For centuries, authors, poets, and filmmakers have used ghosts for a myriad of purposes. In terms of the cultural history of Poland, ghosts and revenants have appeared throughout several works of literature. Beloved Polish poet and playwright Adam Mickiewicz used the motif of the supernatural in his Romantic poetic drama Dziady (Forefather’s Eve 1823-1832) to propagate the Romantic notion that Poland was a messianic nation doomed to suffer constant martyrdom for the sake of Christian Europe. Likewise, another famous Polish man of letters, Stanisław Wyspiański, wrote his 1901 drama Wesele (The Wedding) using the motif of the supernatural to comment upon the perils associated with Polish independence movements following the November Uprising (1830-1831) and the January Uprising (1863), both of which ended in abject failure. As scholar and author Marek Haltorf (2004, 74) points out, Poland has many “phantoms from the nation’s intricate history.” It is therefore not surprising that the motif of the supernatural, and especially the use of ghosts as characters, should appear within the oeuvre of Krzysztof Kieślowski, arguably Poland’s finest film director. In his films Blind Chance (Przypadek 1987), No End (Bez końca 1985), and Decalogue I (Dekalog I 1988), ghosts play important roles not only as observers and watchers, but main characters. In Blind Chance, the main character, Witek Długosz (Bogusław Linda) is first shown to the audience during a flashforward sequence in which he perishes aboard an airplane, rendering him a doomed individual throughout the rest of the movie. In a sense, after the first scene of Blind Chance, Witek is a ghost of sorts. Throughout the rest of Blind Chance, the audience watches as Witek looks “back at his life at the moment of his death” (Haltorf 2004, 56). In essence, the audience of Blind Chance gets to indulge in playing the role of Saint Peter by observing and weighing Witek’s various life choices and consequences. In No End, the first character introduced to the audience is the recently deceased lawyer and political activist Antek Zyro (Jerzy Radziwiłłowicz). The character of Antek, while not necessarily a principal character insofar as the film’s action is concerned, nevertheless affects the decisions of the people around him, especially those of his grieving wife, Urszula (Grażyna Szapołowska). The film’s portrayal of “Urszula’s sadness and her gradual alienation from people and the outside world” is linked with her attempts “to erase Antek from her memory” (Haltorf 2004, 67). In Decalogue I, death plays the central role in a story about the tragic death of Paweł (Wojciech Klata), the ten-year-old son of university professor Krzysztof (Henryk Baranowski). In the film, both death and a spiritual “God” are present in the character of the so-called Watcher/An- gel (Artur Barciś), who, throughout the entire Decalogue series, performs the role of a harbinger in the context of any given film.

Examining these three films on the basis of their metaphysical and supernatural motifs, it becomes clear that, within Kieślowski’s oeuvre, they are undoubtedly his most spiritual. While Kieślowski did not consider himself a practicing Christian, let alone a devout Roman Catholic, these films attest to an underlying belief in “fate and predestination” (Di Bartolomeo 2000, 48). Furthermore, these films, which are intellectually-stimulating and deeply philosophical, create a discourse upon the ever-present nature of death. In a sense, these films are moral tales that are united not only by the presence of ghosts, but also by the presence of death as the answer to all moral quandaries. Essentially, these films highlight and enforce the reality of death as the eventual end for all living beings. I will examine this philosophical assertion by Kieślowski and his co-writer Krzysztof Piesiewicz through the prism of the three types of ghosts that appear in Blind Chance, No End, and Decalogue I: the ghost of fate, the domestic spirit, and the supernatural entity, respectively.

