

Silence in Krzysztof Kieslowski's *The Decalogue* : A Cagian Perspective

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*We need not fear these silences,
we may love them.*
—John Cage

According to the Old Testament, Moses received the Ten Commandments from God and then presented them to the Israelites. These basic laws of life have been adapted into numerous cultures and continue to inspire artists all over the globe. Polish filmmaker Krzysztof Kieslowski, for example, created a cycle of ten films entitled *The Decalogue* (1988), in which he explored various aspects of these ancient laws. Working in conjunction with co-writer Krzysztof Piesiewicz and composer Zbigniew Preisner, Kieslowski completed a monumental work in which he presented a unique version of the Ten Commandments. His rendition incorporated a sensitive and skilled synthesis of music, sounds and silence presented in a fragmented and sparse manner that can be allied in some ways with the aesthetic of American composer John Cage (1912-1992). In this essay, I suggest that the film cycle can be analyzed from a Cagian point of view in which sounds and silence play a salient and musical role.

John Cage is famous for his appreciation of silence, and he understood that it required sound in order to exist. In his "Lecture on Something," he explained, "This is a talk about something and naturally also a talk about nothing. About how something and nothing are not opposed to each other but need each other to keep on going" (*Silence* 129). In the written version of the lecture, he included spaces in the text as well as some blank pages, emphasizing the reliance of something on nothing. He was also cognizant of the fact that genuine silence does not truly exist. He had the opportunity to visit an anechoic chamber at Harvard University, which is a room that is made with insulation and materials that will absorb sound and provide complete silence. After spending time in the room, he told the engineer that he heard both a high and a low sound. The engineer explained, "The high one was your nervous system in operation. The low one was your blood in circulation" (qtd. in Gann 162).

Although he realized it was not possible to experience true silence, he observed that people often ignore the sounds of everyday life, which become a type of silence. Christopher Shultis pointed out that for Cage, "[t]here were only intended and unintended sounds" (92), and the unintended sounds, the sounds that became part of the background of daily living, frequently tended to be ignored. One of the composer's

contributions to music and to contemporary perception of sound was to bring unintended sounds from the background and situate them in the foreground, thereby providing them with a much higher profile. He even suggested that carefully listening to them could be considered a musical experience.¹

In regard to silence, Cage is remembered in particular for his musical composition 4'33" (Four Minutes Thirty-Three Seconds). In this mid-twentieth century piece, any number of musicians may perform any particular type of instruments. The performance, however, does not involve the literal playing of the instruments; the musicians simply listen with the audience to the sounds around them. Thus, a cough, the rustling of a program, the hum of an air conditioning system, or traffic outside on the streets become the music. For the duration of the piece, everyone listens carefully to the 'music' of everyday life.² In his book *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4'33"*, Kyle Gann explains that the piece had both its critics and supporters, but that "[f]or many, it was a kind of artistic prayer, a bit of Zen performance theater that opened the ears and allowed one to hear the world anew" (11). He wrote that Cage was involved in the "act of framing, of enclosing environmental and unintended sounds in a moment of attention," and that the composer believed that "all sounds" were "music."³ 4'33" is frequently referred to as his 'silent' piece, because of the absence of 'music,' or instrumental/vocal expression.⁴

In *The Decalogue*, Kieslowski also situates miscellaneous sounds and silence in the foreground. With the sparseness of words and in conjunction with Preisner's fragmented music, various noises and silences become salient. In his book, *The Films of Krzysztof Kieslowski*, Joseph G. Kickasola writes, "There is a certain deadness that permeates the entire *Decalogue*" (174). Yet the 'deadness' or 'silence' throughout the film series is not truly silent; it lacks consistent dialogue but includes various sounds such as wind blowing, dogs barking, glass breaking, a telephone ringing, and sirens blaring. These sounds, which are carefully integrated with Preisner's music, can be viewed as part of the musical experience.

The first episode deals with the first commandment: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."⁵ The false god in this case is science, which is highly esteemed by the father/scientist Krzysztof. In fact, it is his trust in the scientific method that ultimately leads to the death of his precocious son, when he allows the boy to skate on ice that he has deemed safe using scientific calculations on a computer (and poking the ice with a stick). In this case, the substitute is the computer and the father's general reliance on science and reason. When the ice breaks and his son drowns, the father realizes that his idol, science, has failed him. Kickasola explains that "the event is not the result of a scientific factor overlooked by the computer, but an utter failure on its part" (169).

