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Juliusz Kleiner’s Theory of Humanistic Research as Applied to Film Studies

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Abstract

The author recalls the 1929 essay “U wrót nowej estetyki” [“At the Gates of a New Aesthetics”] by Juliusz Kleiner (1886–1957), an eminent Polish humanist and philologist, and considers it as one of the most important publications within prewar Polish film thought. Lewicki primarily draws attention to the act of ennoblement of film in the scientific world, as well as Kleiner’s important observations on film as an art guided by new principles of creation and characterized by a new mode of reception. The main part of the article is an attempt to apply Kleiner’s other, strictly philological works and the methodology developed therein to film studies as an academic discipline, which was taking shape in the late 1950s and early 1960s (individual remarks concern, among other things, the issue of analysing a work, the theory of the historical process, as well as the principles of interdisciplinary comparative studies). **(Non-reviewed material; originally published in *Kwartalnik Filmowy* 1957, no. 28, pp. 3–17).**

1

The 20th century can boast that after a long series of centuries it was the first to add a new art to the traditional ensemble of fine arts. These words, which begin a consideration of film art, can be read in a short study by Juliusz Kleiner, published in 1929 in the weekly magazine *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* [Illustrated Weekly].¹ This study, which places film art at the forefront of the other arts of our age, is significant insofar as it is, in a fundamental sense, almost completely isolated. Juliusz Kleiner, an excellent literary scholar and art expert, did not deal with film in his works. Never ceasing to be a philologist by vocation, in his scientific activity, he constantly used evidence-based arguments from the history and theory of fine arts, music, and theatre. He accorded first place in the world of art to the art of words – literature. However, he always saw it in close connection with other forms of expression of human thought and beauty. Hence the broad horizons of his view of literature, hence the full vividness of the images of artists he created, hence the precision and depth of his analyses of creative works. As a firm opponent of formalism and sociologism, Juliusz Kleiner was able to build such a system of art research that shows the artistic work in its unique shape, while at the same time bringing its philosophical qualities and educational ambitions to the fore.

Juliusz Kleiner was a high-class artist as a critic and as a researcher – if we extend the criteria of artistry to the field of philosophical prose. When it comes to the language of his works, he was an artist of the Polish language. As an intellectual, he was always versatile like Leonardo da Vinci, Diderot, Goethe, or France. Like Bertolt Brecht, Leon Schiller – like Sergei Eisenstein. Constantly maintaining his own high class of writing endeavours, he was very demanding of other artists and art scholars.

The fact that Kleiner did not discuss the art of film in the comparative sections of his research is only a result of the basic range of his scientific interests: the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and only partly Young Poland. He only attempted to characterize his contemporary era in one study, under the title “U wrót nowej estetyki” [“At the Gates of a New Aesthetics”]. The opening words of this article are taken from this work, and it is in this work that Kleiner defines the leading role of film art in the 20th century, justifying it – most importantly – with arguments of a historical-aesthetic type.

Is there anything unusual in the fact that in 1929, thus more than 30 years after the discovery of the cinematograph, someone would elevate film to the rank of artistic creation? Not at all – if we consider the number of works written about film. Definitely – if we consider that the official knowledge of art and the history of artistic phenomena dismissed the appearance of film with either strong disapproval (as Konrad Lange did in his *Das Wesen der Kunst* [The Essence of Art]) or, worse still, with silence. Mieczysław Wallis wrote about this in his essay “Odkrycie filmu” [“The Discovery of Film”]², so there is no need to repeat his words about how aesthetics and art history of our time have with a certain deliberate consistency omitted the existence and aesthetic achievements of film art. Although film created its own critical literature and the theory of a new aesthetic phenomenon was emerging, it was from the beginning, and remains to this day, an enclave of specialists and enthusiasts, poorly connected to the entire so-called university frontline of knowledge about art. Things were no better in Poland. Although Karol Irzykowski wrote his film theory,