Fate and the belief in chance are the central themes of Blind Chance (hence the title). Originally writ-
Witek's ability to remain a decent human being regardless of his politics, all the while his story eventually ends in his untimely death aboard a plane bound for Libya suggests the belief that no matter the choices we make in life, death is inescapable. As Kieślowski himself said, “the third ending is the one which means the most to me—the one where the aeroplane explodes—because one way or another, that's going to be our fate” (Stok 1993, 113). But Blind Chance is not simply a nihilistic parable about the inescapability of death; it clearly depicts the importance of making good, moral, and ethical choices throughout life. Accordingly, the third section of Blind Chance is the most important for several reasons. First, the third section of the film not only refutes the messages of the earlier two sections, it in fact refutes the dictum that a person must take a stand in life. This notion that a person must never trample a middle path is a strong current within Slavic culture; from the works of Russian authors such as Dostoevsky and Tolstoy to the Romantic Polish tradition of glorifying national martyrs, the idea that an ethical and moral life could be achieved without attachment to a greater cause would seem ludicrous. Furthermore, Witek's third decision not to involve himself in politics and instead to focus on his wife and children seems even more preposterous, considering that Witek's background marks him as heir to the mantle of a distinctly Polish hero: Witek's final decision to pursue a life devoid of politics or Polish national causes presents a unique moral question specific to Kieślowski's Polish audience: what if a potential Polish hero just simply decided not to be a hero?

Blind Chance showcases in the first two segments what happens when Witek decides to pursue each of two opposite paths—the first as a functionary in the Communist Party, the second as a member of the anti-Communist movement. In both instances, Witek ends disillusioned, heartbroken, and dissatisfied over his choices. In the third segment, Witek's choice to lead a moral and ethical life devoid of politics does not prevent him from dying an unfortunate death aboard an airplane. Taken as a whole, Blind Chance is a film about a man whose life is completely encircled by death. In the sequence introducing Witek's unified past, after the flashback prologue, Witek's mother perishes, along with Witek's twin brother, during childbirth. In the film's final sequence, the audience sees the image of Witek's plane exploding only seconds after take-off. This tragic ending seems odd considering that Witek does not board the doomed airplane in either segments one or two, and the third segment clearly portrays Witek as being content with his decision to remain outside of politics. In this regard, Witek suffers moral and spiritual deaths in segments one and two. Although not physical deaths, the symbolic deaths in segments one and two are depicted as being more damaging to Witek, while his death is the third segment is only repugnant because it is so unexpected and tragic in the way that any unfortunate passing is.

Witek, as the film's Everyman, showcases the reality that all human choices lead to death. Especially considering the film's title, Blind Chance, death is shown as an extension of fate and destiny; the entire film's premise of the consequences of choice and chance are rendered moot by the film's climax. The basic under-
lying thesis of Blind Chance is that we, like Witek, will be rendered ghosts someday because we cannot avoid death as our ultimate fate. Fate and death are interlinked in Blind Chance, and as such the physical act of death is composed of fate and chance. Rather than seeing this reality as the foundation for a nihilistic outlook, Blind Chance presents a narrative that explicitly shows death as neither a reward nor a punishment, but only as an unexpected facet of daily life. Witek is therefore a “ghost of fate,” or rather a victim of fate, as we all are.

Much like Blind Chance, No End begins with the recognition of a death and ends with the actual death of one of the main characters. While the film itself follows the emotional turmoil of Ursa Zyro after the death of her husband Antek, the opening scene of No End foreshadows the motif of death and spirituality. As Haltof (2004, 66-67) describes it, the “opening scene offers a bird’s-eye view of a cemetery with flickering, burning candles during the All Souls’ Day on 1 November—a genuinely meaningful day in Poland.” This opening scene, combined with Zbigniew Preisner’s somber and melancholy tone of the film and introduces its major themes of death, memory, and love” (Haltof 2004, 67). The death at the center of No End is that of activist lawyer Antek Zyro. It is important to notice that the second sequence has the ghost of Antek explaining to the viewer that his death was abrupt and sudden. Haltof (2004, 71) sees a connection between Antek Zyro’s sudden death and “the abrupt termination of the Solidarity movement on 13 December 1981.” While Haltof’s reading is a bit too facile only because the link between Solidarity and the death of Antek seems too convenient, “No End serves clearly as the symbol of the suppressed” (Haltof 2004, 71). Much has been written about No End and its presentation of the post-Solidarity, martial law era mindset, and undoubtedly the film takes a pessimistic view of the state of Polish politics and society in the early 1980s. This pessimistic outlook is embodied in the presence of the ghost of Antek; for, he, much like Witek in Blind Chance, represents a failed Polish hero, mainly because he is dead. For the rest of the characters in No End and especially so for Ursa and the defense lawyer Labrador (Aleksander Bardini), the ghostly residue of Antek’s idealism, legal abilities, and his seemingly overall goodness of character prove hard to overcome. In fact, one could argue that Ursa’s suicide at the end of the film was due to her inability to escape the emotional vacuum left by her husband.