This film opens with the sound of the wind blowing by a lake. A predominance of string instruments is heard, and a melodic line performed on a recorder emerges and repeats a three-note motive which is haunting and intense. Although one hears sounds and music, there is a sense of silence until the first words of dialogue are spoken between the scientist and his son.⁶ Noises such as birds flying and cooing, water

splashing from a faucet, the rhythmic typing on a computer, walking/sliding/running on ice, the telephone or doorbell ringing, a newspaper rustling, bells tolling, chess pieces sliding, a door squeaking, running/walking on stairs or the ground, and the sirens of emergency vehicles blaring can be heard throughout the episode. The alarming scream of a woman is both vocal and musical. Strings and other instruments are heard at various times throughout the film, particularly to build suspense and climactic tension as rescuers search for a body immersed in the lake. The music seems to take on a somber, tragic tone as the young boy Pavel is drawn from the water. The film concludes with an intense instrumental solo on the recorder.

Although there is a certain 'deadness' or sense of silence in this first episode, and throughout the film series, there is still sound, including music and these other noises. Interestingly, even early 'silent' films included some type of sound. In *Thinking About Film: A Critical Perspective*, Dean Duncan wrote: "Silent movies were almost never silent. They were accompanied by pianists or organists, small ensembles or large orchestras, all of which added to the presentational, stylized nature of that period's cinema experience" (42).⁷ The hovering silence in the first film of *The Decalogue* tends to be more from the lack of initial dialogue than from the music and other sounds heard. In fact, Cage would likely suggest that the sounds of everyday life heard in the episode can be viewed as music. In an interview with Joan Retallack, he explained that "music takes place wherever we are and is expressed by the sounds that we hear and call simply ambient sound; or, we call them silence!" (190). He would view such sounds as an integral part of the musical expression of the film.

The second episode explores the commandment: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." Kickasola suggests that it deals with the "sanctity of speech" and that "one's word in human life" (164) carries much weight. Dorota, the main character who is a musician, is pregnant with her lover's child while her husband is in the hospital suffering with cancer. She pleads with the doctor, who is also her neighbor and lives in an apartment on a higher floor higher (suggesting a God-like figure), to proclaim whether her husband will live or die. If he is to die, she will give birth to the baby, and if he is to live, she will abort the baby.

In this film the music is quite sparse. Therefore, extraneous sounds, such as the raking of grass and leaves, chirping of a bird, ringing of the door and telephone, splashing or dripping of water, barking of dogs, opening and closing of a door, beeping of the answering machine, sputtering and humming of a car, breaking of glass, and heavy breathing play an important 'musical' role. As with the first episode, there is a strong sense of silence in the beginning of the film, which includes miscellaneous sounds and lacks initial dialogue.⁸ Preisner's orchestral music, including the piano, is heard during some of the more intense moments, such as when the pregnant Dorota announces to her lover that she is having an abortion and when her husband appears to have conquered his illness. Additional music is also included among some of the tensions and difficulties the woman faces as a result of her infidelity and in response to her husband's illness. In the end, however, Dorota leaves her lover, keeps the baby, and her

husband recovers. The words of all the participants, but most profoundly the doctor, hold great weight in this film. The doctor's determination to remain silent for a long time, and not pronounce a definitive outcome regarding the husband's illness until towards the end of the film, plays a strong role in preserving the life of Dorota's unborn child.

The various sounds in this episode (and throughout the film cycle) are actually more controlled and intentional than many viewers may realize. Many sounds in filmmaking are addressed, to a large degree, in the post-production phase of creating a movie. Once the footage has been shot, undesirable noises that were picked up during production, particularly those filmed at an outdoor location, are eliminated. Then other sounds that need to be emphasized are often recreated in the studio and incorporated into the film as needed. Jack Donovan Foley (1891-1967), a sound editor at Universal Studios, was an expert at creating a wide variety of sound effects in the studio to enhance the sounds heard in a film. His name is now associated with this art, and the process has become an important part of the post-production process.⁹ The fact that sound is manipulated in this manner is significant and underscores the role of the filmmaking team in highlighting certain noises, particularly those found in daily living, such as ice cracking, wind howling, or keys jingling. These sounds, which are somewhat manipulated, are then interspersed with the music, and in this particular film cycle, they form a complex musical tapestry. Although Cage found music in sounds that occurred naturally, as a byproduct of everyday life, these more manipulated studio sounds that are made to seem part of daily living, can also be considered music.

