


Karol Irzykowski and Feliks Kuczkowski: (Theory of) Animation as the Cinema of Pure Movement

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Abstract

Karol Irzykowski's *The Tenth Muse: Aesthetic Aspects of Cinema* (1924) is the first extended study exploring the status of cinema as art in the Polish language. This article looks at these aspects of Irzykowski's book that relate to his theory of animated film. As the author shows, Irzykowski's perception of animation can be seen as an effect of his rapport with a Polish animator, Feliks Kuczkowski, as well as Irzykowski's admiration of Paul Wegener's films. However, as will be discussed, Irzykowski did not always perceive film as art in the same way as he did painting and sculpture. It is the author's contention that it was the German critical thinker Rudolf Maria Holzappel's theory of appropriate and inappropriate arts that prompted Irzykowski to reconsider his views on film as art. As will be shown, Irzykowski's theory of animated film developed largely through his familiarity with Kuczkowski's work and Kuczkowski remains the only known Polish figure who made animated films since 1916. In line with many contemporary developments in the arts, Kuczkowski made his films according to his principle of 'synthetic-visionary' film. His innovative ideas are thought of as having influenced such key figures of Polish animation as Jan Lenica and Walerian Borowczyk, while aspects of Irzykowski's theory can be found in the work of such key Polish avant-garde filmmakers of the 1930s as Jalu Kurek and Stefan Themerson. This article will demonstrate that the rapport between Irzykowski and Kuczkowski was crucial to establishing a dialogue between theory and practice as will be later seen in relation to the emerging film avant-gardes.

Keywords

animation, avant-garde, Expressionism, Feliks Kuczkowski, Karol Irzykowski, medium specificity, painting, Poland, visionary

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Introduction

When aspiring film critic Karol Irzykowski (1873–1944) first wrote about animation in 1913, he did not see any examples of such film until two years later. In fact, it wasn't until the publication of his seminal book, *Dziesiąta Muza: Zagadnienia Estetyczne Kina* (Tenth Muse: The Aesthetic Aspects of Cinema, 1924) that he formulated his thoughts on this technique of filmmaking (Giżycki, 1987: 84). Irzykowski was a literary critic and writer, whose anti-novel *Pahuba* (The Hag, 1903) was compared to the likes of Proust and Gide, and influenced the leading Polish modernist writer, Witold Gombrowicz (Coates, 1987a: 113). The main preoccupation of this article is with Irzykowski's theory of animation, which, as I will propose, developed largely through his interest in the films of Paul Wegener, as well as in the work of Feliks Kuczkowski (aka *Canis de Canis*, 1884–1970), a Cracow-based journalist, and an amateur-artist-turned-animator. In *The Tenth Muse*, Irzykowski considered Kuczkowski 'a true innovator of Polish cinema' and placed his films in the highest category of film – 'cinema of pure movement' (Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 84, 255). Kuczkowski was the first Polish artist-filmmaker who made experimental films prior to the 1920s. This article aims to show that it was mainly the rapport between Irzykowski (the critic) and Kuczkowski (the filmmaker) that offers a further insight into Irzykowski's theory of animation.

However, as I will demonstrate, Irzykowski did not always consider film an art form in the same way as he did painting or sculpture. It was through the concept of appropriate and inappropriate developed by the German critical thinker, Rudolf Maria Holzapfel, that Irzykowski eventually recognized the unique potential of (animated) film as art. As I have described elsewhere, a history of Polish avant-garde film suffers from a lack of primary evidence as many films perished in World War Two (Kuc, 2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2016). Although it is the films themselves that bear the most accurate testimony to their existence, their marks can be found outside the apparatus: in critical writings, anecdotes, historical documents and personal memoirs. Here Irzykowski's *Tenth Muse* is crucial to the understanding of the later development of Polish experimental film.

