

On the Problem of Textuality and Intertextuality in Ivan Mosjoukine's Film *Le Brasier ardent* (1923)

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*Based on modern methods of studying the phenomenon of cinema as a text, this article considers *Le Brasier ardent*, directed by Ivan Mosjoukine, in terms of complex intertextual whole, which arose at the junction of varying cinematic traditions, but which also intersects with European visual culture. Taking into account Mosjoukine's aesthetics, principally articulated in interviews with Jean Mitry, the goals, motives and algorithms of his cinematic experiment are revealed. They were created in an implicit dialogue with David Wark Griffith and are an attempt to search for Mosjoukine's own concept of a purely visual language — a correlate of a verbal communicative and semantic-generating system. The symbolisation of the shot and its transformation into a self-value sign, requiring the activation of the viewer's cultural memory and interpretation mechanisms derived from it, is based on the principle of stylistic and genre allusion (German expressionism and French avant-garde), as well as visual quotation; an example of this being the analysis of the correspondence between the image of the main heroine's awakening, iconic for both narrative and metaphorical dimensions of the film, and Henry Fusely's *Nightmare*. The textuality of *Le Brasier ardent* stems from the innovative ideas of Yakov Protazanov, the director who worked with Mosjoukine in the seminal film *The Queen of Spades*, which relates to the internal structure of the shot and types of editing as methods of organising different images into an analog of a speech act.*

Introduction

The silent film *Le Brasier ardent* by Ivan Mosjoukine, a Russian émigré and star of European silent cinema, is a unique experiment and can be seen as one of the very first examples of *auteur cinema*. Being entirely created by Mosjoukine, who acted not only as scriptwriter¹ but also as director and lead actor, *Le Brasier*

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1. The plot focuses on complex relationships between three main characters: a Woman ("She", or "Elle" in the film, Nathalie Lissenko), her Husband (Nicolas Koline), and Detective Z (Mosjoukine). The prologue and at the same time the first scene of the film represents the nightmare of the Woman. She is haunted by a strange man who changes guises: a martyr to be burned at the stake, a gallant seducer, a priest. The last hypostasis is a beggar at the door of a cathedral, who stabs himself with a dagger when he sees the Woman trying to get away. When she awakens, she discovers that the dream images are inspired by a book about Detective Z, whose personae is equivalent to the guises in the dream. The Woman's past is vague, but flashbacks make it clear that her well-to-do, respectable Husband has saved her from both being a member of the social underclass and poverty. While she is grateful to her Husband, the protagonist has no romantic feelings for the unattractive, stunted, and not very gallant man, although she tries to convince herself otherwise.

ardent plays a threefold role in the history of cinema.

On the one hand, it summarises the discoveries of Russian pre-revolutionary cinema,² becoming a kind of “answer” to the challenge emigrants face. Jean Renoir, who came to fully admire the film, emphasised its ambivalence, its “Russianness” in French surroundings.³ The contemporary research discourse interprets the final shots — a steamship with the symbolic name *Liberté* (*Liberty*), visually summarising the meaning of the denouement⁴ — as having autobiographical meaning.⁵

On the other hand, according to most critics (e.g., Ricciotto Canudo, Jean de Mirbel, Marcel Silver, Jean Mitry, Michael Atkinson) and film historians (Jean Arroy, Bernard McCarron, Oleg Sirotin, Aleksey Goussev), Mosjoukine's film unites

Jealous of the crowd of her admirers, the Husband seeks to leave Paris for America and for this purpose enters into a financial deal. However, the Woman discovers this, steals the papers necessary for the departure and flees the house. Rushing in pursuit, the Husband mistakes the door and unexpectedly finds himself at the agency *Let's Find Everything*, where he signs a strange contract. The detective he hired — the same Detective Z from the Woman's dream — undertakes to return not only the papers, but also the favour of his wife. Easily discovering the papers under the Woman's bed, the Detective becomes infatuated with her and is not eager to return the papers to the Husband without her consent. However, he tries to fulfil his promise and to make the Woman disgusted with Paris so that she would voluntarily leave the city. For this purpose, the Detective organises a performance for the Woman in one of the cabarets, forcing the girls there to dance for a fabulous reward until they drop. One of them imitates a fatal heart attack, and the Woman, believing in the reality of what is happening, runs away in terror and asks the Husband to leave as soon as possible. The Detective is now able to return the Husband's papers. However, the Husband turns out to be shrewd enough to understand the true motives behind the actions of the other participants in this triangle. He sends the Woman to the Detective's home, ostensibly to give him a reward, while he himself decides to sail to America alone. Instead of money, the Detective and the Woman discover a letter: the Husband gives his spouse to a rival. In the epilogue, while walking on deck, the Husband meets a female passenger looks like a double-ganger of his wife.

2. Among them are the subtly decadent style of Yevgeni Bauer, his treatment of interiors and architecture as the structural basis of a shot; Yakov Protazanov's experiments with inner-shot editing and cross-cutting, as well as with moving camera.

3. See: B. McCarron, “Le Brasier ardent (1923): Ivan Mosjoukine's Clin d'Œil to German Expressionism,” in *Expressionism in the Cinema* (Eds.) Olaf Brill and Gary D. Rhodes (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2016), 216: 222.

4. Consequently, the Woman is liberated from her marital duties, her beloved is released from the contractual ties with the Husband, and the Husband himself is relieved from the torment inflicted by Paris.

5. See: A. Lezhakova, «Koster pylayushchiy». Snovidcheskiy khaos v kino russkoy emigratsii. *Nozh*. 18th June 2023 [Лежакова А. (2023). «Костер пылающий». Сновидческий хаос в кино русской эмиграции. *Нож*. 18 июня 2023]. In February 1920, Mosjoukine, together with Alexander Volkov, Yakov Protazanov, Nathalie Lissenko, Victor Turzhansky, Natalia Kovanko left Russia on the Greek merchant ship *The Panther*.

all the major discoveries in terms of genre and style of Western cinema.⁶ There is French fluidity of chiaroscuro that dissolves silhouettes, German expressionistic close-ups with an emphasis on the gaze, American gags with the obligatory chase-scene, melodramatic scenes with a meaningful play of gestures and glances — no viewer in any country could do without such scenes, and a travestied detective line,⁷ that is more in line with the French than the American taste.⁸

Finally, *Le Brasier ardent* paves the way for new cinematic structural solutions and new aesthetics. For example, the comic scenes show the absurdist techniques of the emerging cinema avant-garde, while the protagonist's nightmare — the prologue with its illogical quasi-narrative turns and visual labyrinths — anticipates the surrealist experiments of Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel.⁹

6. See: R. Canudo, "Symbolisme," *Paris-Midi* (1 Juin 1923): 1-2; J. de Mirbel, "Le Brasier ardent," *Cinémagazine* 44 (1923): 189-190; M. Silver, "Le Cinéma," (reviewing *Le Brasier ardent*). *Le Gaulois* (1 Juin 1923): 4; J. Mitry, "Le Brasier Ardent," *Ciné pour tous* 114 (1923): 5-6; M. Atkinson, "Reviewing French masterworks: Russian emigrés in Paris 1923-1929," *Sight & Sound* (Jul. 2013): 99-100; J. Arroy, *Ivan Mosjoukine. Ses débuts, ses films, ses aventures* (Paris: Les publications Jean-Pascal, 1927), 52; McCarron, "Le Brasier ardent (1923): Ivan Mosjoukine's Clin d'Œil to German Expressionism," 2016, 216: 221; Sirotin, *Двуязыная звезда. Александр и Иван Моззхухин* [Сиротин О. (2014). *Двойная звезда. Александр и Иван Моззхухин*], 2014, 90; A. Goussev, *Raz v zhizni: Ivan Mozzhukhin. Seans*. 22th November 2013 [Гусев А. (2013). *Раз в жизни: Иван Моззхухин. Сеанс*. 22 ноября 2013].

7. The real "investigation" concerns certainly not the theft, but the area of feelings, psychology and motives; the three protagonists enact all three against each other. As regards the genre solutions, the line is ambivalent: there is both farce and nascent drama.