The action of the third film, which examines the commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," takes place during Christmas Eve. In this episode, Janusz plans to celebrate the holiday with his wife and family, but is distracted by Ewa, a former lover. She convinces him to help her find her boyfriend, and this effort takes all night. She later confesses that this search was really an excuse to spend time with Janusz, because she believed his attention could keep her from committing suicide. Kickasola suggests that time is significant in this episode, and the way we choose to spend our time during holidays, day and night, etc., carries meaning (164). One could also consider the family as holy or sacred, especially during a religious holiday, and that choosing to spend time away from the family is similar to breaking the Sabbath. The issue becomes complex, however, because Janusz may have helped to save someone's life with his choice, which is, in the long run, an act of goodness.

The episode opens with a series of different musical passages. First, an inebriated man sings on the street. Then a formal choir performs Christmas songs, followed by an informal group singing a cappella (and somewhat out of tune) in a home. Orchestral music can be heard, after which a congregation sings at a midnight mass, accompanied by an organ. This is followed by more orchestral music and then a long break from actual music. Eventually more orchestral music is heard, some young children carolers sing a short Christmas song at a door, and the film concludes with the sounds of music. As is the case in the other episodes, miscellaneous noises can also be viewed as 'music,' such as the telephone buzzing, people walking/running, paper crumpling, cars racing/idling/humming, sirens blaring, doors opening and shutting, and bells tolling.¹⁰

The importance of sound in this film and throughout *The Decalogue* is underscored by the fact that a person is assigned to deal with sound for each episode. Although Kieslowski directs and Preisner composes the music for the entire film cycle, a variety of different people deal specifically with sound. For example, Malgorzata Jaworska is in charge of sound for episodes I, II, IV, and V; Nikodem Wolk-Laniewski handles it for episodes III, VI, VII, IX, and X; and Wieslawa Dembinska deals with it for episode VIII. The editor, Ewa Smal, who worked on all the films, also played in role in the effective way in which silence, sound, and music are presented in this cycle.

The fourth episode deals with the commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother." In this film, a young woman named Anka finds a sealed letter written by her deceased mother. In it she explains to her daughter that Michal, the only father she has known, is not her biological father. This episode explores complicated relationships between a parent and child, particularly those between those of the opposite sex. Kickasola explains that "the definition of 'father' and 'mother' and the role of intentionality in the definition of human relationships are key themes in this film" (193). He suggests that, similar to the other episodes, "this story features the commandment, not as a didactic point or lesson, but as ground for the articulation of modern ethical complexities." In the end, Michal, despite temptation to do otherwise, chooses to retain the relationship of father and daughter. Anka is also willing to accept him as her father, whether or not there is a genuine biological connection.

Throughout this film, there is a similar synthesis of music, silence, and sounds that exists in all the episodes. In the beginning, an orchestra briefly plays a series of long, held-out notes separated by rests or pauses. One of the salient aspects of the music is the inclusion of bass notes that act as an ostinato. This ostinato-type figure helps to unify the film structurally in that it recurs at various places throughout the work, including at the conclusion. Silence is also significant because in some ways it includes the music and other sounds. As in the other films, various noises can be affiliated with Preisner's music, including the pouring of water, ringing of the telephone and doorbell, muttering of announcements at the airport, a kiss, droning of airplanes, a slap on the face, crashing of glass, bustling of traffic on the streets, opening and closing of doors, echoing of footsteps, playing of children, and the crackling of a burning letter.¹¹

Preisner gained international fame for his success in composing the music for this film cycle. He studied art history at Jagiellonian University and taught himself music. He would buy a record, study the music, deconstruct it, and then rewrite parts of it to improve the original. Eventually he became the composer of film scores. Associating his work with "romanticism" ("The Music of Zbigniew Preisner"), Preisner is more drawn to music that is highly melodic than to other styles that are not. He refers to his film scores as "creations" because they do not easily fit into a particular category. His style tends to be experimental in its own way, with its sparseness, fragmentation, repetition, haunting harmonies, and melodic exploration.¹² Integrated with silence and sound in the film cycle, it can be examined from a Cagian point of view.