Feliks Kuczkowski in the context of international artist film

As mentioned, Irzykowski's theory of animated film developed largely through his familiarity with Feliks Kuczkowski's work. Kuczkowski remains the only known Polish figure who began making animated films as early as 1916 according to his artistic vision, and who remained within the borders of Poland. Like many later avant-garde filmmakers, alongside making films, Kuczkowski also theorized his practice, as seen in his concept of 'synthetic-visionary' film (Kuczkowski, 1955). This relationship between theory and practice would later become a key factor in the formation of the 1930s film avant-gardes (Christie, 2001; Curtis, 1979; Elder, 2010; O'Pray, 2003; Rees, 1999). Sadly, Kuczkowski's cinematic output was destroyed in World War Two and only a few stills from his films survived (Bocheńska, 1995: 159; Giżycki, 2008: 17; Kuczkowski, 1995: 10).¹

Little is known about Kuczkowski's life apart from the fact that he continued to develop his ideas in a new socio-political and cultural climate after the end of the World War One. At that time literary adaptations and patriotic films constituted 'a staple of Polish cinema' (Haltorf, 2002: 11).² This makes Kuczkowski's vision even more exceptional for the time. Kuczkowski's post-World War One ideas were pursued at a time when many Polish critics began to voice their concerns about the low artistic standard of Polish films more widely, thus pointing to a lack of individual expression among directors. In the 1920s, Kuczkowski relocated to Warsaw and opened his own film production company, Rara Film, where he realized most of his commissions, while developing ideas for his visionary films at night.³ He spent much of his later life in poverty and died in a Social Welfare Home in Radzymin on 6 May 1970.



Figure 1. Lucjan Kobierski's expressionistic cover for Karol Irzykowski's *The Tenth Muse* (1924). Courtesy of Marcin Giżycki's private archive.

Kuczkowski's first film, *Flirting Chairs* (1917), was created according to his original principle of 'synthetic-visionary film'. Consisting of 38 drawings (made by Lucjan Kobierski, who also designed the expressionist cover for the first edition of Irzykowski's *Tenth Muse*; see Figure 1), the film apparently consisted of depictions of two chairs 'flirting' with each other. Elsewhere I have discussed in detail ways in which Kuczkowski's vision of film corresponds with first Polish avant-garde formations (Expressionism and Futurism), as well as international developments (the work of Wassily Kandinsky, Oscar Fischinger and Léopold Survage, to name a few, see Kuc, 2015). His vision is best embodied in his own description of a synthetic-visionary film:

I create a *synthetic* screen. On this screen I demonstrate *spiritual connections*, which one cannot express by photographing natural, impetuous reality ... In order to express such spiritual connections in a *supernatural* fashion, one needs to create tools of expression that are equally supernatural, synthetic ... like *artificial* rubber or fibre. The screen makes it all possible, because it operates only by *the laws of the optical matter* ... (Kuczkowski, 1955: 6, emphases added)



Figure 2. *Flirting Chairs* (Feliks Kuczkowski, 1917, Poland). Courtesy of Marcin Giżycki's private archive.

Influenced by Expressionism and the writings of Wassily Kandinsky, Kuczkowski believed that constructing his own puppets (synthetic, artificial actors) out of plasticine (and other materials) was an expression of the artist's subjective, supernatural vision and allowed him full control over his images.

Writing about Kuczkowski's work almost a decade after *Flirting Chairs* (see Figure 2), Irzykowski believed that cinema had only begun to engage with visual movements like Futurism, Cubism, Formism and Suprematism that had revolutionized painting (Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 256). He was so impressed by Kuczkowski's authorial approach to his animated films that he came to believe that 'ordinary' live action film was no more than 'a temporary substitute' for 'painterly film' (Giżycki, 1987: 87; Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 254).⁴ Irzykowski and Kuczkowski often went to the cinema together and critically discussed films they watched (Bocheńska, 1995: 152). Kuczkowski, Irzykowski and the leading Cracow-based artists Kobierski and the Pronaszko Brothers gathered frequently in Kuczkowski's studio to debate artistic aspects of film and his creations were usually treated as a 'golden rule' for the 'perfect' artistic film (Giżycki, 1996: 27). It is thus possible to claim that Irzykowski's thesis concerning animation developed largely as a response to the rapport he enjoyed with Kuczkowski. This frequent exchange of views between

Irzykowski and Kuczkowski demonstrates that the relationship between early film theory (Irzykowski) and practice (Kuczkowski) contributed to the development of an accomplished film discourse in Poland in the 1930s, when the first ‘proper’ avant-garde films were made.

