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Aleksander Kumor, Danuta Palczewska

Sensualism as a Basis for the Study of a Film Work (Some Preliminary Proposals)

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Aleksander Kumor;
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Abstract
The main objective of the article is to look for universal criteria of film mass appeal, which can be included under the general notion of "sensualism." The authors' proposal refers to the qualities of a film work that not only engage the senses in an increasingly perfect and intense way, but also enable understanding (from purely sensual to intellectual) of the viewed work. One of the important aspects of the text concerns sensualism as the universal language of film. Depending on the saturation of the aforementioned qualities, the authors distinguish three levels in a film work: sensual-semantic (with an emphasis on "sensual excitement," primarily of a visual and/or auditory nature), semantic-sensual (with the dominant role of aesthetic conventions and the film's expressive means, such as the symbol) and semantic (focused mainly on the word). Thus, the "sensualism" in the title is an interpretive category in relation to both the material of the film work and the viewer and the processes that occur during the reception of this work (sensualism as a tool of communication).
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The idea for this sketch came about while considering universal criteria for the mass appeal of film.

So far, the mass appeal of this form of art has been defined in sociological and cultural terms, and we can find the results of research in this regard in the literature on mass media. However, in our opinion, purely sociological criteria are inadequate; in particular, they do not sufficiently emphasise the autonomy of film and its peculiar effect on the mass audience. Little importance is attached to the sensual element of film art, especially to its visual aspect, as well as the sensual experiences based on it. This is precisely what, in our view, particularly distinguishes a film work, making it one of the most important universal criteria of mass appeal.

It was only Karol Irzykowski[1] who, in formulating his *law of the mirror*, emphasised the fact that cinema provides a set of physical events that most powerfully assail humans in a sensual way. He also argued that the illusory world of the screen, structured in a tentative but more precise form, is created when repetition is not total and when we engage only one sense. The sense of sight is best suited for this purpose, as it is the most refined and *filters most efficiently*. As a result, the film provides *focused vision*.

The origins of cinematic sensualism

Irzykowski assumed that one of the conditions for the emergence of the cinematic 'focused vision' is the repetition of the world in a more precise form. However, it is necessary to maintain a qualitative similarity between the sensory stimuli coming from contact with the real world and those coming from the screen. Therefore, from this point of view, we can consider moving film photography to be a replica of the external world. In this case, we are not concerned with the replica's greater or lesser fidelity to the original, but with the fact of similarity itself.[2]

It is vital to point out that, when we speak of the moving photograph as a replica of reality and base on this fact the particularly sensuous workings of film, we mean – as Bela Balázs stated – the resemblance of the 'material' given to us in sensual impressions, and not the resemblance in terms of 'content,' understood as a specific 'truth.' For it is known that this truth can be very different from the raw material (editing, or other ways of interpreting reality).

Starting from the above assumptions, we would like to demonstrate which factors intensify the specifically sensual character of the film experience. Let us already note, and we shall return to this later, that only in completely exceptional cases are there intrinsic sensual qualities in a film work. Therefore, when speaking of sensualism, we will usually understand it as the film's striving towards that ideal limit for which we consider pure sensual qualities.

Recognising film as a replica of the external world, let us draw some analogies between the sensual impressions evoked by film and the experiences resulting from contact with reality. In his book *Treść poznawcza wrażeń zmysłowych* (*The Cognitive Content of Sensual Impressions*), Zdzisław Cackowski[3] firmly emphasises that the impressions of variously labelled resistance posed by matter, as well as

the spatial properties of matter, are perceived identically, in terms of content, by two senses: touch and sight.

Although film is a replica of reality, the relationship between the spatial material object and its image on the screen is only an analogy. The difference is that we tend to react to objectively existing material objects with more senses, especially, as Cackowski noted, with touch and sight. However, one can venture to say that the difference between real objects and the moving screen chiaroscuro that reflects them is not usually perceptible to the viewer. Despite the lack of tactile sensation, the viewer perceives the images of things in space and the relations between them in a film work as real.

Why does this happen? According to the principles of space perception, or rather the formation of the perception of space, psychology points out that a transfer of tactile patterns to visual patterns is carried out. *Our conscious perception of space is primarily an expression of the laws governing the interrelation of the impressions generated by these senses*.[4]

Film acts on two senses: sight and hearing. Touch remains uninvolved. Yet, the film invokes the relationship between the senses as well as certain experiences and habits developed over time. At times, the filmmakers intensify the tangible qualities of the matter. This is made possible by a special emphasis on the texture of the object, whose features evoke both visual and quasi-tactile sensations. Such quasi-tactile sensations can be found in Wajda's work when, for example, he shows the rough and slimy walls of the sewer in the film *Kanal* (1956).

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Let us turn our attention to the factors intensifying sensual experience in silent and sound film.

There were basically two main factors enhancing sensual experience in silent films.[5] As mentioned by Irzykowski, one of them (a negative one) was the lack of stimuli impacting other senses, resulting in the heightening of the sense of sight. The other factor (a positive one) was movement. In the period of technical limitations of silent film, the sensuality of film could be enhanced through movement and it was mainly movement, within the shot since it remains closest to a experiential data. At the time, numerous theoreticians drew attention to the kinetic qualities of film. Again, let us do justice to Irzykowski: he was apparently the only one who linked movement to the sensual impact of cinema, as in his 'law of the mirror' he meant mainly kinetic events. The film of the time did indeed give rise to a kind of kinetic fever, even establishing appropriate genres such as the slapstick comedy. With the invention of sound came a certain reduction in physical movement.