commissioned by the ministry, he did not return to the issues of film aesthetics in his later major works. Stefania Zahorska's paper introduced the issue of film into the proceedings of the 1927 philosophical congress,³ but this ingress did not have any practical consequences in terms of the equal treatment of film science with other disciplines of academic humanities. In his work *U podstaw estetyki* [*The Foundations of Aesthetics*] (first published in 1933), Stanisław Ossowski devoted only three small marginal mentions to film in 312 pages of text. Zahorska's lectures at the Free Polish University in Warsaw and a series of lectures she gave at the John Casimir University in Lviv were the only attempts to link knowledge of film with the recognized sciences. The existence of film was also overlooked by the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, whose archives lack any mention or documentation of film research actually developing in interwar Poland. Neither of the dissertations on film by Leopold Blaustein or Zofia Lissa were acknowledged by critics in scientific periodicals. Only after the war, the works of Roman Ingarden, Mieczysław Wallis, Stefan Szuman, and Kazimierz Wyka suggest that the historical and creative output of film art begins to constitute a significant argument in comparative aesthetic research. However, film studies is still not a university-type discipline in Poland.

When Kleiner put forth his aesthetic formula for film art in 1929, the philosophical aspects of cinema were not unknown to him. Having attended Bergson's lectures, he was familiar with his view of the *cinematographic mechanism of thought*, specified in his *L'évolution créatrice* [*Creative Evolution*]. He probably also knew Irzykowski's book *Dziesiąta muza* [*The Tenth Muse*] and Zahorska's previously mentioned "Zagadnienia formalne filmu" ["Formal Issues of Film"]. It can be assumed, however, that it was not his theoretical preparation, but his sensitive way of perceiving and evaluating all the surrounding manifestations of mental life that led him to remark on the desire, decisive of the style of our times, to *tear down the boundary between the festivity of art and the greyness of everyday life, as expressed in cinema, as expressed in urban poetry*.

The year 1929 was a moment of revolutionary breakthrough in the development of the art of filmmaking. Film was enriched by sound. The word became a component of the film work, extending the range of cinematic creative synthesis to the furthest limits of abstract thinking. As the creative output of the silent cinema period was drawing to a close, precisely in 1929, creative profiles were already outlined, equal in class to all the other arts: Griffith, Chaplin, Clair, Eisenstein, and Pudovkin. Attempts to chart a theory of the new art had already been made by Canudo, Lindsay, Delluc, Epstein, and Irzykowski, by Balázs (his first texts), by Pudovkin and Eisenstein, in their first written works, and by the authors of the French series *L'Art Cinématographique*. However, this was only the first, exploratory period of theorizing on film matters, proving uncoordinated and not entirely systematic, absorbed almost entirely in the very aesthetic identification of the film phenomenon. Its representatives are described by Aristarco⁴ as *i precursori*, while Agel⁵ calls this period *promotion du rêve*. Richter's aesthetic summary of the silent film period⁶ only enumerates the expressive possibilities of film art, without classifying them according to accepted aesthetic criteria or comparing them with the expressive ranges of other arts. It is only in the 1930s that a systematic period in film theory would begin, initiated by Balázs's second book⁷ and the works of Arnheim, Spottiswoode, Rotha, and Nielsen, and deepened by the theoretical discourse of Pudovkin and Eisenstein, growing out of the arguments in their creative practice as directors.

Within the scope of his aesthetic and philological research, Juliusz Kleiner did not, as it was mentioned, come into contact with film art. Neither was he familiar with all theoretical literature on film. And yet he was the one who decided to place film art amongst other arts and, more importantly, to rank it highly. In this respect – in the atmosphere of the “blanket of silence” scholars drew on film matters at that time – he was both isolated and pioneering in his classification. In his approach, film art was moved from the margins of aesthetics (where various aesthetes at best placed it) to the foreground of artistic creation in the 20th century, in which, according to his definition, life had surpassed the work of artists, and in which only cinema was able to keep pace with life through its technicality.