The fifth episode involves the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." It focuses on a young man, Jacek, who needlessly takes the life of a cab driver. The youth is found guilty for his crime and hung. Kickasola explains that this film concentrates on the theme of "murder and punishment" (164), and the question of capital punishment comes to the forefront. Is it ethical to kill a criminal as punishment for murder? In the book *Double Lives, Second Chances: The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieslowski*, Annette Insdorf points out that during the time the film cycle was made, Poland was actively practicing capital punishment. She suggests, "Even if the Biblical injunction of 'an eye for an eye' seems to justify the death of Jacek, the graphic authenticity of the execution is as difficult to watch as the first killing" (90). Kickasola writes of the "deathly stillness" (208) one finds at the end of the film. He finds irony in the fact that a physician, a lawyer, and a priest are present at the hanging, and these professions that are "dedicated to healing, justice, and restoration" tend to be "oddly out of place."

In this fifth film, there are brief musical fragments that are quite diverse. Music which is tonal and harmonious is heard in parts of the film, but there are also musical passages that are tense, ominous, and somewhat dissonant. One also finds curious juxtapositions, such as cheerful children's music on the radio after the murder of the taxi driver, which is a serious, somber offense. Some sounds in the film that can be affiliated with music include the murmuring of voices; opening, closing, and/or squeaking of a door; tolling/whistling/ringing of bells; playing/talking of children; humming/screeching of trucks, cars, and trains; footsteps on the floor, pavement, or stairs; and honking of a horn (particularly during the murder).¹³

According to a Cagian perspective, as suggested earlier, miscellaneous sounds can be framed, as in the silent piece 4'33". In this case, a musician or conductor determines how long the audience will listen to the noises in the environment around them. Cage believed, however, that it is also possible to simply be aware of and enjoy such sounds throughout the day, and in this sense 4'33" does not require a formal performance. In 1982 he explained to William Duckworth that he used the piece constantly. He said, "No day goes by without my making use of that piece in my life and in my work. I listen to it every day. . . I don't sit down to do it; I turn my attention to it. I realize that it's going on continuously" (qtd. in Gann 186). Kyle Gann suggests, "Ultimately, we are left with the conundrum that 4'33" has expanded into an infinite river of a piece into which any of us can dip at any time we please" (187). He explains further, "Someone can frame it, in performance or on recording, to draw attention to it. But for those who have an affinity for Cage's appreciation for the physicality of sound, even that is no longer necessary." In regard to *The Decalogue*, there are sounds that are, for the most part, intentional, recorded, and 'framed.' They are skillfully highlighted, which is evidence of Kieslowski's awareness of daily sound, and they reflect a Cagian appreciation for miscellaneous noise. Integrated with Preisner's music, they become part of the musical tapestry of the film cycle.

The sixth episode addresses the commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." In this film, Tomek, a young man who works in the post office, becomes obsessed with

Magda, a woman who lives in an apartment building opposite his. He spies on her looking through a telescope. The two finally meet and their eventual date concludes in extreme embarrassment for Tomek. He becomes so distraught with his experience with Magda that he becomes disenchanted with the concept of love and attempts to commit suicide. Eventually Magda realizes she has developed deeper feelings for Tomek, but by this time he seems to have lost interest in her. Kickasola suggests that the film explores the “nature and relation of love and passion” (164). A variety of issues are explored in addition to the main focus of fornication, adultery, love, lust, and passion, such as lying, deception, and killing (oneself).