Defending movement in the seventh decade of cinema history may seem an exceedingly risky undertaking. But even today it is possible to speak of movement as a basis for intensifying sensual experience. Movement has not been eliminated. It is just expressed differently. Unable to manifest itself sufficiently as the movement of an object, it has switched to the camera-narrator, which, while constantly wandering, embraces ever new areas of visibility. It is only in many

contemporary films that the camera has become truly dynamic. An example of this is Max Ophüls's film *Madame de...* (1953), where we are actually dealing with one almost endless, fluid camera movement.

The sensual point of view allows us to take a slightly different approach to the significant reduction of film editing in contemporary cinema. It is not only a matter of the 'heaviness' of a film equipped with sound, and not only the redundancy of editing when ideas can be communicated more easily with words. It is also the desire not to rip up the visual material which – as in reality – remains integrated and thus ensures the fluidity of visual excitement.

We agree with André Bazin when he opposes the extended cut editing. We also advocate 'depth' shots, allowing several layers of the set to be viewed at the same time and in the same space. That is the method of filming we find in Jean Renoir's *La Règle du Jeu* (1939) or Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1940).[6] In our view, Bazin's claim that depth of field is a more subtle and economical means needs to be substantially supplemented with the formulation that it is also a means of preserving the fluidity and richness of the visual experience.

It is also important to consider the consequences of the invention of sound for the intensification of the sensual experience. As visual sensations have been enriched by auditory sensations, in sound film we are dealing with reactions to the sounding image.

Pierre Schaeffer discusses sound in film in his article *L'élément non visuel au cinema*.[7] Analysing the film sound range, the author states that it consists of three completely separate elements: murmurs, words, and music. *The murmur is the only sound that corresponds closely to the image. For the image represents objects and the murmur is their language*.[8] By dividing objects into two classes: visible and audible, the author goes on to claim that we can enhance our sensory experience if we can not only see them, but also hear them. *Among the objects shown on the screen, there are also people. The word is their sound*.[9] Reflecting on the role of the word, the author states that this basic principle is forgotten and the sound of the human voice is treated as a recited text. *One can ... think that the text plays here a much lesser role than the intonation and timbre of the voice; even to the limits of its intelligibility. I am far from denying any value to the text in film. However, it is important to remember that it is not the intellectual elements that come here first*.[10] In this sense, both murmurs and words, in their purely sensual role of a sound, enhance the sensual experience and are additional factors heightening the viewer's sense of the film's identity with the real world.

But the sense of identity does not mean that the sensual impact of such a sounding image is equal to the sensual impact of the real world and that we can still speak of more intense sensual experiences of image and sound in film. If we assume that the sensual impressions of the sense or senses involved can intensify if the other senses are switched off, then the condition of this intensification is still preserved. It is because even a sound film does not give us the possibility to react with other senses apart from sight and hearing. On the other hand, this intensified visual and auditory sphere can all the more readily evoke quasi-sensual sensations inherent in the uninvolved senses, and this again in accordance with the earlier remarks about the sensual associations given to us in experience. This state of heightened sensual influence would continue as long as – at least in theory – there was at least one sense that was not 'activated.'

If one were to assume that, as a result of technical improvements, a film would 'duplicate' the world to such an extent that it would engage all the senses, then its sensual impact would be equal to the sensory impact of concrete reality.

The second type of 'duplication' occurs when we somehow complement the sensual data of sight and hearing (introduction of a wide screen, colour, stereoscopy, stereophony, a larger palette of natural murmurs, etc.). Taking into account the intensity of the sensual impact, such complementation should be regarded as a positive phenomenon because, in a way, we 'raise' sensual experiences – auditory and visual – in the film to the level of those given to us in contact with the real world.

We can see, therefore, that sensual experiences in a film work have a specific character. On the one hand, they are, as it were, incomplete; on the other, they are somehow more powerful than reality can give them to us. It is perhaps worth noting that the directions of technical development of cinematography follow the path of intensification of auditory and visual experiences. The audio-visual sphere continues to be expanded in film, while attempts to introduce, for example, 'scent cinema' do not go beyond occasional experiments and, more importantly, do not seem to generate much interest. Perhaps what is decisive here is not only the difficulty of adapting these new techniques to spectacle forms, but maybe this is how cinema manifests its desire to expose the sensual sphere in its own right.[11]

So far we have discussed the realistic use of image and sound. However, an unrealistic combination of visual and auditory stimuli has a different effect; the sensuality of a film work is then enhanced either in the visual or in the auditory sphere, or – and this is observed most often – in both. This can probably be explained by the fact that responses to mixed sensory stimuli are normal when they correspond to the normal associations of stimuli received from exposure to the real world. However, when these normal bonds are broken, then our relationship to the stimuli changes: due to the difficulties that arise in understanding the relationships taking place in the film reality, we mobilise sensual sensitivity. In other words – the focus of attention necessary for intellectual mastery of the material given to us must go hand in hand with concentration in the sensory sphere. For example, unforeseen silence when we expect the regular sounds of nature forces us to look more carefully and, at the same time, sensitises our hearing to catch the first sound and its type, to check whether our senses are not deceiving us, etc.

