I’m so-so...
Krzysztof Kieślowski
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Epigraph
Film-making doesn't mean audiences, festivals, reviews, interviews. It means getting up every day at six o'clock in the morning. It means the cold, the rain, the mud and having to carry heavy lights. It's a nerve-racking business and, at a certain point, everything else has to come second, including your family, emotions, and private life. Of course, engine drivers, business men or bankers would say the same thing about their jobs. No doubt they'd be right, but I do my job and I'm writing about mine. Perhaps I shouldn't be doing this job any more. I'm coming to the end of something essential to a filmmaker — namely patience. I've got no patience for actors, lighting cameramen, the weather, for waiting around, for the fact that nothing turns out how I'd like it to. At the same time, I mustn't let this show. It takes a lot out of me, hiding my lack of patience from the crew. I think that the more sensitive ones know I'm not happy with this aspect of my personality.

Film-making is the same all over the world: I'm given a corner on a small studio stage; there's a stray sofa there, a table, a chair. In this make-believe interior, my stern instructions sound grotesque: Silence! Camera! Action! Once again I'm tortured by the thought that I'm doing an insignificant job. A few years ago, the French newspaper Libération asked various directors why they made films. I answered at the time: 'Because I don't know how to do anything else.' It was the shortest reply and maybe that's why it got noticed. Or maybe because all of us film-makers with the faces we pull, with the money we spend on films and the amounts we earn, with our pretentions to high society, so often have the feeling of how absurd our work is. I can understand Fellini and most of the others who build streets, houses and even artificial seas in the studio: in this way not so many people get to see the shameful and insignificant job of directing.

As so often happens when filming, something occurs which causes this feeling of idiocy to disappear. This time it's four young French actresses. In a chance place, in inappropriate clothes, pretending that they've got props and partners they act so beautifully that everything becomes real. They speak some fragments of dialogue, they smile or worry, and at that moment I can understand what it's all for.
Background
Returning Home
Half an hour’s wait for luggage at the airport in Warsaw, as usual. The belt keeps going round and round – a cigarette butt, an umbrella, a Hotel Marriot sticker, the buckle from a suitcase belt and a dean, white handkerchief. Despite the ‘No Smoking’ signs, I light up a cigarette. Four men from the luggage service have been sitting near by on the only four available chairs. ‘Smoking’s not allowed here, boss,’ one of them says. ‘But sitting doing nothing is?’ I ask. ‘Doing nothing in Poland is always allowed,’ another one says. They roar with laughter. One of them is missing two top teeth, another is missing his canine teeth and another tooth on the right side. The third hasn’t got any teeth at all, but he’s older, about fifty. The fourth, about thirty, has all his teeth. I wait another twenty minutes for the luggage, nearly an hour all in all. Since we already feel we know each other, the luggage guys don’t say anything when I light up another fag.

There are thousands of traders in the centre of Warsaw. They sell meat, towels, shoes, bread or sugar from their cars parked along the roads. That’s good – it’s easy to buy things although it’s harder to drive through. On the pavements are spread goods from the cheapest supermarkets in West Berlin, ‘Bilka’ and ‘Quelle’, and from Kreuzberg: chocolates, televisions, fruit, everything. I come across an elderly man holding a beer can. ‘Empty?’ I ask. He nods. ‘How much?’ ‘500 zlotys.’ I think this over. He no doubt thinks I want to buy the can. He encourages me: ‘I’ll give it to you for 400.’ I ask him: ‘What do I need an empty beer can for?’ ‘That’s your business. If you buy it, you can do what you like with it.’

My love for Poland is a bit like love in an old marriage where the couple know everything about each other and are a bit bored with each other, but when one of them dies, the other follows immediately. I can’t imagine life without Poland. I find it very hard to find a place for myself in the West, where I am now, even though the conditions are wonderful; drivers are generally considerate and people say ‘good morning’ in the shops. Yet when I think of myself in the future, I can only see myself in Poland.

I don’t feel myself to be a citizen of the world. I still feel a Pole. In fact, everything that affects Poland, affects me directly: I don’t feel so distanced from the country as to feel no concern. I’m no longer interested in all the political games, but I am interested in Poland itself. It’s my world. It’s the world I’ve come from and, no doubt, the world where I’ll die.

When I’m away from Poland, it feels as if it’s only for a while, as if I’m in transit. Even if I’m away for a year or two, I feel as if I’m only there temporarily. In other words, on going to Poland there’s a sense of returning, a sense of coming back. Everyone ought to have a place to which they return. I have a place; it’s in Poland, either in Warsaw or in Koczek in the Mazurian lakes. Things don’t change to such an extent as to change my basic feelings. When I return to Paris, I don’t have this sense of coming back. I come to Paris. But I come back to Poland.
My Family
My father was more important to me than my mother because he died so young. But my mother was important too and she was one of the reasons, in fact, why I decided to go to film school.

One of the things that spurred my ambition happened just after I had taken the entrance exam for the second time. I got back home and, over the phone, arranged to meet my mother in Warsaw by the escalators in Castle Square (Plac Zamkowy). She was probably counting on my getting into film school, but I already knew I had failed. She arrived at the top of the escalators and I arrived at the bottom. I rode up and went out. It was raining like hell. And Mum just stood there completely drenched. She was so sorry that I hadn’t got in the second time around. ‘Look,’ she said, ‘maybe you’re just not cut out for it.’ And I don’t know whether she was crying or whether it was the rain but I felt very sorry that she was so sad. And that’s when I decided that I’d get into that film school no matter what. I’d prove to them that I was cut out for it, simply because she was so sad. That’s when I really made the decision.

We were quite a poor family. My father was a civil engineer, my mother an office clerk. My father had tuberculosis and for twelve years after the Second World War he was dying of it. He’d go to sanatoria and since we wanted to be near him — my mum, that is, and the two of us, me and my sister — we’d follow him. He’d be in a sanatorium and my mum would work in an office in the same town. He’d go to another town and Mum would work in an office there.

A great deal in life depends on who smacked your hand at breakfast when you were a child. That is, on who your father was, who your grandmother was, who your great-grandfather was, and your background in general. It’s very important. And the person who slapped you at breakfast for being naughty when you were four, later put that first book on your bedside table or gave it to you for Christmas. And those books formed us — at least, they did me. They taught me something, made me sensitive to something. The books I read, particularly as a child or a boy, made me what I am.

Throughout my childhood I had bad lungs and was in danger of getting TB. Of course, I’d often play football or ride a bike as all boys do, but because I was sick I spent a lot of time sitting covered in a blanket on some balcony or veranda, breathing in the fresh air. So I had an enormous amount of time for reading. At first, when I didn’t know how, my mum would read to me. Then I learnt to read pretty quickly. I’d even read at night, by the light of a small torch or candle, under the bedclothes. Right into the morning sometimes.

Of course, the world which I inhabited, the world of friends, bicycles, running around, and in the winter skiing on skis made out of planks from pickled-cabbage barrels, this was the real world. But equally real to me was the world of books, the world of all sorts of adventures. It’s not true that it was only a world of Camus
and Dostoevsky. They were a part of it, but it was also a world of cowboys and Indians, Tom Sawyer and all those heroes. It was bad literature as well as good, and I read both with equal interest. I can’t say whether I learnt more from Dostoevsky or from some third-rate American writer who wrote cowboy adventures. I don’t know. And I wouldn’t like to make any such classifications. I’d known for a long time that there was something more to life than material things which you can touch or buy in shops. Precisely through reading books.

I’m not someone who remembers dreams for long. I forget them as soon as I wake up – if I’ve had any, that is. But as a child I had them like everyone else: horrible dreams where I couldn’t escape or somebody was chasing me. We’ve all had dreams like that. I also dreamt that I was flying above the earth. I had dreams in colour. I had dreams in black and white. These childhood dreams I remember well but in a strange way. I can’t describe them, but when I have a similar dream now – and I do sometimes have those dreams now, both the good and the bad ones – I know immediately that it’s from my childhood.

There’s something else which I think is more important to me. There are many events in my life which I believe to be a part of my life and yet I don’t really know whether or not they happened to me. I think I remember these events very accurately but perhaps this is because somebody else has talked about them. In other words, I appropriate incidents from other people’s lives. I often don’t even remember who I’ve appropriated or stolen them from. I steal them and then start to believe that they happened to me.

I remember several incidents like that from childhood which I know couldn’t have happened to me, yet at the same time I’m absolutely sure that they did. Nobody in my family could explain where they came from, whether they were dreams of such power that they materialized into what I thought were actual incidents, or whether somebody described similar events to me and subconsciously I stole them and made them mine.

For example, I remember one scene perfectly well. Not so long ago, I went skiing with my daughter and sister. We passed through Gorczyce, a very small town in the Regained Territories, where the incident I remember took place in 1946 or
When I was five or six, I was going to infant school and clearly remember walking with my mum. An elephant appeared. It passed us by and walked on. Mum claimed she’d never been with me when an elephant walked by. There’s no reason why, in 1946, after the war, an elephant should appear in Poland, where it was hard even to get potatoes. Nevertheless, I can remember the scene perfectly well and I clearly remember the expression on the elephant’s face. I’m absolutely convinced that I was going to school, holding my mum’s hand when an elephant walked towards us. He turned left and walked on while we went straight ahead. Nobody even paid any special attention to it. I’m convinced that this happened although my mum claimed it never did.

After a while, I lose control of these incidents which I steal and which I start to describe as having happened to me. That is, I forget that they happened to somebody else and start to believe that they really happened to me. And it’s more than likely that that was the case with this elephant. No doubt somebody had told me about it.

I realized this very dearly quite recently when I went to America. The Double Life of Véronique was about to be released through a regular, decent distributor called Miramax. At a certain moment during its screening at the New York Film Festival, I realized that the people in America were absolutely baffled by the ending of the film. There’s a scene in which Véronique returns to her family home where her father is still living. The scene is very enigmatically done and it’s not made obvious that it’s the family home she’s returning to, but I don’t think that anybody in Europe has any doubt. But in America I noticed that people were confused. They weren’t sure that she returns to the family home, to where her father lives. They weren’t sure that the man who is there is her father. And, even if they were sure, they couldn’t understand why she goes back.

For us, Europeans, going back to the family home represents a certain value which exists in our traditions, in our history and also in our culture. You can find it in the Odyssey, and literature, theatre and art through the ages have very often taken up the subject of the family home as a place which constitutes a set of values. Particularly for us Poles, who are very romantic, the family home is an essential point in our lives. And that’s why I ended the film the way I did. But I realized that nobody understood it in America. So I suggested to the Americans that I should make another ending for them, to make it clear that it’s the family home. So that’s what I did. Later, I thought about why Americans can’t understand this notion. I don’t understand America.

I think we do remember a lot, only we just don’t know it. Digging hard and decisi-
vely, digging sensitively around in our memories makes the lost images and events come back. But you must really want to remember and you have to work hard.

Soon after the Occupation of Poland in 1939, the Germans started to throw everybody out. So we left. Then, after the war, we lived in various places in the Regained Territories including Gorczyce. They were good times for our family – when we lived in Gorczyce – because my father was still fairly healthy and working. We had a house; a real, normal, big house. My sister and I went to school and life was pretty good. This house had belonged to the Germans before the war and was full of German bits and pieces. I’ve still got some of them: a knife, and a set of compasses. Something is missing from the set but it used to be complete. My father, who was an engineer, used these compasses for his drawings, and I inherited them. There were also a lot of German books. I’ve kept a German book from that house to this day. It’s called Mountains in the Sun. There are photographs of skiers in it. In the sun.

But I don’t know where we were during the war. And I’ll never find out. Some letters and documents do survive, but none of them show where we were. My sister doesn’t know either. She was born three years after me, towards the end of the war, in 1944. I do know where she was born, in Strzemieszyce, a tiny part of Silesia which was the last part of that region to belong to Poland before the war. But during the war that didn’t mean anything because the Germans were everywhere anyway. That was where my father’s mother lived, and we lived with her, in a little room. She knew German well but after the war she taught Russian. It was difficult to be a German teacher in Poland then, so, since she knew both German and Russian well, she became a Russian teacher. I even went to her class.

We lived in Strzemieszyce several times after that. We’d move here and there, then return to Strzemieszyce because that was a place where we knew we could stay for a while. It is a terrible place. I went there recently and found the house and yard. As always happens on such occasions, everything seemed smaller, greyer and dirtier than before.

I went to so many schools that I often get them mixed up, and don’t remember even where I went. I would change schools twice or even three times a year. But I think I went to the second or third form, when I was eight or nine years old, in Strzemieszyce. Then, later on, I went to the fourth or fifth form for a while when I was about eleven. I did well at school but I was never a goody-goody or a swot. I got good marks but didn’t make any special effort. I think my schoolfriends quite liked me because I let them copy from me. The level at school was simply very low at the time, and things came very easily to me. But I didn’t waste much time on learning and I can’t remember anything I was taught then. I can’t even remember multiplication tables or spelling. I’m always making spelling mistakes. Nothing has stayed with me, except maybe a few dates
from history. Looking back, I don’t think I gained much from school.

I don’t remember anybody being so unpleasant that it upsets me to think about it now. The children would beat me up, that’s true. Or rather, they wanted to beat me up, but somehow or other I usually managed to escape. I remember there were times, especially in winter when I’d be going home from somewhere in the evening, sledging or school, and I’d have this feeling that there was a group of boys who wanted to beat me up. I reckon it was mainly because I was their teacher’s grandson. My grandmother probably used to give them bad marks and they wanted to beat me up in revenge. But I never talked to her about it so I don’t know whether that’s true or not. Maybe they beat me up because this was Upper Silesia. Upper Silesia was quite particular in that it was very hard to fit in there. Silesians spoke a different dialect from the one used in Warsaw. And if you talked differently in Upper Silesia, you were an outsider. Maybe that’s why they wanted to beat me up.

I remember I used to go to sanatoria for children which were called ‘preventoria’ in Poland. They were for children threatened with TB or who were weak. The whole idea was to spend time in a good climate and to have healthy food. The food there was probably pretty good for those times. And there would always be a couple of hours’ school in the mornings.

The main reason why I went there was because my parents weren’t really in a position to keep us. Father was constantly ill. Mother earned far too little. And I think the preventoria were free. My sister often went too, sometimes to the same one, sometimes to a different one. My parents were terribly sad that they had to send us there but they probably didn’t have any choice. They came to visit us whenever they could and we always looked forward to their visits. Especially me. Usually it was our mother who came, of course, because my father was often ill in bed. I loved them and I think they loved me and my sister very much, too. We were extremely sad that we had to part, but that’s the way things were.

We lived in such small communities that the Communist authorities didn’t really get to us. That is, they didn’t manifest themselves as they did in the towns. The places we lived in were so small that there wasn’t even a policeman there. There were only about 600 to 1000 inhabitants in these places, with a teacher, and a bus-driver who would go to the larger town once or twice a day. That’s all. Of course, there was the manager of the sanatorium, who was probably a Party member, but I can’t remember whether I ever saw him. I haven’t even any idea where I was when Stalin died. It had nothing to do with me: I don’t even know whether I was aware that he’d died – most probably not.

The first film I remember seeing – but maybe I’ve imagined it again – was in Strzemieszyce where they showed a French film with Gerard Philipe. It must have been Fanfan la Tulipe. It was an
absolute sensation that a French film was being shown because all films were normally Czech, Russian or Polish. I must have been seven or eight at the time and under-sixteens were not allowed to see the film. So there was this problem – my parents wanted me to see the film and, of course, I wanted to see it too. They thought it was a beautiful film and that I’d enjoy myself. So my great-uncle, who was an eminent doctor there, went to the four or six o’clock screening, realized that the film was suitable for me and, taking advantage of his authority as a doctor, sorted things out with the director of the cinema and they let me in. I don’t remember anything whatsoever from the film. My parents had kept talking about it for a few days beforehand, that they’d probably manage to get me in to see it and so on. I was terribly excited, of course, and was quite anxious about whether they’d let me in or not. And I remember absolutely nothing of the film.

Then we lived in a place called Sokolowsko, near Jelenia Gora in Lower Silesia, in the Regained Territories. We lived there about three times and that’s the place I remember best from my childhood. There was a sanatorium there where my father stayed. It was only a health resort really. Well, it’s actually hard to call it a health resort because then one always imagines a place like Cannes, for example. This was nothing like that. It was a tiny place with two or three sanatoria. There weren’t any Silesians there because they’d either fled or been driven out after the war. It was a place of about 1000 people, most of whom were patients, and there were another 200 or so people to help with the patients. And their children.

There was a hall there in the House of Culture where the travelling theatre or cinema would come. The cinema came more or less once a week. It was a good hall, decently fitted out with good projectors and so on, and not some old fire station. But there was a different problem there; this time I was not too young to see the films, as they also showed films for children. The problem here was that I didn’t have any money to buy a ticket. Neither did many of my friends. Our parents simply couldn’t afford to give us any money for tickets – or if they could then it was only very rarely. So I’d climb up on to the roof of the hall with my friends. There was a sort of large ventilator there, a chimney with vents in the sides. These vents were great to spit through, down at the audience. We were jealous that they could go to the cinema and we couldn’t. We spat not through our love of the cinema but our anger at the people inside.

We would watch a tiny bit of the screen. From my usual position I’d see the bottom left-hand corner, maybe one and a half square metres. Sometimes I could see the actor’s leg if he was standing, or his hand or head if he was lying down. We could hear more or less, too, so we cottoned on to the action. And that’s how we watched. We’d spit and watch the films. They’d chase us away from there, of course, from that roof. It was very easy
to climb up there because Sokolowsko was a hilly place and the House of Culture stood right up against a hill. Its roof touched the hillside, so it was easy to climb up the hill, then up a tree and from the tree down to the roof. And that’s where we played our childhood games, up there on the roof.

I always climbed roofs a lot. One of my friends, for example, a boy from Warsaw, did nothing but climb roofs. If there was any wine or vodka to drink, he’d have to do it up on a roof. He’d climb the highest roofs with his friends. I’d climb with him, too, and we’d always drink the wine somewhere high above the town.

Later on, I travelled around a lot, looking for these places. I thought of meeting up with these people but when I’d get there the desire would pass. I’d look at the places and leave. I used to think it would be nice to arrive, see someone I hadn’t seen for thirty or forty years; see how he looks, who he is today. It’s an entirely different world but that’s precisely why it’s interesting. You talk about how things are, what has happened. But then later, after I’d met a couple of friends like that, I didn’t want to meet any others. To be honest, I was ashamed. I’m quite well off, drive a good car. And I’d arrive at places where there were slums, and see poor children, poor people. No doubt I’ve been lucky once or twice in my life and that’s all. But they haven’t, and it makes me ashamed. I suspect it would make them ashamed, too, if it came to a meeting. But since I’d initiated these reunions, I was the one who felt the shame and it became a great problem.

My parents couldn’t afford to send me away to school, because they couldn’t afford to pay for lodgings and so on. Besides, I didn’t want to study. I thought I knew everything I needed to know, like most teenagers. That was after first school. I must have been fourteen or fifteen, and I did nothing for a year. My father was a wise man. He said, ‘All right, go to the fireman’s training college. At least you’ll learn a profession and be able to work as you want to.’ I wanted to work. Board was free there. So was the food. And it was easy to get in. My father knew perfectly well that when I got back from that fireman’s training college I’d want to study. He was right, of course. In three months I came back, wanted to study - at any cost - and went to all sorts of different schools.

Then, by chance, I got into a school in Warsaw which was an arts school. That really was pure chance. It turned out that my parents had approached some distant uncle whom I hadn’t known before and who was the director of the College for Theatre Technicians in Warsaw (Panstwowe Liceum Techniki Teatralnej). It was a fantastic school. The best school I’ve ever been to. Schools like that don’t exist any more, unfortunately. Like everything that’s good, they soon closed it down. It had excellent teachers. Teachers in Poland – and in the rest of Europe, I dare say – didn’t treat pupils like younger colleagues. But here they did. They were good, too, and they were wise. They sho-
wed us that culture exists. They advised us to read books, go to the theatre or the cinema, even though it wasn’t such a fashionable thing to do then, at least not in my world, my environment. Besides, I couldn’t have done so because I’d always lived in those tiny places. Then once I saw that such a world existed, I realized that I could live like that, too. I hadn’t known this before. Well, that was pure chance. If my uncle hadn’t been the director of that particular school but of another, then I’d have attended a different school and no doubt be somewhere else today.

My father eventually died of TB. He was forty-seven, younger than I am now. He had been ill for twenty years and I suspect he didn’t want to live any longer. He couldn’t work, couldn’t do what he believed he ought to do for his family and, no doubt, felt he hadn’t entirely fulfilled himself in professional matters – since, being ill, he wasn’t in any condition to do so. He didn’t fulfil himself in emotional matters, family matters. I didn’t talk to him about it but I’m sure that’s how it was. One can feel these things. I can understand it.

Later on, my mother lived in Warsaw. Life was very hard because we didn’t have any money then – I didn’t have any either, of course. It was terribly difficult to find a means of staying in Warsaw, because you weren’t allowed to register there. This was at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. Then step by step, she moved to Warsaw. Somehow she managed to get herself registered there. I had already started to work in films and was living in Warsaw, so could help her a bit. Which, of course, I did.

My mother was sixty-seven when she died in a car accident when a friend of mine was driving. That was in 1981. So I haven’t had any parents for quite some time now. Besides, I’m over fifty. Hardly anybody has parents when they’re over fifty. There are thousands of things we didn’t talk about. Now I’ll never find them out. I’ve only got my sister and I can’t be very close to her because I simply haven’t got the time. I haven’t been close to anybody recently. For the last few years I’ve been quite alone in day-to-day life.

I’ve certainly got something in common with my sister; we were always together as children. In the sort of life we led – with those constant moves and so on, and a sick father – any permanent ties we had were extremely important. Now, we often think about various things which happened in the past, but we can’t recreate the chain of events. Those who played the main roles in those events simply aren’t there any more and can’t tell us what happened. One always thinks there’s plenty of time: that one day, when the opportunity arises.

My parents were too fair with me. My father was a very wise man but I couldn’t make much use of his wisdom. It’s only now that I can understand some of the things he did or said. I couldn’t understand at the time; I was too foolish, too inconsiderate or too naive. So I don’t really talk to my daughter about important matters, or if I do, then very rarely. I do talk about practical things, of course, but
I don’t talk to her about the really important things in life. I write her letters, because she can keep them, look back over them. When you get a letter like that it doesn’t mean much, but later on, in the future

It’s essential that your father is an authority to you, and that he’s somebody you can trust. Maybe one of the real criteria of our behaviour in life is to enable our children to trust us - at least a little. That’s why we don’t disgrace ourselves completely, behave badly or shamefully. At least that’s why I behave the way I do, in most cases.
Film School
PWSTiF w Łódź
At the College for Theatre Technicians, they showed us that there’s a world of values which doesn’t necessarily have to do with such everyday and socially accepted values as how to settle down, how to make comfortable lives for ourselves, own material goods, make money, have good positions. And they showed us that you can fulfil yourself in that other world, the so-called higher world. I don’t know whether it’s higher, but it certainly is different.

Consequently, I fell totally in love with the theatre. From about 1958 to 1962 was a great period in Polish theatre. It was a period of great directors, writers, actors and designers. In 1956 plays by authors from the West began to be shown in Poland, too. This was theatre of an internationally high standard. Of course, there was the Iron Curtain. There was no question of cultural exchange as there is now. Maybe this happened sometimes in the cinema, but rarely. In the theatre, it was impossible. Nowadays, Polish theatre companies travel all over the world. At that time, they didn’t travel anywhere. They performed in their own buildings and that was it.

