings. One sequence begins with a close-up of a cigarette in an ashtray, then a close-up of Dorota in the dark. The phone rings, she turns on the light, finally answers the phone and tells her lover that she will have an abortion, that she knows that it is all over between them. The camera focuses on the receiver she puts down before he says that he loves her. Music begins as the camera then tilts up the wall to a close-up of a large framed photo of a mountaineer whose face is partially masked but evidently that of Andrzej, her husband. The music and the photograph quite literally frame Dorota between the two men she loves.

The camera cuts to the apartment of the doctor who waters his cactus, then moves to a close-up of coffee poured into a glass. The doctor is again sitting at a table with his housekeeper and finishes the story of how his wife and two young children were killed during a bombing raid, many years before, during World War II, while he was working at the hospital.

Earlier we had seen the doctor, in his laboratory looking into a microscope. The slides he studies occupy the screen in close-up. These slides present a new text introduced within the space of the narrative. This text is completely unreadable to the spectator and perhaps also to the protagonists. While the doctor and an associate try to interpret the meaning of the slides in the context of Andrzej’s illness, the witness, who in this film plays the role of a technician or orderly, stands in the doorway and looks on. “It’s progressing,” the doctors ambiguously agree.

As the stories of the doctor and Dorota seem to reach a critical climax, it is worth noting the degree to which all the elements of film language—editing, the startling juxtaposition of spaces, the intense focus on banal ob-
jects—have relativized what “was externally stable, set and ready-made.”

We seem to be in the “carnivalized” world Mikhail Bakhtin describes in Dostoevsky’s novels, a world where “everything is taken to the extreme, to its outermost limit . . . shown in a moment of unfinalized transition” (“Characteristics,” 167). The encounters between Dorota and all other protagonists, including the doctor, almost always occur on thresholds, in hallways, corridors, doorways and other transient, intermediary spaces. The doctor’s first glimpses of her are in the hallway of the apartment house and, in the hospital, from the corridor, through an open door as she looks at her motionless, comatose husband. Bakhtin characterizes this organization of space and time in works of fiction as a “chronotope of crisis and break in a life,” and continues to explain that the word “threshold” itself already has a metaphorical meaning in everyday usage (together with its literal meaning), and is connected with the breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life (or the indecisiveness that fails to change a life, the fear to step over a threshold). In literature, the chronotope of the threshold is always metaphorical and symbolic, sometimes openly but more often implicitly.

In this film, the witness also watches from doorways: first the doctor and his colleague looking into the microscope, and later Dorota at her husband’s bedside in the hospital. A slow dripping sound is heard and images of a leaking pipe alternate with close-ups of Andrzej. The camera tilts down the wall from the pipe to a basin filled with bloody liquid. We are reminded of an earlier sequence where the drab elements of everyday reality at the run-down hospital intrude on the narrative and invite suggestive readings. After Dorota is told that her husband’s situation looks bad, we are shown an astonishing montage: a series of disorienting cuts, first to a water pipe dripping, then a close-up of Andrzej, semi-comatose, then peeling plaster as the camera slowly moves down the wall. Camera and soundtrack point to physical instances of neglect and disrepair surrounding the gravely ill man. The montage intimates other layers of meaning: Do doctors have any control over the lives of patients? Can only a miracle save this man? Slavoj Žižek suggests that “if we want to reconstruct ‘all’ of the narrative content, we must reach beyond the explicit narrative content as such, and include some formal features which act as the stand-in for the ‘repressed’ aspect of the content” (§8, emphasis in the original).