The ghost of Antek, much like the character of Count Dracula in Bram Stoker’s 1897 novel Dracula, is sensed more than he is actually seen. The ghost of Antek “appears seven times throughout the film, either silently observing Ursa or intervening in her daily matters” (Haltof 2004, 70), and, furthermore, the presence of the ghost of Antek is mainly felt through a series of puzzling occurrences throughout the film:

- Labrador’s watch, a gift from his student [Antek] Zyro, falls and stops during his conversation with Darek’s [an imprisoned Solidarity activist who was formerly a client of Antek] wife Joanna (Maria Pakulnis), while a man in black (perhaps Zyro) passes by; the mysterious red question mark appears on the directory of attorneys next to Labrador’s name; Ursa’s Volkswagen car stops on the street for no visible reason, saving her, in all likelihood, from a deadly accident; a newspaper disappears which is important in the context of the worker’s trial. In another scene, when Darek awakens in his prison cell during the hunger strike, the ghost is there and quietly looks at him.

As a result of this visit, Darek changes his mind and ends this suicidal action (Haltof 2004, 71).

Although the ghost of Antek affects all the principal characters within No End, his presence is most strongly felt by his wife Ursa, and that is why I have termed him a “domestic spirit.” For the most part, No End focuses upon the impact of Antek’s death upon Ursa. Ursa’s grief over Antek’s death is only further heightened by the fact that Ursa is the only character who can both directly see and interact with the ghost. In one important scene, Ursa is unable to be hypnotized into forgetting about Antek because Antek’s ghost in the room with her. Even in the scenes where Antek is not physically present, his spirit remains as a force throughout the film’s entirety. This sense is heightened by the fact that the audience actually takes on Antek’s role as watchers and observers in the scenes where the ghost of Antek is not directly portrayed. The audience therefore is closely linked with the character of Antek, which can stem from the process of movie-going, with audience members acting like watching spirits amidst the action of characters who are unaware of their presence. In the final sequences of the film, the camera is positioned behind Ursa as she goes about the process of suicide via a gas-filled, open stove. This specific camera angle represents the point of view of the ghost of Antek, which is also the point of view of No End’s ghost-like audience. Once again, much like in Blind Chance, the audience is placed in the position of the ghost, this time the ghost of Antek.

No End and Blind Chance also share the motif of a central philosophical discussion surrounded by the reality of death. The central discourse at the heart of No End is the extent to which a person can truly overcome the memory of a lost loved one. Ursa, because she commits suicide at the film’s conclusion, answers this question with the assertion that some things are
insurmountable. While one can argue about her moral character or the rightness of her final decision to commit suicide, none can argue that Urszula is the character that the audience is supposed to empathize with most. Since No End details the many emotional hardships that Urszula is forced to deal with, her suicide at the end is somewhat justified by the film's previous one hundred and four minutes. In this sense, No End de‑viles Urszula's suicide much in the same way that Blind Chance de‑viles Witek's multiple decisions. The charge that Urszula’s suicide is selfish because it leaves her son, Jacek (Krzysztof Krzeminiski), without parents, is slightly neutralized by the fact that Jacek seems to be aware not only of his mother’s decision but also of her deep emotional pain. Lastly, Urszula’s suicide is depicted as leading to a reunion with her husband in a somewhat bleak final scene, which depicts the couple walking away from the camera into a brightly‑lit, park‑like setting. Death, which is also present in the first scene in No End, bookends the film with a somewhat happy ending (Happy Ending was initially the proposed title for No End). As in Blind Chance, the central concepts and philosophical questions of No End are answered by death. Even more so than Blind Chance, No End is intrinsically a meditation on death and its presence in our lives. As Kieślowski stated in an interview with Danusia Stok (1993, 134), “there’s a need within us—not only a need but also a fundamental kind of feeling—to believe that those who have gone and whom we dearly loved, who were important to us, are constantly within or around us.” Urszula’s suicide at the end of No End is not only a recognition of her inability to continue on living, but it is also the recognition that some people must “give‑up the ghost” because that is simply their destiny.