8. The mixture probably lacks only Italian grandiosity and the detailed depiction of the interior (but the plot of Mosjoukine's film does not allow for the genre of peplum, for which such stylistics is typical), as well as "irredeemably tragic Danish manner", characteristic of Russian melodrama. See: Goussev, *Raz v zhizni: Ivan Mozzhukhin. Seans*. 22th November 2013 [Гусев А. (2013). *Раз в жизни: Иван Моззхухин. Сеанс*. 22 ноября 2013].

9. It is known that these experiments have developed from the same mythologem as that of Mosjoukine, only in other circumstances and on a different aesthetic grounding. But there is something in common: the motifs of persecution, love desire, death, i.e., a kind of play with the concepts of Eros and Thanatos, which transpire to be united by Hypnos. This triad of ancient Greek deities turns out to be the metaphor on which both Mosjoukine and the French representatives of the avant-garde of the late 1920s formed their visualisation of the life of the subconscious. Dalí and Buñuel did not conceal the relation of their cinematic experiments to their own dreams (L. Buñuel, *Mon dernier soupir* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1982), 125). Similar to the authors of *Un Chien Andalou*, Mosjoukine, if not directly referring to his dreams, was able to recreate the logic of a dream, with its spontaneous twists and turns, through associative editing. According to the émigré writer Alexander Lagorio, "This dream is performed so eloquently, with the common precision of dreams that the viewer should get the impression that the director himself was acting in a dream state" (cit. from: N. Nusinova, *Kogda my v Rossiyu vernyomysya... : Russkoye kinematograficheskoye zarubezhye, 1918-1939* [Нусинова Н. (2003). *Когда мы в Россию вернемся...: Русское*

This synthesis of different traditions was thoroughly elaborated. It came to fruition, firstly, by Mosjoukine's conscious desire to "retrain": this was the actor's decision after watching Marcel L'Herbier's *Le carnaval des vérités*.¹⁰ Secondly, in the way he tried to show in the film all of his hypostases, from that of a drama actor to a comedian — after all, he was known as, perhaps, as the first generalist actor in history.¹¹ As a result, without abandoning his actor's self, he "simply reformulates the actor's question 'Who are you really?' into another, directorial, authorial: 'What is cinema in truth? What does it really look like?' [...] In *Le Brasier ardent*, Mosjoukine is one of the first in history to pose the question of the identity of cinema".¹²

Naturally, this identity is determined not by what cinema tells us, not by its message to the viewer, or, to be more precise, not only by it.¹³ Above all, it is determined by the way cinema presents this message, and by the differences that exist between the ways and means of translating it in cinema and other forms of art.¹⁴ In other words, while putting together a mosaic of genres and styles, a kaleidoscope of roles, Mosjoukine considers them not only *functionally*, as a means of conveying to the viewer the specifics of a plot or an image, but also purely *constructively*. From this point of view, the influence of Mosjoukine on Fernand Léger¹⁵ no longer seems something extravagant. According to Mosjoukine, cinema is an "elaborate artificiality";¹⁶ as Aleksey Goussev mentions, "[...] as is always the case with great artists, the structure of the text becomes its content".¹⁷

кинематографическое зарубежье, 1918-1939] (Moscow: NIIK, 2003), 102).

10. See: O. Sirotin, *Двоуная звезда. Александр и Иван Моззхухины* [Сиротин О. (2014). *Двойная звезда. Александр и Иван Мозжухины*] (Penza: [s. n.], 2014), 93. "In Russia, cinema is fettered by theatre, here it is free." M. L'Herbier, *La Tête qui tourne* (Paris: Belfond (Bâtisseurs du 20e siècle), 1979), 116.

11. Goussev, Raz v zhizni: Ivan Mozzhukhin. *Seans*. 22th November 2013 [Гусев А. (2013). Раз в жизни: Иван Мозжухин. *Сеанс*. 22 ноября 2013].

12. Ibid.

13. If at the dawn of its life, cinema had adopted the plots from literature and theatre (including opera libretti), then at the beginning of the 1920s the directors became interested in the things cinema could add to the existing types of artistic expression.

14. Probably that is why Mosjoukine emphasised that his idea of refusal of theatrical manner of acting was influenced by European cinema. See: L'Herbier, *La Tête qui tourne*, 1979, 116.

15. F. Léger, "Le spectacle, lumière, couleur, image mobile, objet-spectacle." In *Conférence faite à la Sorbonne, 1924, reprise dans Fonctions de la peinture* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 126. And maybe this influence concerns *Le Ballet mécanique* (1924).

16. I. Mosjoukine, *Moi mysli*. *Kino-gazeta* [Мозжухин И. (1918). Мои мысли. *Кино-газета*] 10: 3, 1918.

17. Goussev, Raz v zhizni: Ivan Mozzhukhin. *Seans*. 22th November 2013 [Гусев А. (2013). Раз в жизни: Иван Мозжухин. *Сеанс*. 22 ноября 2013]. This description of Protazanov's *Father Sergius* (the last pre-emigrant film of Mosjoukine and Nathalie Lissenko)

But it is not easy to prove that the film is a full-fledged *visual text* and not just a visualised narrative, i.e., a structural calque of a literary text, i.e. that it is organised according to immanent principles and not the laws of other art forms, be it theatre or literature. Despite all of the above, it is easy to come to the conclusion that *Le Brasier ardent* is simply an eccentric variation on the narrative strategies of detective, dime novel, light comedy, and fantasy novel, relying on the classical disposition of prologue (a dream of the Woman), outset (the real estate transaction and the theft of papers), peripeteia (starting with the scene in the agency), climax (the dance in the cafe), denouement (the reading of the Husband's letter), and epilogue (the Husband on the deck of the streamer). After all, even David Wark Griffith, who defended the independence of cinematic language, did not conceal that his structural solutions were influenced by the constructive principles of Dickens' novels.¹⁸

The article aims to demonstrate what features of the visual language of *Le Brasier ardent* make it a cinematic (rather than quasi-literary) statement, which allows us to name the film a unique early experiment in the search for the "identity of cinema". In other words, the focus is on the specificity of the textuality of Mosjoukine's film. The introduction has already identified those characteristics of *Le Brasier ardent* that, from the moment of its creation, make us treat it as a project unique both to Mosjoukine's career and in the emerging cinematic avant-garde. The *Literature Review* section substantiates the novelty of the proposed perspective of the analysis of this film in relation to those already accepted in film criticism and cinema studies. The *Methodology* section represents the research methods appropriate to the study of the film as a complex and original text in terms of its structure. *Results* are subdivided into two major paragraphs. In the first of them *Le Brasier ardent* is analysed from the point of view of the specificity of its elements, the interaction of which generates complex textual structures that are not characteristic of other types of art. The cinematographic "identity" of these structures is largely determined by those intertextual correlations, without which *Le Brasier ardent* would not be able to exist as an artistic whole. The second paragraph of the main section is dedicated to the problem of intertext and intertextuality in the film. *Conclusion* summarises the findings and shows why Mosjoukine's experiment can serve as a foreseeing of postmodernist exercises from the point of view of the theory of text.

can be applied to Mosjoukine's experiment as well. The many solutions of the latter originate in Protazanov's film.

18. M. Iampolski, *The Memory of Tiresias. Intertextuality and Film* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1998), 83-84, 93, 102.

Literature Review

In film studies, *Le Brasier ardent* has been considered mainly through three aspects, determined by the turns of its creator's fate and the historical and cultural context of its emergence.

