

Language and Cognition in Film Interaction

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The topic of the paper consists in linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of communication (facial expressions, gestures) between persons and between a person and a computer which are presented in Krzysztof Kieślowski's (1941-1996) *The Decalogue: One* (1988). The paper aims at a thorough analysis of those scenes in the film, in which the director ponders over the core of human communication (person-to-person): (1) a conversation between the father and the son, (2) a conversation between the boy and his aunt, and (3) the lecture of the protagonist on communication. The second part of the text pinpoints the innovativeness of Kieślowski as regards creation of film statements concerning the new method of human communication related to technologizing, namely the human-computer one: (1) "the conversation" of the boy with his mother via the computer, (2) spontaneous turning on of the computer, and (3) the mathematical "genius" of the machine. The conclusions will contain 1988's reflections of the director concerning communication—both the still relevant and the already outdated ones.

Keywords: dialogue, the word in the film, film as a language of moving images, film communication, communicative community (cultural, as a reference to *The Ten Commandments*, and media—indication towards a new means of communication, a computer), language and cognition

The Decalogue: One has been one of the most difficult parts to present as a story.
We needed to find a certain pagan fascination in the contemporary world.
—Krzysztof Kieślowski

Introduction

Sometimes that phrase may be a charades and word plays. On the one hand, language is a tool of cognition that allows its speakers to "describe" and "talk about" the world. On the other, it is a medium that lets them acquire knowledge about what surrounds us (a means of communication). The first approach suggests the need to focus primarily on language. The second refers to the core of human relation with reality. Language and cognition is therefore a topic which is fascinating to linguists, psychologists, and film experts. The starting point of the discussion is the moment in which representatives of other humanities discuss the issue. Cinematology may enrich the discussion by new contexts; namely analysis and interpretation of linguistic and metalinguistic phenomena (facial expressions, gestures) present in the film—consciously introduced and functionalized. This brings a cinema expert closer to a literature expert, since they both analyze linguistic communication, with the dominant artistic function super—organizing the message.

Linguists and literature experts usually refer to very general and abstract notions: language as a system (langue), words which enable sending messages (langage) and speech—the concrete realization of the words (parole). The centre of attention consists therefore of messages which are linguistically transparent (with the

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dominant informative function) and spontaneous (something which has not been previously recorded on paper or functionalized in any manner). Similar rules pertain to mimics, gesticulation and more generally: proxemics. When this point of view is enriched, the analyst may check how communication processes are implemented (*parole*) in a concrete material. This becomes even more interesting when the centre of attention is a fictional film, and thus material which had been premeditated and designed (with a script and shooting script).

The art of film allows its analysts to look at two communication situations within the film, which unfold at two levels: in the presented world and in the space of cinematic messages. In the latter case it might be called a second-degree “conversation” (internalized and written into the film): (1) dialogue/dialogues in the film and (2) a film as a dialogue: the sender—the receiver (film in interaction).

The second level becomes a challenge for a designed recipient who becomes an interlocutor and active partner for the director during the screening. This justifies the following expressions: dialogue in film as a language (literary and cultural code) in interaction, and film as a “language of moving pictures” (a system: dictionary, frame, shot, scene, take, etc. and rules according to which film signs are connected). The first variant brings forward a method of judging whether the creator of a film refers to a cultural text known in the European culture, a sort of a code (thus, a repertoire of meaningful elements and a set of rules which allow us to understand them). The second variant assumes that the artist is a “disposer of rules” conscious of the existence and possibilities given by the “language of moving images”. He or she “throws a gauntlet” to the implied recipient. In this sense, *The Decalogue: One* (1988, see Appendix) by Krzysztof Kieślowski (1941-1996) is a dialogue with the recipients of a film message concerning the Decalogue—both that of the *Bible* (the idea of a series based on *The Ten Commandments*), and that of the film. Who is the modelled spectator, and whether the initiated communication situation has been successful are issues worth the critics’ attention.

The words—not only in dialogues or monologues, but also as the process of communication—have been thematized in *The Decalogue: One*. Here, it would be important to focus not only on the language of translation, one of the themes of the film, but also the film as a second-level linguistic and visual message. Such issues have already been undertaken by other researchers, for instance, Hendrykowski (1982, 1999): (1) the word in the film and (2) moving images as language.