I don’t see theatre of this quality anywhere nowadays. I go to the theatre in New York or I go to the theatre in Paris, in Berlin, and even there I don’t see performances of such class. No doubt these are memories from a time when I was young and had the feeling that I was discovering something completely new and wonderful. Now, I don’t see the same standard of directors, actors, designers, the same inventiveness in putting on a play, as I saw then, when I was dazzled by the discovery that something like that could be possible.

So obviously I decided to become a theatre director. But since you couldn’t become a theatre director in Poland without first finishing some other form of higher studies – and it’s still like that now – I wanted to get some sort of higher education. There were a lot of possibilities but I thought: ‘Why not study at film school to become a film director, as a way to becoming a theatre director?’ They’re both directors.

It’s not easy to get into Lodz Film School. As I’ve explained, I didn’t get in either the first time, or the second. If you fail you have to wait a year before you can try again. In fact, it was only through sheer ambition that I took the exams a third time, to show them that I could get in. By then, I was no longer motivated because in the meantime I had stopped liking the theatre. The beautiful period had come to an end somewhere in 1962, and the plays were no longer as good. Something had happened – I don’t know what. After 1956, there’d been an explosion, no doubt, of a certain degree of political freedom and this was expressed in the theatre. This had lasted for a few years, then in 1961 or 1962 it simply started to peter out. I decided that I didn’t want to be a theatre director at all any more, or any sort of director for that matter. Even less a film director.

In the meantime, of course, I worked because I had to have something to live
on. I was grown up and couldn’t expect my mother, who didn’t have any money anyway, to help me. I worked for a year or so as a clerk in the Department of Culture at the Council in Zoliborz. I worked there for a year and wrote poetry. I also worked in the theatre for a year as a dresser. That was more interesting and was connected with my profession. But I had to spend most of my time studying something to get out of the army, so I went to teachers’ training college and studied drawing for a year. I had to pretend that I wanted to be an art teacher.

I drew very badly. The others drew just as badly as they learnt history, Polish, biology or geography at that teachers’ training college. Everybody was bad at their subject. All the boys there were running away from the army and most of the girls were from outside Warsaw and were counting on catching a husband or maybe finding a job in a school in Warsaw and so acquiring a residence permit. People schemed like that and nobody there really wanted to be a teacher, which was a shame because it’s a fine profession. Anyway, I don’t think I met one single enthusiast of teaching.

So all this time I was trying to wangle my way out of the army. And I succeeded in the end. I was finally placed in a category which states that I’m unfit for military service even in the event of war. They’re very rare, cases like that. I’ve got papers which certify me as having schizophrenia duplex which is a very dangerous form of schizophrenia and could mean that, given a rifle, I might, first and foremost, shoot my officer. The whole thing made me aware yet again of how complicated we all are because I didn’t lie to the Conscription Board. I spoke the truth. I simply exaggerated a little and didn’t tell the whole truth, and this proved credible.

That’s how my adventure with the army came to an end. I kept telling them that I didn’t feel like doing anything. That I didn’t want anything from life be it good or bad, that I didn’t expect anything. Nothing at all. I told them that sometimes I read books. So they asked me to describe the books. And I recounted W Pustyń i w Puszczy, sentence by sentence, for example. It took hours. It interested them that I found all sorts of connections, such as, if the author described the end as he did, it means the hero must have met the heroine and so on and so on.

Exactly four days later the film school entrance exams started and I passed. It was quite risky because, on the one hand, for the ten days that I was with the Conscription Board, I behaved as if I didn’t feel like doing anything, while, on the other hand, I had to feel like doing everything the moment I went to take the film school exams.

I was happy when I got in to film school. I’d simply satisfied my ambition to show them that I could get in – nothing else although I do believe they shouldn’t have accepted me. I was a complete idiot. I can’t understand why they took me. Probably because I’d tried three times.

To begin with, you had to show the examiners some work and then they gra
ded you. You could show them films, or a script, or photographs. You could show them a novel, or paintings if you were a painter, whatever. I showed them some absurd short stories – absurd in the sense that they weren’t any good. Once, during an earlier exam, I showed them a short film which I’d shot on 8 mm. Terrible. Absolutely terrible. Pretentious rubbish. If anybody had brought me anything like that I’d never have accepted them. They didn’t take me then, of course. So I wrote a short story. Maybe it’s when I wrote the story that they accepted me. I can’t remember.

They’re very long, the film school entrance exams. It’s still like that now. They last two weeks. I always managed to get through to the last stage. This was quite difficult because there were something like five or six places and always about 1000 candidates, which was a hell of a lot. You had to get through to the last stage where there were about thirty to forty candidates. Then from these, they chose five or six. I always got through to this stage without any problems. But I’d never get past that last stage.

I was quite well read and I was good at history of art because that had been very well taught at the PLTT, the College for Theatre Technicians. I wasn’t bad at history of the cinema and so on. But, to be honest, I was a pretty naive boy – or man, really, because I was over twenty – pretty naive and not very bright. Anyway, I clearly remember what they asked me, in one of those last exams – an oral which was to decide whether or not I’d be accep-

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very easy in a film to show a toilet flushing, but, in actual fact, it’s quite difficult to explain it. Try to describe how a toilet-flush works in whatever language - it’s not that easy. You can gesticulate but the point is to explain why water collects, why, when you press a button, something happens which makes all the water flush and then just the right amount of water collects for you to be able to flush again next time. Well, you simply had to be able to describe it all. With the help of questions like that, they examined your narrative skills, your skills of concentration, and your intelligence, too.

Classes at the Lodz Film School are much like those at any other film school. You learn the history of films, the history of aesthetics, photography, how to work with actors. You learn everything, one step at a time. Of course, you can’t learn any of these things from theory alone, apart from the history. You simply have to experience them for yourself. There’s no other way.

The whole idea of the school is to enable you to watch films and to talk about them, nothing else. You have to watch films, and because you’re watching them and making them, you’re always talking about them. It doesn’t matter whether you talk about them during history lectures, or lectures on aesthetics or even if you talk about them during English classes. It’s all the same. What is important is that the subject is always present. That you’re always talking about it, analysing, discussing, comparing.

Fortunately, that school was well thought out. It enabled us to make films. We made at least one film each year. But if we were clever or a bit lucky, we could make two. I always managed to make one or two films a year. That was one of the school’s objectives; to enable us to enter that world, as it were, and stay there for a bit. Another objective was to give us the opportunity to make films which was the practical realisation of all these discussions.

We had to make feature films and documentaries. I made both. I think I made twenty-minute features in my third year. We’d sometimes base our work on short stories. The films had to be short so there was no question of adapting a novel. But on the whole, most of us wrote our own scripts.

There wasn’t any particular censorship at the School. They showed us various films which people usually didn’t see. They imported films so that students would be educated by them and not merely watch them as scraps of interesting information or forbidden news, albeit political. Of course, we weren’t shown any James Bonds fighting the KGB, but we did see films which weren’t generally shown in Poland or we saw them long before they were shown. I don’t think there was any political censorship in their choice of films. Maybe there was and I just didn’t know about it. They would show us Eisenstein’s Battleship Potemkin and other good Russian films which had a reason for being interesting. The school wasn’t tinged with Communist propa-
ganda. It was really open-minded, and that’s why it was so good, up until 1968.

A number of films have stayed in my memory simply because they’re beautiful. I remember them because I always thought that I’d never be able to do anything like that in my life (no doubt those are the films which always make the greatest impression), not due to lack of money or because I didn’t have the means or technicians, but because I didn’t have sufficient imagination, intelligence or enough talent. I always said that I never wanted to be anybody’s assistant but that if, for example, Ken Loach were to ask me, then I’d willingly make him coffee. I saw Kes at film school and I knew then that I’d willingly make coffee for him. I didn’t want to be an assistant or anything like that – I’d just make coffee so I could see how he does it all. The same applied to Orson Welles, or Fellini, and sometimes Bergman.

There were wonderful directors once but now they’re dead or retired. It’s all in the past – the period of great film personalities. Watching the great films, it wasn’t even jealousy I felt because you can only be jealous of something which, theoretically, is within your reach. You can envy that, but you can’t envy something which is completely beyond you. There was nothing wrong with my feelings. On the contrary, they were very positive; a certain admiration and bedazzlement that something like that is possible and that it would always be beyond my reach.

Once, somewhere in Holland I think it was, they asked me to choose some films which I had liked a lot. I made a selection. I can’t even remember them all, but I made my selection and I even went to two screenings. Then I stopped going. I’d simply understood that somewhere along the way, these expectations and notions which I had had of the films, which I can clearly remember, completely lost their myth.

I remember watching Fellini’s La Strada and not being disillusioned at all. I liked it just as much as before, if not more. And then I watched a film by Bergman called Sawdust and Tinsel and I remember I’d had beautiful recollections of that film. But I found myself watching something on the screen which left me completely indifferent, which was completely alien to me. I couldn’t understand what I’d seen in it before, apart from perhaps three or four scenes. I didn’t experience any of the tension which I’d felt when I’d watched it before. But then Bergman went on to make some more beautiful films which still create this tension. This, among other things, is where the magic of the screen lies: that suddenly, as an audience, you find yourself in a state of tension because you’re in a world shown to you by the director. That world is so coherent, so comprehensive, so succinct that you’re transported into it and experience tension because you sense the tension between the characters.

I don’t know why this happened, because these two films were made at more or less the same time. Fellini and Bergman are, more or less, of the same period. They’re both great directors. But
La Strada hasn’t aged while Sawdust and Tinsel has. I don’t quite know why. Of course, you could analyse it and, no doubt, might even understand the phenomenon but I don’t know whether it’s worth it. That’s philosophizing, the work of critics.

Andrei Tarkovsky was one of the greatest directors of recent years. He’s dead, like most of them. That is, most of them are dead or have stopped making films. Or else, somewhere along the line, they’ve irretrievably lost something, some individual sort of imagination, intelligence or way of narrating a story. Tarkovsky was certainly one of those who hadn’t lost this. Unfortunately, he died. Probably because he couldn’t live any more. That’s usually why people die. One can say it’s cancer or a heart attack or that the person falls under a car, but really people usually die because they can’t go on living.

They always ask me, in interviews, which directors have influenced me the most. I don’t know the answer to that. Probably so many, for all sorts of reasons, that there’s no logical pattern. When the newspapers ask, I always say, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Kafka. They’re surprised and ask me whether these are directors. ‘No,’ I say. ‘They’re writers.’ And that’s as if more important to me than film.

The truth is that I watched masses of films – especially at film school – and I loved a lot of them. But can you call that influence? I think that to this day, apart from a few exceptions, I watch films like a member of the public rather than a director. It’s a completely different way of looking at things. Of course, I watch with a professional eye if somebody asks me for advice or something. Then I try to analyse the film, watch it professionally. But if I go to the cinema – which happens very rarely – I try to watch films like the audience does. That is, I try to allow myself to be moved, surrender to the magic, if it’s there, on the screen, and to believe the story somebody’s telling. And then it’s hard to talk of influence.

Basically, if a film is good, and if I like it, then I watch it far less analytically than if I don’t like it. It’s hard to say that bad films have an influence; it’s the good ones that influence us. And I try to watch – or rather, do watch – good films in the spirit in which they were made. I don’t try to analyse them. It was the same thing at school, too. I watched Citizen Kane a hundred times. If you insisted, I could sit down and probably draw or describe individual takes, but that’s not what was important to me. What was important, was the fact that I took part in the film. I experienced it.

Nor do I think that there’s anything wrong in stealing. If somebody’s gone that way before and it’s proved to be good, then you have to steal it immediately. If I steal from good films, and if this later becomes part of my own world, then I steal without qualms. This often happens completely without my being aware of it, but that doesn’t mean that I don’t do it – it did happen but it wasn’t calculated, or premeditated. It’s not straight plagiarism.
To put it another way, films are simply part of our lives. We get up in the morning, we go to work or we don’t got to work. We go to sleep. We make love. We hate. We watch films. We talk to our friends, to our families. We experience our children’s problems or the problems of our children’s friends. And the films are there somewhere, too. They also stay somewhere within us. They become part of our own lives, of our own inner selves. They stay with us just as much as all those things which really happened. I don’t think they’re any different from real events, apart from the fact that they’re invented. But that doesn’t matter. They stay with us. I steal takes from films, scenes, or solutions, just as I steal stories and afterwards I can’t even remember where I stole them from.

I keep persuading younger colleagues to whom I teach script writing or directing, to examine their own lives. Not for the purposes of any book or script but for themselves. I always say to them, Try to think of what happened to you which was important and led to your sitting here in this chair, on this very day, among these people. What happened? What really brought you here? You’ve got to know this. That’s the starting point.

The years in which you don’t work on yourself like this are, in fact, wasted. You might feel or understand something intuitively and, consequently, the results are arbitrary. It’s only when you’ve done this work that you can see a certain order in events and their effects.

I tried to fathom out what brought me to this point in my life, too, because without such an authentic, thorough and merciless analysis, you can’t tell a story. If you don’t understand your own life, then I don’t think you can understand the lives of the characters in your stories, you can’t understand the lives of other people. Philosophers know this. Social workers know this. But artists ought to know this too – at least those who tell stories. Maybe musicians don’t need such an analysis, although I believe that composers do. Painters maybe less so. But it’s absolutely necessary to those who tell stories about life: an authentic understanding of one’s own life. By authentic I mean that it’s not a public understanding, which I’ll share with anybody. It’s not for sale, and, in fact, you’ll never detect it in my films. Some things you can find out very easily but you’ll never understand how much the films I make or the stories I tell mean to me and why. You’ll never find that out. I know it, but that knowledge is only for me.

I’m frightened of anybody who wants to teach me something or who wants to show me a goal, me or anybody else, because I don’t believe you can be shown a goal if you don’t find it yourself. I’m fanatically afraid of all those people. That’s why I’m afraid of psychoanalysts and psychotherapists. Of course they always say, We don’t show you, we help you find it. I know all those arguments. Unfortunately, that’s only theory while in practice they do show you. I know masses of people who feel wonderful after-
wards. But I also know a great many people who feel terrible and I think that even those who feel good today won’t feel so good tomorrow.

I’m very unfashionable about such things. I know it’s in vogue to run to all sorts of places like that, to various group or individual therapies with psychotherapists, or to seek the help of psychiatrists. I know masses of people do it. I’m afraid of it, that’s all. I’m just as fanatically afraid of those therapists as I am of politicians, of priests, and of teachers. I’m frightened of all those people who show you the way, who know. Because really — and I’m deeply convinced of this, I firmly believe it — nobody really knows, with a few exceptions. Unfortunately, the actions of these people usually end in tragedy — like the Second World War or Stalinism or something. I’m convinced that Stalin and Hitler knew exactly what they were to do. They knew very well. But that’s how it is. That’s fanaticism. That’s knowing. That’s the feeling of absolutely knowing. And the next minute, it’s army boots. It always ends up like that.

I went to a good film school. I finished there in 1968. The School used to have a certain amount of freedom and wise teachers but then the Communists destroyed it. They started by throwing out some of the teachers because they were Jewish, and they ended by taking away such freedom as the School enjoyed. That’s how they destroyed it.

They tried to disguise the censorship they introduced with grand words. For example, at one stage there was a group of young people who wanted to hold positions of power in the School, but they were advocates of experimental cinema. That is, they cut holes in film or set up the camera in one corner for hours on end, filming the result, or scratched pictures on to film, and so on. Totalitarian authorities always support movements like these if the movement can destroy another movement. And that movement was in a position to destroy a movement at School which was based on our trying to see what was happening in the world, how people were living and why they weren’t living as well as they could, why their lives weren’t as easy as the paper described them. We were all making films about that.

The authorities could have closed the School down but it would have looked bad because then people would have said that the authorities were destroying artistic freedom, so they acted far more subtly. The authorities vested their interest in people who claimed to make artistic films. ‘There’s no point in filming people and their living conditions. We’re artists, we have to make artistic films. Experimental films preferably.’

I remember going back to the School in 1981 with Agnieszka Holland, when those young people were there. They were being led by a former colleague of mine who desperately wanted to be Principal and who spent most of his time cutting holes in magnetic tape. White holes. There was a black screen and every now and again a white hole, sometimes small, sometimes large, would flash on one side
or other of the screen. This was accompanied by some sort of music. I’m not an advocate of films like that and I don’t hide the fact that they irritate me. But that’s not the point, because there are people who do like films like that and holes have to be made to cater for them. I’ve got absolutely nothing against that provided that with the help of those holes you’re not going to destroy something else.

I was Vice-President of the Polish Film-makers’ Association at the time and this was one of the many actions which we took and in which we failed; Agnieszka and I went to the School to try and explain to the students that the film school was there to enable them to make films, to teach them where to set the camera up, how to work with actors, what films had been made to date, the basics of dramaturgy, script structuring, how a scene differs from a sequence, and how a wide-angle lens differs from a telephoto lens. At that, the students threw us out, shouting that they didn’t want a professional school. They wanted to study yoga, the philosophy of the Far East and various schools of meditation, claiming that this was very important. And that they wanted to cut holes in film and believed that yoga and the art of meditation was a great help to them in this.

They simply threw us out of the school. This was only one of the numerous undertakings of our Film-makers’ Association during which I realized how ineffective we were. Perhaps I was wrong but I personally believe that the school is there to teach these things. But they thought otherwise. I don’t know, maybe that’s why Polish cinema is in the state it’s in today – because they thought the way they did.

Back in 1968 there was a small revolution in Poland led by intellectuals whom nobody supported. We, at the film school, believed that the papers were lying, that Jews mustn’t be thrown out of Poland, and that perhaps it would be a good thing if people who were more open and democratic than Gomulka’s party, were to come to power. We thought that if we spoke out for something which appeared to be good or better than what had been before – an expansion of freedom, what appeared to be more democratic or effectively more common to all (because, after all, that’s what democracy boils down to, to that which is most common to most people) – then, even if we didn’t achieve it, at least we’d have expressed ourselves decently. Later on, it turned out that we’d been manipulated by people who wanted to gain power but who were far crueler and more cynical than Gomulka. We’d been used by Moczar and his followers.

Twice in my life I tried my hand at politics and twice I came out very badly. The first time was then, in 1968, when I took part in a students’ strike in Lodz. That was not very important; I threw stones and ran away from the militia. That’s all. And then they interrogated me five times, maybe ten. They wanted me to say something, sign something, which I didn’t do. Nobody beat me up, nobody threatened me. I never even got the impression that they wanted to arrest me. What was worse was the fact that they threw people out of
Poland. Anti-Semitism and Polish nationalism are a stain on my country which has remained to this day and I don’t think we’ll ever be able to get rid of it.

It’s only now that I realize how good it is for a country not to be ethnically pure. Now I know. Then I didn’t. Still, I did know that some terrible injustice was being perpetrated, and I knew that I couldn’t do anything about it, that nobody could do anything about it, and that, paradoxically, the more I shouted against the authorities, the more I threw those stones, the more people would get thrown out of the country.

For some time afterwards, I managed to avoid politics. And then I got involved in politics on a small scale as Wajda’s VicePresident, although effectively I was doing the work of an acting president of the Polish Film-makers’ Association, which was quite important at the time. That must have been from about 1976 or 1977 to 1980. I very quickly realized what an unpleasant and painful trap it was to be in such a position. And this, as I said, was only politics on a small scale. But it was politics. We were trying, as an Association, to fight for some sort of artistic freedom, some sort of freedom of expression in films to stop them from clashing so painfully with the censors. Nothing came out of it. We thought we were very important and then it turned out that we were completely insignificant.

I had a painful feeling of having walked into a room where I absolutely shouldn’t have gone, that the compromises which I had to make – and I was constantly having to make compromises, of course – that those compromises embarrassed me because they weren’t my own private ones: they were compromises made in the name of a number of people. This is deeply immoral because, even if you can do some good for somebody, achieve something which people need, there’s always a price to be paid. Of course, you pay with stress but it’s the others who really pay. There’s no other way. I realized it wasn’t my world.

I keep making compromises in my own private and professional life, as well as artistic compromises, but I make them on my own account. They concern my own films, something which I, myself, have imagined, and I’m the only one who bears the consequences. In other words, I don’t want to be responsible for anybody else. And that’s what I realized, despite the fact that I’d got myself mixed up in this Association affair. When Solidarity came along, I simply asked the Association to dismiss me – I wasn’t cut out for such revolutionary times.

But going back to the subject of film school, I was there along with Jerzy Skolimowski, who was just leaving when I joined. Then when I was in my second year, Krzysztof Zanussi, Edek Zebrowski, and Antek Krauze left. We were a good team, my year, and got on very well together. I was very good friends with Andrzej Ttikow. Then I was great friends with Tomek Zygarlo. Also with us were Krzys Wojciechowski and Piotr Wojciechowski who was already a good writer then, and still is. There were some foreign students, too.
That was my year. A very, very good year and we all liked each other very much.

Andrzej Titkow wrote a play for television called Atarax (Atarax is a tranquilizer). I directed the play as part of my work in my second or third year. That was one of the advantages of the School – the possibility of practical work. It wasn’t obligatory but you could direct something if you wanted to. We were given relatively good professional conditions for those times. The machines we used are terribly old-fashioned by today’s standards, but at the time they were decent. We were given professional camera operators, electricians and sound technicians.
After Film School
It turned out that we had different tastes or interests. I went into documentaries as quickly as I possibly could because I very much wanted to make documentary films, and did make them for a good many years. My friends went all sorts of different ways, although some of them went into documentaries, too, later on. This was the end of the 1960s and it wasn’t easy, at the time, to get into documentaries. I don’t really know how I succeeded so quickly. Kazimierz Karabasz, one of my teachers, probably helped me. He was one of the better teachers and certainly had a great influence on me at the beginning.

They used to call me ‘engineer’. Maybe because my father was an engineer, but I suspect I’ve got the habit or obsession of always tidying up around myself. I keep drawing up various lists for everything and I try to put my papers into some sort of order. Or they’d call me ‘orni’ or ‘ornithologist’, probably because of the patience I used to have when making documentaries.

I used to be very patient when making documentaries, of course, because the profession demands it but now I’m absolutely impatient. It’s a question of age. When you start off, you think there’s plenty of time, and you’re patient. Then you become more and more aware that there isn’t any time after all, and you don’t want to waste time on things which aren’t worth it.

Then I started making feature films and found myself in a slightly different group, which later called itself the Cinema of Moral Anxiety. That name was invented by Janusz Kijowski, who was one of our colleagues. I think he meant that we were anxious about the moral situation of people in Poland. It’s difficult for me to say what he had in mind. I always hated the name, but it works.

These friendships were completely different from those of my documentary film-making days, between entirely different people. They weren’t so close, perhaps, not so human, and were more professional. I became friends with Krzysztof Zanussi, and then with Edek Zebrowski and Agnieszka Holland. And for some time, with Andrzej Wajda, too. We were all, as it were, in a group which shared the feeling that we could do something together, that we positively had to do something together, and that in such a group we’d have some sort of power. This was true considering the circumstances in Poland at the time. A group like that was necessary. There were about six years of this Cinema of Moral Anxiety, from 1974 to 1980.

However, all that came later. Soon after I finished film school, somewhere at the beginning of the 1970s, several of us thought it essential to create small pressure groups. We thought that we should create a studio which would bring together young people, which would serve as a bridge between school and the professional film world, and become a place from which one could really enter the professional world. This was because our main grievance against the organization of film production in Poland at that time was that it was immensely difficult.
to find a way into working in film from school. Later, in the mid-1970s, it became a bit easier but at the beginning of the 1970s or the end of the 1960s even, it seemed that there was no way in. So we tried to create one.