This film opens with glass shattering on the ground followed by suspenseful, intense music. Throughout the episode one finds a variety of musical textures and instruments. For example, in some passages Preisner emphasizes the repetition of two notes ascending or descending. In other parts of the film Preisner incorporates a fuller sound with rich harmony often performed by multiple instruments. Silence is significant in this episode, as are other extraneous noises which can be considered part of the musical fabric, such as a door opening/closing/squeaking, a clock ticking or ringing, water splashing, a car screeching, footsteps, cars and traffic, dogs barking, and birds singing/chirping.¹⁴

The seventh episode presents the commandment, “Thou shalt not steal.” In the film, the young girl Ania lives with Ewa and is told that Majka is her sister. However, Majka is really her mother and wants Ania to know the truth. She ‘steals’ Ania and leaves her parents so that she can enjoy a mother/daughter relationship with her child. Kickasola points out that this particular film explores the concept of “[p]ossession as human need and temptation” (164). The desire for possession includes not only material items, such as homes, furniture, vehicles, clothes, etc., but also people and relationships. In this episode, the focus is on ownership of human beings and on relationships. There are, in a sense, multiple ‘thefts’ in the story. After Majka ‘kidnaps’ her own daughter, she says to Ewa, “You stole my daughter.” Insdorf writes that Ewa “was perhaps overly eager to be Ania’s mother because she could not have more children—‘robbed’ of the chance to procreate further” (106).

In this film, the music is sparse but extremely effective. One of the most salient aspects of the music is the repetition of three descending notes which function as a type of ostinato. These three notes can be associated with the three generations involved in the film: grandmother, mother, and granddaughter / old, younger, youngest / high note, lower note, lowest note. Preisner skillfully intertwines the repetition of the three notes and a melodic line to create music that is haunting, eerie, mystical, and intense. A stark contrast is provided with the music at a children’s puppet show, which is upbeat, light, and playful. An additional ‘musical’ element is the crying/wailing of a young girl in various parts of the film, including the beginning. The human voice, in this case, is like a wind instrument that expresses a certain agony, fear, and insecurity.

In the screenplay, the emphasis on silence, sound, and a children’s scream is apparent. The directions at the beginning of the episode are as follows:

Night. Our apartment block is asleep. Apart for the distant clattering of trams, the wind and the windows rattling in the wind, all is quiet. This all-enveloping silence is pierced by the sharp-pitched, dramatic scream of a young child. A light immediately appears in one of the windows. The screaming continues. (187)

Other noises are also intentional, as indicated in the instructions in the screenplay, such as the “pure and high pitched” (188) sound of a small whistle, a door that “bangs shut” (192), a telephone that rings and “shatters the nocturnal silence” (199), and the whistle from “an approaching train” that “can be heard from a distance” (212). These sounds, interspersed with Preisner’s music, become part of the musical qualities in the film.¹⁵

The eighth episode deals with the commandment, “That shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.” Zofia, a professor of ethics at the University of Warsaw, meets Elzbieta, a Jewish scholar from New York who listens to her lecture on ethics. As the story unfolds, we learn that when Elzbieta was younger and living in Poland, Zofia would not help to hide her during the Nazi Occupation. In the end, both women find some sort of closure when Elzbieta learns why Zofia refused assistance at that critical time in her life. Kickasola suggests that the film analyzes “[t]he difficulties of truth amid desperate evil” (164). He writes, “This remarkable film stands as the most philosophically direct of the ten films and, in my opinion, ranks among the greatest” (225). It also delves into the complexities of survival, guilt, repentance, compassion, forgiveness, and resolution.

In this film, the music is also sparse, but is supplemented by other sounds which can be considered musical. As the film begins, one hears a melodious instrumental solo that develops into a duet with two string instruments. This particular musical passage is repeated in various parts of the film, including the conclusion. In the very suspenseful passage of the film, plucked strings repeat notes which add to the mystery and tension of the scene. Additional bowed strings join in, as do other instruments, to create a rich contrast to the starkness of the previous music and to further intensify the building of the climax. Additional ‘musical’ sounds in the piece include footsteps, birds singing outside, the barking of a dog, the sputtering of a car, the ringing of various types of bells, the hum of traffic in a large tunnel, and knocking at the door.¹⁶

Some of the sounds are percussive in nature. In “An Autobiographical Statement,” Cage wrote that “percussion is completely open. It is not even open-ended. It has no end.” He explained that it is different from other sections of an orchestra, such as the strings, the winds, and the brass in that it occurs before and after the concert as well. He suggested that “percussion is exemplified by the very next sound you actually hear wherever you are, in or out of doors.” In this sense, many types of sounds in daily life are both percussive and musical in nature. This could include the clanging of pots and pans in a kitchen or the rhythmic knocking at a door, the types of sounds we often find highlighted in *The Decalogue*. Throughout the episode, even with the music and percussive sounds, there is a pervading sense of silence.