This manner of reading the film is patently relevant in considering the closing sequences. When Dorota again confronts the doctor, asking him
to tell her with certitude if her husband will live or die, he tells her not to have the abortion. Her husband will die. At her insistence, he swears it. He then tells her that he would like to attend one of her concerts. For the first time, we learn that she is a musician, a violinist with the Philharmonic. Music begins, and not a word is spoken during the entire very beautiful and abstractly structured sequence that marks a resolution of the crisis, the closing events for which there is no rational explanation. We see Dorota standing before her window, again looking out through the horizontal slats of the blind (Figure 4–1). The camera then travels slowly down an exterior wall of the building in a movement opposite to the opening of the film. We see a close-up of the doctor’s reddish face seemingly suspended against a black background. Is he at the concert, in his own private world, in a world imagined by Dorota? The camera tracks horizontally to the right. Andrzej, in his hospital room, opens his eyes, looks up, and, for the first time, observes his surroundings as the camera continues to move horizontally until it halts and focuses on a drinking glass of red liquid and a bee caught there, struggling not to drown. After a long close-up of the bee’s struggle, the camera cuts back to Andrzej, who now seems to be watching intently. This is followed by another close-up of the bee, which finally frees itself. An abrupt cut shows Dorota playing the violin as a faint smile seems to move across her lips. Another abrupt cut shows Andrzej, now dressed and looking healthy, standing in the doorway of the doctor’s office. He has come to thank him, and he tells him of the added joy that he and his wife are going to have a baby. “Do you know what it means to have a child?” he asks the doctor, who answers, “I do.”

Figure 4–1. Dorota through the horizontal slats of the blinds in Decalogue Two.
This surprising closing sequence, followed by the coda of Andrzej’s visit to the doctor, summarizes all the aspects of film language that have contributed to the extraordinary impact of Two on the spectator. Camerawork, editing, emotionally charged close-ups, image, and soundtrack converge and point to the element of mystery in human experience. As Kieślowski explains, “I don’t film metaphors. Only people perceive the images as such and that is very good. I want to move people, I want to bring them somewhere, I want to touch them in a certain way” (Biró 28).

At the end of Two, the spectator is not only deeply affected but left with many unresolved issues. Many questions remain in addition to Andrzej’s miraculous cure. Did the doctor lie about her husband’s prognosis when he advised Dorota not to have an abortion? Was this advice given to save the child? Was it tied to his own life experience? To his religious beliefs? Does Andrzej’s question to him in the last scene resolve any of this? Finally, will Dorota and her husband live the lie of the paternity of her child?

When Dorota’s story is presented as an ethical problem in the lecture hall of Eight, the issues seem to be more narrowly defined, somewhat simplified: The doctor is Catholic, it is a true story and we are told from the start that the child lives. The focus seems to be, to a large extent, on abortion and that issue is resolved. It seems fitting that a problem presented for discussion in a philosophy course should be more circumscribed in its outlines. It is also inevitable that theoretical analysis will somehow misrepresent the living, deeply emotional situation as it is described in Two.

Eight is one of the most philosophical and, visually, one of the most beautiful of the films. A Polish American researcher, Elżbieta (Teresa Markczewska), attends a lecture in an ethics course at Warsaw University. Specific ethical problems are presented for reflection and discussion, among them a “hypothetical” story, raised by the visitor, of a Jewish child who was refused shelter from the Nazis in 1943. After class, Elżbieta approaches Zofia (Maria Kościakowska), the ethics professor, and identifies herself as the little girl whom Zofia had refused to shelter during World War II.

After the scene in the lecture hall, there are three lengthy verbal confrontations between Zofia and Elżbieta: in the hallway outside the classroom, in the car in front of the house where Zofia lived during the war, and finally in Zofia’s apartment after a dinner they share. Quite opposite to the technique used in Two, the conversations in this document-like film explicitly articulate questions about the meaning of truth, the relation of the individual to the community, the guidance that religion may or may not offer in ethical matters, and most centrally, the responsibility all bear for protecting children. “Nothing is more important than the life of a child,”
Zofia admits to Elżbieta after a very tense conversation and confession. “Try to understand the woman,” Zofia had earlier told her students to encourage them (and the spectators) to think about the problems raised by Elżbieta’s story as well as, by implication, Dorota’s story.