For now, the comments on the connections between image and sound refer to the three elements of the acoustic field in the film: murmurs, speech, and silence. They do not cover the fourth element of the soundtrack: music used as an emotional commentary. The issue boils down to answering the question: in what relation does music remain to the sensual impact of a film? After all, as a commentary, it is not an element of the real world like the three acoustic components mentioned above.

We will not answer this question, as this problem requires separate, more extensive studies. Following Alicja Helman, we can only state that music in film loses its autonomous character, subordinating itself to the visual material.[12]

For our part, still keeping in mind the sensual point of view, let us risk the assumption that, owing to its lack of independence, music comes closer to atomised, pure sensory-auditory experiences. Therefore, in the process of percep-

tion, we lose the sense of a certain time-extended, organised whole, which an independent musical work is. However, let us also stipulate that our assumption may refer to extreme cases, such as when we are dealing with the so-called 'inaudibility' of music. Yet, this 'inaudibility' does not mean the absence of auditory stimuli. Since they reach the organ of hearing and cease to be music in the sense of a self-contained work of art, we have to accept them irrefutably as something belonging to the visible screen reality.

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Let us further consider whether our reflections on pure sensualism do not refer mainly to a certain type of film intended for a mass audience and whether we are not overlooking the so-called elite film, for example, one with a complex psychological background or innovative means of expression, that is, a film in which intellectual elements predominate. Yet, since heightened sensualism is supposed to be a natural propensity characterising film in general, we must also look for the tendency towards its manifestation in the latter.

Robert Bresson's films (*A Man Escaped*, 1957; *Pickpocket*, 1959), in which psychological analyses are accompanied by a laboratory study of physical action, can be judged from this angle. Likewise in Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Night* (1961), when we wander through the streets of Milan together with the protagonist and watch in detail the entire density of the surrounding matter and its complex, almost 'tangible' texture. Likewise in his *The Eclipse* (1962), when we observe marionette-like, dehumanised movements in the stock exchange sequence. Hard evidence is hard to come by; it is obvious that one can interpret Antonioni's films quite differently and, as one usually does, look for some truth about the world and human loneliness in the protagonist's wanderings through the city streets. It is symptomatic, however, that this truth is communicated in such close connection with matter that it speaks to us primarily through sensual concreteness. It is also through the heightened sensual impact, that is, through those qualities that characterise virtually all the performing arts, that we acquire the knowledge of the characters on the screen.

By exposing this feature of the spectacular even in this kind of intellectualised work, film strives to maintain its material-sensual basis that ensures its existence as mass art.

Sensualism and the semantics of a film work

Since film appeals to everyone in an intensely sensual way, then sensualism would sufficiently characterise it as mass art, and it is pure sensualism that should be considered the most essential element in a film work. But in reality, we rarely deal exclusively with sensual sensations.[13] In connection with (or alongside) sensory experiences that are qualitatively asemantic, there are also semantic (meaningful) qualities in film.

We do not use the term 'concept' here to emphasise the fact that it may refer to all types of (natural or artificial) signs[14]. Here, 'concept' is most often linked to

the spoken or written word or even to the film image (or series of images) that has acquired the ability to communicate concepts through special artistic procedures. We understand semantic qualities as broadly as possible and within their range we also include signs (e.g. the bending of trees as a sign of wind).

However, since we are still interested in sensualism, we will also look for the occurrence of the sensual element in the semantic function of film. Here is a preliminary proposal for such an investigation.

Depending on the degree of manifestation of the sensual element, we isolate three 'levels' in a film work: (1) the sensual-semantic level; (2) the semantic-sensual level; (3) the semantic level.

Here, a terminological clarification is required. By using the term 'level' rather than, for example, 'layer', we want to indicate that we are not concerned with something that is exclusively objectified in a film work. This is because the sensory experience is linked to the subject (a person watching the film) and not the object (a film work). However, the starting point of the research must be the film as the basis of sensual experience, and the sources of the differentiation of 'levels' must also be sought within the film work.

To prove that pure sensual qualities are not present in a film work and to define the sensual-semantic level, let us begin with Eisenstein's theory of 'intellectual cinema.'

As is known, the genesis of Eisenstein's 'intellectual cinema' came from his consideration of the pictorial writing of primitive peoples and from his reflections on Japanese, especially visual, culture. In his article *Poza kadrem* [*Beyond the Shot*],[15] he gave examples of such juxtapositions, where the depictions of two concepts give rise to a new concept (e.g. the images of water and the eye were meant to signify crying). He was concerned with achieving a kind of pictorial metaphorization, and this was to be the essence of intellectual cinema.

This method of metaphorisation was evaluated by Jerzy Toeplitz,[16] who noted that objects (e.g., a tractor) appearing on the screen cannot function as a concept (a machine) because they are always concrete. Eisenstein's mistake was that these concrete objects were intended solely as signs.