Such a state of affairs allows the critic to take an internal and auto-thematic perspective with reference to the motto of this paper. The director, Krzysztof Kieślowski, very clearly suggests that one ought to remember about the fictional space (the word in the film versus the presented world in a film work of art, the film dialogue as a “conversation” with previously established “roles”—including roles for recipients at a higher and abstract level of communication). What is even more interesting, that space lies at the border between sacrum and profanum, at the beginning of the cultural evolutionary process of thinking about communicative communities, attributed to the popularity of computers, the new medium (the cognitive and comparative approach). It will be important to analyze problems such as: (1) dialogue as one of the tools enabling communication (the perspective from outside and inside of the film); (2) “the language of moving images” which allows for (re)cognition and description of relations and interdependencies in the film language—as well as on the border between the language and reality it describes, by comparison of a fictional and factual film; (3) “the language of moving images” and research thereof versus new media (the computer), its evolution in the technology age (the “analogous viewer” and “digital world”); (4) film communication (linguistic and metalinguistic: gesture, facial expressions, proxemics, etc.); and (5) television (also cultural) communication as an ingredient of identity and community.

The starting point for the discussion is the plot of *The Decalogue: One* by Krzysztof Kieślowski. This television series refers to *The Ten Commandments* and turns out to be ideal material to analyze a bigger issue, communication communities. When reading documents touching upon this work of *Amateur's* (1979) author, one often encounters phrases such as:

The Decalogue concerns us all, all the people from the Earth Community. Sometimes we are protagonists of significant events, and sometimes we happen just to pass by a tragic incident, and be its—conscious or unconscious—observers. Regardless of whether we play the main role or are just stunts, this is our community, our life. This *Decalogue* refers to us all... (Lagorio, 1992, pp. 45-47)

Such a look at the issue may offend some, since it is anachronistic and arbitrary, but remains valid for others.

Krzysztof Kieślowski belongs to artists who were interested in the world around since the very beginning. He definitely was a director “believing in reality”, the possibility of learning more about the world and communication with other human beings. The beginnings of his artistic career were related to documentary art, which according to the director of *The Decalogue* performs utilitarian functions. It may change something but for that requires patience and a look full of understanding. After several years the director decided that document is a dead means of expression—probably in a too definitive way. It is a good starting point for the discussion on the nature of documentary language and the importance of the very “writing” in images. The mimetic element dominated in *The Decalogue* as well, despite the fictionalization. Such a state of events may be related to the evolution of director’s viewpoints. He would become favorable towards creation (the dynamic element) instead of reproduction (the static element). These “split interests” were somehow confirmed by Kieślowski in *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991), and then developed primarily in his three last films: *Blue* (1993), *White* (1993), and *Red* (1994). These were projects after which the director of *The Calm* (1976) stated he did not have anything else to say and planned leaving cinema behind. Facts and fiction as well as the growing supremacy of creation over reproduction are the essence of his work.

The Decalogue is an important project, as it depicts the aforementioned evolution. The following elements indicate that: (1) the interest in realization of a television series—a cycle of films, the problem of series and the phenomenon of semiotization, reference to the “never-ending semiosis” and the last scene of *The Decalogue: One*—the face of the dead boy visible on the TV screen; (2) mixing reality with fiction (dramatization of real events known by the co-author of *Decalogue’s* script, Krzysztof Piesiewicz (1945-1987)); (3) the auto-analytical subject matter of *The Decalogue: One*, which in fact is a film message concerning the core of communication; (4) forecasting the changes occurring in thinking about communicative community, appearance of the machine—a new “conversational” partner, invoking the topic: “screens as new spaces for communication”; and (5) *The Ten Commandments* as a cultural text which designs communicative community.