The idea came from a studio in Hungary called the Bela Balasz Studio. Bela Balasz was a Hungarian film theoretician, an intelligent man who was working before and after the Second World War. Our studio in Poland was to be called the Irzykowski Studio. Irzykowski was very close to Bela Balasz as a film theoretician before the war. He was a serious theoretician, and a good one. The main point of our studio was to make films cheaply. Our slogan was ‘debut for a million’. The average cost of a film, at the time, was six million zlotys but we undertook to make first films for a million zlotys.

We decided to concentrate on feature films but thought it might also be possible to make all sorts of films for various distributors. Short documentaries were still being distributed in cinemas as supporting programmes to feature films. We also thought that it might be possible to make documentaries for television. We were looking for all sorts of ways to finance this studio, although, at that time, money came from only one source, namely the State Treasury. It was only a matter of convincing those responsible for cultural politics that such a place was necessary. But, to be honest, we never managed to do that. We never managed to convince them, despite devoting several years to it.

I wasn’t by any means the most important there. The group was made up of Grzes Krolkiwicz (who, I think, had the most energy), Andrzej Jurga, Krzysz Wojciechowski and me. There was also a production manager. We wanted people from all disciplines. We needed a producer and a production manager to work out film budgets and the studio budget.

That’s what we were trying to attain and we wrote various manifestos. We even managed to get the support of various important people from the film industry – Kuba Morgenstern, Andrzej Wajda, Krzysztof Zanussi, and even Jerzy Kawalerowicz, then President of the Filmmakers’ Association – even though this was very difficult at the time because we’d only just left school. We managed to get all those people to sign papers which stated that such a studio was necessary, that it would be a good thing for the film industry. But we always came up against a lack of goodwill on the part of – I don’t really know who – the Ministry of Arts and Culture? Then again, the Ministry probably wasn’t in a position to decide. It was probably the Department of Culture at the Central Committee which decided. I suspect we weren’t trustworthy enough. We were too young for them to know us and none of us belonged to the Party.

In order to give ourselves credibility we even asked Bohdan Kosinski, the documentary film-maker, to be artistic patron of the Studio. Later on, he became a known and very active member of the opposition. But at that time he was
still Party Secretary at the WFD (State Documentary Film Studios). We thought that if we gained such support from the side of the Party, it would be easier. But it turned out that Kosinski, although Party Secretary, wasn’t so trustworthy in the eyes of the Party. He had probably already sensed something because this was, firstly, after 1968 and the anti-Semitic purge in Poland, and secondly, after the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Allied forces. I think the Party vetted everybody very carefully. In fact we had all been involved in the events of 1968. Bohdan, I suspect, was already expressing his attitude to the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Even if he wasn’t doing so openly, he was probably doing it clearly enough at the Party forum to arouse their mistrust.

After a few years, this enterprise collapsed, and the studio only came into being later on, in 1980, during the period of Solidarity. Other young people created the studio under the leadership of Janusz Kijowski, and it’s still functioning to this day. I’ve no idea how it’s getting on because, to be honest, I’m not interested any more. I wanted to create this studio for people of my own generation but later it was the new generation who needed it. We didn’t need it any more; we’d already made our way into the film industry.

I was interested in the new studio for a while because there were students there from the Katowice Film School, which had been founded in 1977, I think, and where I taught for three or four years, together with Krzysztof Zanussi, Edek Zebrowski and Andrzej Jurga. Those people who were finishing the School at the beginning of the 1980s were our students, our younger colleagues. So that’s why I did have some interest in the way the studio was developing.

It’s always like that – that people want something in the name of their ideals. They want to do something together, to define themselves in some way and then, when they get the money and a little bit of power, they start to forget those ideals and make their own films, not allowing anybody else in and, no doubt, that’s how the Irzykowski Studio ended up. They’re always wrangling. The studio management is forever changing. To be honest, I don’t have much faith in that studio.
Filming in Poland
Quality Cuts
Essentially, censorship lay in ourselves – the writers, directors and dramatists. That was where we sensed it most. And in the officials who were professionally engaged in ‘minding’ us, disrupting our work and, at times, helping us too. They weren’t exclusively concerned with disruption. It wasn’t like that. There were those who wanted to help, and did. Paradoxically, people engaged in cultural censorship have an interest in maintaining a culture of quality because their own role depends on its existence. Without culture, censorship loses its raison d’être.

Of course, there was a time when I was fearful. ‘Fear’ is such a mild word. I never felt that cinema was the most important part of my life. I still don’t. But it’s my profession, so the anxiety is there – that I won’t be able to make the next film, that it will be ill-received or released down a blind alley. There was a time when we feared to expose ourselves and stick out our necks, even as we constantly did so. We tried to reach out to the limit, to find the sharp end of the blade. We played games with censorship, while fearing at the same time that we’d lose and be unable to make something later on.

I once did a film for television called Spokoj (Calm) of which I was very fond, and still am, even though I changed it as a result of intervention from the censor. State television had a particularly cunning – almost diabolical – figure of a vice-chairman at the time. He summoned me to see him, so I went. It was quite clear what he wanted. I knew that he intended to cut. He was very charming, very intelligent and precise. He liked the film and spoke about it briefly, and I saw that he had understood everything, even the most subtle, hidden levels of human emotion. But I realised that he hadn’t called me in to flatter me. He wanted to cut. It was the scene where the hero, a former prisoner (played beautifully by Jurek Stuhr) meets his fellow prison inmates on a building site. They are working there and so is he, as a free man.

The vice-chairman said that the scene had to be cut because an international convention makes it illegal for prisoners to work on a building site. ‘Okay,’ I said, ‘but take a look through that window.’ (I had noted a little scene outside the television building as I was going in.)

“Take a look at the tramlines,” I said, “and tell me what you see.”

He walked up to the window, because he was polite, and said: “I can see people at work.”

“Take a closer look,” I said.

“Prisoners,” he said.

“So it’s not true that prisoners don’t work outside in the street. You can see them.”

“Which is the very reason why the scene must go. In Poland prisoners are not permitted to work in public places: international law forbids it.”

“But they do, you can see them through the window.”

“Of course I can. That’s why you’ve got to cut the scene.”

So, of course, I did. I cut a great deal from my films – when I thought that the cuts wouldn’t spoil the essence of the film. In some cases I refused and the films
weren’t shown. Spokoj was never shown in any case.

In the 1970s, the era of the “cinema of moral anxiety” – a phrase I detest – filmmakers and viewers communicated over the heads of the censors. We were forced to find dramatic and intellectual resolutions which we thought viewers would understand and the censors wouldn’t.

And it turned out that this world shown in microcosm was being seen by viewers as a generalised picture of life in Poland. We functioned in this way because we felt that it was our task to depict the world, the real world which wasn’t being shown on the screen at that time – because the censors, the Party, the government, the echelons of power (call them what you will) didn’t want it, because the world wasn’t what it should be. Why did they devise censorship? To show a world which doesn’t exist, an ideal world, or what they envisaged as the ideal world. We wanted to depict the world as it was.

*Edited excerpts from “Tren na smiere cenzora” (Lament on the death of a censor), published in Reżyser, co-published with Kino II/1992, translated by Irena Maryniak*
The Word “Success”
I haven’t backed out of filming in Poland. I still film there. Of course co-production is something different; it offers me better conditions.

I don’t like the word ‘success’, and I always fiercely defend myself against it, because I don’t know what the word means at all. For me, success means attaining something I’d really like. That’s success. And what I’d really like is probably unattainable, so I don’t look at things in these terms. Of course, the recognition I have won, to a certain or even large extent, satisfies an ambition which every film-maker has. I’m certainly ambitious and no doubt I behave the way I do through ambition. There’s absolutely no doubt about that. But that’s got nothing to do with success. That’s very far from success.

On the one hand, my ambition’s satisfied. Yet, on the other hand, recognition only helps you to satisfy ambition because it’ll never be completely satisfied. You can’t ever completely satisfy ambition. The more ambitious you are, the more impossible it is to satisfy your ambition. Recognition makes certain things easier which is very good in resolving everyday matters. Obviously it’s better if you can find money easily rather than if you have to fight for it. The same goes for actors or anything else you might think of. But, at the same time, I’m not sure that making things easier is a good thing in itself. I’m not sure whether it isn’t better if things are difficult. I’m not sure if it’s not better to suffer than not to suffer. I think it’s sometimes better to suffer. Everybody ought to go through it. That’s what makes us. That’s what makes human nature. If you’ve got an easy life then there’s no reason for you to care about anybody else. I think that in order really to care about yourself, and particularly somebody else, you’ve got to experience suffering and really understand what it is to suffer, so that you hurt and understand what it is to hurt. Because if you don’t understand what pain is, you won’t understand what it is not to be in pain and you won’t appreciate this lack of pain.

I’ll never tell you about the time I suffered most; nor will I tell anybody. It’s what’s most painful and most hidden. So, first of all, I don’t talk about it and, secondly, I very rarely admit it to myself, although it probably does emerge somewhere. No doubt, it comes out somewhere and you could find it, if you really wanted to.

Of course I feel I’m running away but that doesn’t bother me. Sometimes, if you want to survive, you have to run away. I think I escaped from the Polish situation too late. I think that I allowed myself to be needlessly taken in yet again in 1980. I needlessly suffered yet another blow. I should have realized and run away much sooner. Unfortunately, I was too foolish.

Generally speaking, you run away from yourself, or from what you think you are. It hasn’t caused me any problems, to be honest. Isolation hasn’t caused me any problems either because, like everybody else, I think I’m the one who’s right and not everybody else, whatever their reasons. And to this day I’m convinced I was right. The only thing I did wrong and
foolishly, was to have turned away from it all so late. But that’s the way it was meant to be, no doubt.

There are many reasons why America doesn’t attract me. First, I don’t like America. It’s too big. There are too many people. Everybody runs around too quickly. There’s too much commotion, too much uproar. Everybody pretends too hard that they’re happy there. But I don’t believe in their happiness, I think they’re just as unhappy as we are, except that we still talk about it sometimes but they only say that everything’s fine, that it’s fantastic. It gets on my nerves on a day-to-day basis, and unfortunately directing is life on a day-to-day basis. You have to spend half a year in a place, in a country, in order to do something. And if I were to be confronted for a whole year with people saying that everything’s fantastic then I simply couldn’t stand it.

When Americans asked me ‘How are you?’, I said ‘So-so.’ They probably thought somebody in my family had died. But I simply had jet lag because I’d been flying for seven hours and didn’t feel particularly well. But it was enough for me to say ‘So-so’ and they immediately thought that something tragic had happened. You can’t say ‘So-so’. You have to say ‘Well’ or ‘Very well’. The most optimistic thing I can say is ‘I’m still alive.’ So I’m not cut out for America for that reason. Second, they don’t allow directors into the cutting-room – at least not in the big studios. The director directs the film; that’s his job. There, one person writes the script, another directs and yet another edits. No doubt, one day I’ll direct somebody else’s script because it’ll be much better than my own, and far more beautiful and clever. But I’ll certainly never give up editing. So I can’t go to America for that reason either. Of course, I can’t go to America because they don’t allow cigarettes, so there certainly are enough reasons for my not being attracted to America.

I’m afraid of America. Whenever I’m in New York I always have the feeling that it’s going to cave in and all I can think about is how to avoid being there when that happens. The same goes for other places in America. You don’t get all those people and all that noise in the streets of California as you do in New York but, in turn, there’s a huge number of cars going to and fro and I always have serious doubts as to whether there are any Americans inside. You know, who’s inside? I’ve always got the impression that those cars drive themselves. So I’m simply frightened of that country, and I always have the feeling that I’m on the defensive when I arrive there. I’ve even been to small provincial places there and I’m still frightened and always escape. I close myself in. I simply run away to my hotel, and usually sleep, if I manage to get to sleep, that is – I don’t fall asleep as easily as I used to. But if I manage to fall asleep, that’s what I do.

I had this adventure. It was silly really. I was hurrying to some screening. I think it was the first screening I had at the New York Festival. No End, I think it was, in 1984 or 1985. I was in a terrible hurry.
I got into a taxi. It was raining. The taxi-driver hit a cyclist. My journey took me through Central Park. It’s like Hyde Park in London where the roads cut across except that in Hyde Park everything is on one level while in Central Park the roads are lower down, not in a tunnel but a sort of gully. Well, that’s where my taxi-driver knocked over a cyclist. It was dusk already or even dark. No, it was dusk. Raining. And he simply hit him. The cyclist jumped off and fell and the taxi-driver ran over the bike. He simply ran over the bike. The road’s narrow there; that is, one line of cars can go in one direction and one line in the other, no more. The cars there are terribly big and wide so maybe two French cars would fit but only one American. Well, when he knocked over the cyclist, he stopped, and got out. We started to help the cyclist up. I also helped, because he was lying there with his leg bleeding. Well, car horns started beeping. An enormous river of cars had stopped behind us. A gigantic traffic jam, a couple of miles long, had formed. And they started to beep their horns and flash their lights and shout and beep and so on and so on.

Since it was literally five minutes before the time I was to appear at the Lincoln Center, I gave the guy what I owed him, five or six dollars, I can’t remember exactly how much, and I started to run. You can guess what the taxi-drivers coming up in the opposite direction thought. A taxi’s standing and some guy is running away from it. Of course they thought that I’d done something to the driver. Mugged him, robbed him, killed him or something. I ran like hell because, on top of that, it was raining and I wanted to save my suit from becoming soaked before I reached the Lincoln Center. So I pelted along. I saw the taxis coming to a halt in the opposite direction, and they started signalling. Guys jumped out of the taxis. I simply started to run away. I started to run away from them, not to the Lincoln Center any more but away from them. I started to climb up the sides of the gully, jumped into the park but it turned out that there were taxi-drivers standing in front of the gully, too, and they’d also noticed a taxi and this guy running away. So they simply started chasing me through Central Park with these great big baseball bats. You know, those huge, long sticks. You get it with one of those and your skull’s cracked open. And I saw the guys waving these sticks above the cars and chasing me across Central Park in their cars. I barely escaped. The trees were pretty dense there and they couldn’t get through with their cars; that’s the only reason why I escaped. Covered in mud, I went and explained at the Lincoln Center why I was late – I was five or ten minutes late. But that’s not why I don’t like America. That was just an amusing adventure.

That’s what comedy’s about, I reckon. You have to put the character in a situation which wouldn’t be funny if you were in it yourself, but when you look at it from the outside, it’s terribly funny. I don’t make comedies like the ones which used to be made with comedians such as de
Funes, for example, but I have made a comic film.

There are many films I regret not having made. The films simply didn’t get made for various reasons. I had various ideas or scripts, for example, which I never realized. There are a lot of documentaries which I wanted to make but didn’t, but that’s not true of full-length features. Maybe there is one I didn’t make; however, I’ve made all the ones I’ve written. I don’t have any drawer full of scripts which I dream of making but haven’t been able to make for various reasons. I don’t have any scripts which I wrote and never made; except one that was written fifteen years ago.

At one stage, for example, I wanted to make a film with Jacek Kaczmarski, I who sang beautiful songs. He once played a very small role in Blind Chance. I once thought that he was somebody who should have a film written for him; that is, a role written for him. He had so much energy, so much strength; there was so much truth in the way he behaved, yet so much discretion, too. A film should absolutely have been written for him, but I didn’t write it. To be honest, I couldn’t write it because he left the country and never came back. Now he’s an elderly gentleman, not the Jacek Kaczmarski he’d once been.

One of the documentaries I wanted to film – and I think if I had done, it would be very useful now – was of various long talks with politicians who have since died; with Communists, that is. I submitted the subject to the State Documentary Film Studios (WFD) proposing between twenty or thirty hours of interviews with Gomulka, Cyrankiewicz, Moczar. And I must say that the Studios even started making moves in that direction and probably managed to get hold of some of these people, but they didn’t get an agreement. That was in the mid 1970s, after Workers’71. I thought that something really had to be recorded on film about these people. Just talking heads, nothing else. Not to do anything else at all. I even proposed that we make the film and hide it in the archives without showing it to anybody. Simply keep it in the archives as a historical document. I suspect those people might have said something, some truth, if I’d have been clever.

There were many documentaries which I didn’t make. I managed to put a few of them into Camera Buff. The film buff makes them as amateur films. A documentary about pavements, or about a dwarf. Filip makes them.

I think that I made a few films completely unnecessarily, both documentaries and full features. I don’t know why I made them any more. One such film is The Scar. I think I must have made it because I wanted to make a film. That’s the greatest sin a director can commit; to make a film simply because he wants to make a film. You have to want to make a film for other reasons – to say something, to tell a story, to show somebody’s fate – but you can’t want to make a film simply for the sake of it. I think that was my biggest mistake – that I made films I no longer know why I made. While I was making
them I told myself I knew why but I don’t think I really believed that. I made them simply for the sake of making them. Another such completely unnecessary film was Short Working Day. I’ve absolutely no idea why I made it. I made a lot of unnecessary documentaries, too.

Another mistake was that I realized too late that I had to move as far away from the world of politics as possible. As far away as possible so that there’s no sign of it even in the background of my films. Of course, you could, no doubt, call my going to film school the biggest mistake I ever made.

The film industry is in a bad condition the whole world over. It’s very nice to celebrate a silver wedding but it’s good only if the married couple feel well, still love each other, want to kiss or go to bed with each other, but it’s bad if the couple have had just about as much as they can take and aren’t interested in each other any more. And that is more or less what’s happened with the film industry; the industry’s not interested in the public and the public, in turn, is less and less interested in film.

But it has to be said, we don’t give the public much of a chance. Apart from the Americans, of course. They care for the public’s interests because they care about their wallets; so that’s a different sort of caring really. What I’m thinking of is caring also for the audience’s spiritual life. Maybe that’s too strong a word but something which is a little more than just box-office. The Americans take excellent care of the box-office. And while doing so they make the best, or some of the best, films in the world anyway, also on the spiritual level. But I reckon that this realm of higher needs, of something more than just forgetting about everyday life, of mere recreation, this realm of needs has been clearly neglected by us. So the public’s turned away from us because they don’t feel we’re taking care of them. Maybe these needs are disappearing. But I willingly take part of the blame myself as director.

I don’t know whether I’ve ever watched a film I’ve made. I once went in to a screening for a moment during some festival, in Holland I think it was. But that was for just a few minutes when I went in to see whether Personnel had aged. I decided it had aged a bit and left. I never watched any film of mine after that.

The audiences I like most are those who say that the film’s about them, or those who say that it meant something to them, those for whom the film has changed something. I met a woman in a street in Berlin who recognized me because “A Short Film about Love” was being publicized at the time. This woman recognized me and started crying. She was fifty. She thanked me profusely because she had had a conflict with her daughter for a good many years; they weren’t talking to each other although they were sharing a flat. The daughter was nineteen at the time. The woman told me that she and her daughter hadn’t spoken for five or six years, apart from informing each other about where the keys were or that there was no butter or what time they’d
be home. The previous day, they’d been to see my film and the daughter kissed her mother for the first time in five or six years. No doubt they’ll quarrel tomorrow again and in two days’ time this’ll mean nothing to them; but if they felt better for five minutes – or at least the older woman felt better – then that’s enough. It’s worth making the film for those five minutes. The daughter had probably been in conflict with her mother for some reason and that reason lurked somewhere in the contents of A Short Film about Love. And when they saw the film together, the daughter or older woman probably understood what had been the real reason for the conflict, and the daughter kissed her mother. It was worth making the film for that kiss, for that one woman.

Many people, after seeing A Short Film about Killing, asked me: ‘How do you know that that’s what it’s like?’ Similarly, I got a lot of letters after Camera Buff from people asking, ‘How do you know what it’s like to be a film buff? It’s a film about me. You made a film about me.’ Or, ‘You’ve plagiarized my life. Where do you know me from?’ I got a lot of letters like that, after many of my films. The same thing happened after A Short Film about Love. I got a letter from a boy who claims that the film’s taken from his life. There’s something very pleasant when you make something without really knowing exactly how it’ll go – because you never really know – and then it turns out that you’ve hit on somebody’s fate.

Or take this girl, for example. At a meeting just outside Paris, a fifteen-year-old girl came up to me and said that she’d been to see Véronique. She’d gone once, twice, three times and only wanted to say one thing really – that she realized that there is such a thing as a soul. She hadn’t known before, but now she knew that the soul does exist. There’s something very beautiful in that. It was worth making Véronique for that girl. It was worth wor-
king for a year, sacrificing all that money, energy, time, patience, torturing yourself, killing yourself, taking thousands of decisions, so that one young girl in Paris should realize that there is such a thing as a soul. It’s worth it. These are the best viewers. There aren’t many of them but perhaps there are a few.
A Serial of TV-Films
While all this was going on, I happened to bump into my coscriptwriter in the street. He’s a lawyer, roams around, hasn’t got much to do. Maybe he’s got time for thinking. It’s true that he has had a bit to do over the last few years because we had martial law and he took part in quite a few political trials in Poland. But martial law finished sooner than we’d all expected. And one day I bumped into him. It was cold. It was raining. I’d lost one of my gloves. ‘Someone should make a film about the Ten Commandments,’ Piesiewicz said to me. ‘You should do it.’ A terrible idea, of course.

Krzysztof Piesiewicz and I spend hours on end talking about our friends, our wives, our children, our skis, our cars. But we keep going back to what would be useful for the story we’re inventing. It’s very often Krzysztof who has the basic ideas; ones which, in fact, look as if they can’t be filmed. And I defend myself against them of course.

Chaos and disorder ruled Poland in the mid-1980s — everywhere, everything, practically everybody’s life. Tension, a feeling of hopelessness, and a fear of yet worse to come were obvious. I’d already started to travel abroad a bit by this time and observed a general uncertainty in the world at large. I’m not even thinking about politics here but about ordinary, everyday life. I sensed mutual indifference behind polite smiles and had the overwhelming impression that, more and more frequently, I was watching people who didn’t really know why they were living. So I thought Piesiewicz was right but filming the Ten Commandments would be a very difficult task.

Should it be one film? Several? Or maybe ten? A serial, or rather cycle of ten separate films based on each of the Commandments? This concept seemed closest to the idea of the Ten propositions, ten one-hour films. At this stage, it was a question of writing the screenplays — I wasn’t thinking about directing yet. One of the reasons for starting work was the fact that for several years I’d been deputy to Krzysztof Zanussi, artistic head of the Tor Production House. Zanussi was working largely abroad so he made general decisions while the day-to-day running of the Production House was left to me. One of the functions of the Production House is to help young directors make their first films. I knew a lot of directors like that who deserved a break and I knew how difficult it was to find the money. For a long time in Poland television has been the natural home for directorial debuts — TV films are shorter and cheaper, so less risk is involved. The difficulty lay in the fact that Television wasn’t interested in one-off films. It wanted serials and, if pushed, agreed to cycles. So I thought that if we wrote ten screenplays and presented them as Decalogue, ten young directors would be able to make their first film. For a while, this idea motivated our writing. It was only much later, when the first versions of the screenplays were ready, that I realized rather selfishly that I didn’t want to hand them over to anybody else. I had grown to like some of them and would have been sorry to let them go. I wanted to direct the films and it became obvious that I would do all ten.

We knew from the very beginning that the films would be contemporary. For a while, we considered setting them in the world of politics but, by the mid-1980s, politics had ceased to interest us.
During martial law, I realized that politics aren’t really important. In a way, of course, they define where we are and what we’re allowed or aren’t allowed to do, but they don’t solve the really important human questions. They’re not in a position to do anything about or to answer any of our essential, fundamental, human and humanistic questions. In fact, it doesn’t matter whether you live in a Communist country or a prosperous capitalist one as far as such questions are concerned, questions like, What is the true meaning of life? Why get up in the morning? Politics don’t answer that.