Kleiner’s study (which went unnoticed by film bibliographers and was not even mentioned in Wallis’s “Odkrycie filmu”), postulating the creation of a new aesthetics, sees the artistic progressiveness of film in the fact that: a) it expanded the sphere of illusion and brought it closer to everyday reality, b) it blurred the boundary between the visual and rhythmic arts, and c) it changed the hitherto prevailing foundations of artistic creation, i.e. the principle of selection and the principle of transformation of material. The new principle of creation, formulated in the wake of the experience of film art, reads as follows: *artistic creation does not necessarily consist in selection and transformation; it can also be the arrangement of a given reality*. Kleiner calls this principle the *original sin and epochal gain*, which, in relation to thus defined film art, is both a positive assessment and a sceptical warning signal. The author of “U wrót nowej estetyki” did not take into account the peculiarities of documentary film, in which the principle of “arranging a given reality” may be the most important factor (Kleiner was presumably unfamiliar with the theoretical premises and films of Dziga Vertov); still, he could not mean relegating the aesthetic postulate of “selection and transformation” to the background as an unreservedly positive qualification. In fact, the principle of selection and transformation plays a very serious role in film aesthetics, as it did back then, in 1929.

In the study under discussion, Kleiner potentially appreciated the aesthetic position of film art. There was one thing, however, that he, an excellent expert on literature, did not see: the fact that both film art and its structural principles derive from the artistic shape of literary epics. He did not notice – or at least did not write – that the visual and temporal-rhythmic elements of a film work are subordinated to the principles of narrative construction and literary imagery. (This view, pioneered by Eisenstein, is adhered to by most film theorists). The historical derivation of the principles of film editing from Dickens’s narrative method would have been a crucial argument here, but this revelatory attempt by Griffith is not mentioned in Kleiner’s study. Perhaps he simply did not know about it.

If, despite these oversights, Kleiner’s formulation and classification of film should be regarded as an important stage in the development of film theory, it is also because it is precisely film art that became the basis of his conclusion in the study “U wrót nowej estetyki”. This conclusion is *a call for great art that would recompose all collective life and turn all reality into a work of art*. In its lofty stylisation, this conclusion is quite typical of the creative stance of Kleiner, who saw in a work of art, first and foremost, its relationship to reality: current, historical, or that which is yet to be born.

2

The study "U wrót nowej estetyki" is Kleiner's only work in which this eminent scholar of the Enlightenment and Romanticism eras took a stand on film art. If we wish to draw from his theory of art research and his philological practice some conclusions regarding the methodology of film research, we can do so without any reservations. And this is for several reasons. Kleiner is: a) an innovative methodologist of humanistic research – and film knowledge is a humanistic discipline, b) a researcher and theoretician of literature – and the structural principles of film, as mentioned, derive from literature, and c) an outstanding philologist – and the development of film theory, through the activities of the Paris Filmological Institute, for a long time already has been moving towards the creation of a specific film philology. The compilation of the foundations of Kleiner's theory of literature cannot be intended to suggest any mechanical transfer of the laws of one discipline to another. It is an attempt at confrontation which, given the fundamental affinity between the two fields, literature and film, may become a fertilizing methodological and research impulse.

The first thing that opens up the whole complex of Kleiner's views on the method of art research is his theory on the specificity of the humanities. The specificity of the humanities was dealt with in the last century by Wilhelm Dilthey (*Geisteswissenschaft*) and later by Heinrich Rickert (*Kulturwissenschaft*); they are both often regarded as codifiers of this field of scientific research. Juliusz Kleiner took a specific, thoroughly progressive stance on this issue. Stefania Skwarczyńska writes the following about his stance as the founder of a new direction in humanistic research: *Having opposed the old school of positivist research with his choice of the Romantic era as his fundamental research topic, J. Kleiner opted for newer trends in literary studies, whose cradle was the neo-idealist school of W. Dilthey. However, his position in their battle with positivism was his own, and he brought its victory and influence in Poland thanks to the excellent achievements of his research work. Having rejected the tendencies of historicism, which threatened the recognition of the specificity of art, and having rejected extreme geneticism, which threatened the valuation of a work of art, J. Kleiner never renounced history as a determinant of a particular work of art, nor the evaluation of a work of art in terms of its social function and its role in the historical development of culture. On the other hand, J. Kleiner, sharing the view of newer currents in humanistic research on the specificity of their subject and their methods, sharing their view on the importance of the creative personality for the character of the work, never allowed himself to be led into the blind alleys of psychologism, into formalistic detachment of the work from life, into indifference to the content and social function of the piece. As a result, he stood as a researcher on the ground of both history and human individuality, on the ground of the concept of a work of art with a definite socio-historical content and with its own artistic form, determined both by the artistry of the creator embedded in history and by his personality.*⁸