Irzykowski’s theory of animated film

Irzykowski began his career as a film critic in the early 1910s, when the cinematograph was perceived as a scientific curiosity, and neither its artistic potential nor its potential for mass entertainment in Poland had yet been discovered (Bocheńska, 1977b: 8; Ostrowska, 1995: 37). Irzykowski was dedicated to investigating these qualities of film that would help elevate it to the status of art. His dislike of the commercialization of early cinema later earned him the respect of the leading Polish avant-garde filmmaker, Stefan Themerson, who in his book *The Urge to Create Visions* (1937) quotes the following passage from *The Tenth Muse*:

The growth of art cinema can be compared with the growth of a plant buried under stones. The stones are Industry and Commerce which impose their own ways and means upon it. Cinema, to be born again, must withdraw for a moment into solitude, silence, into the very souls of those individuals who really do need it in order to express themselves – Cinema must be given a breath of fresh air – become disinterested. (Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 145, translated in Themerson, 1983[1937]: 47)

Like many critics at the time, Irzykowski admired the films of Charlie Chaplin and DW Griffith, but it was Kuczkowski whose work really impacted on his thinking about film. At the time, Irzykowski was among the very few critics (next to Leon Trystan and Leo Belmont) who considered the cinema as having an artistic potential. Nonetheless, his theory of film contains significant ambiguities and tensions (Bocheńska, 1977b: 101; Dondziłło, 1968; Kumor, 1965: 215–222).⁵ This is largely due to his complex cultural background. Born in 1873, Irzykowski was a descendant of the Positivist tradition (particularly the philosophy of Stanisław Brzozowski) and a student of German critical thought, literature and philosophy, which influenced the way he perceived film (Bocheńska, 1977a: 9–12, 1980; Silvert and Taborski, 1971: 623).⁶ On the one hand, Irzykowski was a modernist, who searched for the unique qualities of film and analysed its significance in a wide cultural context. On the other hand, he applied German idealist philosophy (particularly that of Johann Fichte and Friedrich Schelling) and critical thought (Konrad Lange and Rudolf Maria Holzapfel) to film, which led to confusion in his writing and made him a difficult figure to place within the tradition of Polish film criticism (Lange, in particular, was a fierce opponent of perceiving cinema as an art form).

Although *The Tenth Muse* was relatively widely read at the time, it did not impact on contemporary Polish film discourse and practice. Moreover, numerous critics thought of Irzykowski’s theory as incomplete and significantly flawed (Brun, 1925; Książek-Konicka, 1980). Nonetheless, the book remains the most detailed source that explores the aesthetic values of film in the Polish language at that time written by one author. Commissioned by the Department of Culture and Art, *The Tenth Muse* aimed to educate readers about film aesthetics (Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 36). Taking the form of an intellectual diary, it presents modern researchers with a number of linguistic problems. This is largely due to Irzykowski’s use of terminology and his neologisms, which, when translated, are at risk of losing their initial meaning (Bocheńska, 1977a: 5).