Even when my films were about people involved in politics, I always tried to find out what sort of people they were. The political environment only formed a background. Even the short documentary films were always about people, about what they’re like. They weren’t political films. Politics were never the subject. Even when, in Camera Buff, a man appears who represents the so-called other side, that is, the factory director who cuts out some scenes from the main character’s film, he’s also a human being. He isn’t merely a representative of dull-witted bureaucrats who cut scenes out of films. He’s also a man who’s trying to explain why he intervenes. He is just like the censor in Warsaw who used to cut various bits out of my films. Through Camera Buff, I wanted to observe him and find out what lies behind his actions. Is he only dull-wittedly carrying out decisions? Is he aiming for a more comfortable life? Or maybe he’s got reasons which I may not agree with but which are nevertheless reasons.

I’m sick of Polish realities because everything’s running its course in spite of us, above us and there’s nothing we can do about it. Piesiewicz and I didn’t believe that politics could change the world, let alone for the beKer. Also, we’d begun to suspect intuitively that Decalogue could be marketed abroad. So we decided to leave politics out.

Since life in Poland is hard – intolerable, in fact – I had to show a bit of this in the films. However, I did spare the viewers many very unpleasant things which happen in daily life. First, I saved them from anything as horrible as politics. Second, I didn’t show queues in front of shops. Third, I didn’t show such a thing as a ration card – although many goods were being rationed then. And fourth, I didn’t show boring and dreadful traditions. I tried to show individuals in difficult situations. Everything pertaining to social hardships or life’s difficulties in general was always somewhere in the background.

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, circumstances which are fictitious but which could occur in every life – suddenly realize that they’re going round and round in circles, that they’re not achieving what they want. We’ve become too egotistic, too much in love with ourselves and our needs, and it’s as if everybody else has somehow disappeared into the background. We do a lot for our loved ones – supposedly – but when we look back over our day, we see that although we’ve done everything for them, we haven’t got the strength or time left to take them in our arms, simply to have a kind word for them or say something tender. We haven’t got any time left for feelings, and I think that’s where the real pro-
blem lies. Or time for passion, which is closely tied up with feelings. Our lives slip away, through our fingers.

I believe everybody’s life is worthy of scrutiny, has its secrets and dramas. People don’t talk about their lives because they’re embarrassed. They don’t want to open old wounds, or are afraid of appearing old-fashioned and sentimental. So we wanted to begin each film in a way which suggested that the main character had been picked by the camera as if at random. We thought of a huge stadium in which, from among the hundred thousand faces, we’d focus on one in particular. We also had an idea that the camera should pick somebody out from a crowded street and then follow him or her throughout the rest of the film. In the end we decided to locate the action in a large housing estate, with thousands of similar windows framed in the establishing shot. It’s the most beautiful housing estate in Warsaw, which is why I chose it. It looks pretty awful so you can imagine what the others are like. The fact that the characters all live on one estate brings them together. Sometimes they meet, and say, ‘May I borrow a cup of sugar?’

Basically, my characters behave much as in other films, except that in Decalogue I probably concentrated more on what’s going on inside them rather than what’s happening on the outside. Before, I often used to deal with the surrounding world, with what’s happening all around, how external circumstances and events influence people, and how people eventually influence external events. Now, in my work, I’ve thrown aside this external world and, more and more frequently, deal with people who come home, lock the door on the inside and remain alone with themselves.

I think that all people – and this is irrespective of the political system – have two faces. They wear one face in the street, at work, in the cinema, in the bus or car. In the West, that’s the face of someone who is energetic, the face of someone who’s successful or will be successful in the near future. That’s the appropriate face to wear on the outside, and the appropriate face for strangers.

I think integrity is an extremely complicated combination and we can never ultimately say ‘I was honest’ or ‘I wasn’t honest’. In all our actions and all the different situations in which we find ourselves, we find ourselves in a position from which there’s really no way out – and even if there is, it’s not a better way out, a good way out, it’s only relatively better than the other options, or, to put it another way, the lesser evil. This, of course, defines integrity. One would like to be ultimately honest, but one can’t. With all the decisions you make every day, you can never be ultimately honest.

A lot of people who have seemingly been the cause of a great deal of evil state that they were honest or couldn’t have acted any other way. This is another trap, although what they say might be true. It’s definitely like that in politics, although that’s no justification. If
you work in politics, or in any other public sphere, you’re publicly responsible. It can’t be helped. You’re always watched by others – if not in the newspapers then by your neighbours, family, loved ones, friends, acquaintances or even by strangers in the street. But, at the same time, there’s something like a barometer in each of us. At least, I feel it very distinctly; in all the compromises I make, in all the wrong decisions I take, I have a very clear limit as to what I mustn’t do, and I try not to do it. No doubt sometimes I do, but I try not to. And that has nothing to do with any description or exact definition of right and wrong. It has to do with concrete everyday decisions.

That’s something we thought about a lot when we were working on Decalogue. What, in essence, is right and what is wrong? What is a lie and what is truth? What is honesty and what is dishonesty? And what should one’s attitude to it be?

I think that an absolute point of reference does exist. Although I must say that when I think of God, it’s more often the God of the Old Testament rather than the New. The God of the Old Testament is a demanding, cruel God; a God who doesn’t forgive, who ruthlessly demands obedience to the principles which He has laid down. The God of the New Testament is a merciful, kind-hearted old man with a white beard, who just forgives everything. The God of the Old Testament leaves us a lot of freedom and responsibility, observes how we use it and then rewards or punishes, and there’s no appeal or forgiveness. It’s something which is lasting, absolute, evident and is not relative. And that’s what a point of reference must be, especially for people like me, who are weak, who are looking for something, who don’t know.

The concept of sin is tied up with this abstract, ultimate authority which we often call God. But I think that there’s also a sense of sin against yourself which is important to me and really means the same thing. Usually, it results from weakness, from the fact that we’re too weak to resist temptation; the temptation to have more money, comfort, to possess a certain woman or man, or the temptation to hold more power.

Then there’s the question of whether we should live in fear of sin. That’s an entirely different problem which also results from the tradition of the Catholic or Christian faith. It’s a little different in Judaism; they have a different concept of sin. That’s why I spoke about a God of the Old Testament and a God of the New. I think that an authority like this does exist. As somebody once said, if God didn’t exist then somebody would have to invent Him. But I don’t think we’ve got perfect justice here, on earth, and we never will have. It’s justice on our own scale and our scale is minute. We’re tiny and imperfect.

If something is constantly nagging you that you’ve done the wrong thing, that means you know you could have done the right thing. You have criteria, a hierarchy of values. And that’s what I think proves that we have a sense of what is right and wrong and that we are in a position to set our own, inner compass. But often, even when we know what is honest and the right thing to do, we can’t choose it. I believe we are not free. We’re always fighting for some sort of freedom, and, to a certain extent, this freedom, especially external freedom, has been achieved – at
least in the West, to a much greater extent than in the East. In the West, you’ve got the freedom to buy a watch or the pair of trousers you want. If you really need them, you buy them. You can go where you like. You’ve got the freedom to choose where you live. You’re free to choose the conditions you live in. You can choose to live in one social circle rather than another, amongst one group of people rather than another. Whereas I believe we’re just as much prisoners of our own passions, our own physiology, and certainly our own biology, as we were thousands of years ago. Prisoners of the rather complicated, and very frequently relative, division between what is better and what is a bit better and that which is a tiny bit better still, and what is a little bit worse. We’re always trying to find a way out. But we’re constantly imprisoned by our passions and feelings. You can’t get rid of this. It makes no difference whether you’ve got a passport which allows you into every country or only into one and you stay there. It’s a saying as old as the world - freedom lies within. It’s true.

When people leave prison – I’m thinking about political imprisonment in particular – they’re helpless when faced with life and they say they were only really free in prison. They were free there because they were sentenced to live in one room or cell with one particular person, or to eat only this or that. Outside prison you’ve got the freedom to choose what you eat; you can go to an English, Italian, Chinese or French restaurant. You’re free. Prisoners are not free to eat what they want because they only get what they’re brought in a bucket. Prisoners are not free because they haven’t the possibility of making moral or emotional choices, and they’ve got fewer choices because they don’t have the day-to-day problems which fall on our shoulders every single day. They don’t encounter love or can only experience longing. They don’t have the possibility of satisfying their love.

Since there are far fewer choices to be made in prison, there’s a much greater feeling of freedom than at the moment of leaving prison. Theoretically, when you leave, you’ve got the freedom of eating what you want, but in the realm of emotions, in the realm of your own passions, you’re caught in a trap. People are always writing about this and I understand them very well.

The freedom we’ve achieved in Poland now doesn’t really bring us anything, because we can’t satisfy it. We can’t satisfy it in the cultural sense because there isn’t any money. There simply isn’t any money to spare for culture. There also isn’t any money for a lot of things which are more important than culture. So there is a paradox: we used to have money but no freedom, now we’ve got freedom but no money. We can’t express our freedom because we haven’t got the means. But if that’s all there was to it, of course, it would be relatively simple; some day money will somehow be organized. The problem is more serious than that. Culture, and especially film, had enormous social significance in Poland once and it was important what sort of film you made. It was the same in all the east European countries. And in a sense masses of people waited to see what film Wajda or Zanussi, for example, would make next because for a great number of years film-makers hadn’t come to terms with the existing state of affairs, and they tried to do something which
would express this attitude. The nation in general couldn’t come to terms with the existing state of affairs either. In this sense we were in a luxurious and unique situation. We were truly important in Poland – precisely because of censorship.

We’re allowed to say everything now but people have stopped caring what we’re allowed to say. Censorship bound authors to the same extent as it did the public. The public knew the rules by which censorship worked and waited for a signal that these rules had been by-passed. It reacted to all these signs perfectly, read them, played with them. Censorship was an office and its workers were clerks. They had their regulations, books of injunctions and that’s where they found words and situations which weren’t allowed to be shown on screen. They’d cut them out. But they couldn’t cut out words which hadn’t been written in their regulations yet. They couldn’t react to situations which their bosses hadn’t described yet. We quickly learnt to find things which they didn’t know yet and the public faultlessly recognized our intentions. So we communicated over the censors’ heads. The public understood that when we spoke about a provincial theatre, we were speaking about Poland, and when we showed the dreams of a boy from a small town as being hard to fulfil, these dreams couldn’t be fulfilled in the capital or anywhere else either. We were together, us and the public, in the aversion we had for a system which we didn’t accept. Today this basic reason for being together doesn’t exist anymore. We’re lacking an enemy.

I have a good story about a censor. I have a friend in Krakow who’s a graphic artist, a cartoonist mainly. His name is Andrzej Mleczko. He’s an extremely intelligent and witty man. Of course, he had constant problems with the censors. They kept bothering him. They’d take his drawings. Recently, they abolished censorship. It doesn’t exist. One day, Mleczko sent for a carpenter because he had to level out his banisters. And who should come along? The censor, of course. He gets hold of the plane and works the banister with it. Mleczko approaches and says, ‘I won’t let that pass.’ So the censor planes the banister a second day. Mleczko watches him: ‘I won’t let that pass.’ The censor went bankrupt.

The fact that we had censorship in Poland – which even worked quite well although it wasn’t as intelligent as it could have been – didn’t necessarily entail tremendous restrictions of freedom since, all in all, it was easier to make films there then than it is under the economic censorship here in the West. Economic censorship means censorship imposed by people who think that they know what the audience wants. In Poland, at the moment, there’s exactly the same economic censorship- audience censorship- as there is in the West, except that audience censorship in Poland is totally unprofessional. The producers or distributors are in no position to recognize the public.

When I had written all the screenplays for Decalogue I presented them to Television and was allocated a budget, but I realized that we were still short of money. We had two sources of finance in Poland at that time. One was Television. The other was the Ministry of Arts and Culture. So I went along to the Ministry; I took a few of the Decalogue screenplays with me and said, ‘I’ll make you two films very
cheaply, on the condition that one of them will be number five’ - because I really wanted to make number five – ‘but you choose the other one.’ So they chose number six, and gave me some money. Not much but enough. I wrote longer versions of the screenplays. Later on, while shooting, I made the two versions of both films. One for the cinema, and the other for television. Everything got mixed up later on, of course. Scenes from television went to the cinema version, from the cinema version to television. But that’s a pleasant game in the cutting-room. The nicest moment.

What is the difference between films made for television and those made for cinema? First, I don’t think the television viewer is less intelligent than the cinema audience. The reason why television is the way it is, isn’t because the viewers are slow-witted but because editors think they are. I think that’s the problem with television. This doesn’t apply so much to British television which isn’t as stupid as German, French or Polish television. British television is a little more predisposed to education, on the one hand, and, on the other, to presenting opinions and matters connected with culture. These things are treated far more broadly and seriously by British television, especially the BBC or Channel 4, and this is done through their precise, broad and exact documentary films and films about individuals. Whereas television in most countries – including America – is as idiotic as it is because the editors think people are idiots. I don’t think people are idiots and that’s why I treat both audiences equally seriously. Consequently, I don’t see any great difference in the narration or style between films made for television and those made for cinema.

There is a difference in that you always have less money when making a television film, so you have less time. You have to make TV films faster and a little less carefully. The staging has to be simpler, shots are closer rather than wider because in a wider shot you’d have to set up more scenery. That’s where the principle of television close-ups came from. When I see films on television where there are very wide shots, even American large budget films, they’re very watchable on the small screen. Perhaps you can’t see everything in such detail but the impression is much the same. The impression is equally one of size. What doesn’t pass the test on television is Citizen Kane, for example, which doesn’t look right on television because it requires greater concentration than is possible on the small screen.

The difference between the cinema and television audience is very simple. The cinema-goer watches a film in a group, with other people. The television viewer watches alone. I’ve never yet seen a television viewer hold his girlfriend by the hand, but in the cinema it’s the general rule. Personally, I think that television means solitude while cinema means community. In the cinema, the tension is between the screen and the whole audience and not only between the screen and you. It makes an enormous difference. That is why it’s not true that the cinema is a mechanical toy.

It’s a well-known theory that film has twenty-four frames to the second, and that a film is always the same; but that’s not true. Even though the reel might be exactly the same, the film’s entirely different when it’s shown in a huge cinema, to an audience of a
thousand, where a certain tension and atmosphere are created in perfect conditions, on a perfect screen, and with perfect sound. It’s a completely different film when shown in a small, smelly cinema in the suburbs, to an audience of four, one of whom might be snoring. It’s a different film. It’s not that you experience it differently. It is different. In this sense, films are hand-made; even though a film can be repeated because the reels are the same, each screening is unrepeatable.

Those are the main differences between television and cinema films. But, of course, there are also characteristics specific to television films which are mainly based on the fact that television has got people used to certain things. I’m not talking about stupidity – God forbid – but it has got people used to certain things. For example, to the fact that every evening or once a week the same TV characters will pay them a visit. That’s one of the conventions when you make a serial, for example, and people have grown used to it, have grown to like these visits, like their family visiting them on Sundays or having Sunday lunch with their friends. If they’ve got any sympathy for the characters, that is. The Americans try very hard to make their characters likeable even though you might have reservations about them.

So television films have to be narrated in a way to satisfy the viewers’ needs to see their friends and acquaintances again. That’s the general convention and I think that’s where I went wrong in Decalogue. Decalogue was made as a number of individual films. The same characters reappear only now and again and you have to pay great attention and concentrate very hard to recognize them and notice that the films are interconnected. If you watch the films one a week, you don’t really notice this. That’s why wherever I had any influence on how the films would be shown on television, I always asked that they be shown at least two a week, so that the viewer would have a chance to see what brings the characters together. But that means I made an obvious mistake in not following conventions. I’d probably make the same mistake again today because I think there was some sense in the films being separate - but it was a mistake as regards the viewers’ expectations.

Talking about conventions, one more thing has to be mentioned. When you go to the cinema, whatever it’s like, you always concentrate because you’ve paid for the ticket, made a great effort to get on the bus, taken an umbrella because it’s raining outside, or left the house at a certain time. So, because of the money and effort spent, you want to experience something. That’s very basic. Consequently you’re in a position to watch more complicated relationships between characters, more complicated plots, and so on. With television, it’s different. When you’re watching television, you experience everything that’s going on around you: the scrambled eggs which are burning, the kettle which has boiled over, the telephone which has just started to ring, your son who isn’t doing his homework and whom you have to force to his books, your daughter who doesn’t want to go to bed, the thought that you’ve still got so much to do, and the time you have to get up in the morning. You experience all this while watching television. Consequently - and that’s another mistake I made with Decalo-
gue-stories on television have to be told more slowly, and the same thing has to be repeated several times, to give the viewer who’s gone off to make a cup of tea or gone to the loo a chance to catch up with what’s happening. If I were to make the films again today, I still probably wouldn’t take this into account even though I consider it a mistake.

The best idea I had in Decalogue was that each of the ten films was made by a different lighting cameraman. I thought that these ten stories should be narrated in a slightly different way. It was fantastic. I gave a choice to the cameramen I’d worked with before, but for those whom I was working with for the first time, I sought out ideas, or films, which I believed would, in some way, suit and interest them and allow them to make best use of what they had: their skills, inventiveness, intelligence, and so on.

It was an amusing experience. Only one cameraman made two films; all the others were made by different lighting cameramen. The oldest cameraman must have been over sixty, and the youngest about twenty-eight – he’d just finished film school. So they came from different generations, had completely different experiences and approaches to the profession. Yet these films are, all in all, extremely similar visually, even though they are so different. In one the camera is hand-held, in another a tripod is used. One uses a moving camera while another uses a stationary one. One uses one kind of light, another uses something different. Yet despite everything, the films are similar. It seems to me that this is proof, or an indication, of the fact that there exists something like the spirit of a screenplay, and whatever resources a cameraman uses, if he’s intelligent and talented, he will understand it, and this spirit will somehow get through to the film – however different the camerawork and lighting – and determine the essence of the film.

I’ve never given lighting cameramen as much freedom as I did in Decalogue. Each one could do as he pleased, albeit because my strength had run out. Besides, I counted on the competence, on the energy which results from freedom. If you impose restrictions on someone, he won’t have any energy. If you give him freedom, then he’ll have energy because there’ll be lots of different possibilities for him and he’ll try to find the best. So I gave my lighting cameramen a tremendous amount of freedom. Each one could decide how and where he put the camera, how to use it, how to operate it. Of course, I could disagree but I accepted nearly all their ideas concerning operating, structure and staging. And despite this, the films are all similar. It’s interesting.

I know a lot of actors in Poland but there are a lot I don’t know and I met a great many of them for the first time when making Decalogue. Some actors I didn’t know and I might as well go on not knowing them because they’re not my actors. It often happens that you meet an actor whom you think is fantastic then, when you start working, it turns out that he simply doesn’t understand, work, or think on the same wavelength as you. And, consequently, your work together simply becomes an exchange of information, an exchange of requests. I ask him to play like this or like that. He plays like this or slightly differently and not much comes of it. On the other hand, I met a lot of actors whom I did-
n’t know before and I really ought to have known; experienced actors of the older generation and young actors whom I used for the first time.

The films kept overlapping because of the actors and because of various things to do with organization and production. It was all carefully planned. People knew that if, on a particular day, we were going to be filming a corridor in a building which was going to be used in three films, then three cameramen would come along, light it and we’d do their three successive scenes. This was simply because it was easier to bring in three cameramen, and even change the lighting, rather than hire the same location three times, demolish everything three times and set it up again.

This is how we worked. The lighting cameraman would be informed ahead of time that he’d have to come on a certain day because a bit of his film was going to be shot, a bit of his scene in a given interior. So he’d come along. We often made breaks in the shoot. Why, for example, did we interrupt the filming of Decalogue 5? We began it, shot half, and made a break. Slawek, the cameraman, was probably busy, working on some other film. So we shot more or less half of it and then took a break of two or three months. Meanwhile we made two other Decalogues and then returned to number five. Of course, it’s more difficult in the West because the money involved belongs to somebody in particular: the money’s not nobody’s, that is, it’s not State money as it was in Poland. So it is harder, but I do try this stratagem. Decalogue was a typical example of this. I could manoeuvre all the time. If something didn’t seem right in the cutting-room, I’d simply shoot another scene. Or reshoot it. I’d change it. And I’d know why I was changing it and how. It was much easier.

In fact, I just keep shooting these tests all my life. Then suddenly the tests are finished and a film’s got to be cut from them. I always work like this and always have done. It’s difficult for me to write a film on paper the way it will look in the end. It never ends up looking like that. It always looks a bit different.

Decalogue took a year to shoot with a break of a month, so eleven months in all. I even went to Berlin during that time because I was giving seminars there. Sometimes I’d go on a Sunday or in the evening. I’d go in the evening, for example, and come back in the morning, to shoot.

I often used to catch flu or a cold or something but I don’t get ill when I’m shooting. I don’t know why. Energy accumulates, from some past time in your life and that’s when you use it—because you’re in dire need of it. I think it’s like that in general. If you really need something, really want something, then you get it. It’s the same with energy and health while filming. I can’t remember ever being ill while shooting. My own energy kept me going, plus something like—for example in Decalogue—curiosity to know what was going to happen because a new lighting
cameraman was coming the following day, with different actors and so on. What’s going
to happen? How’s it going to turn out?

I was shattered by the end, of course. But I
remembered everything accurately; how
many takes I had, how many retakes of a par-
ticular take in film 4 or 7 or 3 or 2 or 1, right
up until the very end of the edit. I didn’t have
any problems there.

There’s this guy who wanders around in all
the films. I don’t know who he is; just a guy
who comes and watches. He watches us, our
lives. He’s not very pleased with us. He comes,
walks and walks on. He doesn’t appear in
number 7, because I didn’t film him right and
had to cut him out. And he doesn’t appear in
film 10 because, since there are jokes about
trading a kidney, I thought that maybe it’s not
worth showing a guy like that. But I was pro-
bably wrong. No doubt I should have shown
him in that one, too.