What is considered here are linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of communication (facial expressions, gestures) between persons and between a person and a computer which are presented in Krzysztof Kieślowski’s *The Decalogue: One*. With such a take on the problem, it is possible to perform a thorough analysis of the scenes in which the director ponders over the core of human communication (person-to-person): (1) the conversation of the father, Krzysztof, with his son, Paweł, about death and God; (2) the conversation of the son, Paweł, with his aunt Irena about God; and (3) the lecture of Krzysztof, the protagonist, on communication.

On the other hand it allows to pinpoint the innovativeness of Kieślowski as regards creation of film statements concerning the new method of human communication related to technologizing, namely the

human-computer one. A detailed analysis of the following scenes will help illustrate the point: (1) “the conversation” of the boy with his mother via the computer; (2) spontaneous turning on of the computer: *I’m ready...*; and (3) “the genius” of the machine which becomes the new god.

Conclusions from the considerations may be summed up as indications to director’s reflections on these topics: (1) linguistic communication (communicative communities) as regards the European culture: *The Ten Commandments* is a text that lets the viewers talk about religious or cultural community, and a post-modern one: the online communicative community (virtual nomadism and rules for creation of an online community) and (2) learning about the world, sense of life and death with the means of the language (spoken and written) in the past and now.

The focus on abovementioned scenes allows the analyst to select thoughts from 1988 which are still relevant and some are outdated.

Dialogues in *The Decalogue: One* *The Decalogue: One* as a Dialogue

The notion of the “dialogue” suggests two internalized conversations, led in the dramatized layer of the film by its characters, and also the most important, “coded” in the film message, referring to the “I” of the author (sender) and “I” of the viewer (recipient) in the film message. Such approach to the film message, namely switchability of roles and interaction is partially justified with literary fascinations of Kieślowski, Dostoyevsky, Mann, Camus, and Kafka. It would be good to analyze the following elements of the cinematographic message: (1) literary projects of *The Decalogue: One* (script and shooting script); already at the writing stage the director suggested that the originator of the series Krzysztof Piesiewicz got rid of adjectives and adverbs. The planned verismo (in film art) refers us to the austerity of documents; (2) the word in the opening and closing credits, accompanied at the beginning by transcendental music and an image of lake surface, and at the end by the image with a smiling boy’s face and a musical motif on flute; and (3) the word in dialogues and monologues—what is important is the domination of the first form of the spoken word in the analyzed message, and noticing that the dialogues feature very succinct, balanced and refined utterances.

The first dialogue between the boy and the father about the essence of life and death (the secular perspective) and its equivalent, the dialogue of the director’s “I” (internalized sender of the message) with the viewer’s “I” takes place as follows:

Paweł: Why do people die?

Krzysztof: It depends... from heart attacks or cancer.

Paweł: I mean... What is death?

Krzysztof: Death... The heart stops pumping the blood to the brain... the brain stops working, everything stops functioning... a person dies.

Paweł: Is that all?

Krzysztof: That’s all... what matters is the memory of what kind of a person you were. (...) Leave it, Paweł, it is too early for such conversations, what do you want, it’s still morning.

The dialogue includes an important suggestion that death touches everyone (even a child), indicated by the crossing from the abstract level to the reality: “to be” in the second person singular, past tense: “were”. The communication between protagonists has been purposefully disrupted by the father who wants to save the boy from sadness and introduces the wordplay: “too early” (in fact: for you to ask about death) and “it’s morning”

(in fact: return to the everyday life). Then, the dialogue concerns the belief in souls. Such thoughts help some cope with the awareness of human mortality. Obituaries noticed by the boy in his father's newspaper justify the willingness of the living to remember only the good things about the deceased.

The second dialogue between the boy and his aunt about God and faith (the religious perspective) is a reflection of the dialogue between the "I" of the director and the "I" of the viewer (as above). It establishes the relation between characters and shows another possible take on the same issue. At the beginning, the characters are standing at a distance. With time, the conversation becomes more intimate and they sit at the table where photographs of the Pope blessing people are placed. Finally, their meeting ends in a hug. The aunt explains that God, equated with love, is in this gesture. This is another take at the same issue: the essence of life and death. It is a suggested change, since new meaningful props appear; instead of a newspaper with obituaries, we see images (photos). Love replaces rationality.