The Tenth Muse opens with Irzykowski’s (1977[1913]) ironically titled article, ‘Death of the Cinematograph?’⁷ The most relevant assertion to this essay is his claim that the cinema ‘opened the Kingdom of Movement’, which he believed was the most successfully depicted in animated film (Irzykowski, 1977[1913]: 455). In animated film, as in painting

the history that plays out in the [screen] image is not the main point. It is rather an occasion for the secrets of light and shadow to reveal themselves or the shades of colour to play ... A concept that is tightly cinematic need not necessarily make movement a marginal part of a film but can make it the main subject. (Irzykowski, 1977[1913]: 39, translated in Skaff, 2008: 58)

It was through the representation of movement, Irzykowski believed, that a filmmaker could explore the film's formal and stylistic features. He considered movement an expression of 'spirit' in cinema, which was best captured in animated film, in which there were 'no laws of space, time, substance or physical cause and effect' (Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 252, my translation). To this end, the actual story, as also proposed by filmmakers such as Georges Méliès, was of less importance than the 'tricks' that allowed for an exploration of the early attractions, i.e. qualities that were unique to the art of film:

As for the scenario, the 'fable', or 'tale', I only consider it at the end. I can state that the scenario constructed in this manner has *no importance*, since I use it merely as a pretext for 'the stage effects', 'the tricks', or for a nicely arranged tableau. (Méliès, 1961: 118, emphasis added)

Like Kuczkowski, Irzykowski believed that 'only animated film allowed the artist immediate individual and personal expression', without the need to involve actors, set designers and a production team (Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 250). 'If the future of feature film belongs to the engineers of the matter', Irzykowski argued, 'then the future of animation is in the hands of a painter-poet' (p. 253). The critic appreciated the fact that in animation the artist was not restricted in his choice of themes and was absolutely free to 'forge the material and his vision'. On the other hand, action film, despite its tricks, was a limited medium due to its reproductive nature (p. 254). Animated film could be made through simple means: paper and pencil, which were enough to guarantee its great potential and independence (p. 250). Because of the above qualities and the authorial freedom animated film offered, Irzykowski was convinced that only this type of film could give the cinema its artistic character (p. 253).

Kuczkowski's animated films, as well as his concept of synthetic-visionary film, are at the heart of Irzykowski's theory of animation in which he pronounces this type of film as the highest form of film art. But Irzykowski was not always convinced about the status of film as art. The impact of German idealist philosophy and contemporary German critical thought are largely responsible for the critic's initial distrust of cinema's artistic features. It was mainly Konrad Lange, a fierce opponent of film, who influenced most of Irzykowski's early thinking about film.⁸ In 1920, Lange claimed that because of cinema's raw and primitive nature, as well as its mechanical aspect, any artistic individuality was impossible within it (Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 253–254; Wallis, 1949: 158–160). He argued that the cinema was incapable of becoming art in its own right and was destined only to preserve reality (Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 88).⁹ Irzykowski agreed with this only partially, and it was in the theory of Rudolf Maria Holzapfel, and in Kuczkowski's and Wegener's films that he found a way to consider animation as an example of film art.¹⁰

Through his application of Holzapfel's theory of the appropriate and inappropriate arts, which the German critic coined in 1901 in his *Panidealische Psychologie der sozialen Gefühle* (Panidealist Philosophy of Social Emotions), Irzykowski 'cheated' his conservative views and thus was able to perceive animated film as art. According to Irzykowski, out of all the arts, cinema most resembled painting, but he did not consider film a 'pure art' as he did painting, literature and theatre (Bocheńska, 1977a: 9; Coates, 1987b: 115; Irzykowski, 1977[1913]: 455).¹¹ For Holzapfel the 'appropriate' arts, such as music and painting, used their own material as a source (Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 36). The inappropriate arts, on the other hand, employed nature as an inspiration. In

this category were acting, pedagogy, gardening and film (p. 37). Holzapfel's distinction, as employed by Irzykowski, is highly confusing since on the one hand the critic attempted to discover the unique qualities of film, yet on the other, he repeatedly compared film to painting and this tension remains unresolved in Irzykowski's theory. He accepted Holzapfel's distinction up to a point and believed that film could rehabilitate itself to the position of an appropriate art through animated film since it was the only type of film that uses its own resources (in Kuczkowski's case, clay and wood figures instead of real actors, which were considered materials from real life) (Bukowska-Schiemann, 1991: 147).