Kleiner's view on the position and specificity of the humanities was partly expressed in his study "O typach poznania naukowego" ["On the Types of Scientific Cognition"] (included in the volume *W kręgu Mickiewicza i Goethego*, 1938). Here, he discussed three types of scientific cognition: a) self-sufficient cognition, the object of which is at the same time a product of the process of cognition – what

is known as mathematical cognition, b) useful cognition, the object of which is the ever-changing reality, and the goal of which is the ability to cause changes in reality – what is known as naturalistic cognition, and c) cognition of valuable objects, the object of which is a single and unique process or work, and the goal of which is to learn the value of this process or work – and this is precisely humanistic cognition. The condition of humanistic cognition is the mental assimilation (understanding, experience) of the object of study. *Humanistic cognition*, writes Kleiner, *is a field of complete autonomy. Applicability cannot be the basis for judging its role* (p. 244).

The method of humanistic research involves knowledge that constructs patterns, classes of objects, their relationships, their laws, their changes. According to Kleiner's definition, this is *naturalistic knowledge of humanistic reality* (p. 245). For the naturalist is primarily concerned with the hierarchy of truths, while the humanist is concerned with the value of a process or work. As a consequence of the intersection of the humanistic investigation of values with the "naturalistic" establishment of a hierarchy of truths, certain general concepts are formed, which are taken over by philosophy into its quasi-mathematical circle of cognitive self-sufficiency. In this way – in Kleiner's view – all three types of scientific cognition are intertwined in the humanities, as the different types of cognition are also in general interconnected and mutually supportive in the field of scientific research.

The complex nature of film art, its aesthetic diversity, and at the same time, its physical-chemical and technical background, its physiological-perceptual conditioning, indeed postulates the complexity and diversity of research methods. However, the fact that film knowledge belongs to the family of humanities is determined by the fact that it is knowledge about valuation – of both works and creative processes.

3

Juliusz Kleiner's humanistic methods of research and valuation are expounded not only in his theoretical works. We can see them in their full richness in his monographic works on Słowacki, Mickiewicz, and Krasiński, in his studies of the works of Krasicki, Fredro, and Goethe. He was particularly meticulous and masterful in his analyses of individual works, seeing their accuracy as the basic condition for aesthetic and historical valuation. Here is how he speaks of the researcher's attitude to the work of art under study (in the introduction to his monograph on Mickiewicz): *One can take the position of a sculptor or a painter towards works of art. The former isolates the figure but in return lets us to view it from all sides, endows it with the truth of solidity. The latter enriches the image of the figure with a varied background, but portrays it unilaterally and in only one light. It is desirable to imitate both methods: let the background make the works the efflorescence of a vast life, let isolation make the artistic creation available in its self-contained plasticity.* Kleiner's analytical study "Sztuka poetycka Słowackiego" ["Słowacki's Poetic Art"]⁹ is a capital example of this research position. And it is here, in the conclusion, that we can find an expression of the author's research honesty and, at the same time, of wise humanistic scepticism: *The action of poetry, the action of art escapes the strict control of consciousness. It is possible to examine objectively the elements and relationships that make up an artistic creation. It is possible to subject the corresponding*

sensations to scrutiny. But there is always something intangible in the interdependence of these two spheres. It is similar to the motivation of spontaneous acts: we construct motives that appear to be a sufficient rationale for the act – but is it certain that these motives, and only these motives, determined the act? (p. 191). And a little further on, another sceptical doubt: *The sound organism of the poem and the style of the word sequences included in this organism, together with the sphere of representation and association they suggest every time, are the sources of poetic charm. But what is their interaction? What acts most strongly in them, what only accompanies this action? It is not known whether a certain, precise answer will ever be given in relation to individual creations* (p. 192).