In Decalogue I, the first installment of Kieślowski and Piesiewicz’s ten‑part series continues much in the same vein as Blind Chance and No End with its ostensible central motif concerning the death of Paweł. But unlike Blind Chance or No End, the spiritual and the supernatural are far more potent in Decalogue I. The entire Decalogue series deals with how the Ten Commandments are followed and practiced in our everyday life, and Decalogue I corresponds with the First Commandment in the Roman Catholic enumeration—Thou Shalt Have No Other Gods Before Me. The presence of spirituality and indeed the presence of a “God” are best exemplified in the character of the Watcher/Angel who appears in the majority of the Decalogue films. Decalogue I is no exception; the Watcher/Angel is first introduced as the mysterious man warming himself by the fire on the fateful pond in the opening scene. The Watcher/Angel character in Decalogue I is symbolic of a seemingly divine force that acts as a harbinger for the ensuing events in the film. Therefore, because Pawel dies after falling through the pond’s ice while skating, the Watcher/Angel’s presence on the icy pond can only be taken as foreshadowing the film’s ultimate tragedy. The Watcher/Angel character, as a manifestation of the supernatural, also points to other strange premonitions throughout the film: “a dead dog, probably frozen to death, found by Pawel; a frozen bottle of milk, and milk that turns sour; and a computer that switches itself on inexplicably” (Haltorf 2004, 82). But even more important than the Watcher/Angel character, who represents the supernatural, is the use of color, specifically blue and green, in Decalogue I.

Kieślowski scholar Dr. Lisa Di Bartolomeo writes in her 2000 article “No Other Gods: Blue and Green in Krzysztof Kieślowski’s Dekalog I” that “blue lighting effects” are used “repeatedly to evoke loss and sadness, and also to suggest the enduring presence of the transcendent, the spiritual” (47). In this sense, the color blue in Decalogue I represents and often foreshadows the death of Paweł. In one of the earliest scenes in the film, Pawel’s grieving aunt Irena (Maja Komorowska) watches television footage of Pawel as he runs with several classmates through his school. This shot of Pawel is “swathed in blue,” which coincides with a medium close‑up shot of Irena that is “heavily blue‑tinged” (Di Bartolomeo 2000, 50). This presence of blue foreshadows the death of Pawel, and furthermore, this blue‑heavy shot is a flashforward much in the same vein as Blind Chance. Both films use the motif of the flashforward to enhance a sense of mystery in their films, and both flashforwards display the later deaths of their respective characters, Witek and Pawel.

But blue is not the only color present in Decalogue I; Di Bartolomeo (2000, 47) also points out that the color green points to “a spiritual void, philosophical error, or moral quandary.” Green, within the context of Decalogue I, is most associated with the computer, which, as many scholars have pointed out, is the “false god” associated with the First Commandment. Pawel’s father, the university professor Krzysztof, believes in the “supremacy of calculation and reason, and in the pronouncements of science” (Di Bartolomeo 2000, 49). Krzysztof’s belief in the “false god” of logic, reason, and the computer “seems to incur the wrath of the divine” (Di Bartolomeo 2000, 49), which inevitably leads to his son’s death. In this reading, Pawel’s death is a manifestation of divine anger over the worship of another god, i.e., Krzysztof’s computer. Divinity, in the context of Decalogue I, is ultimately associated with death.

The presence of the divine within Decalogue I is represented by three factors, all of which are associated with the tragedy at the center of the film. First, the Watcher/Angel character is the physical manifestation of the divine or supernatural, and within the context of Decalogue I, the Watcher/Angel character foreshad-
ows the death of Pawel. Second, as already stated by Di Bartolomeo, the presence of the color blue within various scenes of the film invokes not only sadness, but also “fate and predestination” (Di Bartolomeo 2000, 48). Finally, the divine is powerfully portrayed in the scene where a distraught Krzysztof encounters a “makeshift altar with the icon of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa (Matka Boska Częstochowska) in the centre” (Halft 2004, 83). Krzysztof, unable to control his grief, upends this replica of the foremost Polish religious symbol. Of great symbolic importance, wax from overturned candles dribbles upon “Mary’s face, and the icon now appears to be crying, grieving with the bereft father” (Di Bartolomeo 2000, 55). As with Blind Chance and No End, death is once again at the forefront of not only the symbolism of Decalogue I, but also as the element that ties the entire narrative together.