First, there is the biographical aspect. In the works of Jean Arroy, Jean Mitry, Gabriel Chéreau, and Oleg Sirotin dedicated to Mosjoukine's tragic career and life, this film is mentioned as his unique directorial experiment, one of the pinnacles of his creative activity, often in connection with the development of the *Albatross* film studio.¹⁹ It should be noted that, although Mosjoukine's name appears on the pages of many books and articles on the history of the Russian emigration²⁰, there remain few serious studies concerning the actor. The reason for this is that, in Soviet epoch, Mosjoukine, as an émigré who was not repatriated, was perceived in general as a *persona non grata*.²¹ Mosjoukine's fully-fledged "return" to Russia took place only in 1989, when a museum named after the Mosjoukine brothers (the actor's brother, Alexander, who was a famous opera singer, a rival of Feodor Chaliapin) was opened in the actor's homeland, the village of Kondol, Penza district.²²

Second, as for the cultural and historical aspect, *Le Brasier ardent* is characterised from the perspective of Mosjoukine's dialogue with the Western cinematic tradition (works by Aleksey Goussev, Anastasia Lezhakova).²³ Of particular significance is the comprehensive article authored by Bernard McCarron, dedicated to the problem of the synthesis of French Impressionism and German Expressionism. That

19. Arroy, *Ivan Mosjoukine. Ses débuts, ses films, ses aventures*, 1927, 36, 52; Mitry, "Ivan Mosjoukine, 1889-1939," *Anthologie du cinéma* 48 (1969): 426; G. Chéreau, *Ivan Mosjoukine, prince du muet* (Nantes: TSM éditeur, 1989), 79-85; Sirotin, *Dvoynaya zvezda. Aleksandr i Ivan Mozhukhiny* [Сиротин О. (2014). *Двойная звезда. Александр и Иван Можухины*] (Penza: [s. n.], 2014), 90, 141.

20. For example, Neïa Zorkaïa notes the specifics of the actor's game and the turning points of his career (N. Zorkaïa, "Les stars du muet," in *Le cinéma russe avant la révolution* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux (coll. « Ramsay Cinéma ») 1989), 46).

21. Unlike Protazanov, who from 1923 worked in the USSR at the *Mezhrabpom-Rus* factory. His films *Aelita*, *The White Eagle*, and *The Tailor from Torzhok* made him popular. However, some of the Soviet filmmakers appreciated Mosjoukine, e.g., Leonid Trauberg. See: L. Trauberg, "Leonid Trauberg o Charli Chapline i Ivane Mozhukhine. Chaplin – "Kinonebele"," *Ryzhiy - na pomoshch. Publikatsiya, predisloviye i kommentarii N.I.Nusinovoy*) [Трауберг Л. Леонид Трауберг о Чарли Чаплине и Иване Можухине. Чаплин – "Кинонеделе". Рыжий - на помощь /Публикация, предисловие и комментарии Н.И.Нусиновой)]. *Kinovedcheskiye zapiski* [Киноведческие записки] 63 (2003): 219.

22. The museum website: <http://kondol-museum.ru/>.

23. Goussev, Raz v zhizni: Ivan Mozhukhin. *Seans*. 22th November 2013 [Гусев А. (2013). Раз в жизни: Иван Можухин. *Сеанс*. 22 ноября 2013]; Lezhakova, «Koster pylayushchiy». *Snovidcheskiy khaos v kino russkoy emigratsii*. Nozh. 18th June 2023 [Лежакова А. (2023). «Костер пылающий». *Сновидческий хаос в кино русской эмиграции*. Нож. 18 июня 2023].

synthesis makes Mosjoukine's film a laboratory for the "chemical" mixing of style principles. In fact, such "chemistry" would later be characteristic of auteur European cinema, at least from the first sound films by Jean Renoir, who was inspired by Mosjoukine (*La Chienne*, 1931, *Boudu sauvé des eaux*, 1932, then *La Bête humaine*, 1938, *La Règle du jeu*, 1939 and others). Finally, film criticism (including directorial criticism, from Louis Delluc to Jean Renoir) stands apart:²⁴ it takes as its starting point the inherently artistic aspect of its structure (specifics of acting, genre, and style). An additional source of information that allows us to highlight the innovative aspects of Mosjoukine's aesthetics are his own statements and texts, in which, however, he does not offer a clear theory of cinema, but reflects on its essence and meaning and places emphasis on his own acting personality and manner of acting.²⁵

Thus, from the point of view of text (and cinematic text) theory, *Le Brasier ardent* is yet to be subject to study, although the very question of the need for such a focus of study was implicitly raised in the already cited short lecture-article by Aleksey Goussev. The present article proposes to introduce this new aspect of the analysis of the film, which will make it possible to: 1) demonstrate the significance of Mosjoukine's project as a milestone work for the formation of the theory and practice of European *cinematic language*; 2) identify Mosjoukine's solutions most relevant to the Soviet cinematic avant-garde;²⁶ and 3) identify those means of creating intertextual connections that place the film not only within the cinematic tradition, but also within a broader cultural context that includes visual, verbal, and even musical sources. For the activation of the intertextuality²⁷ of *Le Brasier ardent* the participation of the viewer is required. The intertextuality allows us to raise certain questions concerning 1) the role of the recipient's cultural memory in the creation of the film's artistic meaning and 2) Mosjoukine's anticipation of structuralist and postmodernist practices and the phenomenon that Umberto Eco would name the "open work".

Methodology

The perspective given to study of *Le Brasier ardent* determines the application of theories that focus on the phenomena of cinematic language, cinematic text,

24. L. Delluc, *Cinéma et Cie*. (Paris: Cinémathèque française. (Ecrits cinématographiques; 2), 1986), 382; Renoir, J. "Mes années d'apprentissage." In *Jean Renoir. Écrits: 1926-1971* (Paris: P. Belfond, 1974), 39-40.

25. For example: Mosjoukine, I. "Moi mysli." (My thoughts.) *Kino-gazeta* [Мозжухин И. (1918). Мои мысли. Кино-газета] 10: 3, 1918.

26. First of all, to Leonid Trauberg and Lev Kuleshov.

27. We distinguish intertextuality as the quality of connection between the components of different text systems and intertext as the field of meanings, created by these connections, generated by both connecting texts and existing at their intersection.

and intertextuality in cinema and put forward principles for analysing these phenomena. First of all, these are the "authentic" theories of directors who, in their efforts to transform cinema from a mass entertainment into an art form, have emphasised its communicative and structural potential, i.e., its potential as a sign system which generates and transmits meaning. The ideas of David Wark Griffith, which were admired by Mosjoukine²⁸ and later adopted and developed by Soviet film reformers such as Kuleshov and Sergei Eisenstein, come to the fore here.

These ideas were comprehensively developed by Mikhail Iampolski, who not only traced their origins and gave their historical reception, but also projected them onto the cinema of later periods, including the era of sound cinema. It is not by chance that Iampolski's book bears the metaphorical title *The Memory of Tiresias*: in it, the totality of cinematic culture appears in its formation as the united metatext, whose threads are those of cultural *memory* originating in times when cinema had not yet existed. Based on the extensive theory of intertext from Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva to Michel Riffaterre, Iampolski considers the principles of a activation of the recipient's memory by means of screen images, prompting the reader to form the algorithm of analysis of a film as a text, as well as its intertextual traces. The scholar's view on a film as a semiotic structure turned out to be so accurate that the subsequent professional literature on the subject developed, consciously or not, his approach to the cinematic text, even when it considered the areas which were little touched by him.²⁹

The article attempts to reveal the implicit analytical algorithm of Iampolski and apply it to *Le Brasier ardent*. It consists of the following stages.

- 1) Searching for significant shots or images in the film that fulfil not only the function of representation but also the symbolic function of a sign, implying an *unrepresented or fundamentally unrepresentable signified*.
- 2) Identification of a possible signified on the basis of the expressive qualities of the screen image (its structure, configuration, colour, etc.).
- 3) Searching for other signifieds which, in terms of cultural memory, preceded the analysed screen image; the latter is their functional and semantic equivalent; the associative mechanisms activated by the recipients due to their cultural memory become the instrument here for establishing such equivalence.
- 4) Identification of the visual (purely cinematographic) means of establishing this equivalence.

28. See: Mitry, "Les idées d'Ivan Mosjoukine sur le cinéma," *Ciné pour tous* 117 (Octobre 1923): 14; Arroy, *Ivan Mosjoukine. Ses débuts, ses films, ses aventures, 1927*, 58.