Long wordless sequences accompanied by music and/or sound effects are another distinctive aspect of the style of this film. When they alternate with scenes of profound dialogue, they not only underscore the drama, but also allow time for the spectator to reflect. This editing technique is visually paralleled by the intense focus on faces captured in lengthy close-ups or sweeping tracking shots, as in the lecture hall scene where Elżbieta tells her story. The focus on people, which most often accompanies dialogue, alternates with wordless, long, often deep shots, frequently in darkness—at night, through tunnels, in narrow streets or alleyways—as if the camera, the characters, and the spectators are seeking enlightenment. Again, contrary to the technique used in Two, film language here seems to support the possibility of attaining resolution.

The credits are shot against a disorienting and deeply moving sequence focused on an adult leading a small child by the hand, in twilight or early evening. It is only later that we come to realize that this scene represents a retrospective to a time some forty years before the action of the film. However, the close shots of clasped hands shown in this episode establish an important visual motif in Eight, and, as is so often the case in Kieślowski’s work, the close-up shot itself is central to the grammar of the entire film. After the credits, a straight cut brings the viewer to another close-up, this time of a beautiful flower in bright daylight, and then the camera reveals a long shot of a park while it tracks a jogger at her morning exercise. We see this elderly woman in close-up and look at her hand in close-up, and then the camera accompanies her to the gray housing complex, now familiar to viewers of The Decalogue, where she lives. Not a word is spoken until she briefly greets a neighbor. While the credits and the scene from the past are accompanied by a musical score, the outdoor scene and the later scenes of Zofia in her apartment are accompanied by postsynchronized sound effects, the few words of dialogue as she greets her neighbor, and ambient sounds.

After the somewhat disconcerting opening sequence, the film seems to document the present-time trajectory of Zofia’s ordinary day: jogging and exercise in the park, collecting the mail, activities in her apartment, the drive to the university, the greeting of the students, the visit to the dean’s office and finally in the lecture hall with her class. During this daylight trajectory, there is some evidence of disorder in Zofia’s orderly and organized
life. She has difficulty lighting her stove and starting her car, and a painting in her living room will not hang straight. Nevertheless, the spectator experiences the continuity of what Bakhtin calls “biographical” space (DI, 252–253).

In the lecture hall, Zofia announces the topics of the class discussion as examples of “ethical hell.” A student tells the story of the pregnant woman who must know whether her husband will die in order to decide whether she should have an abortion. The student who tells the story emphasizes that the doctor believes in God. As the camera tracks over the faces of the other students, it seems to halt momentarily on Elżbieta fidgeting with her necklace. As the student continues that it was up to the doctor to decide on the life of the child, Zofia finishes the story by saying that she knows that the child lives and that this is the most important aspect of the story. As Zofia gives information about the child, Elżbieta rises from her chair and moves forward in the lecture hall, asking if she could tell a story since the life of the child is so important. The camera frames her in close-up as she begins her story and then moves slowly over the faces of the students.

When she refers to the young Catholic couple whose apartment the child and her guardian visit, there is a momentary interruption by a drunken student who bursts into the lecture hall. After the intruder is asked to leave, the camera returns to a close-up of Elżbieta who continues her story by noting that the woman said that she had to go back on her promise of acting as a godparent to the Jewish child, since she could not bear false witness before God. The camera stops on the witness, played by Artur Barciś, whom we see in this film as a student in the lecture hall. He looks pensive, and stares straight into the camera, toward the front of the lecture hall and the professor. The camera stops more than once to allow us to contemplate his indecipherable look while other students comment on the complex moral issues. Does his look convey secret knowledge? Consternation?