A (proper) sign is understood here according to Schaff's definition: *Every material object, its properties, or material event becomes a sign when, in the process of communication, it serves, within the framework of the language adopted by the interlocutors, to convey some thought about reality, i.e., about the external world or about the internal experiences (emotional, aesthetic, volitional) of either of the communicating parties*.[17]

According to this theory, Eisenstein's images lacked a fundamental feature of the sign, namely the previously accepted social contract that a given object is simultaneously supposed to express a particular concept. There are, of course, many objects with which broader concepts are associated, and that includes well-known symbols (e.g., the cross as the symbol of Christianity). However, Eisenstein's symbols were established arbitrarily and even a sophisticated viewer could not always understand them.

There is, however, a certain 'inherent' semantics of screen objects when the process of understanding is closely linked to and, as it were, serves the sensual data. It must be made clear that every concrete object seen on the screen has some

natural role to play and as such must mean something. When a sequence of events is given, then all visible objects take on a relative character: they relate to something, occupy a place, perform a function. They then enforce conceptual thinking, because it is only in the process of thinking that the interrelationships in the real world can be determined.

The events unfolding on the screen are the basis of the cognitive process. No matter how far along it goes, this cognitive process must take on mental forms, and so sensory experiences immediately become encapsulated in concepts. Since we have considered sensory experiences to be qualitatively asemantic, we cannot claim that they are a form of direct cognition, although this has been defended by philosophers such as Husserl and Bergson.[18]

The existence of a conceptual superstructure associated with specific sensory data results from the nature of the film spectacle, which should be classified as a semantic art. Here, we refer to the division introduced by Mieczysław Wallis. In his work *O rozumieniu pierwiastków przedstawiających w dziełach sztuki* [*On the Understanding of Representational Elements in Works of Art*],[19] Wallis classified film as a semantic art, stating that *(w)orks of some arts affect us with their sensual form and represent certain objects; works of other arts affect us only with their sensual form. The former are signs or sets of signs, they are semantic works; the latter are asemantic works. Depending on this, we can divide the arts into semantic (sculpture, painting, graphics, poetry, theatre, film, etc.) or, remembering that every work of art that is a sign or set of signs, is always a sign or set of representing signs, into representing and non-representing arts*.[20]

Mieczysław Wallis also notes that towards any object that is a sign (or a set of signs), one can behave in such a way that one apprehends it as a sign or as a set of sensual data (contemplation of colour patches, sounds, etc.). The first of these two modes of behaviour is called the 'semantic attitude.'[21] As he writes elsewhere, this semantic attitude is a normal thing in the environment in which the work was created and for which it is intended.[22] Especially when, as in the film, there is a similarity in the visual sphere.[23] He adds that *in works of the representational arts, the representational elements tend to overwhelm the sensual elements, rejoicing in themselves*.[24]

It is clear from our remarks, as well as from Wallis's observations, that film as a representational art performs a semantic function and leads to certain concepts.

However, the point is that as long as we do not leave the sphere of concrete objects, the conceptual superstructure over the particulars perceived through the senses cannot be too extensive. This is because the context of sensual connections comes into play, and then conceptual thinking is impeded. Or it runs as far as it needs to in order to determine the role and place of each visible element in the whole multiplicity of these elements, in the whole unity of material reality. Concentrated cinematic sensualism directs us more towards signs, towards a direct translation of sensual data, i.e., how one sensual stimulus is related to another or what the causal relations between audiovisual elements are. It is simply a matter of merely understanding not so much the action but the physical and natural laws guiding visible and audible matter unfolding in its various forms, including laws involving the physical being of man.

The limited scope of concepts bound by sensual experience can be justified by the fact that these concepts, in the first phase of their existence, do not relate (when it comes to understanding the physical and natural laws) to signs proper. That is, they are not the result of human communication, nor do they serve to communicate anything. They are initially impersonal, directed towards the concrete, although later on, the same visual material can yet fulfil all the requirements of a visual sign and, in particular, acquire the ability to communicate a thought to others. For example, we must first understand why leaves are falling from the trees (natural signs as the first phase of conceptual thinking related to the sensory sphere), and only then can we assume, according to the artist's intentions, that it is autumn (the same image now in the role of a sign).

Finally, when dealing with sensual experiences as encountered in the film, the process of association itself sets the limits of conceptual thinking in the first phase. For example, when a film shows us two different images, we try to associate them. Sensual experiences then lead our association process and lead it no further than is necessary to understand their interconnectedness. Later, further, more complex associations can also occur.

The observations made so far lead us to the conclusion that visible objects can appear in the film neither in a purely sensual role nor in a purely semantic one. They must be, in part, a sensual stimulus, and also, to some limited extent, they must mean something. This is the sensual-semantic level.

It should be added, however, that film, although a semantic art, occupies a special position in the group of semantic arts. As a result of its natural tendency to heighten sensual experience, it binds a significant part of the thought process to the perception of visible reality in motion. In this form of art, the separation between asemantic (sensual) qualities and semantic qualities is sometimes so slight, so blurred, that, in fact, at times, with a particular set-up in a film work, it is possible to abandon the semantic stance and contemplate the sensory qualities alone and thus – at times – not to go beyond pure sensualism. We are referring, of course, to the average feature film and not to films that invoke sensuality from a creative premise, such as various experimental films devoid of semantic elements (e.g., Andrzej Pawłowski's 'cineforms').