The guy didn’t appear in the screenplays
initially. We had a very clever literary mana-
ger, Witek Zalewski, at the time in whom I had
and still have immense trust and, when we’d
written the Decalogue screenplays, he kept
saying to me, ‘I feel there’s something missing
here, Krzysztof. There’s something missing.’
‘But what, Witek? What do you feel is mis-
sing?’ ‘I can’t say, but there’s something mis-
sing. Something’s not there in the scripts.’ And
we talked, talked, talked, talked and talked
and in the end he told me this anecdote about
a Polish writer called Wilhelm Mach. This
Mach was at some screening. And Mach says,
‘I liked the film very much. I liked it and espe-
cially that scene at the cemetery.’ He says, ‘I
really liked the guy in the black suit at the
funeral.’ The director says, ‘I’m very sorry but
there wasn’t any guy in a black suit.’ Mach
says, ‘How come? He stood on the left-hand
side of the frame, in the foreground, in a black
suit, white shirt and black tie. Then he walked
across to the right-hand side of the frame and
moved off.’ The director says, ‘There wasn’t
any guy like that.’ Mach says, ‘There was. I saw
him. And that’s what I liked most in the film.’
Ten days later he was dead. So Witek Zalew-
ski told me this anecdote, this incident, and I
understood what he felt was missing. He mis-
sed this guy in a black suit whom not every-
one sees and who the young director didn’t
know had appeared in the film. But some peo-
ple saw him, this guy who looks on. He does-
n’t have any influence on what’s happening,
but he is a sort of sign or warning to those
whom he watches, if they notice him. And I
understood, then, that that’s what Witek felt
was missing in the films so I introduced the
character whom some called ‘the angel’ and
whom the taxi-drivers when they brought him
to the set called ‘the devil’. But in the screen-
plays he was always described as ‘young man’

The Polish ratings for Decalogue were
good, or rather, the so-called ratings. They’re
counted in percentages by a special office. It
started with 52 per cent for film I and went
up to 64 per cent for film 10. That means
about 15 million viewers, which is a lot. The
critics weren’t bad this time. They had a few
digs at me but rarely below the belt.
The first of 10 brilliant one-hour television episodes by Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski, each based on one of the Ten Commandments and all set in the same contemporary apartment complex. Illustrating the First Commandment, this outing is a cautionary fable about worshipping false gods, specifically technology. But rather than fall into glib pronouncements on modern man’s unscientific faith in science, Kieslowski sketches out a complete ethical landscape, in which issues of family love, religion, and social responsibility all coalesce into a drama of searing power. Krzysztof, a center-aged mathematician, uses his home computer to strengthen his already warm bond with his 11-year-old son. Although the boy’s aunt is a believer, his father insists on raising him according to principles of absolute rationalism – a principle that leads them to judge the fitness of a local pond for ice skating by calculating weather and freezing points on a computer. The tragedy that almost inevitably ensues is played out in detail, not merely to dramatize the ruins of a broken heart but, in one of the provocative theological twists that Kieslowski tosses off almost offhandedly, to depict how hatred of God is an act of faith. The melted wax and ice that substitute for tears at the end of the film are among the most moving images in modern cinema.

Kieslowski’s illustration of the Ten Commandments continues. In this second episode of The Decalogue, an elderly and cranky doctor, whose family we learn had been wiped out years before during the war, is presented with an insoluble ethical dilemma. A young woman in his apartment house tells him that her seriously ill husband is in one of the wards under her charge. She loves him deeply, but she is pregnant by her lover and, though she does not want to leave or hurt her husband, for medical reasons this is her only chance to have a baby. If her husband is going to live, she will abort, not wishing to hurt him. But if he is going to die, she will happily carry the pregnancy to fruition.

The world-weary physician does everything he can to avoid the imposed obligation to play God, but eventually he must step into the role. Again, with Kieslowski the immediate consequence of the drama’s end does not fully satisfy his moral aims, and this outing, like all the others, ends on a note of profound ambiguity accompanied by morally unforgiving consequences.
Kieslowski ponders “Honor the Sabbath Day” in the third installment of his television study of the relevance of the Ten Commandments to the modern world, an appositeness he discovers is always acutely distressing. In this outing a married man (Daniel Olbrychski) is pulled away from his family on Christmas Eve by an old flame (Maria Pakulnis) whom he hasn’t seen for three years. She needs him and his cab, she insists, because her husband has disappeared, probably on a bender, and needs their help. They make the rounds of deserted city streets, visiting the drunk tank and dealing with the police as they conduct a search not just for the phantom husband, but for the truth of what broke up their romance.

As always, Kieslowski is interested in the way moral absolutes affect contemporary life, and the result of his study is a moral debate brought to vivid life by the immediacy of its application, and a dingy reality which gains vitality by the pressing needs to discern right and wrong. Applications to authority must be made because choices have consequences; the tour through sad Polish streets and the desperate loneliness of a drunk tank presided over by a sadistic civil servant are perhaps the most searing indictments of political arrogance to emerge from a country that specializes in them.

“Honor thy Father and Mother” the commandment goes, but what if the man who has raised you is not your father? Well, says Kieslowski in the most open-ended of his ethical fables, perhaps the performance of obligation imposes moral sanctions as great as those of blood. Anka (Adrianna Biedrzsnska) is a lovely young woman embroiled in a warm and tender relationship with her somewhat subdued father, Michael (Janusz Gajos), who has raised her single-handedly since her mother died. One day she discovers a letter her mother wrote on her deathbed, and when Michael returns from a trip she confronts him, declaring that the dead woman has confessed that Michael is, in fact, not her father. Love does not die, however, but begins to take on more passionate forms as, freed from taboo, the pair slowly admit to feeling other affections for each other. Kieslowski continually juggles the facts, never showing the letter and keeping the issue of incest wide open. However, he does so not to titillate, but to further the investigation into what it is that actually constitutes a parent-child relationship and what parameters grow naturally around such love. Warmer and slightly more passionate than others in the series, this episode still does justice to the psychological and moral complexities from which it issues.
Kieslowski’s contemplation of the ways we violate the divine injunction “Thou Shalt Not Kill” composes the most unsettling and riveting episode of his moral series. Built around a pair of murders, one solitary and the other performed by the state, the director reaches some of his most wrenching effects simply by refusing to turn away from the face of sin, thus depicting a punishment that is part and parcel of the crime.

Shot with a unique array of filters and masks, this story of death and retribution opens with the almost casual murder of a brutish taxi driver by a lonely young man, then quickly moves to his own execution, which takes place only after the most agonizing self-appraisal and yearning for forgiveness on the young man’s part. This last is witnessed by his lawyer Piotr, a young man himself who has only recently passed the bar. Unalterably opposed to capital punishment for any reason, Piotr is nonetheless pressganged into aiding the legal assassination of his own client as he accompanies him to the hangman. Both killings are shown in detail—one the fruit of gathering passion, the other the outcome of dry routine, but both utterly horrifying. As Piotr goes out to the country to vent his anger in a scream of frustration, he occupies a landscape similar to the one where the first murder was committed, sentenced by Kieslowski to a term on an earth bounded on every side by futile suffering and empty vengeance.

This story of voyeurism and the perils of erotic revenge was later expanded by Kieslowski into A Short Film About Love. Here, shorn of some of its psychological density, the one-hour film becomes an almost abstract assertion that the real way to wield power—the kind of power worth wielding—in a love affair is by being absolutely submissive, just as a supplicant would be to the deity.

Tomek (Olaf Lubaszenko) is a 19-year-old postal clerk who whiles away his hours spying on a neighbor, the voluptuous Magda (Grazyna Szapolowska), and calling her to his office on false errands. However, as he circles in on his object of desire and eventually reveals his activities to her, Magda becomes preoccupied with avenging her perceived humiliation, and she achieves her end with surprising efficiency. However, having destroyed her prey, she suddenly finds herself the moral prisoner of a supine and perhaps unconscious youth who, by her cruelty, has been liberated from his own passions.

The film is not merely a nifty tale of clever reversals; everything that happens is animated by a spiritual force that is almost palpable in the director’s dark frames and airless silences—vacuums filled by the ineffably divine.
Thou Shalt Not Steal
Decalogue 7

The unendingly destructive consequences of a theft set the pattern for the dramatization of the divine injunction, “Thou Shalt Not Steal.”

Majka (Maja Barelkowska), an intense young woman, accepts her expulsion from her university on the same day that she applies for a passport to Canada. At home, she is angered when she cannot quiet a crying child who awakens from a nightmare, while the woman the child calls mother can; and why not, because Majka is the birth mother of the child Ania and the older woman, Ewa (Anna Polony), only her grandmother. Ewa had coaxed Majka into this deception following an early and accidental pregnancy, but in the years since, Majka had grown furious with Ewa’s usurpation of her role as the child’s mother.

Majka snatches Ania and runs off into the country where she hides out in the house of the girl’s father, a former writer reduced to manufacturing teddy bears. Majka’s frantic efforts to reclaim the affections of her daughter occupy her time, but her loss cannot be counteracted with another sin, and Majka’s strategy finally collapses in a heart-rending departure on the platform of a rural train stop.

More so than in any other episode, Kieslowski here succumbs to the temptation to play God himself, and his own violation of divine dictates lends a forced air to an otherwise accomplished film.

Thou Shalt Not Bear False Witness
Decalogue 8

When is a lie justified? Kieslowski offers several tempting possibilities before asserting, in the end, that every lie claims at least one victim in this most ethically demanding dramatization of the Eighth Commandment.

Zofia (Maria Koscialkowska) is a professor of ethics in her 60s who conducts her university class as a Socratic round of ceaseless questioning built around hypothetical situations. One day a visitor to the class, Elzbieta (Teresa Marczewska), the American translator of Zofia’s work, presents a disturbingly familiar situation to Zofia involving Zofia’s decision during the German occupation not to provide sanctuary to a young Jewish girl. Zofia’s response comes only after some self-examination, during which she comes to realize that Elzbieta was that little girl, now safely, if hazardously, grown.

Zofia’s reasoning behind her past actions satisfies Elzbieta, and the two go off to visit a poor tailor who inadvertently caused much of the trouble. But the revelation of one disturbing truth has also exposed another damaging lie, and in the dinge of the poor tailor’s ramshackle business, Kieslowski once again shows that divine laws are constructed to protect humans from their own frailties.
Krysztof Kieslowski rarely makes full use of melodrama, but he does so here in order to demonstrate why one should “not covet thy neighbor’s wife.”

Roman (Piotr Machalica) and Hanka (Ewa Blaszczyk) are typically well-educated and sophisticated Kieslowski protagonists, but Roman, a surgeon, has lately become undone by the realization that he is impotent. Eavesdropping and spying on his wife, he grows convinced she is having an adulterous romance. She insists she is faithful and, in her way, she is telling the truth; the affair she carries on in her mother’s empty flat is little more than a physical release. Increased suspicion leads to humiliating discovery and new declarations of fidelity, yet Roman cannot keep from suspecting. When his wife goes off for a skiing weekend and Roman spies his old rival with skies mounted on his car roof, a paroxysm of jealousy, unabated by narrowly missed phone calls, ends in tragic death.

The plot is a potboiler, but Kieslowski’s treatment of it is restrained. Creating pauses in the narrative, he uses this space to spell out Roman’s dedication to others and Hanka’s dedication to him – a diagram of nearly complete devotion just shy of the grace needed to overcome spiritual adversity.

For his final entry in the Decalogue series, Kieslowski actually turns benignly comic for an illustration of why one should not covet one’s neighbor’s goods. Accountant Jerzy and punk singer Artur are a pair of adult brothers whose amiable indifference to each other dissolves after their father dies. To their surprise, the old skinflint was the owner of the most valuable stamp collection in Poland, and the apparent burden of his debts turns into a potential bonanza for the two financially strapped men. However, rather than cash in, the pair, who still have bitter memories of the way their father neglected his family, become mesmerized and then obsessed by the collection, spending hours staring at the stamps and then pouring over plans to complete various arcane sets. Their strange preoccupation leads them into the shadowy and ruthless world of professional stamp trading, and the two novices, with supreme confidence in their own abilities, eventually wind up the victims of a tremendous scam.

Assuming a conventional structure for the only time in the series, Kieslowski delivers the comic goods with ease and still manages to drive home his point. Perhaps because this is the simplest and most self-evident of moral commandments, it requires the least amount of elucidation but the greatest amount of narrative sugarcoating. In any case, Kieslowski provides plenty of both.
Living in an undiscribed world is hard. I have to try it to know what it feels like. It's like having no identity. Your problems and sufferings disappear. They disintegrate. To put it more radically: You feel completely cut off from other people. You cannot refer to anything, because nothing has been described and properly named. You are alone.
Three Colours
Liberty, Equality, Fraternity
Blue, white, red. It was Piesio’s idea that having tried to film the Decalogue, why shouldn’t we try liberty, equality and fraternity? Why not try to make a film where the commanding dictums of the Decalogue are understood in a wider context? Why not try to see how the Ten Commandments function today, what our attitude to them is and how the three words liberty, equality and fraternity function today? – on a very human, intimate and personal plane and not a philosophical let alone a political or social one. The West has implemented these three concepts on a political or social plane, but it’s an entirely different matter on the personal plane. And that’s why we thought of these films.

Blue is liberty. Of course it’s equality too. And it can just as easily be fraternity. But the film Blue is about liberty, the imperfections of human liberty. How far are we really free? For all its tragedy and drama, it’s hard to imagine a more luxurious situation than the one Julie finds herself in. She’s completely free at the beginning because her husband and daughter die, she loses her family and all her obligations. She is perfectly provided for, has masses of money and no responsibilities. She doesn’t have to do anything any more. And here the question arises: is a person in such a situation really free? Julie thinks she is. Because she’s not strong enough to do away with herself and follow her family into the next world, or maybe because she thinks she mustn’t do so – we’ll never know her reasons – she tries to live a different life. She tries to free herself of everything to do with the past. In this sort of film there ought to be many scenes with her visiting the cemetery or looking at old photographs and so on. There aren’t any shots like this at all. There’s no past. She’s decided to cross it out. If the past comes back it does so only in the music. But it appears that you can’t free yourself entirely from everything that’s been. You can’t, because at a certain moment something like simple fear arises, or a feeling of loneliness or, for example, as Julie experiences at a certain moment, the feeling of having been deceived. This feeling changes Julie so much that she realizes she can’t live the way she wanted to.

That’s the sphere of personal freedom. How far are we free from feelings? Is love a prison? Or is it freedom? Is the cult of television a prison or is it freedom? Theoretically it’s freedom because, if you’ve got a satellite, you can watch channels from all over the world. But in fact you immediately have to buy all sorts of gadgets to go with the television. And if it breaks down you have to take it to be repaired or get an engineer to come and do it for you. You get pissed off with what’s being said or shown on television. In other words, while theoretically giving yourself the freedom of watching various things you’re also falling into a trap with this gadget.

Or you buy yourself a car. Theoretically, you’re free. You can leave whenever you want. You don’t have to reserve a ticket. You don’t have to buy anything. You don’t have to phone anywhere. You simply fill up with petrol and go. But, in practice, problems crop up straight away. Because someone might steal the car or smash the windscreen and take the radio, you install a radio which you can remove from the car. Of course this doesn’t change anything because you keep thin-
king that someone’s going to steal it anyway. So you go and get it numbered. But, of course, you think that that’s not going to change anything because somebody’s going to pinch it anyway. So you get yourself connected up to a computer system which, with the help of a satellite, allows you to locate the car should it get stolen. Apart from getting it stolen you might get it scratched, which you don’t want because it’s new. So you try and park it in such a way as not to get it scratched and you start looking for a garage which, in a city, is extremely difficult. There aren’t any garages. There aren’t any parking lots. You’ve got nowhere to park. So theoretically you’re free but in practice you’re a prisoner of your car.

Well, that’s freedom and the lack of freedom as regards objects. The same applies to emotions. To love is a beautiful emotion but in loving you immediately make yourself dependent on the person you love. You do what he likes, although you might not like it yourself, because you want to make him happy. So, while having these beautiful feelings of love and having a person you love, you start doing a lot of things which go against your own grain. That’s how we’ve understood freedom in these three films. On the personal level.

In Blue the prison is created by both emotions and memory. Julie probably wants to stop loving her husband because it would make it far easier for her to live. That’s why she doesn’t think about him. That’s why she’s forgotten. That’s why she doesn’t visit the cemetery and never looks through old photographs. When someone brings her old photographs, she says she doesn’t want to see them. We don’t actually show this in the film but it becomes clear later on that she’s refused them. She wants to forget all this. But is it really possible to forget? There comes a moment when she starts to feel fine. She starts to function normally, smile, go for walks. So it is possible to forget. Or at least to try to forget. But suddenly there’s jealousy and she can’t get rid of it. She becomes a prisoner of a jealousy which is absurd because it concerns somebody who’s been dead and buried for at least six months. There’s nothing she can do for or against him. She can’t define herself in relation to him. She can’t say ‘I love you’ or ‘I hate you’. There’s nothing she can do yet the jealousy torments her as if he were still alive. She tries to fight it off and she does so in an absurd way. She suddenly becomes so good that she’s too good. But she can’t get out of the trap. She puts it quite clearly at a certain moment in the film, that all this is a trap: love, pity, friendship.

In a way, Julie’s in a static situation. She’s constantly waiting for something, waiting that something will change. She’s extremely neurasthenic – because that’s what she’s decided to be – and the film, in a sense, has to follow her, follow her way of life and her behaviour. Of course this doesn’t mean that if a film’s about boredom it has to be boring itself.

There are various fade-outs. There’s the typical elliptical fadeout: time passes. A scene ends, there’s a fade-out and a new scene begins. And there are four fade-outs which bring us back to exactly the same moment. The idea is to convey an extremely subjective point of view. That is, that time really does pass but for Julie, at a certain moment, it stands still. A journalist comes to visit her on
the hospital terrace, says ‘Hello’ and Julie replies ‘Hello’. That’s the way the fade-out starts the first time we see it. Two seconds go by between one ‘hello’ and the other. What I want to show is that for Julie time has stopped. Not only does the music come back to her but time stands still for one moment in the film.

The same applies when the young stripper/neighbour approaches her in the swimming pool. The girl says: ‘Are you crying?’ And time stands still for Julie. Because she really is crying. Another example – Antoine says: ‘Don’t you want to know anything? I got to the car a couple of seconds after…’ And Julie replies: ‘No.’ And suddenly time stands still for her. She doesn’t once visit the grave, which means she doesn’t want to think about the accident or her husband. But the boy reminds her of it. By his very appearance he causes it all to come back to her.

Antoine is an important character – not for Julie but for us. He’s somebody who’s seen something, knows something. He tells us a lot about her husband, for example. What do we know about Julie’s husband? Very little. All we know is what we find out from Antoine. We learn that he was one of those people who repeats a joke twice. And we find out a lot about Julie - that she noticed this in her husband and was able to mention it to the young man. Apart from that, Antoine brings something else, something which we haven’t seen before. Julie laughs only once in the film and it’s here, when she’s with him. She keeps walking around with a long face but when she’s with Antoine we see that she used to laugh.

Antoine’s there for other reasons, too. I like observing fragments of life and I like films where I glimpse a bit of life without knowing how it began or how it ends. The way Antoine does.

All the three films are about people who have some sort of intuition or sensibility, who have gut feelings. This isn’t necessarily expressed in dialogue. Things are very rarely said straight out in my films. Very often everything that’s most important takes place behind the scenes, you don’t see it. Either it’s there in the actors’ play, or it isn’t. Either you feel it, or you don’t.

White is also about a very sensitive person. Of course, he has very different reasons for this sensitivity from Julie, but the film is about a very sensitive man.

It’ll be a very different film from Blue. That’s how it was written and that’s how it was made. It’s supposed to be a comedy but I don’t think it’s going to be all that funny. I’ve cut out most of what was supposed to be funny but didn’t turn out that way.

White is about equality understood as a contradiction. We understand the concept of ‘equality’, that we all want to be equal. But I think this is absolutely not true. I don’t think anybody really wants to be equal. Everybody wants to be more equal. There’s a saying in Polish: There are those who are equal and those who are more equal. That’s what used to be said during Communism and I think it’s still being said.
This is what the film’s about. At the beginning, Karol is humiliated, trampled into the ground. He wants to get out of this situation, both literally and metaphorically. Of course, to a certain extent he’s to blame, but that’s the way things stand. He isn’t having any success sleeping with his wife. Nobody knows why he’s suddenly impotent. Once he could and now suddenly he just can’t get it up. He says that maybe it’s his work, wine at lunch or whatever, but we don’t really know. And because he can’t get it up he is extremely humiliated both as a man and as a human being. Everything he ever had is taken away from him and his love is rejected. Consequently, he wants to show that not just is he not as low as he’s fallen, not just is he on a level with everybody else, but that he’s higher, that he’s better.

So he does everything he can to prove to himself and to the woman who, to put it mildly, has spurned him, that he’s better than she thinks. And he does. Therefore he becomes more equal. Except that, while becoming more equal, he falls into the trap which he’s set his wife because it turns out that he loves her – something he didn’t know. He thought he no longer loved her. His aim was to get even with her. Whereas with this revenge it suddenly appears that love has returned. Both to him and to her.

You see them both on the ferry but you have to see the third film, Red, to know that White has a happy ending.

I’ve got an increasingly strong feeling that all we really care about is ourselves. Even when we notice other people we’re still thinking of ourselves. That’s one of the subjects of the third film, Red fraternity.

Valentine wants to think of others but she keeps thinking about others from her own point of view. She simply can’t have any other. The same way as you or I don’t have any other way of looking at things. That’s how it is. Now the question arises: even when we give of ourselves, aren’t we doing so because we want to have a better opinion of ourselves? It’s something to which we’ll never know the answer. Philosophers haven’t found it in 2000 years and nobody will.

There’s something beautiful in the fact that we can give something of ourselves. But if it turns out that while giving of ourselves we are doing so in order to have a better opinion of ourselves then immediately there’s a blemish on this beauty. Is this beauty pure? Or is it always a little marred? That’s the question the film asks. We don’t know the answer, nor do we want to know it. We’re simply reflecting on the question once again.

But Red is really about whether people aren’t, by chance, sometimes born at the wrong time.

What interested me about Véronique were the parallels, the fact that one Véronique senses the other, that one has the feeling that she isn’t alone in the world. And this idea is repeated very often in Véronique. Each of them says that she has a feeling that she isn’t alone, or one of them says that she has a feeling that someone is next to her or that she’s lost someone who’s very important although she has no idea who that person is. Auguste in Red hasn’t any feeling that a judge exists. The judge, of course, knows that Auguste exists. But we’ll never be sure whether Auguste really does exist or whether he’s only a variation of the judge’s life forty years later.
The theme of Red is the conditional mood – what would have happened if the judge had been born forty years later. Everything that happens to Auguste happened to the judge although, perhaps, slightly differently. At one point in the film, the judge says that he saw a white mirror with the reflection of his fiancée's legs spread out and a man between them. Auguste doesn't see any white mirror. Auguste sees it differently but the situation's the same. He sees the legs spread out and a man between them. So, does Auguste really exist or doesn't he? Is Auguste repeating exactly the judge's life? Is it possible to repeat somebody's life after some time or not? But the essential question the film asks is: is it possible to repair a mistake which was committed somewhere high above? Somebody brought someone to life at the wrong moment. Valentine should have been called to life forty years earlier or the judge forty years later and then they'd have constituted a good pair. These people would probably have been very happy together. They probably suit each other very well. That's the theory of the two halves of an apple. If you cut one apple in half and cut another identical one, the half of the one apple will never fit with the half of the other. You have to put together the halves of the same apple to make the apple whole. The whole apple is comprised of a matching pair and it's the same with people. The question is: has a mistake been committed somewhere? And if it has then is there anybody in a position to rectify it?

Blue, White and Red are three individual films, three separate films. Of course they were made to be shown in this order but that doesn't mean that you can't watch them the other way round. There were a lot of connections between the films of the Decalogue. There are far fewer connections here and they are far less important.

It wasn't possible for me to manoeuvre the shooting schedule, nor did I want to. There's a very different kind of production set-up here. The Decalogue was shot in one city so there was the possibility of manoeuvring with the various films. We did this chiefly because of the actors, the cameramen's schedules and so on. But here we're making three films in three different countries with three different crews and three completely different sets of actors, so it's impossible to overlap like that. There's only one scene here where we could overlap. We shot a scene in Paris, in the Palace of Justice, which is in the film Blue and where you glimpse Zamachowski and Julie Delpy for a second, while in the film White Binoche briefly appears. That was an overlap where we simply had one or two shooting days during which half of the time was devoted to Blue and the other half to White.

First we shot the whole of Blue, then immediately the next day we started shooting that part of White which takes place in France. We had ten or twelve shooting days on White in Paris and then we went to Poland where everything was different, a new crew, new electricians. But a lot of people also came
from France. The continuity girl was the same. So was the soundman, Jean-Claude Laureux.