Like Holzapfel's, Irzykowski's employment of the distinction of the arts for the appropriate and inappropriate also poses some questions. Is it not the case that every artist uses nature as an inspiration and 'material' for his or her work? As Mazierska (1989: 20) explains, to a great extent this is true, since every artistic activity takes place in the world and 'requires material tools, be it a typewriter, paper or paint'. On the other hand, each of the arts has its own specific materials, thus each discipline uses nature in a different way. Although Irzykowski's distinction is in no way free from problems, it is correct when one considers, for example, that the main material of gardening is flowers, whereas actors are the main tool/material in the art of acting. The difficulty of this approach appears when one attempts to find a physical object which would embody the art of poetry or painting. As Mazierska (1989: 20) writes, 'one does not say that poetry is built from paper and ink, and that a painting is made of canvas and paint.' We tend to agree that shapes and tonality are the material of painting, while words build poetry. If one considers materials as the main characteristic of art, the process of making a film has in fact more in common with the work of a gardener arranging flowers than with a painter. The starting point for a gardener is a particular flower, with its individual shape and smell, while a painter operates with his or her imagination and a brush and often does not even require a model. In the same way that a gardener uses the physical reality when arranging flowers, a filmmaker uses physical reality, such as people and objects; unless, of course he or she is creating animated films, with imaginary, supernatural, non-realistic worlds.

Irzykowski's puzzling approach and his sympathy towards Holzapfel's distinction can perhaps be traced back to Irzykowski's own belief in two types of film: intensive and extensive (Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 235–240). Intensive, quality film, Irzykowski thought, fully explores the cinema's potential to reveal reality (movement) and transform the sensibility of the viewer (p. 236). Intensive film is thus experimental in nature, but unfortunately here Irzykowski does not offer particular examples and one can only assume that animated film belongs to this category. Extensive, quantitative cinema, on the other hand, exists on a lower level. This usually theatrical, popular type of film deals with 'facts rather than representation of movement' – it does not investigate the formal qualities of film. However, its aesthetic responsibility is to transform and make more accessible the achievements of the intensive film (pp. 236–237). As an example of this, Irzykowski names Murnau's *Phantom* (1922), in which the fast rhythm of Lorenz Lubota's (Alfred Abel's) life is captured in short, rapidly changing scenes, which are transformed into a quickly moving carousel circle. The frenzy of the character's existence is thus depicted with the use of a carefully crafted metaphor in a form of a graphic match that's specific to a cinematic language only (pp. 237–238).

Irzykowski's distinction explained above brings to mind Victor Shklovsky's later idea of two types of film: one that is close to poetry and the other that resembles prose (Shklovsky, 1994[1927]: 177). According to Shklovsky, Dziga Vertov's film *A Sixth Part of the World* (1926) was composed around 'the principle of poetic formal resolution'; hence he refers to it as a 'poem of pathos' (pp. 177–178). Shklovsky also proposed that in Vsevolod Pudovkin's *Mother* (1926), through a rhythmical construction 'we observe a gradual displacement of everyday situations by purely formal elements' (p. 177). On the other hand, he thought that Chaplin's *A Woman of Paris* (1923) was 'prose based on semantic constants, on things that are accepted' (p. 178). At the heart of Shklovsky's

distinction between poetry and prose in cinema rested the idea that an artistically sophisticated film had more in common with poetry (Irzykowski's intensive film), while popular cinema was oriented towards prose (Irzykowski's extensive film). Irzykowski believed that because animation was dependent only on the imagination, it was thus closer. It was for this reason that Irzykowski considered animated film 'the language of the spirit' (Kumor, 1965: 140).