The camera tracks back to Elżbieta and to Zofia’s tense and nervous face. Before she finishes the story Elżbieta says that she remembers that it was getting dark, that a green lamp was not lit and that she was offered tea in good but unmatched porcelain cups. After a brief discussion of the possible motives of the woman who went back on her promise, Zofia dismisses the class and asks the students, in preparation for the next class discussion, to try to understand the woman. After Zofia leaves the lecture hall, the camera focuses on Elżbieta, who stays seated as the students leaving class pass in front of her, and extradiegetic music begins, as in the prologue. There is an abrupt cut as the camera, in a lateral pan, moves over a shelf of books and a telephone until it stops on the face of a pensive Zofia sitting in
her darkened office. As the music continues, the camera cuts to a medium shot of Zofia walking down a barely lit corridor toward Elżbieta, seated and seemingly waiting. After a tense conversation, Zofia invites the American to dinner and the camera cuts to a long shot of a car moving down a dark street. The car stops in front of a building, and in a brief conversation in alternating close-ups between the two women, we learn that “this is the place,” as the music begins again.

Elżbieta walks into the dark courtyard as the camera follows her; she looks briefly at a small chapel where candles flicker on an altar, she moves on and then hides as the camera focuses on Zofia who gets out of the car and starts calling Elżbieta’s name. The sound track reverberates with music, the echoes of the name of Elżbieta, and the sharp sound of steps that accompany Zofia’s desperate search. “Is there another exit from this courtyard?” she asks an attendant in the building. She seems lost. Is she trapped, has she lost Elżbieta again?

When she returns to her car, she finds Elżbieta sitting there. During a brief conversation in the darkness, the faces are occasionally lit by passing cars. The women seem to agree that they analyze but do not understand. They drive off into the dark street. There is an abrupt cut to a close-up of the brightly lit shade of a table lamp in Zofia’s apartment. After the long nocturnal trajectory of Zofia and Elżbieta, this is the first sign of hope and it dramatically underscores the moral implications of Kiesłowski’s use of light and darkness in *Eight*.

After dinner and a long conversation between the two women, other visual signals of redemption and forgiveness begin to appear in the film. Most striking of these is that Zofia and Elżbieta are now shot together in the same frame, in a two-shot, whenever they speak to each other. Prior to this, earlier in the film, all conversations between the two were either in shot-reverse shot showing the face of one and then the other, or in alternating close-ups.

This stylistic shift occurs during a rather unusual series of shots that seem to fall between a classic shot-reverse shot and a two-shot. Elżbieta is seated and Zofia stands behind her with a hand on her shoulder. The camera moves up and down, focusing on one and then the other during this tense conversation. When Zofia again says that nothing is as important as the life of a child, the camera focuses on her hand, which rests on the younger woman’s shoulder as Elżbieta raises her own hand to clasp Zofia’s (Figure 4–2). This close-up of the clasped hands parallels the opening shots of the film and seems to mark visually the moment of forgiveness. It is followed by a prolonged medium two-shot of the two women sitting
next to one another discussing what they can, as philosophy professors, teach their students about themselves, about good and evil, about the existence of God. At this point, a neighbor, the same man Zofia had greeted at the beginning of the film, briefly visits. The flow of everyday life interrupts philosophical speculation just as the intrusion of the drunk had in the lecture hall. The interruption also serves to release tension and allow the viewer to reflect on the difficult issues raised.

Zofia asks Elzbieta to spend the night in her apartment in the room of her son, whom Zofia has not seen for a long time. In a brief shot, the spectator and Zofia observe Elzbieta kneeling in prayer, in the darkened room, before going to sleep. This is immediately followed by a cut to Zofia again jogging in the park in bright morning sunlight. Her meeting with a contortionist offers comic relief, the intrusion of an unusual aspect of everyday life, which could also be read as a graphic representation of the ethical twists and turns of the story we have been watching.

During their conversations of the previous evening, Zofia had revealed the reason that caused her to turn Elżbieta away during World War II. The man who was to shelter the child was suspected—falsely, it turned out—of collaborating with the Nazis, and Zofia, a member of the Resistance, was afraid to put the movement at risk. In the morning, Elżbieta asks Zofia to take her to meet the tailor (Tadeusz Łomnicki) whom the resistance fighters had unjustly suspected of collaborating with the Nazis.