29. This is, for example, the typology of intertextuality applied to music in the film by the researcher Jérôme Rossi (the term "intermusicality" is introduced) and based on the differentiation of textual relations (including semantic) between systems of dissimilar nature (audial and visual) and homogeneous (musical scores) — although Rossi doesn't mention Iampolski's methodology. See: J. Rossi, *L'Analyse de la musique de film. Histoire, concepts et méthodes* (Lyon: Symétrie, 2021), 184-190.

- 5) Building a chain of semantic links between different signifiers, which result in the screen image.
- 6) Constructing a sequence of symbolic screen images-signs for the analysed film, which constitute a number of semantic and constructive pillars of the film.
- 7) "Deciphering" the obtained sequence from the perspective of the general idea of the film as an artistic whole and as a message.³⁰

Mosjoukine's Film as a Visual Text

The phenomenon of textuality as a quality of a particular film can be considered only if a number of conditions for the generating, structuring, and representation of meaning are observed. The first of these is that the film is a correlate of a text, or at least can fulfil the function of a text. In this case, the elements of such a film serve as signs whose structure and mode of interaction arrange the process of semiosis (as the process of generating of significance and, in the case of film as a work of art, allowing for artistic meaning). For this process to reach its logical conclusion, the film should communicate with the viewer, who completes the process of reading the signs. The viewer should not only possess the ability to potentially perceive the signs, but be truly able to do so. After all, a sign does not

30. For example, based on Iampolski's analysis of Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1932) (Iampolski, *The Memory of Tiresias. Intertextuality and Film*, 1998: 32-35), it is possible to reveal this algorithm as follows: 1) the main shot-symbol is a 'hotel's unusual signpost, a winged angel, holding a bough in one hand and a wreath in the other' (Ibid, 32). The symbolic function of this image is derived from the fact that its repetition is not narratively justified, as well as from its visual isolation from the context (the signpost exists as a self-valuable visual "character" and is never shown together with the hotel); 2) the signified is a link to the otherworld (the angel as a messenger from another reality); 3) Iampolski searches for semantic correlates of the angel's attributes: the bough is associated with the golden bough of Aeneas from Virgil's *Aeneid*, which he needs to cross the Styx, the wreath adorns the descendants of Aeneas. The scholar then searches for a correlate for the angel himself, who appears as a guide to the otherworld, in the context of the vampire plot and in correlation with such an expressive means as the play of chiaroscuro and such a concept as a dream (of the protagonist). Iampolski finds in the film possible references to Baudelaire's sonnet *La Mort des pauvres*, in which death is associated with both an inn and an angel, to Balzac's *L'Auberge rouge*, and to several sonnets by Jean Cocteau; 4) the visual triggers of such correlations in this case are purely figurative (images of the bough, the signpost, the wreath, wings, etc.); 5) other important signifiers in the film are the image of the castle and the image of blood, which combine with the image of the signpost to form an extraordinary metaphor of an unsafe place — a portal of death; 6) the sequence of signifiers for these signs: dusk - shadows - sleep - death; and 7) the generalising meaning of the appearance of the signpost in the film is its function of indicating the protagonist's metaphorical path to the world of death and victory over it.

exist without the consciousness that perceives and *interprets* it.

Mosjoukine himself was against considering as art those films that are not capable of *generating and transmitting a message*, and which are only pure representation, reflecting images of the surrounding reality or illustrating a literary source (in this case, of course, the film visualises the book's message rather than creating its own, i.e. it is simply a visual translation of the verbal, which is not enough for cinema as art). "*Pour moi, l'Art cinégraphique ne doit pas se borner à être une banale photo de la vie, ou une collection de « cartes postales » représentant de beaux paysages. [...] A mon avis, l'intérêt artistique de la nature à l'écran n'est pas plus grand que celui des actualités de Pathé-Journal*",³¹ Mosjoukine emphasised in an interview with Jean Mitry. As for the theatrical and literary imprint in the cinema, the actor said, "*de même pour les adaptations de romans ou d'œuvres littéraires, je crois que, dans un avenir prochain, they n'hanteront plus le cerveau des cinéastes, ni des industriels du film*".³²

If the Skladanowsky and Lumière brothers had begun the invention of cinema with such a simple reflection on life, then it was not only the magician Méliès who began with the adaptation of literature, but also Mosjoukine's favourite — David Wark Griffith, who was the first theorist of cinema as language and film as text. The latter was a professional writer, who found inspiration in the works by Charles Kingsley, Alfred Tennyson, and Charles Dickens. According to Iampolski, Griffith, influenced by Swedenborg, Hobbes, Baudelaire, and the transcendentalists,³³ planned to develop a "Baudelairean" correspondences between the verbally expressed meaning (a narrative or an idea) and its visual representation, i.e., simply to create a visual *equivalent* to an utterance, a kind of visual Esperanto. By adopting an analog of language for communication, essentially enabling visual speech, Griffith hoped it would address the issue of Babylonian confusion.³⁴

Applying Charles Peirce's system to any type of sign, one can come to the conclusion that in this simplest case the image should be an icon, i.e., it should be an equivalent of a noun, a word-name. As an icon, being at the primary level of signification, the image can be read in the same way, if not by all people (as Griffith thought), then at least by Europeans. In this case, the signifier and signified practically coincide (the window represents the window, the flowers are

31. Mitry, "Les idées d'Ivan Mosjoukine sur le cinema," 1923, 13. "For me, cinegraphic Art should not be limited to being a banal photo of life, or a collection of "postcards" representing beautiful landscapes. [...] In my opinion, the artistic interest of nature on the screen is no greater than that of the Pathé-Journal news".

32. Ibid. "The same applies to adaptations of novels or literary works, I believe that, in the near future, they will no longer haunt the brains of filmmakers, nor of film industrialists".

33. Iampolski, *The Memory of Tiresias. Intertextuality and Film*, 1998: 88-90, 92-93, 95-96. On the one hand, it implies the ideas of the conventionality of language (that means the possibility to apply a new, auteur "arrangement" for the creation of a new language, e.g., visual); on the other hand, the ideas of the Universe as a book written with images of phenomena.

34. Ibid, 56.

shown because the director needs to show the viewer the bouquet, and so on). However, it is clear that the *direct significance of the image* is not enough to create an artistic work.

Griffith himself realised that, while he used images as icons in his films (e.g., in the narrative scenes of *Intolerance*),³⁵ he endowed the most significant for the description of the characters or plot twists with an additional, symbolic meaning. How to form this symbolic meaning? Similar to a realist painter, Griffith always remained within the bounds of mimesis. Therefore, while being an image from the surrounding reality, the shot *per se* did not possess the self-evident semantic overtones and subtexts. The rocky shore as an icon is an element of the sea landscape, nothing more. By endowing the icon with a supplementary meaning, the director should make it *visible* to the audience; otherwise, this meaning will not acquire the status of the *conventional* meaning, even if only within the limits of one film. This visibility can be achieved in several ways.

First, the additional meanings are clarified through direct correlation with other images, i.e., through *comparative* (associative) editing (e.g., the image of white doves in *Intolerance* is metaphorical due to repeated juxtaposition with the image of the Mountain Girl). It was this type of editing that would be later in the focus of the Soviet avant-garde filmmakers such as Eisenstein,³⁶ and formed the basis of the famous “Kuleshov effect”, which the director illustrated with shots from films by Mosjoukine.³⁷ The latter was not accidental. In fact, in *Le Brasier ardent*, Mosjoukine gave his own examples of associative editing. The most vivid of these is the scene of the Woman’s nightmare, which appears quite natural: it consists of associative mechanisms that are activated by the logic of dreams. A striking illustration is the visual correlation between the tongues of flame, the strands of the Woman’s hair (a strange character pulls her by the hair into the

35. For example, the scene of the Persian invasion of Babylon, and the scene of the interrupted execution of the protagonist of the American line (inherently, this line as a whole).