The third dialogue takes place between Krzysztof and the aunt, concerns enrolment of the boy to religion lessons and is a telephone conversation. The characters do not see each other. The viewer only hears and observes one of them, Paweł's father. The man gives his sister free rein as regards education of the child. Thus, he presents openness to other ways of thinking and living. The openness is related to external encoding mechanisms typical for the realistic outlook on life. It also forecasts potential new contacts via for instance the Internet.

Finally, it is good to mention the lecture delivered by Krzysztof to the students, concerning translation and new tools (such as the computer) helpful at translations. It also has an equivalent of the internalized monologue of the director's "I" projected at the "I"s of recipients. This situation is particularly interesting due to spatial arrangement resembling the situation of a cinema-goer. The lecture starts with an analysis of associations behind the word "pod-judz-aństwo" (troublemaking, in Polish literally "under-instigating"). Already at the word level, the director suggests an invisible "game" of reality and fiction in the film. What is named and unnamed (see Table 1):

Table 1

Game of the Word (or Formative Game-Analysis)

Sphere I	Sphere II	Sphere III
Judas	podbechtywać	draństwo
Juda	podskakiwać	zaprzaństwo
judzenie	podkopywać	świństwo
judzić	podjudzać	kołtuństwo
		państwo

The word "podjudzać" (to make trouble) does not appear in the film, although it is used as a synonym to the one analyzed by the character. The suggestion of the director is as follows: There is a word which describes the activity, but it is not indicated. It is replaced by another, non-existent one. Research of translato-logists is often analogical to research of creators of messages, including (forecasting) virtual messages.

An analysis of poetic features of *The Decalogue: One* is also important for the discussion on the "coded" dialogue between the director and the viewer:

(1) The title of the film—reference to reason: logos (Latin: *decalous*, from Greek: *dekálogos*), but also to the Holy *Bible*.

(2) The topic of the film—meaning of life, essence of death, presence of God, and possibility to delve into

these themes via a contact with another person or the world in general.

(3) Narration and plot, most importantly: intellectual discipline next to chance and fate related to it, necessity to make choices suggested by the title.

(4) Character/characters: that may refer both to Krzysztof, the namesake of Kieślowski and Piesiewicz (film creators), and the triangle made by the main characters: the father, the son, and the aunt. Here, we might refer to the trilemma as a scheme for conclusion drawing that allows us to understand the story. The man stands on the side of the rational world and science. The most significant prop in the film which characterizes him the best is his computer. The woman stands on the side of the irrational world of faith. Things that characterize her the best are images and signs related to religion. The child stands between these two characters. The death of the boy is therefore the result of previous choices of others—the adults.

(5) The construction of time and space—The director shows the world he knows very well. The reality is contemporary to the times the film was made, namely 1987/1988, and it is based in one housing estate where all the characters from all the episodes of the series “live”.

(6) The dominating means of film expression: ellipsis, cliff-hangers, gradation, and many others hide the “inner” crack in the world of the characters caused by the lack of one of family members: the mother.

(7) Sound (acoustic effects, music) and silence.

Cognition and thinking about communication is only possible when there are two parties: the sender and recipient of the message. Not only the message, but also its context and the code to which it refers are important. The first episode of *The Decalogue* series by Krzysztof Kieślowski is a message. The sender is the director, and designed recipient—the television spectator. Importantly, this is a TV series, and television—the medium via which the film has been broadcast. The code to which the artist refers is clearly heterogeneous, both as regards the type of message used (film art), the topic (*The Ten Commandments*), and the means of coverage (television). It is thus possible to speak about the following codes that enable us to understand the message:

(1) The film code: synergy of the image and sound (choice of sets, takes, composition of particular frames, movement within the frame, elements of scenography; words, acoustic effects, music, silence).

(2) The cultural code: the past (at the philosophical level: reference to the *Bible* and *Decalogue* as ethical “signposts”, and to the community of “times of print”, “times of the Book”) and the future (at the philosophical level, reference to the new God—computer and the idea of artificial intelligence, “times of new media, of money”).

(3) The television code: allows us to ponder over issues such as repetitiveness (the series builds a system of connections), availability, and mass production.