This limited range of the conceptual sphere associated with sensory perception does not, as we have seen, exclude broader conceptual thinking, even associated with visible objects. But this broader thinking, and we shall look into that later, arises to different degrees in all viewers. Whereas the conceptual thinking associated with sensual perception applies to every viewer. This is why we consider the level where this sensual-semantic experience takes place to be the most important from this point of view: because it is here that the condition of the universal mass appeal of the film is fulfilled.[25]

Jean Epstein's statement about film as a universal language, which – communicating through images – becomes a 'superlanguage' intelligible to all, seems useful here.[26] However, the question remains: to what extent does this general intelligibility work? Well, this universalism may refer to (assuming that this is a borderline concept) pure sensualism, the intelligibility of which consists in the fact that we encounter similar sensual experiences as in the case of dealing with the

objects of the real world. But it will mainly be about the sensual-semantic level, which, as we have just stated, is accessible to all. Thus, the universal intelligibility of the 'superlanguage' refers entirely to the first level.

As it seems, the sensual-semantic level is characterised by a peculiar property, namely that it remains in a state of precarious stability. There are factors which seem to lower it towards sensualism, towards that limit which is pure sensualism, while other factors cause it to turn upwards, towards fuller conceptuality. The former include movement, colour, all those elements inherent in sensory perception which intensify and complete it; the latter include the accumulation of signs, whether pictorial or verbal. Thus, when a sequence is dominated by, for example, action, sensuality is more strongly present. Whereas, for example, when a dialogue is involved, then the 'natural' conceptuality (connected with the sensual perception of the visible world) is enriched with a broader conceptuality. It would be a matter of further, detailed research to establish where this level currently stabilises, depending on the type of film, the nature of the situation presented, etc.

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As we have stated, the conceptual thinking associated with visible objects can be broader than the sensual attitude allows it. This is the case when, as it were, the objects are forced to communicate to us something more than their natural properties allow, as when the various expressive means of film come into play. This is, in fact, what the whole study of film language is actually dealing with. This is the semantic-sensual level. Here, the shift of words in relation to the name of the previous (sensual-semantic) level reflects a very important difference. Namely, the previous level must indeed be reached, but the scope of the sensual impact of the film that manifested there is now – at the semantic-sensual level – considerably reduced: our attention now shifts to the concepts communicated by the film.

When the communicative process takes place, the images begin to function primarily as signs. According to Adam Schaff's classification, these are mainly substitute signs: *signs with an accentuated function of substitution, representing other objects, states of affairs, or events*. The author includes among them substitute signs *sensu stricto*, such as those that substitute other objects on the basis of similarity (drawings, paintings, photographs, sculptures) and symbols.[27] Moving film photographs would also be, *sensu stricto*, substitute signs. Here, however, we will pause for a moment on symbols because of the possibility of demonstrating the sensual connections of interest.

Schaff distinguishes three main features of symbols:

1) *material objects represent ... abstract concepts*; 2) *the representation is based on a convention that must be known in order to understand the symbol;* 3) *the conventional representation is based on the sensual external shape (and, in terms of content, exemplifying, allegorical, based on a metaphor, on mythology, on the principle of 'pars pro toto,' etc.) of the presentation of the abstract concept by the sign*.[28]

First of all, let us note that, as the third point demonstrates, the semantic understanding of the symbol is broader than the understanding of the symbol as a literary stylistic figure. Exemplification, allegory, metaphor, *pars pro toto* exhaust

(content-wise) a considerable range of cinematic means of expression, and therefore the remarks on the symbol will also largely characterise the so-called film language in general.

With regard to the first characteristic of the symbol (the representation of abstract concepts by material objects), it is worth quoting Schaff's particularly important remark: *The deepest meaning of symbols – which is why they are such a favourite means in all mass movements, in agitation and propaganda, in literature, etc. – is that they bring abstract concepts closer to man by presenting them in the guise of a material object, and thus in a form that is easier for the mind to perceive and to remember*.[29]

We are particularly interested in the way in which the abstract approaches the concrete. This approach occurs on a sensual basis and, even more importantly, in the vast majority of cases, on a visual basis.[30] This informs us that the symbol as a sign is organically linked to its sensual impact and that, at the semantic-sensual level, the link to the sensual sphere must be preserved, albeit the emphasis is shifted to the concepts associated with the sign. This obligatory nature of the connection between sign and sensuality provides the researcher (e.g., a normative aesthetician) with a tool for investigating the sensual impact of film at this level.

It is worth noting another characteristic of a symbol that Schaff did not consider, but which must be taken into account when discussing art. Namely, that a symbol is conventional, though in many cases it is not exclusively conventional. When a symbol lacks full conventionality, its two properties can be distinguished. Firstly, in a symbol, a sensually given object acts as a symbol because it possesses some physical characteristic to an outstanding degree, and this characteristic determines its symbolic power. For example, the capitalists in Sergei Eisenstein's *Strike* and, in general, highly typified characters in many other films. Secondly, a certain analogy can be found in a symbol between sensually given objects and the symbolised abstract concepts or emotional states (e.g. expressing the protagonist's feelings by means of certain signs in nature, which is often used in cinematography).[31] This lack of discretion in terms of establishing a symbol, linking it in a certain way to the objects of the material world, signals that the sensual elements cannot entirely escape from the viewer's field of consciousness. And due to the fact that film gravitates towards sensualism, the symbol merges with the material concrete all the more strongly, more powerfully than in other arts.