For Irzykowski, animation surely must have been an example of an intensive film because only this type of film was created by a single, independent artist. Only in such film did Irzykowski see the future of cinema:

If we can imagine that painters might be supplying their own pictures for cinematographic shows one day, just as was the case at the dawn of cinema, when various 'wheels of life' and 'magical drums' were not yet using photographic images, then cinema would become the 'true art' and we would receive overwhelming impressions from it, of which today we get only the slightest taste when seeing contemporary films of fantasy and wonder. Then a Michelangelo of cinematography might emerge. (Irzykowski, 1977[1913]: 37, translated in Giżycki, 1987: 84)

According to Irzykowski, the creator of an animated film, who was primarily a painter, was a 'Michelangelo of cinematography' (p. 37). Only in animated film – the film of pure movement – and without any outside inspirations, such as literature, people and other 'creations of God' – could Irzykowski's ideal of cinema be achieved (Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 256). Thus, Irzykowski saw this sensibility in Kuczkowski's films, to which the critic often referred as 'painterly, graphic symphonies'.

The impact of Paul Wegener on Irzykowski's perception of film as art

Considering all the qualities he notes that are features of animated film, Irzykowski believed that aspects of animation could be successfully integrated into feature film productions. He saw the expression of this in Robert Wiene's *Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (1919) and its painted set decorations (Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 248). He also considered Paul Wegener's films among the most innovative in the history of cinema for their ability to create fantastic worlds, in which the 'trickery' served the purposes of the narrative (p. 44), as also encountered in animation.¹² Like Kuczkowski's creations, Irzykowski (1977[1924]: 249) felt that in Wegener's films both fantasy and real life existed simultaneously and only in such films was the filmmakers' creativity fully expressed. Once again, Shklovsky held a similar view regarding animated film and the use of fantasy elements in film. He believed that animated trick film was cinema's 'yet quite unrealised potential' (Shklovsky, 1994[1923]: 99). According to him, in animation the most important factor was 'the play with illusion'.

Irzykowski's fascination with Kuczkowski's films is rooted in his admiration of the visionary, mystical qualities of film, very much linked to Romanticism, which was the most prominent artistic movement in both Germany and Poland prior to the emergence of Modernism.¹³ Irzykowski saw animation's ability to express the screen-specific, imaginary worlds as also present in Wegener's films. On numerous pages of *The Tenth Muse*, Irzykowski admires the uncanny atmosphere in *The Golem* (Wegener and Henrik Galleen, 1915), *The Yogi*, *The Inventor* (Wegener and Rochus Gliese, 1916) and *Rübezahl's Wedding* (Wegener and Gliese, 1916) (Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 42–46, 47–49, 50–53).¹⁴ Incidentally, Wegener himself saw animated film as an inspiration for his live action films and considered it the most progressive of all film genres (Eisner, 2008: 33). For Wegener, as for Irzykowski, the wonders of animation could be best achieved through the employment of specially designed models, filmed with the use of a

stop-motion technique, which would ‘give rise to fantastic images which would prove absolutely novel associations of ideas in the spectator ... It would be impossible to distinguish the natural elements from the artificial ones’ (Wegener, 1916, quoted in Eisner, 2008: 33–34).

Irzykowski too was enamoured by this part of cinema that did not reproduce reality but instead manipulated and transformed it according to the needs of the artist. He believed that it was the cinema’s ability to see ‘unusual and supernatural things (special effects, fantasy films) that transferred it into art’ (Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 57).¹⁵ It is evident that Kuczkowski’s and Wegener’s emphasis on the fantastical and the imaginary shaped much of Irzykowski’s theory of film as art. His own short scenario, *Miłość żywiołów* (The Love of the Elements, 1916–1917), can be seen as further proof of his sympathy towards similar, Romantic and Symbolist qualities in film:

An empty field. There are stones in it.
 One of the stones slowly becomes animate. It is
transformed strangely. *Something* like a face and
 hands emerge.
 One hand holds a hammer, the other holds a
 chisel, and they form a human being.
 He stretches his arms and legs in the realm of life.
 [...]
 Plants and flowers appear.
 Finally the man carves a female companion. The
 very act of forming her is an unceasing caress.
 [...]
 A kiss.
 They get closer to each other.
 They become one.
 Their features gradually lose their human form.
 A shapeless form stirs.
 It becomes still.
 There remains only the stone.
 All the creations of the liberated man turn into
 [...]
 (Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 95–96, translated in Giżycki, 1987: 86)¹⁶