With both of these remarks, Kleiner the analyst disassociates himself from any simplification of aesthetic research methods. Analysis is the basic research procedure, but it does not guarantee the discovery of the real value and impact of a work of art. A healthy social sense and awareness of the social function of art does not allow him to detach the work of art from its receptive concretisation. The work of art, with all the autonomy and uniqueness of its formation, exists for Kleiner primarily as a historically conditioned creation and as a creation with a specific range of influence.

These issues are dealt with in detail in Kleiner's study "Historyczność i pozaczasowość w dziele literackim" ["Historicity and Extra-Temporality in a Literary Work"].¹⁰ The general aesthetic spirit of this text, as well as of Kleiner's other works, can be understood without unnecessary genre associations if the words "literature" and "language" are substituted in our minds with the concepts of "art" and "means of expression," since most of Kleiner's theoretical works refer to all the issues of art.

Literature in the fullest sense (read: art in the fullest sense) is made up, according to Kleiner, of works which *have shown the ability to endure despite the passing of that intellectual atmosphere which accompanied their formation* (p. 7). Thus, we are talking about works with a powerful stamp of one-offness and uniqueness, about works that form the classics of every field of art, about outstanding works. *Their isolated exceptionalism requires the exceptional attitude of a researcher, who isolates himself from all irrelevant spheres* (p. 7). Here Kleiner appears as a strong opponent of the principle of egalitarianism in aesthetic research. *Peak phenomena, he argues, are not the most perfect form of average phenomena, but are something essentially different* (p. 8). And further on: *The work of art must be considered as a self-contained organism. The unveiling of its immanent logic, the self-sufficiency of its internal interconnections, should be the aspiration of the researcher. The entirety of the expressive means used must be reduced to the dictates which emerged from the shaping of the work itself; one must break through to the paths of the immanent explanation of style. What is decisive for individual life in a work must be the key to solving the mystery of its unity* (p. 8).

The research isolation of the work, which Kleiner postulates as essential to its formal and stylistic analysis, must not last throughout the research process. The researcher must establish the full historicity of the work, embedded in its organism, before proceeding to determine its transhistoricity. *Expressions fused into the organism of a work are not inanimate material which only the creator fills with individual life, but carry within them certain potential qualities of life* (p. 10). It is a matter of discovering in the individual constituent elements of a work their relationship to the era that formed them and provided them for the author to use. This idea of examining the morphology of a work of art as a product of the era, in addition to

the individual style of the author, is one of the ways in which an analysis of a work should provide as many arguments as possible for the reading of the so-called cognitive background of the work. This does not, however, constitute the end of analytical endeavours. *Our mind, just as it demands a cognitive background for works of art, so it demands the inclusion of the people and facts that shape them, it demands the construction of a genesis. This is the condition of getting close with the work* (p. 13). And in this way, the process of analysing a work of art is assisted, to use Kleiner's expression, by the aspect of historical documentation. By setting such a broad scope of the process of analysis in aesthetic research, Kleiner forestalls a misconception of the concept of historicity. For the genetic history of a work of art is one thing, while the historicity inherent in its structure is another.

Quoted here in as faithful a summary as possible, Juliusz Kleiner's remarks on "historicity and extra-temporality in the literary work" (read: in the work of art) are key to the issue of analytical methods in aesthetic research. They are entirely transferable to the methodology of research on film. Both Kleiner's broad argumentation and the expressive issues of literature, which are close to film, allow these views to be considered without corrections due to the specificity of film art. The concern about a mechanic transfer of research methods is unfounded here, since Kleiner's notion of literature extends, as in many of his works, to the entire field of artistic creation.