After the memorable experience of having fourteen sound engineers recording Véronique, I now only have one. One of the basic conditions with which I confronted production at the very start was that I have the same soundman from the beginning of the shoot to the finished copy. Of course, a different sound engineer comes along for the mixing because these are two different professions here. In Poland it’s not like that. In Poland the soundman mixes his own film. He can’t do that here, in the West, because mixing is so specialized and computerized. A soundman, if he’s any good, can’t know all about it because he hasn’t got the time to learn. So Jean-Claude is with us to the end. I think he’s pleased, although he’s got an enormous amount of work. It’s his creation. He’s got his own sound path which he’s creating. He’s got some specialized equipment – I think it’s the second time this system’s being used in France for recording sound – and he’s editing all the sound effects on a computer. He enters them onto the computer and edits. The computer belongs to him. He hires it out with himself and does all the work. He doesn’t even use a cutting table, only his computer. Of course this is nothing new as far as music or mixing are concerned, but it is new in the case of effects.

I think I made a good choice with the lighting cameramen. First, I chose the ones with whom I wanted to work. Three Colours were a pretty good opportunity for them because this is a large and serious production. Although there are a number of Polish cameramen working abroad, most of them generally work for small productions or for television. Consequently, I thought it would be right to employ those lighting cameramen who had helped me on the Decalogue and with whom I’d enjoyed working. To be honest, I enjoyed working with all of them on the Decalogue but there were some whom I’d felt had done a better job or who’d put more into it. Decalogue was a very difficult film to make. Very hard for the cameramen, too. Very difficult conditions and little money. So I thought they simply deserved some sort of friendly gratitude.

I had to choose lighting cameramen who knew how things work in the West. Firstly, they had to know the language. And secondly, they had to know how production works. It’s too great a responsibility, too complicated to have somebody who didn’t know how a production works in any country other than Poland or who doesn’t know any language other than Polish. So this choice was in itself limited.

I think they’re well chosen for the style. Each one of them has a different world, sets up different lighting, uses the camera differently. When I decided to work with them, I bore in mind the needs of the films, their dramaturgy, their structure and so on. Of course, one could imagine Slawek Idziak lighting Red and Piotrek Sobocinski lighting Blue, but Slawek dearly wanted to work on Blue. He had a certain amount of freedom – he’s the lighting cameraman I’ve worked with the most. Apart from that I thought that Blue required his way of looking at the world, his way of thinking, above all.

All in all, I’m happy with the way Blue looks. There are a few impressive shots but there aren’t too many effects as such. I cut
out a great number of effects. We wanted to convey Julie’s state of mind. When you wake up on an operating table what you see first is the lamp, the lamp becomes a great white haze and then it becomes clearer and clearer. After the accident, Julie can’t see the man who brings her the television set clearly. She opens her eyes and, for a while, she sees a blur. This isn’t accidental. It’s typical of her mental state of absolute introversion, of focussing in on herself.

Piotrek Sobocinski photographed Red very well indeed. Perhaps he restricts the actors a bit too much at times but that’s how it is when a lighting cameraman really does follow strictly and consistently what he wants to do.

The vital components of Red are red, the filters aren’t. Red clothes or a red dog’s leash, for example. A red background to something. The colour is not decorative, it plays a dramaturgic role: the colour means something. For example, when Valentine sleeps with her fiancé’s red jacket, the red signifies memories, the need of somebody. Red is very complex in its construction. I don’t know whether we’ll manage to get my idea across on the screen. We had all we needed. We had very good actors, because both Irene Jacob and Jean-Louis Trintignant were very good. The photography’s very good and the conditions were good. We had excellent interiors. The locations in Geneva weren’t badly chosen. So I’ve got everything I need to put across what I want to say, which really is quite complicated. Therefore, if the idea I’ve got in mind doesn’t come across, it means that either film is too primitive a medium to support such a construction or that all of us put together haven’t got enough talent for it.

It’s different over here, in France. In Poland, it’s the designer who generally looks for locations but here it’s the director’s assistant. I tell my assistant what I’m looking for, he searches, searches, searches and then the lighting cameraman and myself decide. The designer only comes later, to change what needs to be changed, to build walls, paint the right colours and so on. But I don’t categorize so strictly. I don’t want to bureaucratize the work. If the grip, for example, suddenly has a good idea for a location, then I go and see it – it might be very good.

Of course, Blue could take place anywhere in Europe. However, it’s very French because the district Julie goes to live in is very Parisian in character. It’s a very well-known part of Paris called rue Mouffetard. It took us a good two weeks to find it and we chose it because of the possibilities it offered for shooting. We found a place on rue Mouffetard where we could set the camera up on four sides and we shot from all four sides although you can hardly see that. The district’s a bit too touristy and postcard-like for me but all places with a market tend to be like that. And we wanted a market and lots of people. The idea was that Julie should feel that she could lose herself very easily, that when she goes there nobody will find her, she’ll drown.

Initially, Julie and her husband were to live in a villa in Paris and she was to move to the suburbs, but we decided that they’d have a
house some 30 kilometres from Paris and Julie moves to the centre, to a district where she can lose herself in a crowd. You can find complete anonymity in a big city among people. To be honest, it’s also partly to do with the fact that we couldn’t find a good suburb.

You can never find what you really want. Geneva, where the action of Red takes place, is exceptionally unphotogenic. There’s nothing there you can photograph. There’s nothing to catch the eye. The architecture isn’t uniform. The whole of Geneva has been hacked to pieces. Houses have been pulled down and the gaps filled with modern buildings dating from the 1960s, 70s or 80s. It irritates me immensely. Geneva is spread out and lacks character. Of course, in a wide shot showing the fountain, you know it’s Geneva, but apart from that there’s nothing characteristic.

We needed houses in Geneva which topographically fit in with each other. We must have gone through the whole of Geneva, which isn’t large, and found two places like that. Of course, it isn’t all that important that the action takes place in Geneva but if you’re in a city you do want to convey some sort of character of the place.

I don’t know anything about music. I know more about atmosphere than music as such. I know what sort of atmosphere I want to have in my films but I don’t know what music would help achieve it or how to write that music. Zbyszek Preisner is somebody I can work together with, rather than just ask him to come up with a given effect. I often want to put music in where he says it would sound absurd, and there are scenes which I don’t imagine having music but which he thinks should have music, so we put the music in. He is definitely more sensitive in this area than I am. I think in a more traditional way whereas his thinking is more modern, full of surprises. That is, it surprises me where he wants music. Music is important in Blue. Musical notes often appear on the screen, so in this sense the film’s about music, about the writing of music, about working on music. For some people Julie is the author of the music we hear. At one stage the journalist asks Julie: ‘Did you write your husband’s music?’ And Julie slams the door on her. So this possibility does exist. Then the copyist says: ‘There are a lot of corrections.’ There had always been a lot of corrections. Did Julie only do the corrections? Maybe she’s one of those people who aren’t able to write a single sheet of music but is wonderful in correcting a sheet which has already been written. She sees everything, has an excellent analytical mind and has a great talent for improving things. The written sheet of music isn’t bad but when she’s improved it it is excellent. But it’s not all that important whether she’s the author or co-author, whether she corrects or creates. Even if she only does do the corrections she’s still the author or co-author because what has been corrected is better than it was before. The music is cited all through the film and then at the end we hear it in its entirety, solemn and grand. So we’re led to think that she’s played a part in its creation. In this sense the film’s about music.

As yet I haven’t got any ideas for the music in White, the Polish film about equality, apart from the fact that Karol plays ‘The last Sunday, tomorrow we’ll part’ on a comb two or three times. It’ll probably have a certain sim-
plicity characteristic of music written for silent films, but it won’t be played on a piano. It’ll be a bit more complicated musically. I suspect that it’ll be inspired, to a certain extent, by Polish folk music such as the mazurka, for example, music which is a bit coarse yet at the same time romantic.

Preisner has written a long bolero for the last film, Red. A bolero is always made up of two motifs which interweave with one another. We’re going to use the two motifs and then, at the end, they’ll combine into a bolero. Or maybe we’ll use the bolero at the beginning and then divide it into the two motifs which we’ll use in the film. We’ll see how things go.

In each of the three films we cite Van der Budenmajer. We already used him in Véronique and in the Decalogue. He’s our favourite Dutch composer from the end of the nineteenth century. He doesn’t exist. We invented him a long time ago. Van der Budenmajer is really Preisner, of course. Preisner is now taking his old works and saying that they were written by Van der Budenmajer. Van der Budenmajer has even got a date of birth and a date of death. All his works are catalogued and the catalogue numbers used for recordings.

There were four versions of the script for each of the films. Then there was another, so-called amended fourth version which only dealt with dialogue. A dialogue writer was to join us initially but the producer and I managed to persuade Marcin Latallo to translate our dialogue properly, finding all the correct idioms.

I generally dedicate a whole day only to changes in dialogue. The actors sit around and for the whole day we hack it out to see whether anything could be put in a better way, more concisely or even left out. Then we change it on set another ten times, of course.

I don’t rehearse actors. I never have, not even in Poland. And I don’t use stand-ins. Except, perhaps, when somebody has got to get punched in the nose and the actor doesn’t want to get punched, then I use a stuntman. We did, however, use a stand-in for JeanLouis Trintignant who had difficulty walking because of an accident and had to use a walking stick. But that was only in rehearsal. Because, despite what I’ve just said, I did have to rehearse certain very long scenes in Red, scenes with actors which last some ten minutes. That’s extremely long and everything has to be prepared very accurately. We rehearsed these scenes with the lighting cameraman for two or three days in the proper interiors, to decide exactly where each actor was to sit, where we could put the lights and so on and so on.

I try to make what I do interesting for people. Just as I want the audience to be interested, so I want the crew to be interested, too. I think that as soon as they see where I’m putting the camera, where the cameraman is arranging the lights, how the soundman is preparing himself and what the actors are doing, they realize very quickly what sort of
a world we’re in. Besides, they are experienced people who have already worked on a large number of films.

Of course I try to get as much out of everyone as I can. I’m always expecting people to tell me something simply because I think that they often know better than I do. I expect it from actors, cameramen, soundmen, editors, electricians, assistants, everyone. As soon as I start carrying boxes around, which I most willingly do, they stop thinking that they’re allotted to a certain box and realize they, too, can belong to a different box. They immediately sense that I’m open to their ideas.

I can’t complain about producers. Up until now I’ve always worked without a producer because there weren’t any producers as such in Poland. My friends and colleagues, without putting a penny into any of my films, were like producers to me. They’d look on from the side at everything I did and express their opinions.

Freedom, of course, is tied up with many things. Money, for example. I prefer to work with someone who will ensure that I have the necessary amount of money. I have to have my requirements guaranteed. I keep repeating that I want to make low budget films but that doesn’t mean I’m going to look for my own hotel, for example, when I’m on location. And I’m not going to ask my friends to play the main roles or to do the make-up and costumes. I prefer everything to be done professionally.

This is intrinsically tied up with the possibility of my having a certain freedom to manoeuvre. While discussing the script with the producer and coming to an agreement with him about the budget and working conditions – and I try hard to keep to these conditions very strictly – I expect him to give me the possibility of manoeuvring. That, for example, I’ll be able to shoot a scene which isn’t in the script, or that he’ll allow me to cut a very expensive one out if that scene turns out not to be necessary.

On the other hand, I expect the producer to be a partner. That is, I expect him to have an opinion, to know something about films and the film market. That’s why it’s extremely important for the producer to have contacts with distributors, or to be one himself.

The producer of Véronique, who was a very good partner to me and created very good working conditions, turned out not to be a producer at all, because he didn’t tell me the truth about how the film was being financed and that led to numerous misunderstandings.

In Three Colours, which I’m making now, I’ve also got this freedom. Maybe even to a greater degree, because I’ve got a decidedly better executive producer. Yvon Crenn is far more experienced than my previous executive producer. He is far better in managing the money and creates better working conditions. An executive producer, someone who directly supervises the set and spends the money on a daily basis, is an extremely important person. On the other hand, Karmitz, of course, is far more experienced than my previous producer and therefore has far more pronounced opinions. Yet he’s always ready to talk, discuss and find a way which will suit us both. He’s helped me resolve a good many artistic problems. That’s another thing I expect of a producer, of course. That, in a sense, he’ll be an arbitrator, somebody I can turn to in difficult moments. I don’t think there are many producers like that in the world.
Though I speak with the tongues of angels, if I have not love
My words would resound with but a tinkling of a cymbal.
And though I have the gift of prophecy
And understand all mysteries and all knowledge
And though I have all faith
So that I could remove mountains, if I have not love
I am nothing.
Love is patient, full of goodness;
Love tolerates all things,
Aspires to all things,
Love never dies,
while the prophecy shall be done away,
tongues shall be silenced,
knowledge shall fade
thus then shall linger only faith, hope, and love
but greatest of these is love.
Paris, the 10th of June 1998
1:15 a.m. Return from a walk with my wife, my daughter and our dog. Sat down in a little café at 0:30. When we left the café shortly after 1 o’clock there were no empty seats.

1:20 a.m. I phoned Zbigniew Preisner, the composer. He had arrives in the afternoon from Warsaw. Tomorrow morning we are going to watch the “dirty” version of “Blue”, from the “Three Colours”.

7:45 a.m. The alarm clock rings for the first time.

7:50 a.m. The second ring of the alarm clock.

7:55 a.m. The third ring, this time it’s the alarm of my watch. I have a shower, breakfast, rolls with slices of cold meat, left-overs of last night’s dinner. I like it that way.

9:15 a.m. Meeting with Romek Grenem at the parking area, it has become an everyday routine lately.

9:45 a.m. A meeting with the producer Marin Kamitz. We have a conversation about the photos for “Blue”. We haven’t got choice, due to a lack of photos because the production team haven’t delivered them. At 10 o’clock a.m. Zbigniew Preisner arrived. We discuss a few typical things for the music, then we start to watch the film. I’m very curious to know how the film will turn out with the complete sound.

11:50 a.m. The production has been competed. We have squeezed too many side-effects and too much atmosphere. That’s why we had this “preliminary run” to see how much sound the film will need. We decide to cut out parts of the nega-
tive while the sound is being recorded. This starts in the morning of the 14th. We decide favour of Elzbieta Towarwicka for the concert, whose voice we use in “Blue”. Two days ago we taped two other singers, but the first one is the best.

0:30 p.m. Dinner – a small salad. Since I finished the production, I can’t eat much. I am sitting permanently.

1:30 p.m. The final mounting-corrections with Jacques Witta. We are cutting the filmshots and the first sound-version. Then the cutters do the corrections for every scene, on here 20 tapes for every act, altogether about 20 cuts. The film will be one minute shorter. I’m interrupted rather often when cutting the film “Blue” since the cutter of “White” Urszula Lesiak has some difficulties and is preparing the second mounting-version of “White” for tomorrow.

2:30 p.m. My assistant for “Three Colours” Stas Latek has arrived from Canada. We talk in the corridors between the mounting-rooms. I constantly phone home. My wife and my daughter aren’t there. I’m worried because K. Piesiewicz, the co-writer of the screenplay, arrives from Warsaw at 6 o’clock. He hasn’t got a key to my flat. I call them at 6:15 p.m. and they are all in.

6:50 p.m. We make the beginning and ending of “Blue”. There is enough music, but it should be short. Jacques says that they are too short. I think it is sufficient.

8:00 p.m. We come back home. We think about how Romek is going to translate the vulgar expressions in the dialogues for the film “White” during the shooting tomorrow. The scene is
set in Poland, that is why it must be translated for Marina and the French. Romek is very sensitive, therefore he might choose “a Russian clock, probably not a good choice” instead of the original vulgar version. There are many similar vulgar expressions and I am sure that Romek will translate them properly.

8:30 p.m. Stasio Latek wants to see Krzysztof Piesiewicz, therefore we go to my flat for dinner. We have bean soup and strawberries, a delicious meal. Krzysztof Piesiewicz has brought some drafts of the screenplay from Warsaw. He has to write it for a French film-director Franci Kuzui together with Latek. They talk about it. Krzysztof talks about Poland. After 11 o’clock Stas goes home. Krzysztof asks me whether I could read the draft of his screenplay. There are a few pages. I read them.

11:45 p.m. I take Krzysztof to the hotel, it is not very far. He has got a nice room. On our way we talk about the draft. In front of the hotel I crash into a stone while driving backwards. There is a small hole in the door. That’s life.

00:00 I’m in a traffic jam in front of the place Clichy and I know it will go on. I’m tired. I’m sure that I’ll get up after the third ring tomorrow. The day will be like this one.
Juliette Binoche
When we developed the filmscript, we had no cast, we didn't know, who would be able to play this. But I had met Juliette Binoche several years before. For sometime I thought that she could play the main part in "The double Life of Véronique". At that time it was not possible, because she was just playing in another film. Then I wasn’t so unhappy about it, because Irène Jacob could play the role instead, and she was really very good. Later I started again to think about Juliette Binoche; I absolutely wanted to work with her, I assess her very highly as an actress. But I had thought as I knew, that I wanted to make the film "Blue", that she was too young for the role. At that time she was playing for Louis Malle in the film "Damage" in London. I went to London to meet Juliette Binoche there. She didn't know about my hesitation; she didn't know, that I believed her to be too young for that role. I only told her about my doubts, when we had supper. She answered, that she didn’t see it that way, and I answered, yes, for sure, you are too young. So we had in fact not a good basis to continue our conversation after supper. Then we had a nice conversation, as one usually has, and I took her home. And when we arrived on her doorstep, she gave me an envelope that she had prepared before. In my hotelroom I opened it, and two pictures of her were inside, and on one of them she looked exactly as old as I needed her. Then I realised, how clever and intelligent she is: she had felt about my hesitation much earlier and she had known about my plans long time before I had expressed them. At that moment I knew: she would play this role. I had no doubts any more. We wrote the last version of the filmscript exactly for her. From the beginning of the film-shooting we had been well prepared and everything was planned, but even while shooting the film Juliette helped a lot in developing her role. Even I shot some scenes again, when she thought, they should be different. But this is exactly, what I expect of good actresses. They have a personality of their own. She especially has something, that was very important for this film: an extrem female kind of sensitivity, and power at the same time. And especially this fusion of sensitivity and power works so well in her role, and we could consider this fact when writing this filmscript. Good actors are always exceptions, and I consider Juliette Binoche such an exception.
Interview with K.K.
Why were you interested in the French motto: Liberty, equality, fraternity?

Precisely for the same reason that I was interested in “Decalogue.” In ten phrases, the ten commandments express the essential of life. And these three words – liberty, equality, and fraternity – do just as much. Millions of people have died for those ideals. We decided to see how these ideals are realized practically and what they mean today.

So what interests you is life.

Is this why you left your first job as a designer to go to school and specialize in documentaries?

I wanted to describe the world at the same time, through image, express what I felt. It was the time of the great documentary filmmakers: Richard Leacock, Joris Ivens. Today, television has put an end to this type of filmmaking. The television industry doesn’t like to see the complexity of the world. It prefers simple reporting, with simple ideas: this is white, that’s black; this is good, that’s bad...

How did you conceive the films in relation to each other?

We looked very closely at the three ideas, how they functioned in everyday life, but from an individual’s point of view. These ideas are contradictory with human nature. When you deal with them practically, you do not know how to live with them. Do people really want liberty, equality, fraternity? Is it not some manner of speaking? We always take the individual, personal point of view.

So you turned to fiction yet you stick very close to real life.

I think life is more intelligent than literature. And working so long in documentaries became both a blessing and an obstacle in my work. In a documentary, the script is just to point you in a certain direction. One never knows how a story is going to unfold. And during the shoot, the point is to get as much material as possible. It’s in the editing that a documentary takes place. Today, I think I still
If you took this way of thinking far enough, don’t you think you might end up using scripts merely as pretexts?

No, not at all. Absolutely not. For me the script is key because it’s the means to communicating with the people I work with. It may be the skeleton, but it is the indispensable foundation. Later, many things can be changed: Certain ideas may be eliminated, the end may become the beginning, but what’s between the lines, all the ideas – that stays the same.

You call yourself an artisan, as opposed to an artist. Why?

Real artists find answers. The knowledge of the artisan is within the confines of his skills. For example, I know a lot about lenses, about the editing room. I know what the different buttons on the camera are for. I know more or less how to use a microphone. I know all that, but that’s not real knowledge. Real knowledge is knowing how to live, why we live... things like that.

Did you shoot the films separately, with an interval between them?

We started with “Blue” and shot from September to November 1992. On the last day, we started “White” because in the courtroom scene, you see the characters from both films together. As it is very difficult to shoot in a courtroom in Paris, since we had the permit, we took advantage of it; we immediately shot about 30% of “White” because the first part takes place in Paris. Then we left for Poland to finish it. After ten days of rest, we went to Geneva to start “Red” which was shot in Switzerland from March to May 1993.
Was the screenplay of the three films fully written?

It was completed well before the first day of shooting, six months before. You cannot forget the scouting for locations which takes time. You have to think in terms of 100 sequences, three countries and three different directors of photography. You have to organize and prepare in order to arrive at what was agreed with the producer.

Did you have the same crew on all three films?

The directors of photography were different: Sławomir Idziak for “Blue,” Edward Klosiński for “White” (he worked several times with Andrzej Wajda) and Piotr Sobociński, who is young but very talented, for “Red.” The others, for sound, set design, and music are the same. It worked well for “The Decalogue” so we kept the same principle.

Did you start editing before having completed shooting three films?

Yes, I was editing during the shooting from the first week. I even edited during the breaks.

The more concrete and tangible your films are, the more metaphysical they seem to become. You take more and more close-ups, you’re ever nearer to the characters and objects: you seem to be searching for something beyond the concrete or the physical.

Of course I’d like to get beyond the concrete. But it’s really difficult. Very difficult.

What is it you’re trying to capture?

Perhaps the soul. In any case, a truth which I myself haven’t found. Maybe time that flees and can never be caught.

Do the names of the characters have a particular meaning?

I tried to think of names which would be both easy for the audience to remember and reflective of the character’s personalities. In real life, there are names that surprise us because they don’t seem to suit the person at all.
For “The Double Life of Vronique” did you have Vronique from the Gospel in mind?

Later on I did, but not when I chose the name, and although it had been unconscious, it seemed like a good association to have made. For “Red,” I asked Irene Jacob what her favorite name was as a little girl. At the time, it was “Valentine.” So, I named her character Valentine. For “White,” I named the hero Karol (Charlie in Polish) as a tribute to Chaplin. This little man, who is both naive and shrewd, has a “chaplinesque” side to him.

“The Decalogue” was full of chance meetings — some of them failures and some successful. And in “Three Colours”, from one film to another, people seem to run into each other.

I like chance meetings — life is full of them. Everyday, without realizing it, I pass people whom I should know. At this moment, in this cafe, we’re sitting next to strangers. Everyone will get up, leave, and go on their own way. And they’ll never meet again. And if they do, they won’t realize that it’s not for the first time. In the trilogy, these encounters have less importance than in “A Short Film About Killing” in which the fact that the future killer and the lawyer fail to meet each other is key. In the trilogy, they’re included mainly for the pleasure of some cinephiles who like to find points of reference from one film to another. It’s like a game for them.

Each film has a scene with an elderly person trying to put the bottle in the trash can. What does this mean?

I merely thought that old age awaits all of us and that one day we won’t have enough strength left to put a bottle in a container. In “Blue,” to avoid having this scene seem mora-

listic, I over-exposed the image. I figured that this way Julie doesn’t see the woman, and doesn’t realize what lies ahead for herself. She’s too young. She doesn’t know that one day she’s going to need someone’s help. In “White” Karol smiles because he realizes this is the one person worse off than he is. In “Red”
Valentine knows the price of fraternity and Julie will learn to love again. The same can be said for Karol and Dominique. Even when you’re talking about liberty and fraternity, love is the final word.