What is apparent in the script is Irzykowski’s preoccupation with nature and its unpredictable powers as a pretext for exploring the representation of physical movement in film: ‘One of the stones slowly becomes animate. It is transformed strangely. *Something* like a face and hands emerge’ (emphasis added). This enchantment with animating the inanimate also reflects his view of animated film as close to a ‘moving experiment’ or a ‘moving arabesque’, which ‘opened new

perspectives for film' (Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 130–134).¹⁷ What is also striking about Irzykowski's scenario is that for him, as for the Romantics and German idealists, nature constituted the main source of inspiration. It also reflects his fascination with the symbolist paintings of Arnold Böcklin (p. 252).¹⁸ The script also marked Irzykowski's departure from the employment of human figures and thus it resembles scenes from Wegener's *Rübezahl's Wedding*, which Irzykowski admired for its symbolic use of nature, particularly in the scenes with a waterfall and such highly cinematic moments as the metamorphosis of Rübezahl's beloved into a butterfly and then a dove (pp. 44–45). It is thus clear that Irzykowski's fascination with film leaned towards the tradition of the cinema of attractions, with its prime emphasis on exploring effects that were specific to the medium of film only.

As proposed in this article, Irzykowski found a reflection of such an approach to filmmaking in the work of Kuczkowski and Wegener, whose films explored special effects and aimed at creating alternative realities through a series of 'tricks' that explored the language that was unique to the new medium of film.

Conclusion

At the time of its publication, *The Tenth Muse* suffered from much negative criticism. However, in the introduction to the book, Irzykowski expressed his awareness of certain contradictions in his theory (Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 26). His aim was to offer the public a certain set of criteria which they could apply to contemporary film. To summarize, only through animation, Irzykowski believed, could film elevate itself to the status of art because only in this type of filmmaking does the filmmaker transform reality into his or her own vision, which for Irzykowski was the main characteristic that defined art. Animation did not attempt to imitate reality but instead presented its own and unique model of reality.

It is a significant loss that none of Kuczkowski's films survived, as with them Poland would have had 'the purest avant-garde cinema' prior to the films of the 1920s inspired by Futurism, Dada and Constructivism (Giżycki, 1987: 90). Kuczkowski's 'visionary' concepts are thought of as having influenced such key figures of Polish animation as Jan Lenica and Walerian Borowczyk, whose work has been acclaimed internationally (p. 91), while aspects of Irzykowski's theory can be found in the work of such key Polish avant-garde filmmakers of the 1930s as Jalu Kurek and Stefan Themerson (especially in their insistence on working with objects rather than actors). Even if Irzykowski's theory of film was indeed flawed, he was the first Polish critic to have attempted to develop a theory that would deal with the aesthetic values of film. His rapport with Kuczkowski was also demonstrative of a close relationship between theory and practice that was crucial to the development of the later film avant-gardes.

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Notes

1. Kuczkowski's memoirs contain three different versions of his filmography. In *The Tenth Muse*, Irzykowski includes numerous film descriptions, which he attributes to Kuczkowski, but which do not feature anywhere in the filmmaker's memoirs, thus their origin and existence cannot be fully confirmed.
2. Patriotic films were heavily promoted by the Polish state and only the 1920s witnessed the appearance of a few directors with more personal style. The most promising was Wiktor Biegański, who in 1921 established a film co-operative Kinostudio and became the founder of the Warsaw Film Institute in 1924 (see Haltof, 2002: 11–18).