* * *

Another of his studies: "Treść i forma w poezji" ["Content and Form in Poetry"] (written as early as in 1922, republished in the volume *Studia z zakresu teorii literatury*, 1956), can also be regarded as key to the issue of the analysis of a work of art. The strictly literary formulations contained both in the title and in the text of the work should not put off researchers of other fields of art, especially since the author, treating the notions of content and form very broadly, polemizes in one of the references (p. 26) with Józef Strzygowski and his method of examining paintings, and by the very fact of this controversy allows his view to be considered with regard to non-literary aesthetic phenomena. The very concept of the elements emerging successively during the creative process (A – essential content, B – concept or shape, C – structure, and D – external form or final expression), their formation of successive causal chains that determine the boundaries of content and form, which shift depending on the starting point of the research – all this seems an appropriate starting point for defining the basic aesthetic elements of any work of art, and therefore also of a film work. This study is one of Kleiner's most brilliant theoretical works. Assimilating it to the methodology of film art research seems almost necessary.

The thematic richness of Juliusz Kleiner's theoretical works forces one to select the problems that are most significant for film – an art that draws so abundantly on the achievements of other arts, especially, and this should be emphasized, on literature, but which nevertheless has its own unique aesthetic specificity. Aesthetic specificity also demands specific research methods. Therefore, all research suggestions, including those of Juliusz Kleiner, can only be a starting point for trying out and then developing filmological research methods. However, the methods of film

research must not break with the traditions of art knowledge – for example, with the poetics of Aristotle or Horace or with the visual theory of Leonardo da Vinci. The aesthetic complexity of film art means that a certain ray of truth falls from each aesthetic theory on the matter of aesthetic verification of a film work.

The traditions of the most complete research accuracy belong to philology – the ability to correctly read and interpret a literary work. Literature, like film, uses a specific system of imagery beyond the abstract semantic sphere of human speech: fragments of sights and sounds, arranged according to a specific narrative method. Both the elements of literary imagery (words and sentences) and the elements of cinematic imagery (montage phrases consisting of visual-motor ‘sets’ and sequences of spoken words and melodic fragments) seem to share a common base of existence in the mode of viewer perception. A literary work exists concretely only in the verbal understanding and imagination of the reader. The aesthetic existence of a cinematic work depends on whether the viewer has understood it, i.e., whether the set of expressive means has fused with the viewer’s physiological mechanism of perception. The structural connections that link literature and film make it necessary to look to certain research methods and traditions of philology as an appropriate reference point in the formation of objective and rigorous criteria for judgements about the value of a film work and its class, historical and transhistorical. To date, the practice of film theory – if one may be tempted to make a certain generalisation – has seemed to overestimate the importance of the grammatical elements of film aesthetics: montage, close-ups, arrangements of artistic composition. Even when calculated and classified in the most precise way, they do not provide a basis for judgements about the essence of a film work, nor do they entitle one to construct synthetic evaluations. It is a partial and insufficient method in the same way that the study of the language of a literary work is insufficient for assessing its value and meaning. The poetics of film art has developed to some extent, albeit quite limited, and film stylistics, understood as the study of the development of individual, supra-grammatical forms of artistic expression, has hung in the vacuum. The study of style, Kleiner says in the essay “Pojęcie stylu” [“The Concept of Style”],¹¹ leads not to a classification of stylistic devices, but *to the interpretation of their value, to an understanding of the governing laws, to the unveiling of the individual personality and the collective physiognomy* (p. 158). The objective determination of the style of a work, or of the style of the entire *oeuvre* of a single artist, depends again on a properly conceived and properly conducted analysis, which again cannot be limited to a systematic classification of the formal elements of cinematic grammar. This closes the circle of research attempts that lacked a proper interpretive philology with all its auxiliary aspects: historical and comparative.

The richness of the theoretical issues in Kleiner’s works, as already mentioned, also forces one to reflect that there are still many morphological and historical aspects that film theory has not yet explored or even signalled. One example is the role of memory in the reception of a work and in its structure.¹² *The role of art in life is not only a fleeting submission to a directly acting artistic creation, but also the persistence of a set of remembered objects* – this is Kleiner’s introduction to this issue, which is important for literature, but much more important for film. The specificity of film

lies, among other things, in the organic transience or fleeting nature of the cinematic work. The reader can turn back to recall something, reread each paragraph of the literary work he is reading. The cinema viewer does not have the capacity to go back in this way – and even the researcher of a film work has serious difficulties with this. As if with this characteristic of film art in mind, Kleiner formulates the principle: *in determining the essence of a work of art, one must reckon with both the characteristics of the thing directly experienced and the characteristics of the object remembered* (p. 77). Speaking of the selective character of a literary work (here we remember that this is also a peculiarity of film structures), he concludes: *for poetic generalisation one only needs a few features, or sometimes just a single feature given suggestively* (p. 78). In connection with this observation, how necessary it seems to examine the suggestiveness of those “features” of film language that are designed to stick in the memory of the viewer.