36. See his essay *Dickens, Griffith, and Us*. Of course, even *narrative* editing produces a positional ambiguity of shots. But this type of editing does not, in fact, transmit the basic equivalence of visual and verbal language: the meaning of a sequence of shots is not equal to the simple combination of the meanings of each of them, just as the meaning of a phrase depends not only on the meaning of words, but also on their correlations and interactions. In *Le Brasier ardent*, Mosjoukine masterfully used this obvious characteristic of visual language, especially within the meaningful episodes and scenes that require sequential editing, such as the scene of the Woman’s awakening or the scene of the Husband’s visit to the surrealist agency. The place and meaning of beautiful things in the Woman’s world is revealed by juxtaposing them and placing them in the space of the narrative.

37. See: A. Sokolov, *Montazh: televideniye, kino, video. Editing: television, cinema, video* [Соколов А. (2000). *Монтаж: телевидение, кино, видео. Editing: television, cinema, video*] (Moscow: A. Dvornikov, 2000), 13-14; Sirotnin, *Dvoymaya zvezda. Aleksandr i Ivan Mozzhukhiny*, 2014, 143. On Mosjoukine’s experiments with editing see: R. Abel, *The French Cinema: the First Wave, 1915-1929* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 367-371; McCarron, “Le Brasier ardent (1923): Ivan Mosjoukine’s Clin d’Œil to German Expressionism,” 2016, 230.

fire), and the fluttering folds of her dress, due to which the flames begin to be perceived as a symbol of burning passion. According to Mitry's interpretation, "*L'homme souffre moins du brasier allumé sous ses pieds que de la flamme intérieure qui le consume*".³⁸ The image of tongues of flame "enciphers" the emotional tension between the protagonist and the Woman, which becomes a crucial catalyst for the plot. An additional meaning of the image of the hair and dress is the ties that bind the Woman not only to the mysterious man from the dream, but also to the city: just as the character burning at the stake pulls the Woman by her hair, a beggar grabs her by the shawl at the stairs of the mansion (the shawl remains in his hands). Then she is grabbed again by the same mysterious man, but at the gates of the church. In this case, associative editing in the first episode of the nightmare (the burning flame) arouses the sequence of the discrete associative "rhymes", which form, similar to discrete ostinato in music, the sequence of the images-symbols.

The second way of visualising the supplementary meanings of an image is to choose such a phenomenon of the surrounding world, which in itself activates the recipient's cultural (and personal) memory, since it has for a long time been treated as a symbol in art. The aforementioned image of fire is quite suitable,³⁹ and it is not by chance that Mosjoukine titles his film *Le Brasier ardent*. Yet, the real flame occurs only twice in the film: in the opening scene of the Woman's nightmare and in the following, where the pursuer burns down the cabaret curtain to catch her. Rich in additional mythological meanings already in the ancient times, the image of fire activates its connotations of a destructive element that sweeps away obstacles.

Another, less ancient, but often symbolised in culture, image is connected not with natural forces, but with the *artificial*, man-made world: this being the staircase. Vaguely reminiscent of Jacob's dream, a metaphor for the connection between Earth and Heaven, a staircase in the *intellectual* German cinema of the Golden Age,⁴⁰ distinguished by parable and allegorical qualities, symbolised the transition from the world of the living to the world of the dead (*Der Student von Prag* by Paul Wegener, 1913, the scene of Balduin's persecution by his double; *Der müde Tod* by Fritz Lang, 1921, a Gothic passage through the wall built by Death). Although Mosjoukine was not greatly inspired by romanticised expressionistic films due to "their heavy psychology" ("*leur psychologie lourde*"),⁴¹ the idea of *transition* from one space to another, symbolised by the image of a staircase, may well have been adopted by him. The staircase appears several times both in the Woman's nightmare and in reality, uniting and, at the same time, separating the Woman and her pursuer,⁴² acting as the connecting thread in the maze of the

38. Mitry, "Le Brasier Ardent," 1923, 5. "The Man suffers less from the brazier lit under his feet than from the inner flame that consumes him".

39. Water is the most typical icon-symbol in Griffith's films, e.g., a wave.

40. This is the common name for the cinema of the Weimar Republic.

41. Mitry, "Les idées d'Ivan Mosjoukine sur le cinema," 1923, 14.

42. The researcher noted the visual efficiency of the plastic motive of doors, leading

dream space and the corresponding space of “real” Paris.⁴³

The characteristic “real” has to be placed between quotation marks: despite the Arc de Triomphe, the view of the Tuileries, the Monceau Park and other symbols of the city, the very space where the characters actually exist (rather than the space they merely *pass through between* significant places) is limited to bizarre *interiors*. In the case of the Husband’s mansion, the interiors are modelled on the eclectic rooms of Yevgeni Bauer, with heavy curtains, vases, flowers, classicist decor and stucco moldings, which constitutes a certain reference to pre-revolutionary Russian film culture.⁴⁴ In the case of the vague space of a dream or the absurdist space of the agency *Trouve Tout (Let’s Find Everything)*, the interiors are not just composed of elements of reality, but are constructed from *deliberately artificial* details that do not exist in life. “*Je n’aime pas la nature au cinéma et je m’efforce d’ailleurs à ce que mes films contiennent le moins possible de scènes d’extérieurs*”,⁴⁵ to quote Mosjoukine.

On the one hand, a theatrical trace can be seen, a visual reminder of the structure of scenery, backdrops, and drapes. On the other hand, this visually “catchy” artificiality is of the same kind as, e.g., the strange urban landscape of *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* — an image-symbol of Francis’s distorted consciousness.⁴⁶ It is intended to *replace* images of reality, and this is a very different approach from simply endowing an image-icon with additional meanings. This approach is based on the conscious overcoming of mimesis, on its consistent negation through the deformation of the images of reality and their gradual transformation into something completely foreign to it.

Yakov Protazanov, a director of many films with Mosjoukine, can be seen to have established himself as an innovator through his gradual negation of the mimetic principle. Seeking to convey the distorted reality in the consciousness of the mad Hermann (*The Queen of Spades*, 1916), the director depicted his struggle within an enormous cobweb with a giant Kafkaesque spider in the centre.⁴⁷ The

to a fundamentally different space. See: (Lezhakova, 2023).

43. The classicist marble staircase with banister near the doors of the *Let’s Find Everything* agency (the Woman perceives it as a duplicate for the door from her nightmare) “responds” to the shabby staircase which she tries to climb, wresting her shawl from the beggar.

44. “The characteristic trait of emigrant cinema is its deeply mythological nature” (Lezhakova, 2023). In this case, Mosjoukine preserves the beauty of the lost world, similar to his character from Bauer’s film *Beauty in Death*, who has embalmed his beloved to keep her beauty imperishable.

45. Mitry, “Les idées d’Ivan Mosjoukine sur le cinema,” 1923, 13. “I don’t like nature in the cinema and I also try to make sure that my films contain as few outdoor scenes as possible”.

46. It is known that the expressionistic design of the film was invented by Walter Reimann and Walter Röhrig.

47. Jean Mitry mentions Protazanov’s creative power in case of depicting of hallucinations in this film (Mitry, 1969:414). According to the critic, it was “*ce fantastique intellectuel*” (“this ‘intellectual fantastic’”), which had caused misunderstanding among the general audience in Russia (Ibid.: 419).

image's hyperbolic nature (let us note that it is absent in the novel of Alexander Pushkin) is the first step, if not for the purposes of the destruction of mimesis, then to the questioning of its universality as a means of transmitting meaning and communicating it with the viewer. In *Le Brasier ardent*, Mosjoukine uses a similar technique, which can be called a visual synecdoche: emphasised by the floodlight, the character's eyes stand out as a bright spot from the semi-darkness in which the face sinks and becomes a sign-substitute for the entire image. These eyes represent the man at the bonfire and the Woman during her nightmare. The choice of the gaze as a self-valuable sign is primarily due to Mosjoukine's personal acting taste: "*L'artiste cinégraphique - le vrai -, doit vibrer en son for intérieur et rester calme et froid dans son aspect extérieur.[...] Seuls ses yeux doivent refléter son émotion et ses sentiments*".⁴⁸ The famous Mosjoukine's "eyes with a tear" were his calling card, and Alexander Vertinsky, referring to a poem by Akhmatova, called the actor the "grey-eyed king".⁴⁹ But this choice of the visual sign was predetermined also by the logic of tradition. It is not by chance that Bernard McCarron called the above-mentioned nightmare shots "*The Expressionist Gaze*".⁵⁰ Cesare's gaze in *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* possesses the similar function of a sign — a symbol of death. It is the somnambulist's *awakening* that proves fatal: he is predetermined to kill anyone who sees his eyes. In Mosjoukine's film, the psychologically elaborate half-confession duels between the Detective and the Woman are based on the play of gazes, and the sequence of such scenes can be interpreted as revealing the meaning of the first such confrontation of gazes in the nightmare. The initial visual sign, generated by the mimetic strategy but overcoming it by its structure, defines the twists of the plot. Yet, its inherently visual expressiveness and symbolic capacity are weakened by the narrative; that is to say, "dissolved" in it. In this case, the logic of the plot prevails over the logic of the visual structure.