Then, there is the question of the film's intelligibility. From the fact that a symbol is a favoured means in various types of mass interaction, it would follow that the universal mass appeal of film art is also fulfilled at the semantic-sensual level. Schaff's second characteristic of the symbol, however, concerns an agreement that must be acknowledged for a symbol to be understood. For no symbol has a natural meaning; each has an artificial meaning that is ascribed to certain objects, and each is in part conventional. This indicates that a symbol must be first assimilated by the viewer, which means that a learning process must take place. And if this is the case, then it is no longer possible to speak of a general criterion for the universality of film at the level in question because the knowledge of a symbol can vary enormously (incomprehensibility of Japanese films!). This statement can be mitigated insofar as, although the audience's previously acquired knowledge may vary, a certain extent of it is generally afforded to everyone. Therefore, the

familiarity with the forms of film language also increases in the course of the development of these forms. Yet, from a theoretical point of view, the semantic-sensual level does not meet the requirements of the universal mass appeal of film. Besides, the history of cinema teaches us that a certain amount of time often had to pass before some expressive means of film became universally assimilated.

The problem of the symbol, and the expressive means of film in general, can be explained in yet another way if one still keeps in mind the question of the universal mass appeal of film. At the semantic-sensual level, we encounter a two-stage semantic interpretation. As Wallis pointed out, having in mind the representational arts and, therefore, film, a film image – or a corresponding arrangement of images – represents an object or event of the real world (the first level), and this representation is, in turn, supposed to give rise to symbolic objects (the second level).[32] This first, sensual-semantic level, is accessible to everyone. The second level does not have this accessibility. Not only for the reasons outlined above (that the knowledge of the symbol, a consequence of its partial conventionality, is obligatory), but also because the meaning of the symbol is usually vague, which is sometimes raised to the level of an artistic principle. In other words: when there is an indirect connection to the sensual sphere (which is the case with the second level of semantic interpretation), we cannot speak of the absolutely universal intelligibility of a film work.

There is one more reason against the universal mass appeal of the semantic-sensual level. The point is that every sign system, including the pictorial signs of a film, is translated into the language of words.[33] As in any process of translation, there can be incompleteness, inadequacy, and varying degrees of fidelity in the translation. The possibility of different translations means that the cognitive content of the semantic-sensual level is not the same for everyone.

An interesting problem arises in connection with the level in question: to what extent can visual material be involved in the process of creating concepts (achieved by cinematic means of expression) without losing its natural, sensual impact and its own immediate semantic framework. For it may well be that images begin to function solely as detached signs, and this gives rise to the danger encountered by Eisenstein in his theory of 'intellectual cinema.'

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What remains to be discussed is the level of meaning. We are only concerned here with the spoken word in the film, and we will only pay attention to it as long as it exhibits, in its semantic function, some relation to sensuality.

First of all, it should be noted that the word, as a component of the narrative fabric, influences to varying degrees the extent to which sensuality presents itself and the more or less explicit manifestation of the previous levels. The role of the word is therefore indirect. It does not constitute the sensory experience, but it creates the conditions for the occurrence of these sensations, it provides the appropriate 'food' for the eye and the ear. This role of the word is quite obvious and needs no further discussion.

It is more important to draw attention to the direct connections, to the more organic function of the word for sensual perception. We have in mind those

meanings associated with the word that evoke in us and that concern the audio-visual sphere. We are, then, dealing with objects that are given to us in a sensual experience (sounding film images) and with imaginary objects. It seems that the role of the latter in the intensity of the manifestation of a sensual experience can be twofold.

Firstly, there is sometimes an imaginative specification of objects that are sensually given in the film image but are nevertheless not given to us in their entirety. For instance, we see the façade of a house, but we do not see it from all sides, while appropriate dialogue allows for the emergence of imagined invisible 'sides' of the image. At the sensual-semantic level, we were talking about the 'natural' conceptual surroundings connected with sensual perception, where the concrete directed us to its closest conceptualisation. Whereas now, we are talking about the opposite, where the word leads us to the imaginative completion of the concrete.

Secondly, the imaginary objects, brought to life by words, may be different from those we see on the screen, but whose relationship to the sensually given objects is only made clear to us by the verbal information. For example, when the narrator recounts an event and the film image illustrates certain episodes of the story (the use of ellipses), the omitted visual sections exist only in the imagination. The visible image guarantees, as it were, the imaginary 'continuation.' But the opposite also happens: the visibility itself intensifies, becoming a kind of sensory document that confirms the correctness of our imaginings.

Let us mention another issue concerning the dominance of verbal or visual parts in a film. The structure of a film may be such that, in some sequences, the emphasis might shift to another level, especially the sensual-semantic one. This can happen when there is a kind of concentration of, for example, dialogue parts that provide necessary factual information or develop a certain 'thought,' while, in turn, other parts give a fuller sensual experience in the consecutive images. This is one of the possibilities guaranteeing the mass appeal of film, which is worth taking into account when analysing the work.