The most interesting point of reference here is in this case the cultural code that enables understanding of two dialogues in *The Decalogue: One*: (1) between the little protagonist and his aunt and (2) between the aunt and the father of the boy (the telephone call concerning enrolling the boy to religion classes).

The cultural code understandable to the European community refers to those areas of communication which are related to religion and the *Decalogue* featured in the title. The commandment presented in the first episode of the series by Krzysztof Kieślowski is the first commandment:

I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. You shall have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: You shall not make for yourselves an idol, nor any image of anything that is in the heavens above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD

thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. (*The Holy Bible*, 2000, p. 86)

The quote sounds rather ambiguous in the context of *The Decalogue: One*. First of all, it informs about liberation from the past (after some time). Secondly, it warns against dangers related to such liberation. Freedom may lead directly to the void without any—or very deceptive—support. In the film, Kieślowski suggests that the belief in reason may be such support (main character's Krzysztof's rational approach to the world). The computer announces changes caused by the feeling that God is not present in the contemporary world. It is thus a signal of a new order, appearance of a new generation and new community. It will not be joined by writing on stone tablets with rules for ethical behavior, but by computer network. Virtuality, anonymity, and lack of real contact suggest that a new communicative situation has occurred. It is more and more often difficult to say who the sender is and who the recipient, as well as what the real context of the "conversation" (contact) is or as in the film the dialogue via the Internet. The "surface" of the computer screen, just as the lake surface, hides or replaces the face, image of the body. It creates the world in which absent or even dead characters, e.g., the wife and son of Krzysztof, exist. As a result, there are numerous misunderstandings following such communication. The conversation with the computer (the dialogue with the machine in the film) suggests it is possible to move quite smoothly: (1) from the feeling that some information is transmitted to the impression that there is no recipient for the message or that they are not interested. An example could be the "non-existent" conversation with the mother via the computer, which informs that the woman sleeps at 15.33; (2) from the state in which the dialogue with the machine is a quirk or fun, to the feeling of tiredness; and (3) from the conviction that the conversation is intimate to the observation that it might be just the opposite.

Another important element is the analysis of functions of the linguistic communication in *The Decalogue: One*. They are: (1) the autotelic/artistic function (*The Decalogue: One* as a film message, artistic expression, film as a work of art, Kieślowski as an artist); (2) the informative/cognitive function (*The Decalogue: One* as a message describing the past, the world which is no longer there, its characters and their problems, and as a statement on an important topic); (3) the magical function (*The Decalogue: One* as a film statement on the topic which is impossible to verbalize, for instance presence of God, faith, essence of death, sense of life); (4) the expressive function (the director's "I" written into the film message, and thus the suggested position or avoidance of taking positions towards a given topic); and (5) the impressive function (emotions and virtual recipient implied in the message). Kieślowski would speak about a certain "game" played with himself and the spectator in the film.

The impressive function appears also at the musical level of the film, consisting among others of the musical motif composed by Zbigniew Preisner (1945-), dominated by the flute. It is heard in the transcendent parts of the film, six times: (1) in the opening credits (surface of the lake with green residue); (2) when Paweł goes to the store, meets his friend and sees a dead dog; (3) at the balcony with water frozen in a milk bottle; (4) when the father checks the strength of ice on the lake; (5) when he learns that Paweł skated on the frozen lake; and (6) during the return home from the church. Other important and meaningful acoustic elements are: the cooing of the pigeons, the cawing of ravens, the sound of fingers on computer keyboard, the sound of firefighting vehicles, helicopters, short-wave radios; the noise of children playing, whimpering of the dog, etc.. All the sounds impact the reception of *The Decalogue: One*, as they forecast the final scene, and thus the end of

a certain world, the world of a young innocent boy.

The phatic function in the plot layer dominates mostly during the two phone conversations between Krzysztof and his sister Irena, concerning enrolment of Paweł to religion lessons and then after he has gone missing. The first time the contact is not really established and the conversation ends with responsibility being transferred to the aunt. The second time the contact is impossible since Irena does not know what happened to the missing child.