Yet the screenplay for “Red” seems to say that you believe in fraternity. And the end of “Blue” is optimistic since Julie is able to cry.

A man who goes to visit his wife in prison. You call that a happy ending?

You think so? For me optimism is two lovers walking into the sunset arm in arm. Or maybe into the sunrise – whatever appeals to you. But if you find “Blue” optimistic, then why not? Paradoxically, I think the real happy ending is in “White” which is, nevertheless, a black comedy.

But they love each other! Would you rather have the story finish with him in Warsaw and her in Paris – with both of them free but not in love?

The theme of equality is not, at first glance, very obvious in “White.” It can be found in different areas: between husband and wife, at the level of ambitions and in the realm of finance. “White” is more about inequality than equality. In Poland we say “Everyone wants to be more equal than everyone else.” It’s practically a proverb. And it shows that equality is impossible: it’s contradictory to human nature. Hence, the failure of Communism. But it’s a pretty word and every effort must be made to help bring equality about... keeping in mind that we won’t achieve it – fortunately. Because genuine equality leads to set-ups like concentration camps.

To tell you the truth, in my work, love is always in opposition to the elements. It creates dilemmas. It brings in suffering. We can’t live with it, and we can’t live without it. You’ll rarely find a happy ending in my work.
You’ve lived in France for a year now. Has the experience modified your notion of liberty hence the tenor of “Blue?”

“Blue” seems like a continuation of “The Double Life of Vronique,” which itself picks up on an element from “Decalogue 9” (the cardiac singer). We could go on and on. Each film seems to give you a rough outline for another film.

Each color is shot in a different country. Was this out of duty to the European film industry?

Is it difficult to shoot in France without speaking the language?

No, because this film, like the other two, has nothing to do with politics. I’m talking about interior liberty. If I had wanted to talk about exterior liberty – liberty of movement – I would have chosen Poland. Since things obviously haven’t changed there. Let’s take some stupid examples. With your passport, you can go to America. I can’t. With a French salary you can buy a plane ticket to Poland, but this would be impossible vice-versa. But interior liberty is universal.

Of course, because I’m always shooting the same film! There’s nothing original in that though. All filmmakers do the same, and authors are always writing the same book. I’m not talking about “professionals,” I mean authors. Careful, I said authors, not artists.

The idea of a European film industry is completely artificial. There are good and bad films: that’s it. Take “Red” – we filmed in Switzerland for economic reasons – Switzerland is co-producing. But it’s not only that. We started thinking… Where would a story like “Red” take place? We thought of England, then Italy. Then we decided that Switzerland was perfect, mainly because it’s a country that wants to stay a bit off-center. The proof is the referendum concerning its connection to Europe. Switzerland leans towards isolation. It’s an island in the middle of Europe. And “Red” is a story of isolation.

Of course, but I have no choice. Here I get financing. At the same time, it’s more interesting than working somewhere I know too well. It enriches my perspective. I’m discover-
You’ve created a European symphony during your three shoots

As you may have gathered, we speak French, English, Polish, and German. We’ve created an atmosphere in which everyone is comfortable. I have no problem being with people of different nationalities.

Do you feel European?

No. I feel Polish. More specifically, I feel like I’m from the tiny village in the Northeast of Poland where I have a house and where I love to spend time. But I don’t work there. I cut wood.
Farewell to a Friend
By Krzysztof Zanussi
I suppose that there are artists who have completely exhausted and fulfilled themselves in their creation. Krzysztof Kieslowski existed next to his creation, and the body of his work cannot fill the void that has been left by his death. While still alive, Krzysztof pronounced that his work was complete and, knowing him well, I had to take seriously his words that he would not make any more films. However, that he is no longer here is a much bigger blow.

Much time has passed since the funeral, yet it is not possible to accept this loss; each and every word spoken about him becomes part of the eulogy, which should never have been delivered—all of us who were close to Krzysztof felt his stern opposition to anything that could be construed as an attempt to formalize or explain death, something which he knew was so much larger than words could convey. Especially a death that is so sudden, so unneeded, and unnecessary, as though wished out of silence and given a voice. The unfortunate heart surgery could have been avoided, canceled, or postponed; it did not have to be performed that exact day and hour. It’s impossible to push away the thoughts about what could have been. And yet this exact thought haunted Krzysztof—the concept of chance and fate, about what is necessary and inevitable, or what could have happened differently. The concept of chance became the key to noticing life’s secret. Krzysztof’s work has its greatest value in that it rationally and consciously discovers the key to the secret. Krzysztof discovered its existence, yet the secret is not solved—otherwise it would be just an illusion of a secret, a misunderstanding by the artist who has falsely interpreted the subject of study.

Krzysztof’s life makes one think about what he has said in many of his films, perhaps most clearly in the last ones—that life, which goes on in a plane of palpable reality, is a string of various causes and effects—yet in essence is incomprehensible in such a plane. The “Three Colours” films (Blue, White, and Red) disclose at the very end the mysterious sense of those various fates tied together by an accident, in the same way that an accident connected the three versions of the protagonist’s fate in Blind Chance.

I remember Krzysztof from our years at the film school; later we worked together at the same studio, “TOR.” Eventually we more or less took turns managing the studio’s affairs. Krzysztof took my place in film production during the martial law instituted in 1981 by General Jaruzelski, when I worked more in the West.

Our friendship was too close for me to write about today, even from this perspective. I don’t think there will ever be a proper perspective, and time will not create a distance between us because with time one does not achieve a distance from oneself—and in friendship there is this element of becoming one with someone else. When Krzysztof is not here, I feel something in me is missing. During the filming of White I was on the set with my own camera, because I wanted Krzysztof to say a few words for my television pro-
gram. I asked him what he thought about life after death, about some existence in another world. He replied by recalling, without embarrassment, a very personal example—he remembered his parents who had been dead for a long time and said, “For me, they are alive. With every choice I think about what they would say, whether they would approve my choice. In my life, they are with me.” Krzysztof and I used to differ on many matters, but on this one I can easily agree. Krzysztof is here even if apparently he is not.

If I wanted to describe Krzysztof in a way that one can describe even oneself (assuming that the description will be, to a degree, unbiased), I think that I would first describe his freedom of spirit. Krzysztof had a talent. And that is why he tried to avoid life’s traps in his art. And a rather bitter life it was. He had behind him a relatively late start in his profession, and for many long years it seemed that he looked at people and situations too closely to be able to generalize. Looking back, we see that it was a false illusion. From the beginning, in everything he did, Krzysztof was honest with matter, obsessively demanding truth—but only today, taking into account his later films, is it visible that all his works had the force of generalization. At the time, only the truth in them struck.

Later came the series of feature films, such as No End (1984) – films that were strongly and uncommonly rooted in reality and so seemingly very political, though again, looking back, it is clear that for Krzysztof politics were just a back-drop—he was interested in human voice and moral complications, the drama of duty and weakness, the fight for human dignity. And for his own, as well—for the dignity of an artist, who would not be “for sale” or would not allow himself to be bought.

At the end of the 1970s, Krzysztof became a great authority in his professional circle, had developed a following, and had experienced success abroad; yet even in his own mind he remained a local artist. Foreign critics felt that his view of the world was incomprehensible to international audiences: It was too Polish, too leakproof, and not universal. Today we know this was not true. The same films, almost 20 years later, are being sold and shown and, it turns out, understood, even though these are very difficult times for the film industry. For Krzysztof, the height of success came at a time when he was no longer here.

At the end of the 1970s, Krzysztof did not want to conquer the world. He accepted, without resistance, the restrictions placed on him—that he was understood only in Poland—and he had no aspirations to go somewhere farther, nor was he envious of others who were functioning better in the world. He sensed, with uncommon intuition, the plainness of the world—that drama everywhere is similar, if not the same. He had no fascination with zagranica (things that are foreign and desirable) because he paid no attention to appearances. This is even more unusual since at that time he was “mute”; he spoke no foreign languages. In this he was like...
Andrzej Munk. It was with great effort, even disgust, that he learned English in his late 40s. Krzysztof understood the world without words. And he was of the opinion that he did not have to wrestle with the “world” as a challenge. Instead he felt that a world-renown career was something left to fate, and later, when it happened (both during martial law and after), that it was just something that was supposed to happen.

The martial law was for Krzysztof an experience not so much political, as aesthetic and moral. For him, it was a time of great disgust. Many people gained a chance to develop their worst traits. Krzysztof did not mince words, but he never offended anyone for fun or out of carelessness. During the martial law he used the word ryje (snouts) to describe those whose faces had lost their dignified features.

It was at that time he made No End. It is, to me, one of his most interesting films. And the most poorly received among critics. A Communist Party secretary, after seeing the film, promised to make sure it would get the worst possible review Ð and he kept his word.

Not that poor reviews in the official press were all that unpleasant. But at that time there appeared, probably for the first time, a whole pack of small podgryzaczce (biters, or nitpickers), who accompanied Krzysztof until his death. It was common knowledge that his movie Blind Chance (1981) was on the shelf, thus the podgryzaczce were all the more active, knowing the artist was in disfavor [with the government].

Unfortunately, the Solidarity side was equally disappointed. Blind Chance was filmed in black and white; it contained neither the agitation nor that true sense of suffering demanded by the opposition. Instead, it had an uncommonly simple metaphysical layer, a quality that is not easily accepted in Polish tradition (our country did not give birth to Georges Bernanos or Paul Claudel), and religious thought in Polish art is more strongly influenced by Henryk Sienkiewicz than by Cyprian Norwid. The heroine’s husband in No End became the target of ridicule.

Perhaps I am being petty to mention all this, but I know how much bitterness Krzysztof had to swallow after the release of No End. And he reacted in a rather unusual manner – with the kind of courage he displayed when confronting his own illness: He did not take offense, did not become introverted, did not jump into a whirlpool of arguments. Instead he isolated himself for two years while making his Dekalog.

No one could expect even for a moment that the Dekalog would become a hit on a global scale. As soon as the first two episodes were finished, I, as producer, traveled to various TV stations, trying to arrange a deal: a broadcast in exchange for negatives to finish filming the series. I have a whole stack of refusals. I show them today to young people, so they can learn about the deceitful cir-
circumstances that can decide the fate of an artist, and his creation.

Krzysztof could not acquire the negative because the very subject, Dekalog, seemed provincial and anachronistic to the contemporary TV decision-makers. Later, these same decision-makers were buying the series at a much higher price. (Had this happened in a free market, they would have certainly been kicked out of work. But in Europe, public TV dominates even to this day. And, by nature, mistakes go unpunished.)

Dekalog turned out to be a hit, shown during prime time – sold even today on videocassettes. In the blink of an eye it made Krzysztof a renowned artist and opened for him limitless possibilities for work. As though in a dream, producers and sponsors lined up at his door in order to obtain his further collaboration. The Double Life of VŽronique was produced, and later the „Three Colours.“

The last years of Krzysztof’s life were consumed with a personal fight for freedom in the face of this success – success that came too late and was an unexpected complication. Krzysztof constantly tried to simplify his life. Meanwhile there came festivals, honors, invitations – the entire masquerade of show business with its flashlights, interviews, and photographs. Few have hated this world more, while at the same time not being able to completely reject it. Eventually, however, the rejection took place – a radical break. Krzysztof announced that he had had enough and that he would not make any more films. Blackmail – a trap set for himself? Krzysztof was a man of honor. We used to make fun of a well-known Polish colleague who made several such declarations and was back at work a year later.

The success was consummated. Krzysztof had reached the highest status that exists in European cinema, ranking with such recent greats as Federico Fellini, Ingmar Bergman, or Luis Buñuel. Krzysztof did not want to become his own promoter, like Michelangelo Antonioni did. He did not want to race against his own fame. Kieslowski’s success was proof, following the fall of Communism, that in a free country art reaches farther than under a dictatorship; for the promoters of Marxism – in Poland as well as in Western Europe – such an example was rather uncomfortable.

According to a proverb, no one can be a prophet in his own country. The more famous he became around the world, the more he was looked down upon in Poland – in a mean, filthy manner that defines Polish hell. Krzysztof was tired of the world, and he did not experience joy in his own country. Did he suffer? Perhaps it is better said that he felt distaste, distrust, and shame for the people who showed their mediocrity just to write something disgusting. We had piles of those clippings in the studio. I would be ashamed to look through them today, since there are known as well as unknown names there.

When one considers that Krzysztof is no longer living, all of this becomes so trivial and without meaning; perhaps now the curtain of mercy could be drawn over
all that is wasteful in Poland. I think this is what I would have done had I not remembered how Krzysztof himself used to call things by their name, sharply and without pardon. And he did this justly, not to be little, but to make others reflect upon what they were doing – why they were creating Polish hell and adding to the wrong of this world, the enormity of which is so great that one needs great love of people in order not to break down. And Krzysztof loved people very much. That is why he was rough and harsh with them. He saw how they were ruining their lives and wanted to save them from doing it.

Translated by Hanna Karczewski
Filmography
Night. A boy runs and jumps on a tram. There are very few passengers: a worker on his way to work, a pretty girl. The boy, attracted to the girl, tries to make her laugh, then watches her fall asleep. He gets off at his stop but has second thoughts and, as in the first sequence, runs after the same tram where the girl sleeps.

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Screenplay: K. Kieślowski
Cinematography: Zdzisław Kaczmarek
Production company: Łódź Film School
Cast: Jerzy Braszka, Maria Janiec

Short Feature
35 mm black and white
5 mins 45 secs

The counter of a State-owned insurance office, a queue forms in front of the counter window and the employee repeats the question: ‘What have you done in your lifetime?’. A satire on the impenetrability of bureaucracy.

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Screenplay: K. Kieślowski
Cinematography: Lechosław Trzȩsowski
Production company: Łódź Film School

Documentary
35 mm black and white
6 mins

A coachful of rowdy youths stops by a lake. They drink, play football, generally fool around. One of the youths runs after the ball and sees a couple among the bushes. He stands, entranced by the girl, but the coach driver sounds his horn; it’s time to go. The coach leaves. The couple pack their bags and overtake the coach on their motorbike. The girl, sitting on the back of the bike, drops her backpack. The coach driver stops, picks it up. The couple turn back for the bag. The driver won’t hand them the bag unless the girl travels in the coach with the drunken youths. She’s ready to do so but peace is restored as the girl goes back to her boyfriend. The youth with the football wistfully watches the couple ride away.

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Screenplay: K. Kieślowski
Cinematography: Lechosław Trzȩsowski
Editor: Janina Grosicka
Production company: Łódź Film School

Short Feature
35 mm black and white
17 mins
An old photograph of two little boys, wearing soldiers’ hats and holding rifles. The camera goes in search of these two boys, now grown men, and registers their emotion as they are confronted with the photograph.

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Cinematography: Marek Jażwiak
Editor: Niusia Ciucka
Production company: Polish Television

Documentary
16 mm black and white
32 mins

“A portrait of a town where some people work, others roam around in search of Lord knows what… A town which is full of eccentricities, full of all sorts of absurd statues and various contrasts… full of ruins, hovels, recesses.”

Krzysztof Kieślowski

A documentary “about men who had been soldiers and lost their sight in the Second World War… The soldiers just sit there, in front of the camera, throughout the film, and talk.”

Krzysztof Kieślowski

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Screenplay: K. Kieślowski, Ryszard Zgórecki
Cinematography: Stanisław Niedbalski
Production company: Czołówka

Documentary
35 mm black and white
16 mins
A working day in the Ursus tractor factory. Shots of workers alternate with those of a management board meeting. The factory cannot meet its production quota because there is a shortage of equipment, parts, and so on. Papers are sent out, licences are applied for, numerous meetings held, but there seems to be no way out of the vicious network of misunderstandings and bureaucracy – the left hand doesn’t know what the right is doing. As one of the board members says: ‘the bureaucracy in this country hampers any solution’. Yet the workers still have to meet their quota.

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Cinematography: Stanisław Niedbalski, Jacek Tworek
Editor: Maria Leszczyńska
Sound: Małgorzata Jaworska
Production manager: Halina Kawecka
Production company: WFD

Documentary
35 mm black and white
10 mins 19 secs
**Między Wrocławiem a Zieloną Górą**
*Between Wroclaw and Zielona Góra*
1972

A commissioned film about the Lubin copper mine.

**Director:** Krzysztof Kieślowski  
**Cinematography:** Jacek Petrycki  
**Editor:** Lidia Zonn  
**Sound:** Andrzej Bohdanowicz  
**Production manager:** Jerzy Herman  
**Production company:** WFD, commissioned by Lubin Copper Mine

**Documentary**  
35 mm colour  
10 mins 35 secs

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**Podstawy BHP w Kopalni Miedzi**
*The Principles of Safety and Hygiene in a Copper Mine*
1972

Commissioned film about the conditions of safety and hygiene in the Lubin copper mine.

**Director:** Krzysztof Kieślowski  
**Cinematography:** Jacek Petrycki  
**Editor:** Lidia Zonn  
**Sound:** Andrzej Bohdanowicz  
**Production manager:** Jerzy Herman  
**Production company:** WFD, commissioned by Lubin Copper Mine

**Documentary**  
35 mm colour  
20 mins 39 secs

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**Robotnicy '71: Nic o Nas Bez Nas**
*Workers '71: nothing about us without us*
1972

Filmed after the strikes of December 1970 and the downfall of Gomutka, the film “was intended to portray the workers’ state of mind in 1971. We tried to draw a broad picture showing that the class which, theoretically at least, was said to be the ruling class, had somewhat different views from those which were printed on the front page of the Trybuna Ludu.” (Krzysztof Kieślowski) The film was later re-edited by Polish Television and shown, without credits, as Masters (Gospodarze).

**Directors:** Krzysztof Kieślowski, Tomasz Zygadło, Wojciech Wiszniewski, Paweł Kędzierski, Tadeusz Walendowski  
**Cinematography:** Witold Stok, Stanisław Mroziuk, Jacek Petrycki  
**Sound:** Jacek Szymański, Alina Hojnacka  
**Editors:** Lidia Zonn, Maryla Czolnik, Joanna Dorozynska, Daniela Cieplińska  
**Production managers:** Mirosław Podolski, Wojciech Szczęsny, Tomasz Gątbiowski  
**Production company:** WFD

**Documentary**  
16 mm black and white  
46 mins 39 secs
Documentary about a bricklayer who, during the Stalinist era, was encouraged by the Party to become an exemplary worker and further the Communist cause. A young activist, he was promoted and, he says, "I became a jack-in-office, instead of an activist... I got a desk job and gasped for breath, I had to let in fresh air through the window... And then came the year 1956 and everything tumbled down all of a sudden. It was a little painful. The question was: What now? And in 1956 I asked them to relieve me and send me back to my job in production. I returned where I had come from." The camera follows the bricklayer – a man whose life has been used up by ideological powers above him – during a May Day parade, alternating with scenes from his daily life.

A woman has left her teaching job in a small town where she used to live and works as a shop decorator in a pedestrian subway in Warsaw. Her husband comes looking for her in the hope that she will return to him.

Patients suffering from tuberculosis speak of their fears and of their wishes to return to a normal life.

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**Documentary about a bricklayer**

Bri ck l ayer

1973

**Przejście Podziemne**

Pe destrian Subway

1973

**Przeswietlenie**

X-Ray

1974

**Murarz**

Bricklayer

1973

**Przejście Podziemne**

Pedestrian Subway

1973

**Przeswietlenie**

X-Ray

1974

**Metadata**

- **Director:** Krzysztof Kieślowski
- **Cinematography:** Jacek Petrycki
- **Editor:** Lidia Zonn
- **Sound:** Mieczysław Hardest
- **Production manager:** Jerzy Łukaszewicz
- **Production company:** WFD

**Documentary**

35 mm colour

17 mins 39 secs

**TV Drama**

35 mm black and white

30 mins

**Metadata**

- **Director:** Krzysztof Kieślowski
- **Cinematography:** Witold Stok
- **Editor:** Lidia Zonn
- **Sound:** Małgorzata Jaworska
- **Production manager:** Tomasz Gołębiowski
- **Production company:** WFD

**Documentary**

35 mm colour

17 mins 39 secs
The camera follows a young unmarried couple during the girl’s pregnancy, through their wedding, and the delivery of the baby.

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Cinematography: Jacek Petrycki
Editor: Lidia Zonn
Sound: Małgorzata Jaworska, Michał Zarnecki
Production company: Polish Television

TV Documentary
16 mm colour
30 mins

A Party Control Committee cross-examines a Party member threatened with expulsion from the Party. The life-story of the accused is a fictional one although the man playing the role had experienced something similar in his own life – while the Party Control Committee is real. As the meeting progresses, the Control Committee begins to believe in the authenticity of the case and gives the accused its professional inquisitorial treatment.

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Screenplay: Janusz Fastyn, Krzysztof Kieślowski
Cinematography: Jacek Petrycki, Tadeusz Rusinek
Editor: Lidia Zonn
Sound: Spas Chróstow
Production manager: Marek Szopiński
Production company: WFD

Drama Documentary
35 mm black and white
45 mins 10 secs

Romek, a sensitive and forthright young man fascinated with the magic of art, comes to the opera to work as a tailor. Gradually as he is confronted with the reality behind the scenes – the bickering, petty jealousies, vindictiveness and corruption – his illusions shatter. The film ends with Romek sitting in front of a blank sheet of paper on which he is to denounce his friend, a fellow tailor who was sacked through the maliciousness of one of the performers.

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Screenplay: K. Kieślowski
Cinematography: Witold Stok
Artistic director: Tadeusz Kozarewicz
Costumes: Izabella Konarzewska
Producer: Zbigniew Stanek
Production company: Polish Television and Tor Production House
Cast: Juliusz Machulski, Irena Lorentowicz, Władzimierz Borunski, Michał Tarkowski, Tomasz Lengren, Andrzej Siedlecki, Tomasz Zygańco, Janusz Skalski

TV Drama
16 mm colour
72 mins
The camera follows orthopaedic surgeons on a 32-hour shift. Instruments fall apart in their hands, the electrical current keeps breaking, there are shortages of the most basic materials, but the doctors persevere hour after hour, and with humour.

Director: Krzysztof Kieslowski
Cinematography: Jacek Petrzycki
Editor: Lidia Zonn
Sound: Michał Żarnecki
Production manager: Ryszard Wrzesiński
Production company: WFD

Documentary
35 mm black and white
21 mins 4 secs

A compilation of footage from The Scar not used in the final cut of the feature film.

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Cinematography: Slawomir Idziak
Sound: Michał Żarnecki

35 mm colour
6 mins

1970. After discussions a decision is taken to built a large new chemical factory. Bednarz, an honest Party man, is put in charge of the construction. He used to live in the small town where the factory is to be built, and he has unpleasant memories of it. But he sets to the task in the belief that he will build a place where people will live and work well. His intentions conflict with those, who are primarily concerned with their short-term needs. Disillusioned, Bednarz gives up his post.