But Mosjoukine does not abandon the idea of creating this. Analysing "*Visions originales du Club-des Chercheurs*" ("*Original visions of the Club-Researchers*"), Mitry observes: "*de même que Wiene dans Caligari et L'Herbier dans Don Juan et Faust, Mosjoukine s'est servi de l'expressionnisme du décor, et de l'image pour extérioriser une ambiance et une atmosphère extérieures au monde tel que nous le concevons habituellement*".⁵¹

48. Mitry, "Les idées d'Ivan Mosjoukine sur le cinema," 1923, 14. "[...] the cinegraphic artist - the real one - must vibrate within himself and remain calm and cold in his external aspect.' '[...] Only his eyes should reflect his emotion and feelings'".

49. A. Vertinskiy, Seroglazyy korol. *Bereginya* [Вертинский А. (1999) Сероглазый король. Берегиня] 3: 54-61, 1999. See also: Chéreau, *Ivan Mosjoukine, prince du muet*, 1989, 46-47; R. Jeanne, "Ivan Mosjoukine. Préface," in *Ivan Mosjoukine. Ses débuts, ses films, ses aventures* (Ed.) J. Arroy (Paris: Les publications Jean-Pascal, 1927), 4.

50. McCarron, B. "Le Brasier ardent (1923): Ivan Mosjoukine's Clin d'Œil to German Expressionism," 2016, 223.

51. Mitry, "Le Brasier Ardent," 1923, 5. "[...] like Wiene in *Caligari* and *L'Herbier* in *Don Juan* and *Faust*, Mosjoukine used the expressionism of the decor, and the image to externalise an ambiance and an atmosphere that are external to the world as we usually

Here the next stage of the work with visual language is outlined: the path from the *transformation* of an icon into a symbol, and then into the *creation* of a self-valuable visual symbol, independent from mimesis as far as possible.⁵² “[...] *des essais de stylisation et d’esthétisme d’un champ illimité*” (“stylisation and aesthetic experiments of an unlimited field”) was what Mosjoukine considered to be the *direction of the development* of cinema as art⁵³. The core of this process should correspond to the new types of screenplay — “*faits exclusivement pour l’écran, c’est-à-dire: visuels*” (“made exclusively for the screen, that is to say: visuals”),⁵⁴ whose basis and the core of meaning — “*le fond*” — consists in “*l’expression d’une idée et la forme, la stylisation de cette idée*” (“the expression of an idea and the form, the stylisation of this idea”)⁵⁵ and should be “*extériorisé en images*” (“exteriorised in images”).⁵⁶ Consequently, the “idea” should be presented precisely in the form of a visual message, and should ultimately be *purely visual*.

What is a visual idea? In terms of visual expressiveness and constructive integrity, it is a plastic, geometric, colour, light-and-shade idea. There are plenty of such ideas in *Le Brasier ardent*, and all of them in one way or another develop the discoveries of European experimental cinema.⁵⁷ For example, there are the previously mentioned tongues of flame with their correlate — the fluttering hair

conceive it”. The critic returns to his Caligariistic parallels in the book about Mosjoukine (“*un fatras humoristico-caligaresque*” — “a humorous-caligaresque mess”); but he also notices the traces of the French avant-garde cinema, especially of *La Roue* of Abel Gance (Mitry, “Ivan Mosjoukine, 1889-1939,” 1969, 426).

52. An illustrative experiment is the film *Étude cinégraphique sur une arabesque* (1929) by Germaine Dulac, conceived as a visualisation of Claude Debussy's compositions and arranged following the purely musical principle of varying the recurrent patterns. See: T. Williams, *Germaine Dulac: A Cinema of Sensations* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 127.

53. Mitry, J. “Les idées d’Ivan Mosjoukine sur le cinéma.” (Ivan Mosjoukine’s ideas on cinema.) *Ciné pour tous* 117 (Octobre 1923), 14.

54. Mitry, “Les idées d’Ivan Mosjoukine sur le cinéma,” 1923, 14.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid, 13.

57. According to Mitry’s paradoxical view, *Le brasier ardent* has nothing original, i.e. invented by Mosjoukine himself, “*Aucune technique nouvelle, aucun nouveau moyen d’expression visuelle. Il s’est seulement inspiré — mais quelle inspiration! — des meilleurs cinéastes actuels*” — “No new technique, no new means of visual expression. He only inspired himself — but what an inspiration! — from the best current filmmakers” (Mitry, “Le Brasier Ardent,” 1923, 5). Yet the critic does not consider it to be a disadvantage, “*Le Brasier Ardent [...] est plus neuf par le fond que par la forme*” (“*Le Brasier Ardent [...] is more new in substance than in form*”), but it is one of Mosjoukine’s first experiments (Ibid, 6). One can add that to make a masterful synthesis (and not an eclectic mixture of the existing ideas) is a special gift. Maybe the basis of this synthesis is the specifics of Russian mentality, of “the Russian soul”, the ones Jean Arroy was talking about (“*L’âme slave, fruste et mystique, avec ses révoltes violentes, inattendues, foudroyantes*” — “The Slavic soul, fruste and mystical, with its violent, unexpected, thunderous revolts”); see: Arroy, *Ivan Mosjoukine. Ses débuts, ses films, ses aventures*, 1927, 26.

and folds of the Woman's dress, which, from the point of view of expression, dance playfully in the shot, independently of the figurative meaning of each of these images. The *plastic* apotheosis of this visual idea is the shot of the Woman fleeing into the darkness, while her silhouette is emphasised by the floodlight: her garment flutters like Loïe Fuller's costume, and the brief play of shawl and chiaroscuro creates a rhythmic arabesque — quite in the spirit of Germaine Dulac's film which will appear later. The interior scenes, including those in the agency, are rich with purely *geometric* ideas. By means of *multiple exposures*, Mosjoukine develops the discoveries of Marcel L'Herbier, whose influence on the Russian artist was noted by Mitry.⁵⁸ The shot representing the translucent figures of the Woman and her admirers against the background of Paris evokes a similar technical solution corresponding to Hedwick's reveries and responding to the loosely impressionistic atmosphere (both in the sense of "*ambiance*" and "*atmosphère*"). A blurred image of the Woman's profile as she concludes that she will never see the Detective again reminds us of the blurred effect in the episode of Sibilla's reveries in L'Herbier's film.⁵⁹

The idea of a *shadow as signifier*, resonating with the solutions of Lang, Murnau, and Wiene,⁶⁰ is perfectly realised in the episode of the Husband's waiting for the Woman: a procession of shadows passes by against the background of a huge

58. Mitry, "Le Brasier Ardent," 1923, 6. Mitry is convinced that the scenes in the cabaret El Dorado from l'Herbier's film of the same name directly influenced the episode in the Montmartre cabaret from *Le brasier ardent*. Indeed, even the hairstyle, clothes and the essence of the Woman's movements in this scene are very reminiscent of Sibylla — the heroine of the French director. Mosjoukine himself named l'Herbier among his favorite authors. See: Mitry, "Les idées d'Ivan Mosjoukine sur le cinéma", 14.