On the way to see the tailor, at the end of the film, the two reconciled women ride together and their car is shown moving through a dark tunnel with light at the end. Elżbieta goes into the tailor’s shop, but he refuses to talk about the past. After she leaves, we see a close-up of the tailor as
he looks through the window at the two women on the street. The image is cut horizontally, thus reframing Zofia and Elżbieta talking, embracing one another. The camera returns to the face of the tailor, expressionless or puzzled at what he observes. The two women come to terms with the past while the tailor does not speak or cannot put his predicament into words.

Like all of Kieślowski’s films, the ending of *Eight* leaves the spectator with a sense of the mystery of the human condition, an acknowledgment of the secret areas which lie within each individual. “I try to be as close as possible to the protagonist,” Kieślowski explains. “The closer I am to him the more I discover mystery, fantasy, imagination, philosophy. All this is within ourselves” (“De Weronika à Véronique,” 117). Yet, as we have noted, formal elements used in this film—editing, the configuration of filmic space, lighting—give a sense of documenting real experience, of a more positive access to meaning. There seems to be light at the end of the tunnel.

Because of its focus on the impact of past decisions on present day lives, Kieślowski considered *Eight* one of the most important films of the *Decalogue* series (“Je cherche,” 102–103). Other thematic resonances between *Eight* and Kieślowski’s oeuvre can also be noted. When Zofia tells her visitor, after the neighbor leaves, that every house is interesting, she underscores a theme important to Kieślowski as a filmmaker. “If you look through any window you will see people,” he told his interviewers in 1989. “If you are willing to look closely there is something very interesting about them . . . inside each one there is something interesting” (“Je cherche,” 94). Insdorf sees a similarity between Zofia’s words and the language Kieślowski himself uses in interviews, and she concludes that “it is hard not to see Zofia . . . as Kieślowski’s mouthpiece, espousing a skeptical humanism rooted in spiritual belief” (113). René Prédal suggests that *Eight* can actually be seen as a formal model for the other films of *The Decalogue*: “*Decalogue Eight* conceptualizes the procedure used in the entire series by proposing a method of reading: like the filmmaker, the ethics professor presents situations drawn from everyday life in her classes . . . the ethical problem is born out of the story, the idea is expressed through flesh and blood protagonists, the concept is never separated from human substance” (82–83). *Eight* thus documents not only human experience for both the filmmaker and the characters he creates but also serves as a model for structuring and reading the *Decalogue* films.

The relation between *Eight* and *Two* is ultimately not more substantial than the many connections that bind all the component films in the *Decalogue* series. However, the thread of Dorota’s story allows us to juxtapose
and compare the formal elements of these two films, which brilliantly demonstrate the range and the virtuosity of Kieślowski’s style as a filmmaker.

NOTES

1. Joseph G. Kickasola notes the differences between the Roman Catholic and the Protestant numbering of the commandments, suggests that it is very clear that Kieślowski is using the Catholic system, and even provides a chart showing the relation of each film to the biblical commandment. The Films of Krzysztof Kiesłowski: The Liminal Image (New York: Continuum, 2004), 161–164. Slavoj Žižek, on the other hand, reads philosophical significance in what he calls “the shift of gear” that is operated between each film and the corresponding biblical commandment. He titles an entire chapter “Displaced Commandments,” and in a lengthy footnote summarizes other conjectures about the relationship between the Ten Commandments and Kieślowski’s Decalogue. Žižek, The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kiesłowski between Theory and Post-Theory (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 111–135 and 196–197 n. 1. Further references to Žižek’s work will be cited in the text.


6. Krzysztof Kiesłowski, “De Weronika à Véronique,” interview by Michel Ciment and Hubert Niogret, Positif 364 (June 1991), repr. in Amiel, Krzysztof Kiesłowski, 111. Further references will be cited in the text using the abbreviated title “De Weronika à Véronique.”