And yet, even in these dialogue parts, we can see a peculiarly 'cinematic' role of words. Let us recall (what has often been discussed, for example, by Béla Balázs) the expressiveness of acting when the spoken words are accompanied by physical reactions, mainly mimics, capable of being perceived with the senses. Our point of view does not direct us to trace what can be voiced by means of this expressiveness (in addition to or beyond the word) but to differentiate concepts according to their greater or lesser capacity to evoke sensual experience. This concerns all those words when they occur as word-gestures. In this case, they lose some, and sometimes all, of their objectivised character – which they have acquired in the course of their social and historical development – and take on highly individualised characteristics as a result of the sensory stimuli that accompany their utterance. This function becomes all the more evident when one takes into account that the sensual arousal provided by the word-gestures overlaps with the concentrated sensuality of the film work. Since the word-gestures also evoke certain emotional experiences, the usual semantic function of words in films is, in fact, very limited. In short, words often become de-intellectualised.

Have we departed from the criteria for the mass appeal of film? It seems not, once we agree that not all concepts involving words reach the mass audience in equal measure. Yet, those concepts that are closely linked to the sensual sphere can be taken in by all.

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Further research would be needed to trace the relationships between the three levels of a film work outlined above. Its aim would be to discover the relationships inherent in a particular film as well as those relationships that tend to recur, for example, in different film genres.

Furthermore, learning about the structure of a film work using a single sensual criterion (naturally, this does not exclude the use of other criteria) would make it possible to ascertain, in effect, the degree to which a given work meets the requirements of mass appeal. In particular, it would make it possible to determine to what extent a film must bear witness to the real world and to what extent this is its imperative. But also – to what extent this is its strength.

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[1] K. Irzykowski, *Dziesiąta muza*, Warszawa 1957, pp. 51-53.

[2] Therefore, the concept of 'film art' should probably be defined differently to what Arnheim did. By basing his theory on the differences and limitations of film in relation to the real world, he thereby limited its usefulness in a situation where film aims to eliminate these differences. Perhaps that is why his theory did not go beyond a certain stage of film development, and perhaps that is why he tried to find refuge for true film art in 'pure human work' free from photographic reproduction, such as a cartoon or a painting. (R. Arnheim, *Film as Art*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 1957, p. 213).

[3] Z. Cackowski, *Treść poznawcza wrażeń zmysłowych*, Warszawa 1962, pp. 288-289.

[4] P. Guillaume, *Podręcznik psychologii*, Warszawa 1959, p. 153.

[5] We do not deal with such factors of intensification of sensual experiences as the technical conditions of projection (watching the image in the dark), the role of the screen frame, the isolation of one object from a multitude of others, close-ups, the possibilities of the camera in terms of more precise or complete 'viewing' of material reality, etc. Some of them do not belong to a film work itself, while others are not qualitatively different from other means of reflecting the world, especially from photography.

[6] See: A. Bazin, *Revolution du langage cinématographique*, in: idem, *Qu'est-ce que le cinema*, vol. I, Paris 1958.

[7] P. Schaeffer, "L'element non visuel au cinema", *La Revue du Cinema* 1946, no. 1-2. Polish translation by S. Pazura, *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, 1962, no. 2 [Polish version of the text: P. Schaeffer, "Element pozawizualny w filmie", *Kwartalnik Filmowy* 1961, no. 2, pp. 45-57; in the text the authors provided an incorrect issue number of *Kwartalnik Filmowy*. [Editor's note].

[8] Ibidem, p. 45.

[9] Ibidem, p. 46.

[10] Ibidem, p. 46.

[11] Against this background, one must assess the popular justification that the wide screen, stereoscopy, stereophony are defensive measures against television, which does not have such capabilities. It is so, but with the addition that new techniques are also an autonomous striving of film, which would most certainly manifest itself even if television were not an option.

[12] A. Helman, *Rola muzyki jako środka wyrazowego sztuki filmowej*; especially the chapter *Specyfika muzyki filmowej*. The doctoral thesis manuscript is available from the IS PAN library.

[13] Z. Cackowski similarily states in the above-quoted book that in the actually existing reality *our experiences are not, in fact, 'purely' sensual experiences* (Z. Cackowski, op. cit., p. 287).

[14] See. A. Schaff, *Ogólne podstawy typologii znaku*, in: idem, *Wstęp do semantyki*, Warszawa 1960, pp. 253-259.

[15] S. Eisenstein, *Wybór pism*, Warszawa 1959, p. 308.

[16] J. Toeplitz, *Historia sztuki filmowej*, vol. 2, Warszawa 1956, p. 136.
[17] A. Schaff, op. cit., p. 252.
[18] Ibidem, p. 461.
[19] M. Wallis-Walfisz, *O rozumieniu pierwiastków przedstawiających w dziełach sztuki*, a supplemented reprint from: *Fragmenty Filozoficzne – Księga Pamiątkowa ku uczczeniu piętnastolecia pracy nauczycielskiej U. W. Prof. Tadeusza Kotarbińskiego*, Warszawa 1934.
[20] Ibidem, pp. 25-26.
[21] Ibidem, p. 13.
[22] Ibidem, p. 8.
[23] Ibidem, pp. 33, 35.
[24] Ibidem, p. 26.
[25] Wallis similarly maintains that: *In works of art that combine direct and indirect representation, e.g. in theatre performances or sound films, in principle only the elements of direct representation are understandable to everyone* (Ibid., p. 36).
[26] J. Epstein, *Le Cinématographe vu de l'Etna*, Paris 1926 (as quoted in: Z. Gawrak, *Jan Epstein – studium natury w sztuce filmowej*, Warszawa 1962, p. 100).
[27] A. Schaff, op. cit., pp. 264-265.
[28] Ibidem, p. 266.
[29] Ibidem, p. 268.
[30] Ibidem, p. 270.
[31] See: M. Wallis-Walfisz, op. cit., pp. 17-18.
[32] Ibidem, p. 21.
[33] A. Schaff, op. cit., p. 233.