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Screenplay: K. Kieślowski, based on a story by Romuald Karas
Dialogue: Romuald Karas, Krzysztof Kieślowski
Cinematography: Slawomir Idziak
Editor: Krystyna Górnicka
Art director: Andrzej Płocki
Sound: Michał Żarnecki
Music: Stanisław Radwan
Producer: Zbigniew Stanek
Production company: Tor
Cast: Franciszek Pieczka (Bednarz), Mariusz Dmochowski, Jerzy Stuhr, Jan Skotnicki, Stanisław Igar, Stanisław Michalski, Michał Tarkowski, Halina Winiarska, Joanna Orzechowska, Agnieszka Holland, Małgorzata Leśniwska, Asia Lamtiugina

Feature
35 mm colour
104 mins
Antek Gralak has just been released from prison. He leaves his home town of Kraków and sets to work on a building site in Silesia. All he wants are the simple things in life: work, somewhere clean to sleep, something to eat, a wife, television and peace. Anxious to avoid conflicts and happy to be alive and free, he is friendly with his colleagues and grateful to his employer. He finds a girl, marries, but conflicts at work prove inevitable. Building materials disappear and Gralak’s boss is involved in the theft. A strike breaks out among the builders. Torn between the two sides his boss and his colleagues – and longing for peace, Gralak turns up for work. The builders believe he has grassed and beat him up as he mutters ‘Calm… calm.’

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Screenplay: K. Kieślowski, based on a story by Lech Borski
Dialogue: Krzysztof Kieślowski, Jerzy Stuhr
Cinematography: Jacek Petrycki
Editor: Maryla Szymańska
Art director: Rafał Waltenberger
Sound: Wiesław Jurgąta
Music: Piotr Figiel
Producer: Z. Romanowski
Production company: Polish Television
Cast: Jeny Stuhr, Izabella Olszewska, Jeny Trela...

TV Drama
16mm colour
44 mins

Portrait of a factory porter, a fanatic of strict discipline, who extends his power even into his personal life as he tries to control everybody and everything in the belief that “rules are more important than people... That means that when a man doesn’t obey the rules,” he says, “you could say he’s a goner... Children also have to conform to the rules and adults who live on this earth, for whom this beautiful world has been created. I reckon you’ve got to have capital punishment... Simply hang him [the culprit]. Publicly. Tens, hundreds of people would see it.”

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Cinematography: Witold Stok
Editor: Lidia Zonn
Sound: Wiesława Dembińska, Michał Żarnecki
Music: Wojciech Kilar
Production manager: Wojciech Kapczyński
Production company: WFD

Documentary
35 mm colour
16 mins 52 secs
Episodes in which each day of the week shows a ballerina of classical dance at work or in rehearsal; but the ages of the dancers vary from the smallest child taking her first steps in ballet to the eldest ballerina who is now a ballet teacher.

*Director:* Krzysztof Kieślowski  
*Cinematography:* Witold Stok  
*Editor:* Alina Siemińska, Lidia Zonn  
*Sound:* Michał Zarnecki  
*Production company:* WFD  

Documentary  
35 mm black and white  
16 mins

Filip Mosz buys himself an 8 mm camera to record the first years of his new baby. He becomes fascinated and his interests turn to filming subjects other than his family. In the factory where he works, his bosses appoint him their official chronicler. His films win prizes at amateur contests and he wants to record reality as it really is and not as it is officially reported to be. At his factory he is confronted with censorship: the management believe a documentary portrait of a disabled worker to be a discredit to their factory. Meanwhile his wife, despising the time and commitment Mosz dedicates to his films, leaves him. Mosz opens his cans of film, exposing them to light. He turns the camera on himself.

*Director:* Krzysztof Kieślowski  
*Screenplay:* K. Kieślowski  
*Dialogue:* Krzysztof Kieślowski, Jerzy Stuhr  
*Cinematography:* Jacek Petrycki  
*Editor*: Halina Nawrocka  
*Art director:* Rafał Waltenberger  
*Sound:* Michał Zarnecki  
*Music:* Krzysztof Knittel  
*Producer:* Wielisława Piotrowska  
*Production company:* Tor  

Feature  
35 mm colour  
112 mins

Warsaw’s Central Railway Station. “Someone has fallen asleep, someone’s waiting for somebody else. Maybe they’ll come, maybe they won’t. The film is about people like that, people looking for something.” says Krzysztof Kieślowski. Overhead video ‘spy’ cameras watch over the station.

*Director:* Krzysztof Kieślowski  
*Cinematography:* Witold Stok  
*Editor:* Lidia Zonn  
*Sound:* Michał Zarnecki  
*Production manager:* Lech Grabiński  
*Production company:* WFD  

Documentary  
35 mm black and white  
13 mins 23 secs
Seventy-nine Poles, aged seven to 100, answer three questions: When were you born? What are you? What would you like most?

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Cinematography: Jacek Petrycki, Piotr Kwiatkowski
Editor: Alina Siemińska
Sound: Michał Zarenecki
Production manager: Lech Grabiński
Production company: WFD

Documentary
35 mm black and white
15 mins 32 secs

Witek runs after a train. Three variations follow on how such a seemingly banal incident could influence the rest of Witek’s life. One: he catches the train, meets an honest Communist and himself becomes a Party activist. Two: while running for the train he bumps into a railway guard, is arrested and sent to unpaid labour in a park where he meets someone from the opposition. He, in turn, becomes a militant member of the opposition. Three: he simply misses the train, meets a girl from his studies, returns to his interrupted studies, marries the girl and leads a peaceful life as a doctor unwilling to get mixed up in politics. He is sent abroad with his work. In mid-air, the plane he is on explodes.

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Screenplay: K. Kieślowski
Cinematography: Krzysztof Pakulski
Editor: Elżbieta Kurkowska
Art director: Rafał Waltenberger
Sound: Michał Żarnecki
Music: Wojciech Kilar
Producer: Jacek Szeligowski
Production company: Tor
Cast: Bogustaw Linda, Tadeusz Tomnicki, Bogusawa Powelec, Zbigniew Zapasiewicz, Jacek Borkowski, Adam Ferency, Jacek Sas-Uchrynowski, Marzena Trybala, Irena Burska, ...

Feature
35 mm colour
17 mins

“It’s a critical film about a Party Secretary in a pretty large town 100 kilometres from Warsaw. Rebellions and strikes started up in 1976 because of price rises. A large protest broke out which ended with the people setting fire to the regional Party Committee headquarters. At almost the last moment, the Secretary fled the building. He tried to stay right up to the end but when the furniture started getting hot, the police, with help from their informers, somehow managed to get him out.”

Krzysztof Kieślowski

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Screenplay: K. Kieślowski, based on a report by Hanna Krall ‘View from a First Floor Window’ (‘Widok z okna na pierwszym piętrze’)
Cinematography: Krzysztof Pakulski
Editor: Elżbieta Kurkowska
Sound: Michał Żarnecki
Music: Jan Kanty Pawluśkiewicz
Producer: Jacek Szeligowski
Production company: Polish Television
Cast: Waclaw Ulewicz

Feature
35 mm colour
79 mins 22 secs
The ghost of a young lawyer observes the world as it is after martial law. Three motifs interweave. A worker accused of being an activist with the opposition and whom the young lawyer was to defend, is now being defended by an older colleague who is resigned to a degree of compromise. The lawyer’s widow realizes now how much she loved her husband and tries to come to terms with her emptiness. And there’s the metaphysical element, “that is, the signs which emanate from the man who’s not there anymore, towards all that he’s left behind.”

Krzysztof Kieslowski

The ghost of a young lawyer observes the world as it is after martial law. Three motifs interweave. A worker accused of being an activist with the opposition and whom the young lawyer was to defend, is now being defended by an older colleague who is resigned to a degree of compromise. The lawyer’s widow realizes now how much she loved her husband and tries to come to terms with her emptiness. And there’s the metaphysical element, “that is, the signs which emanate from the man who’s not there anymore, towards all that he’s left behind.”

Krzysztof Kieslowski

One of a cycle of films made about cities by various directors. Warsaw. Monday to Saturday, each day shows a fragment of the life of a different person. Sunday all six are reunited at supper; they are all members of one family.

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Cinematography: Jacek Petrycki
Editor: Dorota Warduszkiewicz
Sound: Michał Zarnecki
Music: Fryderyk Chopin
Production manager: Jacek Petrycki
Production company: City Life, Rotterdam

Documentary
35 mm colour
18 mins

A youth randomly, and brutally, murders a taxi-driver. Piotr has just passed his law exams and been admitted to the bar. He is to defend Jacek, the young murderer. There is no evidence for the defence and no apparent motive. Jacek is put on trial, found guilty and executed by hanging. Piotr, after his first case, is left with the bitter doubt – does the legal system, in the name of the people, have the right to kill in cold blood?

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Screenplay: K. Kieślowski, Krzysztof Piesiewicz
Cinematography: Slawomir Idziak
Editor: Ewa Smol
Art director: Halina Dobrowolska
Sound: Małgorzata Jaworska
Music: Zbigniew Preisner
Producer: Ryszard Chutkowski
Production company: Tor and Polish Television
(for the television version, Decalogue 5)

Feature
35 mm colour
85 mins
Tomek, a young post office worker, is obsessed with Magda, the promiscuous woman who lives in the tower block opposite. He spies on her through a telescope and finally declares his love. She initiates him into the basic fact of life: there is no love, only sex. Tomek, shattered, tries to commit suicide but doesn’t succeed. When he returns from hospital, it is Magda who becomes obsessed with him.

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Screenplay: K. Kieślowski, Krzysztof Piesiewicz
Cinematography: Witold Adamek
Editor: Ewa Smal
Art director: Halina Dobrowolska
Sound: Nikodem Wołk-Laniewski
Music: Zbigniew Preisner
Producer: Ryszard Chutkowski
Production company: Tor and Polish Television (for the television version, Decalogue 6)
Cast: Grażyna Szapołowska, Olaf Lubaszenko, Stefania Iwińska (Godmother), Artur Barciś, Stanisław Gawlik, Piotr Machalica, Rafał Imbro, Jan Piechościński, Małgorzata Roźniewska, M. Chojnacka, T. Gradowski, K. Kaperski, J. Michałewska, E. Ziółkowska

Feature
35 mm colour
87 mins

Krzysztof introduces his small son, Paweł, to the mysteries of the personal computer, a machine which he believes to be infallible. It is winter. Paweł, anxious to try out his new pair of skates, asks his father if he can go out to the local pond which has just frozen over. They consult the computer; the ice will hold the boy’s weight; he can go. Paweł doesn’t come home. There was a freak local thaw; the computer was wrong; Paweł drowned. Krzysztof runs to the church in protest and despair, falls against an altar. Candle wax splashes over the face of the Black Madonna and dries on her cheeks as tears.

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Screenplay: K. Kieślowski, Krzysztof Piesiewicz
Cinematography: Wiesław Zdort
Editor: Ewa Smal
Art director: Halina Dobrowolska
Sound: Małgorzata Jaworska
Music: Zbigniew Preisner
Producer: Ryszard Chutkowski
Production company: Polish Television
Cast: Henryk Baranowski, Wojciech Kłata, Maja Komorowska, Artur Barciś, Maria Gladkowska, Ewa Kania, Aleksandra Kiselewska, Aleksandra Majsiuk, Małgorzata Sroga-Mikołajczyk,...

TV Drama
35 mm colour
53 mins

Dorota visits Andrzej, her dying husband, in hospital. She is pregnant – this might be the last chance for her to have a baby – but not by him. She asks the Consultant in charge of her husband’s case, whether Andrzej will die. If he lives, she will have to have an abortion; if he dies, she can have the child. How can the doctor decide the life or death of an unborn child? How can he be certain whether his patient will die or miraculously recover? He tells Dorota that her husband doesn’t have a chance; but Andrzej recovers. Dorota tells Andrzej that they are going to have a baby: he thinks it’s his.

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Screenplay: K. Kieślowski, Krzysztof Piesiewicz
Cinematography: Edward Kosiński
Editor: Ewa Smal
Art director: Halina Dobrowolska
Sound: Małgorzata Jaworska
Music: Zbigniew Preisner
Producer: Ryszard Chutkowski
Production company: Polish Television
Cast: Krystyna Janda, Aleksander Bardini, Olgierd Łukasiewicz, Artur Barciś, Stanisław Gawlik, Krzysztof Kumor, Maciej Szary, Krystyna Bigelmajer, Karol Dllenius, Ewa Ekwińska...

TV Drama
35 mm colour
57 mins
Christmas Eve, a night when families are together and nobody wants to be alone. Ewa tricks Janusz, her ex-lover, away from his family and under various pretexts tries to keep him with her for the night. Janusz wants to go home but Ewa is determined. They part at dawn.

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Screenplay: K. Kieślowski, Krzysztof Piesiewicz
Cinematography: Piotr Sobociński
Editor: Ewa Smal
Art director: Halina Dobrowolska
Sound: Nikodem Wołk-Laniewski
Producer: Ryszard Chutkowski
Production company: Polish Television
Cast: Daniel Olbrychski, Maria Pakulnis, Joanna Szczepkowska, Artur Barciś, Krystyna Drochocka, Krzysztof Kurmur, Dorota Stalińska, Zygmun Fok, Jacek Kalucki, Barbara Kołodziejska, Maria Krawczyk, Jerzy Zygmun Nowak, Piotr Rzymskiewicz, Włodzimierz Rzeczycki, Włodzimierz Musiał

TV Drama
35 mm colour
56 mins

Anka is 20 years old. Her mother is dead and she lives with her father. They get on well together. Her father has to go on a trip abroad. While he is away, Anka finds an envelope in her father’s room: “Not to be opened before my death.” Within that envelope is another, addressed, in her mother’s handwriting, to her. Anka meets her father on his return and quotes the letter where her mother reveals that he is not Anka’s real father. A different relationship emerges between Anka and him. He resists; she might still be his daughter. As he leaves for another trip, Anka runs after him, confessing that she hasn’t read the letter after all.

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Screenplay: K. Kieślowski, Krzysztof Piesiewicz
Cinematography: Krzysztof Pakulski
Editor: Ewa Smal
Art director: Halina Dobrowolska
Sound: Magorzata Jaworska
Music: Zbigniew Preisner
Producer: Ryszard Chutkowski
Production company: Tor and Polish Television
Cast: Adrianna Biedrzyńska, Janusz Gajos, Artur Barciś, Adam Hanuszkiewicz, Jan Tesarz, Andrzej Blumenfeld, Tomasz Kozłowicz,...

TV Drama
35 mm colour
57 mins

A youth randomly, and brutally, murders a taxi-driver. Piotr has just passed his law exams and been admitted to the bar. He is to defend Jacek, the young murderer. There is no evidence for the defence and no apparent motive. Jacek is put on trial, found guilty and executed by hanging. Piotr, after his first case, is left with the bitter doubt – does the legal system, in the name of the people, have the right to kill in cold blood?

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Screenplay: K. Kieślowski, Krzysztof Piesiewicz
Cinematography: Sławomir Idziak
Editor: Ewa Smal
Art director: Halina Dobrowolska
Sound: Małgorzata Jaworska
Music: Zbigniew Preisner
Producer: Ryszard Chutkowski
Production company: Tor and Polish Television

TV Drama
35 mm colour
57 mins
Tomek, a young post office worker, is obsessed with Magda, the promiscuous woman who lives in the tower block opposite. He spies on her through a telescope and finally declares his love. She initiates him into the basic fact of life there is no love, only sex. Tomek, shattered, tries to commit suicide but doesn’t succeed. When he returns from hospital, it is Magda who becomes obsessed with him.

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Screenplay: K. Kieślowski, Krzysztof Piesiewicz
Cinematography: Witold Adamek
Editor: Ewa Smal
Art director: Halina Dobrowolska
Sound: Nikodem Wołt-Łaniewski
Music: Zbigniew Preisner
Producer: Ryszard Chutkowski
Production company: Tor and Polish Television

Six-year-old Ania is being brought up by Ewa in the belief that Majka, Ewa’s daughter, is her sister, whereas Majka is really her mother. Tired of living this lie, Majka ‘kidnaps’ Ania. She seeks refuge with Wojtek, Ania’s father. Majka was just a schoolgirl when Wojtek, her teacher, got her pregnant. Ewa, jealous of Ania’s love, phones Wojtek. Majka will only return home if her mother allows her to bring up her own daughter in the recognition of the true relationship. Majka and Ania hide at a nearby station. Ewa asks the woman at the ticket office whether she has seen a young woman with a little girl. In the background, Ania wakes up and sees Ewa. ‘Mummy,’ she calls and runs to her. A train arrives, Majka jumps on.

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Screenplay: K. Kieślowski, Krzysztof Piesiewicz
Cinematography: Dariusz Kuc
Editor: Ewa Smal
Art director: Halina Dobrowolska
Sound: Wiesława Dębicka
Music: Zbigniew Preisner
Producer: Ryszard Chutkowski
Production company: Polish Television
Cast: Maria Kościatkowska, Teresa Marczewska, Artur Barciś, Tadeusz Łomnicki, Marianna Opania, Bronisław Pawlik, Wojciech Asiński, Marek Kępiński, Janusz Mond,...

Elżbieta, researching the fate of Jewish war survivors, is visiting from New York and sits in on lectures in ethics at the University of Warsaw. She approaches Zofia, the professor, and tells her that she is the little Jewish girl whom Zofia refused to shelter from the Nazis during the Occupation. As Zofia explains the reason for this apparent cowardice – someone had betrayed Zofia’s husband who was active in the underground and any Jewish child would have fallen into the hands of the Gestapo – her long-standing sense of guilt is cleared while Elżbieta’s faith in humanity is restored.

Director: Krzysztof Kieślowski
Screenplay: K. Kieślowski, Krzysztof Piesiewicz
Cinematography: Andrzej Jaroszewicz
Editor: Ewa Smal
Art director: Halina Dobrowolska
Sound: Wiesława Dębicka
Music: Zbigniew Preisner
Producer: Ryszard Chutkowski
Production company: Polish Television
Cast: Anna Polony, Maja Baretkowska, Władysław Kowalski, Bogusław Linda,...

TV Drama
35 mm colour
55 mins
Roman learns he’s impotent. Recognizing his wife, Hanka’s, sexual needs, he encourages her to take a lover. She is reluctant; she loves Roman, but does have an affair with Mariusz, a student. Roman, despite his own words, becomes excessively jealous and obsessed with the thought that Hanka might have followed his encouragement and taken a lover. He spies on her and learns of her relationship with Mariusz, unaware of the fact that Hanka has broken off the affair. Roman tries to commit suicide but survives. Hanka rushes to his side.

A man dies leaving an extremely valuable stamp collection to his two sons, Jerzy and Artur. Although they know very little about stamps, they are unwilling to sell. They learn that one very rare stamp is needed to complete a valuable set. To acquire the stamp Jerzy donates his kidney — the man in possession of the stamp is in need of a kidney for his daughter. Returning from hospital, Jerzy and Artur find that they have been burgled. The entire stamp collection is gone. Shamefully, they confess that they suspected each other and are reconciled.

Poland. Weronika, who sings beautifully, suffers from a heart condition. She has to choose — continue singing and risk her life, or give up her singing career. During a concert she suffers a heart attack and dies.

France. Véronique is Weronika’s double. She, too, has a beautiful voice and a heart condition. When Weronika suffers, Veronique senses that she must reject her singing career. She teaches music at a primary school. Alexandre, a puppeteer and story writer, visits her school. Days later she receives mysterious messages. She finds Alexandre at a station café waiting for her. In a hotel room, where they make love, Alexandre finds the photographs which Véronique took when she visited Poland. He sees Weronika, thinking it’s Véronique. Now Véronique realizes that she has a double.
Julie loses her husband, a renowned composer, and their young daughter in a car accident. She tries to forget and begin a new life. She moves to an area in Paris where she believes no one will find her but she cannot avoid all the traps – feelings, ambitions and deceptions which threaten her new freedom. Nor can she lose her husband’s – or is it her own? – music. This is one aspect of her life which she cannot control.

**Trois Couleurs: Blue**
Three Colours: Blue
1993

**Trois Couleurs: White**
Three Colours: White
1993

**Trois Couleurs: Red**
Three Colours: Red
1994

Karol, a Polish hairdresser in Paris, is humiliated. He has become impotent and his wife throws him out on to the streets. He meets a fellow countryman who helps smuggle him back into Poland. On home ground, Karol tries to be ‘more equal’ than others and plots revenge on his wife. No longer happy with the small-time hairdressing establishment which he ran with his brother, he tries to make quick money. Through connivance and cunning, he makes himself a fortune, then feigns his own death. His wife appears at his ‘funeral’, and when Karol discloses himself to her, their love for each other is resurrected. But it is too late.

**Valentine, a young model,** knocks over a dog as she drives. She takes the bitch in, checks out her address and goes in search of her owner. She finds the villa and discovers an elderly gentleman, living in neglect and eavesdropping on telephone conversations. Initially indignant at what the man is doing, she is nevertheless drawn into a psychological relationship. A friendship grows as the Judge begins to confide in Valentine.

**Directors:** Krzysztof Kieślowski, Krzysztof Piesiewicz
**Screenplay:** K. Kieślowski, Krzysztof Piesiewicz
**Cinematography:** Piotr Sobociński
**Editor:** Urszula Lesiak
**Art director:** Claude Lenoir
**Sound:** Jean-Claude Laureux
**Sound mixer:** William Flageollet
**Executive producer:** Yvon Crenn
**Production companies:** MK2 Productions/SA/CAB Productions/Tor Production
**Cast:** Juliette Binoche, Benoît Regent, Florence Pernel, Charlotte Very, Helene Vincent, Philippe Volter, Claude Denet, Emmanuelle Riva, Florence Vignon, Jacek Ostaszewski, Yann Tregouet, Isabelle Sadayan, Daniel Martin, ...
In 1994, the acclaimed director Krzysztof Kieslowski, known especially for The Decalogue (Filmfest DC, 1995) and Blue, White, and Red, announced that he wanted to retire from films and spend the rest of his life “smoking cigarettes on a quiet beach somewhere,” so he was reluctant, when approached by Wierzbicki, to take part in this interview documentary. This Danish-produced insight into the master, whom Desson Howe recently described in The Washington Post as “part of the great-director pantheon that includes Jean Renoir, Federico Fellini, Yasujiro Ozu, Max Ophuls, and Andrei Tarkovsky,” is presented in memorium. Poland, in Polish with English subtitles.

Producer: Karen Hjort
Screenplay: Krzysztof Wierzbicki
Cinematography: Jacek Petrycki
Editor: Milenia Fiedler
Music: Zbigniew Preisner
Principal Cast:
Krzysztof Kieślowski

TV Documentary
colour
56 mins
Addresses

Studio Filmowe TOR
Pulawska 61
02-595 Warszawa, Poland
tel. (22) 455-303
fax (22) 455-045

The Association of Polish Filmmakers
Krakowskie Przedmiescie 21/23
00-071 Warszawa, Poland
tel. (22) 276-785
fax (22) 263-096

The Film, Television and Theatre School Lodz
ul. Targowa 61/63
90-323 Lodz, Poland
tel. (48-42) 748 180
fax (48-42) 748 139

Juliette Binoche
chez FMS, 7, rue Lincoln
75008 Paris, France

Julie Delphy
c/o William Morris Agency
151 El Camino Dr.
Beverly Hills, CA 90212, USA

Irène Jacob
c/o Nicole Cann
1 rue Alfred de Vigny
75008 Paris, France
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Krzysztof Kieślowski
I’m so-so

State Academy of Arts Stuttgart
Am Weißenhof 1
D-70191 Stuttgart
Germany
April 1998

Thanks to
Professor Manfred Kröplien
and Professor Günter Jacki

Laserprints and Colorprints
on book-paper 80 g/qm
edition 4

Frank-Joachim Grossmann
Holzstrasse 1
D-67346 Speyer
tel. (06232) 79594

Also thanks to
Birgit and Yves Grossmann
Gerburg Bischof
Erik Christiansen (DRTV)
Dietmar Brühmüller
Hagen Kayser
Remo Krembel
Marion Ottawa
Ulrike Rothe-Becker
Margarethe Schmiedel
Anja Schneider

and my parents