Conclusions

The Decalogue: One is a great parable of absence and the lack of a mother, only partially “substituted” by the aunt. In the film, the void is visualized as the computer screen which replaces actual contact. Via the screen, for instance, does the boy learn that the mother is asleep. The fact that there is no real contact is like a prophecy. The new medium—despite Krzysztof’s fascination with the machine—cannot fill the lack of love, and thus intellectual, emotional and physical contact with another person. The mother belongs to another time and space which will come (a prophecy of the future), but as of now is not available to the young character. At the TV screen in the final scene, we see Paweł’s face after his death. The boy is not related to the digital (computer) world, but to the analogous (TV) one, which is already slipping into oblivion. The deformation of his face in the close-up reminds painters’ anamorphosis—a device that hides the truth of life, time passing, and death. It is enough to refer to identical prophecy in the painting entitled “The Ambassadors” (1533) by Hans Holbein (1496-1543), already in the Renaissance.

In 1998, Wiesław Godzic wrote about the “analogue viewer” and “digital world” as a forecast for the future. Ten years after his article we are living in a digital world, and it seems there is no return and escape from it. It is worth remembering that the topic has been undertaken by Kieślowski 20 years ago in an artistic form of cinematography, in *The Decalogue: One*. After all those years, it is worth watching once again, bearing in mind the words of Godzic (1998):

The analogue is based on similarity and is a domain of human senses, essence of human presence in the world. It is founded on human right to formulate vague and ambiguous answers, and human unwillingness to make choices between *yes* and *no*. (...) *The digital* is the opposite—it is made on binary strings, and its symbol is a subjugated world, where each element may be dissected, analysed, repacked and sent to any place—with full conviction it will get there soon and in an ideal state. At the same time *the digital* may symbolise those features of popular culture which require specific postmodern knowledge: encyclopaedic, ruthless and doubtless (as presented for instance in most of television quiz shows). (pp. 42-45)

Kieślowski forecast this state of contemporary culture.

The hidden pessimism of the director is interesting, and contrary to the initial attitude of the protagonist. Kieślowski’s scepticism concerned the digitalization of the contemporary world, which has its good and negative sides. It is related to the speed and “tyranny of the moment”, development of technologies for communication and sharing, but also to the lack of respect for copyright or writing (symbolized by broken inkwell and spilled ink). On the other hand, one should be reminded that one of its basic themes (cf. the motto of the paper) is consideration of the “clarity” of reason (numbers and computer) and the “darkness” of faith (graphic portrayal of the word, thus its “image” and computer). Such an approach could have been offered only by an agnostic. The film resembles a fictional game of chess. On the one side, there are “perfection” and “necessity”. On the other—their opposites: *The Decalogue*—*The Decalogue* according to Kieślowski is a dialogue, not monologue—with the reader and spectator, about loneliness and pain, and thus concentration and

not revolt. After all, the film is about an attempt at communication, and definitely not about escaping. Despite contemporary “hold” on the fascination with the new medium, the topic of the film—the very core of communication—remains relevant.

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Appendix: Filmography

The Decalogue: One

Directed by: Krzysztof Kieślowski

Written by: Krzysztof Piesiewicz, Krzysztof Kieślowski

Cinematography: Wiesław Zdort

Music: Zbigniew Preisner

Cut: Ewa Smal

Film set: Halina Dobrowska

Production Executive: Ryszard Chutkowski

Cast: Henryk Baranowski (Krzysztof), Wojciech Kłata (Paweł, son of Krzysztof), Maja Komorowska (Irena, sister of Krzysztof), Artur Barciś (a sitting man in the sheepskin coat), Agnieszka Brustman (chess player), Maciej Bormiński (father of Jacek; in the opening credits as: Bormiński), Maria Gładkowska (Ania, friend of Krzysztof who teaches Paweł English), Ewa Kania (Ewa Jezierska, mother of Marek, Paweł's friend), Aleksandra Kisielewska (mother of Jacek), Aleksandra Majsiuk (Ola), Magda Sroga-Mikołajczyk (journalist interviewing the school headmaster), Anna Smal-Romańska, Maciej Sławiński (school headmaster), Piotr Wyrzykowski