59. It is a slightly unusual approach: when Sibilla is immersed in reflections, which is marked by cross-editing, the director blurs the protagonist instead of placing the surroundings out of focus (because she no longer notices them). Mosjoukine does the same. This decision can only be explained by the assumption that in both cases the viewer should step into the protagonist's shoes and see everything as she would see it, or by the assumption that the blurred image is simply a *visual sign* that the protagonist's consciousness is absent from the real world.

Another sign of screen Impressionism is *sfumato*, which contributes to the blurring of silhouettes. Researching the cinematic Impressionism, Bernard McCarron summarises, "[...] one of the key aspects of Impressionist cinema is how character subjectivity is made possible through techniques of *photogénie*. Thompson and Bordwell chronicle a number of techniques that allow for the conveyance of a character's thoughts or memories, including superimpositions, filtering and defocusing the camera lens. Whilst it is difficult to agree upon an exact definition of *photogénie*, what is apparent is that techniques that create subjectivity enhance its properties" (McCarron, "Le Brasier ardent (1923): Ivan Mosjoukine's Clin d'Œil to German Expressionism," 2016, 224).

60. For example, Cesare's shadow in *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* becomes not only the signifier for the character that the viewer does not see in the episode of Alan's murder (to keep the intrigue), but also as a symbol of the inevitable death; in *Nosferatu – Eine Symphonie des Grauens* of Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau the shadow of the Vampire is a symbol of the impending evil.

dial⁶¹ and the silhouettes of the first couple, in which the Woman and the Detective are recognisable, act as *visual signifiers* for the Husband's thoughts about these characters and their relationship.⁶² The procession of male shadows accompanying this couple refers to the row of strange detectives from the agency with whom the Husband has already had a shocking encounter. Now, when the relationship between the Woman and the Detective is becoming ambiguous, the Husband may well regret it. This interpretation of the shadows-symbols is confirmed by the following shots of the dial, on the background of which the Husband's shadow lonely wanders back and forth. These shots alternate with those of the cabaret scene, i.e., where the Woman drinks more and more wine in an attempt to forget herself. This *cross-editing*, quite in the Griffithian spirit, reveals the psychological nuances that correlate with the visual idea and endow it with semantic overtones.

If Mosjoukine were an "avant-garde" artist, some of his visual ideas would have probably remained in the realm of *absolute* visuality, without any connotations beyond them (as far as is allowed for by the peculiarities of human perception). This is essentially the recurrence in cinema of the dispute concerning absolute music, music as a structure, music as a language capable of conveying a message, and "descriptive" music as an analogue of visual art.⁶³ The only difference is that music is not a mimetic art by nature, and the root of the matter is different from that of cinema, which combines the principle of representation with the principle of quasi-linguistic transmission of information. In fact, Mosjoukine faced the same paradox as Griffith, but neither of them probably realised it: in order to be a pure visual *language* (remember "*le scénario — visuel*"⁶⁴), cinema should abandon its claim to *mean* something other than itself, i.e., it should become a correlate to abstract painting — a pure visual form. Connections in such a language should be based on the principle of connecting structures that are self-referential rather than signs, but this is also a way for abandoning the linguistic principle of communication.

Unable to abandon either this principle or the mimesis that substantiates it in cinema, Mosjoukine does not withdraw from the cultural connotations generated by the images that emerge from the mimetic principle. Just as he creates narrative flashbacks,⁶⁵ the artist makes cultural flashbacks with the same associative editing.

61. It is as grotesque as lately the one in Josef von Sternberg's *Der blaue Engel*; the size of the dial is a metonymic exaggeration of the feeling of expectation that torments the Husband.

62. A similar technique is chosen to define the Detective's jealousy, who continues to watch the dancing Woman through a cabaret curtain, seeing only the silhouettes.

63. The idea of structure does not contradict the one of translation the meaning by quasi-linguistic means, since a language cannot exist without the structural connections between its elements. The nature of the structure is more important in the dispute concerning absolute music: is it textual or not? Does it constitute elements which correlate as linguistic units?

64. Mitry, "Les idées d'Ivan Mosjoukine sur le cinema," 1923, 14.

65. The Woman's dream can be interpreted as a map of the psycho-emotional relationships between the characters (a real gift to a psychoanalyst; it may be recalled that later Dalí, Buñuel, and Jean Cocteau did not fear applying the strategy of psychoanalysis to their

Intertextuality in *Le Brasier Ardent*

The means of creating flashbacks which evoke the visual past of culture are, of course, specific, in the sense that they should activate the cultural memory of the recipient. Associative editing is hardly suitable in this case, since it is intended to connect two images *within* the actually-visible space. Both of these images are visible, as well as their juxtaposition, the essence of which the recipient must interpret based on the context in terms of how they appear in the film and on the recipient's own associations.

But the cultural flashbacks in question are of a different nature. The meanings that the viewers should recreate or, more precisely, create through the power of their imagination are inspired by phenomena that are not *presented* on the screen, but are independent elements of the visual cultural heritage that existed *before* the film that refers to them. In other words, these phenomena are either an independent artistic work or its component; i.e., they are either an independent *semiotic system* or its representative, a recognisable component as regards semiosis (otherwise the recipient would not be able to identify such phenomena).

In fact, the already mentioned style and genre references to other cinematic traditions and specific films provide an example of correlations with such systems on different levels (a tradition is an example of a meta system, a particular film is the smallest integral semantic structure), and these systems are of the same nature as *Le Brasier ardent*. This dialogue could represent a model for creating *intertextual* connections if Mosjoukine really considered the quoted cinematic traditions as equivalents of linguistic systems, i.e., first, as proto-material whose elements can serve (and do serve) as *signs* that determine the way it is structured and the formation of internal systemic connections — the way visual structures, analogues of speech syntagms and, in general, of utterances are formed. In this case, Mosjoukine would be interested not only in the technique (Mitry calls it "*la forme*") and the narratively-determined situation, atmosphere, or description of a character realised by it, but in the complex of meanings which, in fact, is the *reason* for the emergence of the "technique" in intellectual cinema, and which becomes the *signified* for the technique as *signifier*.⁶⁶ It is not by pure chance that Mosjoukine, as

films). Mitry mentions "*un caractère psychanalytique*" ("the psychoanalytic character") of Mosjoukine's experiment (Mitry, "Ivan Mosjoukine, 1889-1939," 1969, 426). As the plot unfolds, the shots from the nightmare representing the Detective's hypostasis are incorporated into the narrative by juxtaposition with his real persona. For example, in the cabaret scene, the Woman recalls the furious countenance of the man at the fire, which is juxtaposed with the shrewd and pensive face of the Detective; the juxtaposition of his face with that of the Bishop from the nightmare at the moment of farewell outside the mansion serves as another example. Closing her eyes in fear at the memory of the incident in the cabaret, the Woman recalls the night persecutor surrounded by dancers. At the sight of the Detective sleeping in his grandmother's arms, she conjures up the image of a beggar on the doorstep of the church.

66. Of course, the use of double exposure in the shot with translucent images of the

already mentioned, was not greatly impressed by Expressionism. It was this movement that most clearly demonstrated the process of intertextual semiosis on the basis of pure visuality: the films by German directors “*réflètent [...] beaucoup trop l’esprit de leur race*” (“reflect [...] far too much the spirit of their race”)⁶⁷. Film scholar Lotte Eisner would later name this “*l’esprit*” (*Geist*) an immanent feature of a peculiarly German “demonic nature”, stating that in this case the “demon” is not a real devil but the troubled chaotic energy of mental creativity.⁶⁸ *In these films, the “technique” actually turns into a full-fledged sign-symbol.*

For example, in *Der Student von Prag* Paul Wegener and his screenwriter Hanns Ewers combine all the most culturally famous texts that develop the idea of the split of personality and the struggle of its parts (*William Wilson* by Edgar Allan Poe, *La Nuit de décembre* by Alfred de Musset, the tales by E. T. A. Hoffmann) and summarise their perception in purely *visual* way: on Balduin’s tomb sits his terrible doppelgänger, with an ominous smile on his lips, stroking a raven. Filmed quite realistically, this shot becomes a true symbol of the persistence of evil in the world, *a pure representation of an idea that is beyond the image and generated by a dialogue with culture.*⁶⁹ In this case, they entered into a dialogue with the semantic systems of a *different* essence, not visual, but verbal in nature — and this, perhaps, is the specificity of the German cultural tradition, with its idea concerning the synthesis of the arts.