3. His most famous advertising commission was *Burak cukrowy i sacharynki* (Sugar Beet and the Saccharins) (1929–1930), a stop-motion puppet animation. In 1936, Kuczkowski was known to be working on a film *Prawa wszelkiej rzeczywistości* (The Laws of Being) (1936), but like many of his projects, this remained unfiled (Giżycki, 1987: 18).
4. Giżycki (1987) translates *film malarski* as ‘painted film’; however, here I use my own translation of it as ‘painterly film’, which I believe reflects the nature of Kuczkowski’s films in a more appropriate fashion.
5. Kumor’s monograph on Irzykowski appears to be controversial itself. For the polemics around it, see Karcz (1966).
6. Brzozowski (1878–1911) was a Polish Positivist philosopher who influenced Irzykowski’s concept of man and matter, in which he discusses movement in film, particularly in relation to Chaplin’s films (see Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 65–68).
7. This article (translated by Hendrykowski, 1988) mainly explores Irzykowski’s scepticism towards the introduction of sound (see Irzykowski, 1977[1913]: 455–456). For a general discussion on the issue of sound and its impact on avant-garde film, see Hagener (2007: 22–24, 194–198).
8. Here Irzykowski uses Konrad Lange’s *Das Kino in Gegenwart un Zukunft* (1920) as the main reference. Lange (1855–1921) was a German theorist of aesthetics, the author of the theory of ‘conscious illusion’. In his book *The Essence of Art* (1901) he wrote that film could not be art, because of its connection to mechanical reproduction. He continued exploring his theory in *Der Kinematograph vom ethischen und ästhetischen Standpunkt* (1912) and *Nationale Kinoreform* (1918).
9. This brings to mind André Bazin’s essay ‘The Ontology of the Photographic Image’ (2001[1945]), in which the French critic praised exactly *these* qualities of film because they *allowed* the cinema to faithfully represent reality on screen.
10. Rudolf Maria Holzapfel (1874–1930), an Austrian philosopher of Polish origin. Irzykowski was also influenced by Emilie Altenloh’s first proper sociological study of cinema, *On the Sociology of the Cinema: The Cinema Business and the Social Strata of its Audiences* (1914).
11. There has not been much agreement on how to translate *sztuki właściwe i niewłaściwe* into English. Giżycki (1987: 85) proposes ‘true’ and ‘untrue’ arts. Bren (1986: 97) uses ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ arts, whereas in this article I employ my own translation as ‘appropriate’ and ‘inappropriate’ arts.
12. Paul Wegener (1874–1948) acted mainly in silent Expressionist films and was a member of Max Reinhardt’s acting troupe.
13. On the links between animation, fantastic worlds, Romanticism and German idealist philosophy, see Kearney (2006).
14. Wegener was also important to Irzykowski’s theory of film because of his outright sympathy towards film as an art form. In his 1916 presentation titled ‘On the artistic possibilities of film’ the actor and filmmaker expressed his dislike for the cinema as mass entertainment and considered most contemporary films bad imitations of theatre and ‘trashy novels’ (Westerdale, 2005: 153).
15. Further links between Kuczkowski, Wegener and Irzykowski’s theory can be explored through German Romantic and Idealist philosophy, particularly that of Schelling (see Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 26, 36, 40, 42, 65, 219).
16. Irzykowski and Kuczkowski fell out over this scenario, since after being shown the unpublished manuscript of *The Tenth Muse*, Kuczkowski thought that Irzykowski’s script was a plagiarism of his film *Głazy* (Rocks, 1916–1917).
17. Irzykowski’s notion of the ‘moving arabesque’ brings to mind Germaine Dulac’s idea of a ‘visual arabesque’, as present in her film *Arabesque* (1929) and expressed in the concerns of *cinema pur*: In *The Tenth Muse*, Irzykowski discussed the concept of pure cinema, as well as the French concept of *photogénie*; however, these aspects of his theory require another treatment (see Irzykowski, 1977[1924]: 145–159, 160–165).
18. Arnold Böcklin (1827–1901), a Swiss symbolist painter.

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