Aleksander Kumor

Polish film and television theoretician born in 1925. His professional life was associated with the Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences, and its Department of Film History and Theory. The latter, due to Kumor's efforts as well as his pioneering interests in the area of film studies, was renamed the Department of Film and Television History and Theory. Kumor was one of the forerunners of Polish post-war film studies and one of the first propagators of Walter Benjamin's thought in Poland. His selected works include: *Karol Irzykowski, teoretyk filmu* [*Karol Irzykowski, a Film Theoretician*] (1965), *Telewizja. Teoria – percepcja – wychowanie* [*Television. Theory – Perception – Upbringing*] (1973, 2nd ed. 1976), *W stronę telewidza. Studia i szkice* [*Towards the Television Viewer. Studies and Sketches*] (1988). In addition to the article under discussion, he wrote several papers with Danuta Palczewska. They include the important chapter *Kulturowe wyznaczniki dzieła filmowego. (Z zagadnień standaryzacji filmu)* [*Cultural Determinants of the Film Work. (The Issues of Film Standardization)*] in *Wstęp do badania dzieła filmowego* [*Introduction to the Study of the Film Work*] (1966), edited by Aleksander Jackiewicz. Kumor co-edited volumes in the series "Studia z Teorii Filmu" ["Studies in Film Theory"]: *Sztuka, technika, film* [*Art, Technique, Film*] (vol. 3, 1970) and *Film i telewizja* [*Film and Television*] (vol. 11, 1982). Aleksander Kumor died in 1988.

Danuta Palczewska

Polish film studies scholar born in 1922. Her professional life was associated with the Department of Film History and Theory at the Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences. Author of *Współczesna polska myśl filmowa* [*Contemporary Polish Film Thought*] (1981) and numerous articles on film theory. Later she

was involved in the reactivation of the famous Warsaw school for girls (founded 1883) and the establishment of Towarzystwo Oświatowe im. Cecylii Plater-Zyberkówny [The Cecylia Plater-Zyberkówna Educational Society]. Alongside Ewa Krasnowolska, Palczewska co-edited the book *Szkoła Cecylii Plater-Zyberkówny: 1883-1944* [*Cecylia Plater-Zyberkówna's School: 1883-1944*] (1987) and wrote *Życie i działalność Cecylii Plater-Zyberkówny* [*The Life and Activities of Cecylia Plater-Zyberkówna*] (1991). In addition to the article under discussion, Danuta Palczewska and Aleksander Kumor wrote several other texts together. They include the important chapter *Kulturowe wyznaczniki dzieła filmowego. (Z zagadnień standaryzacji filmu)* [*Cultural Determinants of the Film Work. (The Issues of Film Standardization)*] in *Wstęp do badania dzieła filmowego* [*Introduction to the Study of the Film Work*] (1966), edited by Aleksander Jackiewicz. She also co-edited volumes in the series "Studia z Teorii Filmu" ["Studies in Film Theory"]: *Sztuka, technika, film* [*Art, Technique, Film*] (vol. 3, 1970) and *Film i telewizja* [*Film and Television*] (vol. 11, 1982). Danuta Palczewska died in 1999.

Słowa kluczowe:
Aleksander Kumor;
Danuta Palczewska;
historia teorii filmu;
sensualizm;
zmysłowa teoria filmu

Abstrakt

Aleksander Kumor, Danuta Palczewska

Sensualizm jako podstawa badania dzieła filmowego (niektóre wstępne propozycje)

Głównym celem autorów artykułu jest znalezienie uniwersalnych kryteriów masowości filmu, które można objąć zbiorczym pojęciem „sensualizmu". W przedstawionej propozycji chodzi o takie jakości dzieła filmowego, które – w coraz doskonalszy i bardziej intensywny sposób – oddziałują na zmysły i które pozwalają na rozumienie oglądanego dzieła (od czysto zmysłowego do intelektualnego). Jeden z istotnych wątków rozprawy dotyczy sensualizmu jako uniwersalnego języka filmu. Zależnie od nasycenia wspomnianymi jakościami autorzy wyróżniają w dziele filmowym trzy poziomy: sensualno-znaczeniowy (z akcentem na „podnietę zmysłową", przede wszystkim natury wzrokowej i/lub słuchowej), znaczeniowo-sensualny (z dominującą rolą konwencji estetycznych oraz środków wyrazowych filmu, np. symbolu) i znaczeniowy (skupiony głównie na słowie). Tytułowy sensualizm jest zatem kategorią interpretacyjną w odniesieniu zarówno do tworzywa dzieła filmowego, jak i widza oraz procesów, które zachodzą podczas odbioru owego dzieła (sensualizm jako narzędzie komunikacji). **(Materiał nierecenzowany; pierwodruk: „Kwartalnik Filmowy" 1963, nr 51, s. 35-47).**