In accordance with the mode previously established by Blind Chance, Decalogue I presents a non-linear format, with Pawel being already dead by the first frames of the film. Also, much like the aforementioned film, Decalogue I ends with the depiction of Pawel’s death, thus mirroring the Ouroboros-like nature of Blind Chance’s plot. Also, chance plays an enormous role within Decalogue I. The film suggests that Krzysztof’s mortal error is that he trusts his calculations concerning the density of the ice, calculations that suffer because they do not measure or consider the existence of chance. Decalogue I and No End also share plots full of abject misery, arguably making these movies among Kieślowski’s most depressing. Much like the emotional strain endured by Urszula in No End, the final scenes of Decalogue I depict how the death of Pawel leads the previously atheistic Krzysztof to throw himself upon the altar in a makeshift church. Noticeably, Krzysztof’s grieving leads him to commit sacrilege somewhat similar to but by no means comparable to Urszula’s suicide (which is often considered a sin punishable by eternal damnation).

But the truly uniting factor among these three films is their ruminations upon death. All three films strive to show that no matter the given situation or given moral quandary, death is the one constant in our lives. While Witek and Pawel die at the hands of fate, Urszula takes it upon herself to end her own life. In the guise of these three films, death is presented as, on the one hand unknowable and beyond rational logic, while one the other hand allowing for much-desired closure. It must be noted that not only do all of these films offer dialogues upon the nature and presence of death, but that they all also use the motif of the ghost to create and further along this dialogue. Witek in Blind Chance, Antek in No End, and Pawel and the Watcher/Angel in Decalogue I are all ghosts in their representative narratives. Witek and Pawel are ghosts because they are already dead by the first scenes in their representative films, and therefore they are ghosts in all ensuing scenes because the audience already knows their fate. And yet it should be recognized that Witek and Pawel are not necessarily supernatural or traditional ghosts similar to Antek. Witek and Pawel are only ghosts throughout their representative film because both films use the motif of the flash-forward to hint at their eventual deaths in some early shots.

Antek, much like Witek and Pawel, is already dead by the beginning of the film. Antek’s ghost is also highly influential regarding the other characters in No End, with his presence being able to both prevent death (ending Darek’s hunger strike) and provide the catalyst for death (Urszula’s suicide). The Watcher/Angel in Decalogue I is a ghostly entity who foreshadows the death of Pawel by his mere presence. The Watcher/Angel character is also the most supernatural figure in regards to these three films, for his origins and even his humanity can be questioned.

By focusing so much attention upon the inevitability of death, these three films are in fact preparing their audiences for their own deaths. Much scholarship and questionable psychoanalysis (I cannot hid my scorn) has been done on the theory that reading and film audiences are drawn to horror, war, and other genres of violence because these artistic renderings of death aid humans in their search to become comfortable with death. To it put more bluntly, by reading and watching the process of death, humans become more desensitized to the reality of death in their own lives. Blind Chance, No End, and Decalogue I, by presenting philosophical and moral tales about how death exists within our everyday lives, act similarly to horror films in that they allow any given audience member to indulge in his or her fears of death through the films themselves. But we must recognize that these films are not horror films; they do not attempt to either glamorize or fetishize death as many horror films do. These films should instead be seen as continuing the uniquely Kieślowskian theme of depicting the everyday facets of life. Death in these films is devoid of horror or any trace of romance; it is depicted realistically and with great emotional performances from the actors. Underlying this depiction of death as part and parcel of our human existence is the presence of the otherworldly. The appearance of chance, destiny, fate, and the Watcher/Angel character all point to the subtle theme of a spiritual presence throughout these three films.
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