The ninth film explores the commandment, “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife.” In this case, a surgeon named Roman covets his own attractive wife.

When he learns of his impotence, he encourages her to get a lover. Once he gives her permission to do this, he becomes obsessed with her whereabouts and begins to spy on her. When he discovers she is seeing a young physics student, he becomes jealous, upset, and attempts to take his own life. Kickasola suggests that the ideal in the film involves “[t]he sanctity of commitment” (164). Realizing her error, his wife Hanka terminates the relationship with the student and attempts to repair her own troubled marriage. In discussing *The Decalogue* Kieslowski explained, “I believe the life of every person is worthy of scrutiny, containing its own secrets and dramas” (“An Introduction to *The Decalogue*”). He wanted to highlight particular individual situations that were “credible” and “recognizable.” In this and the other films in the cycle, he accomplished this objective, by presenting “extreme, extraordinary situations” for the characters, “ones in which they would face difficult choices and make decisions which could not be taken lightly.”

The ninth episode begins with silence. Eventually a short, haunting musical motive sounds with the general rhythm of short-short-long. The motive is introduced with three notes, but varies and sometimes has four or more notes. The melodic contour of the notes also varies, frequently following the pattern of pitches of same-same-higher or same-same-lower. In addition, the vocal music of a fictitious Dutch composer, Van den Budenmayer, is presented via a fictitious professional recording as well as through the brief a cappella rendition of Roman and a female patient. This music sounds again at the conclusion of the film, intertwined with the familiar three-note motive. Silence plays a significant role, as do other aural sounds that can be viewed as ‘musical,’ such as the opening/shutting/locking of a door, screeching/humming of a car, falling of rain, chirping of birds, traffic on the streets, tolling of a bell, ringing of the doorbell, footsteps, dialing and ringing of the telephone, barking of a dog, repetitive honking of the horn of the car, the television and its noises, pouring of milk, bells from horses, turning of the wheel of a bicycle, etc. The sound of a young girl playing and singing out-of-doors also adds to the musical texture of the work.¹⁷

John Cage loved sounds and noise, and chose to make them a part of his life rather than shut them out as some people might do. In an interview with Stephen Montague which was conducted at Cage’s loft in New York, the composer said, “But the thing about this place that is musical is the street noise from Sixth Avenue . . . I love it!” (208). Montague noted that Cage did not have double glass on his windows and asked, “Is that because you’ve always been fascinated with sound, noise, and so forth?” Cage responded:

I wouldn’t dream of getting double glass because I love all sounds. The traffic never stops, night and day. Every now and then a horn, siren, screeching brakes, extremely interesting and always unpredictable. At first I thought I couldn’t sleep through it. Then I found a way transposing the sounds into images so that they entered into my dreams without waking me up. (209)

Kieslowski seems to have a similar respect for sounds in his film cycle. There is no double glass to keep out the noise of daily life; rather, such sounds are brought to the foreground and become skillfully intertwined with the music and silence.

The last film addresses the commandment, “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s goods.” In this film two brothers inherit their father’s prized stamp collection. As they learn the value of the stamps, they go to various measures to safeguard it. However, in an effort to obtain the greatest monetary return for it, they become swindled and lose it all. Kickasola suggests that this episode examines “[g]reed and relationships” (164). He points out that although the brothers “have coveted, desired, been selfish, possessive, and suspicious of others” (241), in the end they come to love one another even more. He suggests that this is a pervading theme, not only in this episode, but throughout the entire film cycle. He explains that “giving oneself away to a loved one marks the beginnings of morality and its teleology.”

The music of a rock band opens this film with the persistent, dominant beat of drums, amplified instruments, and a male vocalist. This rock music as well as other intense and suspenseful music, such as the subtle roll of a drum, are interspersed at strategic moments during the film. As in many of the other episodes, silence is significant and is skillfully integrated with the music, voices, and other noises. Some of the sounds in the film which could be viewed as ‘music,’ include keys tinkling against each other; the piercing sound of an alarm; rustling of papers; ringing of the doorbell; steps on stairs; humming of cars, trucks, and traffic; barking of dogs; the incessant sound of birds chirping outside; and the rumbling of voices in a restaurant. The film concludes with the instrumental and vocal music of the rock band.¹⁸