4

In Juliusz Kleiner’s collection of theoretical works under review, *Studia z zakresu teorii literatury*, there is also a study which forces one to reflect on the methodology of writing film history: “Konstruowanie całości i ocena w badaniach historyczno-literackich” [“Constructing a Whole and Evaluation in Research on Literary History”]. Kleiner distinguishes between three ways of constructing knowledge about art. One is history, which groups artistic phenomena according to temporal, local, and personal affiliations. The second is systematics, which groups these phenomena according to essential features. Finally, the third way is theory, which constructs and critically elaborates concepts and laws. All three of these ways converge in the research workshop of the historian, for history takes systematics broadly into account, which again is based on theory. The task of the historian of artistic phenomena is to group them into specific wholes in such a way that: a) each element of the whole is important, b) each preceding element is necessary for the understanding of the subsequent ones, and c) the preceding elements are necessary and sufficient for the understanding of each element. In order to obtain a complete historical picture, in order to highlight the essential connections between the art in question and other manifestations of collective life, it is necessary in the historian’s work to build up a historical-social and general cultural background. However, the historian faces a specific difficulty, namely the system of evaluations that will form the basis for the selection of the artistic phenomena described. The construction of historical wholes cannot do without an appropriate evaluation system. On the basis of these assessments, the historian selects the so-called significant elements – phenomena of great historical importance that predestine them to be outstanding not in a single region or country, but on a global scale. This criterion of historical importance is joined by two others: the criterion of symptomatology and the criterion of absolute value. Absolute value is *the conformity of a phenomenon to a certain system of postulates which we regard as independent of the variability of phenomena* (p. 73). This “system of postulates” of an aesthetic, social, ethical nature is different for each era. Thus, when historians of artistic phenomena wish to obtain a criterion for yet another important evaluation – a historical evaluation – they must seek a measure in the system of postulates of the community within which the work was created. The criterion of absolute value is thus derived from two evalua-

tions: the current one for the moment the history is written, and the “historical” one, referring to the significance of the work at the moment of its creation.

Characteristic of Kleiner’s research stance is his concluding remark. Namely, he states that an art historian does not have to feel bound or enslaved by the rigours of objective value criteria. He himself can, by the force of his arguments, add historical importance to a work of art, even if it did not possess it in the light of its contemporary system of postulates. *For the historian need not confine himself to the study of past life. The shaping of contemporary and future life is also available to them. Evaluation encompasses propaganda* (p. 73).

5

This article, based on a summary of the views of the philologist and art theorist Juliusz Kleiner, does not offer their critical analysis, as it is not based, with regard to film theory, on any research material. Instead, it is a proposal of a research type.

Following Kleiner’s example, this article could be titled: “U wrót nowej estetyki filmu” [“At the Gates of a New Film Aesthetics”]. Or at least: at the gates of a new stage of filmological research in Poland. In the article, several arguments were given to explain why: a) the system of philological and literary-historical research in general, and b) the system of research developed in theory and practice by Juliusz Kleiner in particular – seem to be an appropriate starting position for discussions and attempts to find new, stricter methods of film research.

Attempts at rigorous, ‘philological’ research into film art as a whole, taking into account all its various cross-sections, were undertaken ten years ago by the Institute of Filmology, established at the University of Paris. The development of this research (which grouped together a number of eminent humanists from various European countries) and the direction it has taken¹³ lead us to believe that this is the right path for scientific film theory. There is a passion for research on various aspects of film artistry in the work of the French filmologists and other scholars associated with them, and there is also a determined insistence on linking film theory with other humanistic disciplines.