Notes and References

- ¹ John Cage spoke about the sounds of silence in New York in 1991. See “John Cage about Silence” on YouTube.
- ² For a performance of Cage’s *4’33”* by pianist David Tudor, see “John Cage - *4’33”* by David Tudor.” For an orchestral performance on the same work conducted by Lawrence Foster, see “John Cage *4’33”* (BBC).”
- ³ For more information on the background, reception, and influence of *4’33”* and on its various versions, see Gann’s book *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage’s 4’33”*.
- ⁴ For a discussion on Cage’s emphasis on silence in his work, see my book *Words and Music: Camus, Beckett, Cage, Gould*.
- ⁵ The segmentation of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:3-17 varies according to interpretation. I am following the Roman Catholic enumeration as provided in the screenplay, translated into English by Phil Cavendish and Susannah Bluh. This same model occurs in Facets’ 2003 DVD version of the film cycle, as well as in Joseph G. Kickasola’s outline in his book *The Films of Krzysztof Kieslowski* (164). However, Kieslowski was not interested in a strict correlation of one particular commandment to one particular episode. He explained, “Some of my actors who were religious didn’t want to act in the ‘Decalogue’ unless I told them which commandment it was about. . . . But this is really not important. One can exchange the . . . sixth with the ninth, the fourth with the seventh” (qtd. in Insdorf 71).
- ⁶ To view the opening of the film with its permeating silence, see “Dekalog I - Krzysztof

Kieslowski, part 01/06” on YouTube.

⁷ In his autobiographical novel, *Le premier homme [The First Man]*, which was published thirty-five years after his death, Albert Camus describes the music that accompanied silent films shown in a theater in Algeria. During that epoch, it was common to see several different types of films, all ‘silent,’ as part of the entire day’s experience. First, there was a newsreel, followed by a short comedy. Then viewers could see the main feature, and finally a serial, which would usually be continued the following week. In Camus’ novel, an older woman wearing fingerless gloves played the piano as viewers watched the various films. He writes of accompaniment of the newsreel:

Le commentaire musical des actualités, en particulier, l’obligeait à changer de mélodie selon le caractère de l’événement projeté. Elle passait ainsi sans transition d’un gai quadrille destiné à accompagner la présentation des modes de printemps à la marche funèbre de Chopin à l’occasion d’une inondation en Chine ou des funérailles d’un personnage important dans la vie nationale ou international. (92)

Providing musical commentary to the news, in particular, required her to change melodies according to the nature of the events being shown on the screen. She would go without transition from a lively quadrille accompanying the spring fashion shows to Chopin’s Funeral March for a flood in China or the funeral of a personage important on the national or international scene. (95)

Thus the audible musical accompaniment added significantly to the viewing experience of these ‘silent’ films.

⁸ See, for example, “Dekalog II - Krzysztof Kieslowski part 01/06” on YouTube.

⁹ In the summer of 2011, I visited Sony Picture Studios in the Los Angeles area in California and went to a Foley-studio. I saw how many of the sounds we hear in movies are created in a studio, sometimes using objects other than the ones we hear in the actual film.

¹⁰ Some of the music and sounds can be heard at “Dekalog III - Krzysztof Kieslowski part 01/06” on YouTube.

¹¹ See, for example, “Dekalog IV - Krzysztof Kieslowski part 01/06” on YouTube for the inclusion of silence, sounds, and music in this episode.

¹² See Zbigniew Preisner, *Dekalog: Original Film Soundtrack*. To hear some of his other music, see the CD *Preisner’s Music*.

¹³ See “Dekalog V - Krzysztof Kieslowski part 01/06” on YouTube.

¹⁴ To hear some of these sounds and silence, see “Dekalog VI - Krzysztof Kieslowski part 01/06” on YouTube.

¹⁵ See, for example, “Dekalog VII - Krzysztof Kieslowski part 01/06” on YouTube.

¹⁶ See “Dekalog VIII - Krzysztof Kieslowski part 01/06” on YouTube.

¹⁷ To hear some of these sounds, see “Dekalog IX - Krzysztof Kieslowski part 01/06” on YouTube.

¹⁸ To hear the rock group and some other sounds, see “Dekalog X - Krzysztof Kieslowski part 01/07” on YouTube.

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