Discussing ten years of research output of the Institute of Filmology at the Sorbonne should perhaps be the second proposal for the reform of Polish film studies. It is right, however, that the views of Juliusz Kleiner, a scholar who masterfully, and at the same time in a strictly scientific manner, described and elevated the traditions of Polish national art to a high historical level, have been put first for consideration.

Transl. Jeremy Pearman

¹ This study was republished in 1938 in a volume entitled *W kręgu Mickiewicza i Goethego* [In the Circle of Mickiewicz and Goethe].

² In the edited volume *Estetyka współczesna* [Contemporary Aesthetics], 1949.

³ See: *Przegląd Filozoficzny* [Philosophical Review] 1926-1928, vol. XXIX-XXXI.

⁴ G. Aristarco, *Storia delle teorie del film*, 1951.

⁵ H. Agel, *Esthétique du cinéma*, 1957.

⁶ H. Richter, *Filmgegner von heute – Filmfreunde von morgen*, 1929.

⁷ B. Balázs, *Der Geist des Films*, 1930.

⁸ S. Skwarczyńska, “W pięćdziesięciolecie twórczości naukowej Juliusza Kleinera” [“On the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Scholarly Work of Juliusz Kleiner”], 1956.

⁹ Included in his work *Studia z zakresu teorii literatury* [Studies in Literary Theory], 1956.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Ibidem, p. 77.

¹³ See: yearbooks of *Revue internationale de filmologie*, as well as *Film na Świecie* [*Film in the World*] 1957, no. 3.

Bolesław W. Lewicki

Born in 1908, died in 1981; Polish film expert, film theoretician, historian and methodologist of film studies, promoter of film education. He started his scientific, publishing, and cultural work while still a philology student at the John Casimir University in Lwów. He spent the war years in five concentration camps (including Auschwitz), and included his memories of this time in the book *Wiesz, jak jest* [*You Know How It Is*] (1974, reprinted in 2012). After the war, he settled in Łódź and founded the Department of Film Studies at the university there in 1959. He also contributed to the establishment of the Lodz Film School and was its rector and long-time lecturer. Author of three books (*Wprowadzenie do wiedzy o filmie* [*Introduction to Film Knowledge*] /1964/, *Scenariusz. Literacki program struktury filmowej* [*Screenplay: The Literary Programme of Film Structure*] /1970/ and *Kino i telewizja* [*Cinema and Television*] /1974 – editor of the volume and its co-author/), as well as several hundred scientific articles (the bibliography of his dispersed works includes approximately 750 items; in *Kwartalnik Filmowy* alone – in the 1951–1965 edition – he published nearly 20 articles). In 1995, Ewelina Nurczyńska–Fidelska and Bronisława Stolarska prepared the volume *O filmie. Wybór pism* [*On Film: A Selection of Writings*] collecting 30 articles by Lewicki from different periods of his activity.

Keywords:

Juliusz Kleiner;
history of film thought;
literary studies;
humanistic research
methods

Abstrakt

Bolesław W. Lewicki

Teoria badań humanistycznych Juliusza Kleinera w zastosowaniu do nauki o sztuce filmowej

Autor przypomina szkic Juliusza Kleinera (1886–1957), wybitnego polskiego humanisty i filologa, pod tytułem *U wrót nowej estetyki* z 1929 r. i uznaje go za jedną z ważniejszych publikacji w ramach przedwojennej polskiej myśli filmowej. Lewicki zwraca uwagę przede wszystkim na akt nobilitacji filmu w świecie naukowym, a także na istotne rozpoznania Kleinera dotyczące filmu jako sztuki kierującej się nowymi zasadami tworzenia i cechującej się nowym sposobem odbioru. Główną część artykułu stanowi próba zastosowania innych, *stricte* filologicznych prac Kleinera oraz metodologii tam wypracowanej w kształtującym się na przełomie lat 50. i 60. XX w. filmoznawstwie jako akademickiej dyscyplinie naukowej (poszczególne uwagi dotyczą m.in. kwestii analizy dzieła, teorii procesu historycznego, a także zasad komparatystyki interdyscyplinarnej). **(Materiał nierecenzowany; pierwodruk: „Kwartalnik Filmowy” 1957, nr 28, s. 3–17).**