Other film traditions preferred to structure intertextual space in films based on the semantic systems that are closer to cinema in terms of the principle of translation of meaning. This holds true for theatre and, especially in the silent film era, painting, which also does not use words and represents meaning through visual images. For example, Griffith, when creating the scenery for the Babylonian line in *Intolerance*, referred to John Martin’s painting *Belshazzar’s Feast*. The giant columns and statues of elephants become the image-quotation linking these systems. The intertextual semantic field is formed by their ancient symbolic meaning.⁷⁰

Therefore, for an intertextual “dialogue” with painting, it is necessary to include

Woman and her admirers is not due to the entertaining function of this “technique” (as in Méliès’s films), but to the plot (representation of the Husband’s thoughts). However, this “technique” is prevented from becoming a true visual symbol because of its unambiguous motivation by the meaning *directly visible in the shot*, rather than by the meaning displaced into the “beyond-shot space”.

67. Mitry, “Les idées d’Ivan Mosjoukine sur le cinema,” 1923, 14.

68. L. H. Eisner, *The haunted screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 7-8.

69. The parable undoubtedly contributes to the symbolic qualities of the image, but the choice of this and the turning of the romantic fairytale into a philosophical message depends entirely on the director’s intention to endow the image with an additional semantic dimension, making an implicit quotation or allusion out of it.

70. See the analysis of these intertextual connections based on the symbolic meaning of the image. (Iampolski, *The Memory of Tiresias. Intertextuality and Film*, 1998, 24).

in the shot an image whose equivalent is found in a particular painting (or is a formula-model in a particular painting tradition). Mosjoukine recourses to this method as well, and this is precisely the case when the "technique" is used to construct a real visual symbol, since the purely narrative motivation of the hidden quotation is absent (or, at any rate, completely unnecessary). The very first shot of the film provides an example in this regard: the pose of the nightmare-stricken Woman is a precise copy of the pose of the woman from the famous Johann Heinrich Füssli's painting (in the 1781 version, preserved in the Detroit Institute of Art, Figures 1 and 2).⁷¹ Mosjoukine substitutes here the sinister incubus with a lamp. The correlation of space and chiaroscuro in the painting and in the shot, as well as the general configuration of the room are, if not completely equivalent, then strikingly similar. The similar structure of space and especially the pose of the recumbent body actually play the role of logical connectors between the two visual texts.

The technique itself is not new. Yakov Protazanov, who worked with Mosjoukine, used this technique, e.g., in above mentioned *The Queen of Spades* (1916, Mosjoukine as Hermann). Protazanov's solution concerned not only gluing together the "extreme" moments of the temporal gap (the Countess's past and present), but also a "sudden modulation" from the domain of a dream into a nightmare in reality.⁷² But Protazanov does not enter the ambit of another visual text; he only develops the ideas of Pushkin's story. His editing is cross rather than associative. He emphasises the shifts of action through time and from the inner world of the Countess's consciousness to that of the outer. But the space of the Countess's house, in which both the events of half a century ago and the present moment unfold, remains unchanged, i.e., it serves as a unifying factor.

71. It is known that the painter has made several replicas of the work, but the key images, chiaroscuro, and the general idea remained in all variations.

72. Protazanov pays special attention to the storyline connected with the Countess's youth. In Pushkin's story, it is just outlined slightly and appears in the utterances and reflections of other people. Thus, Hermann's reflections about the Countess's lover, who once walked along the same corridor as he does now, are transformed by Protazanov into the Countess's own half-dreamlike memories. Reaching out her hands to her lover in a dream, the woman suddenly awakens and sees Hermann instead — but retains the pose that marks the editing joint and the transformation of the beauty into an old woman.



Figure 1. Johann Heinrich Füssli, *The Nightmare*. Oil on canvas. 101.6 cm × 127 cm, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan



Figure 2. *Le Brasier Ardent, the Episode of the Woman's Awakening*, 11 min. 14 sec. (according to a restoration of the film made by La Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique, in cooperation with La Cineteca del Comune di Bologna, 1997)

Mosjoukine goes further still. His editing is associative, in that it implies a breakthrough to another text and a relation to it. Furthermore, this relation is suggested to be conjectured, interpreted and developed by the viewers themselves. In other words, the viewers are supposed to actively participate in the process of

semiosis, to activate their creative thinking — strategies that Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco would consider forty years later. The point is not whether Mosjoukine has really “enciphered” a reference to Füssli’s painting, with all its connotations, but that such a reference is *possible* as a key to deciphering the subtext of everything visible on the screen. Summarising his analysis of the above mentioned *Vampyr* by Dreyer, Yampolsky notes: “What I have said so far might give rise to objections. It could be argued that we have no hard evidence that Dreyer knew Baudelaire, Cocteau, and so forth. I would respond that this question has no relevance to our inquiry. Even if Dreyer had something else in mind, Baudelaire and Cocteau allow us to inscribe the signpost into the film, creating an intertextual link that exists irrespective of the director’s intentions”.⁷³

A similar conclusion can be drawn regarding the correlation of the first shot of *Le Brasier ardent* with Füssli’s visual idea. The picture, inspired, on the one hand, by stories about sleep paralysis and, on the other, by those about evil spirits causing suffocation,⁷⁴ not only corresponds to the initial pose of the Woman in the film, but also logically echoes the end of the dream (another name for sleep paralysis is catalepsy of awakening, since this condition most often occurs at this very moment). The Woman dreams that she is being strangled by one of the beggars at the gate of the church,⁷⁵ and she wakes up in terror — in the same pose as at the beginning of the nightmare, which creates a visual frame for this hallucinatory episode and thus emphasises its semantic closure. The whole nightmare seems to be “folded” into one visual symbol of the convulsing protagonist, which can easily be replaced by the same symbol from Füssli’s painting, as if the dream were a moment developed in time, captured by the artist’s brush. Moreover, both the painting and the dream have an underlying sensual and erotic subtext. The woman is pursued by “Him”, an unknown character in different guises. “*Toujours lui!*” (“Always him!”) she exclaims. This man pulls her by the hair into the fire and then presses the strands left in his palms into his face, embraces her and seeks to kiss her (a scene beyond the cabaret curtain), and plunges a dagger into his own heart after a vain plea not to leave. As for Füssli’s painting, the figure of the incubus has repeatedly served as a subject of psychoanalytical studies.⁷⁶ Even its title — *The Nightmare* — is perfectly suitable for the characteristics exhibited in the Woman’s dream.

In such cases, *the very structure of a shot*, i.e., its perceived, purely visual layer, becomes the common element that unites the two visual images, the cinematic

73. Iampolski, *The Memory of Tiresias. Intertextuality and Film*, 1998, 35.

74. C. Stewart, “Erotic Dreams and Nightmares from Antiquity to the Present,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 8, no. 2 (2002): 282, 294, 302, 304.

75. Probably, in the second episode of the nightmare the same beggar pulls her by her shawl when she tries to escape the pursuer by the stairs. The motif of strangulation has already been outlined here already.

76. Concerning an image of incubus and especially Füssli see Stewart, “Erotic Dreams and Nightmares from Antiquity to the Present,” 2002, 286, 291-292, 294, 298, 301-303, 305.

and the pictorial. This layer acts as a shell of meaning, or the signifier, while the signified is *divided* into the visible elements and those left outside the shot, into the space of cultural memory. One can say that the visible signified is similar to the direct meaning of the word, while the outer is similar to its figurative meaning, or those additional semantic nuances that can only be perceived from the context. Moreover, this second component of the signified is so ephemeral, so unstable, and so strongly influenced by personal taste and individual cultural memory that its meanings turn out to be variable over a rather wide range. The image thus becomes a genuine *symbol*.

There are two possible ways of creating such a wide semantic range for the signified. Firstly, the choice of this signified depends almost entirely on the viewer; if the *structural connector* in the shot can address a multitude of different visual phenomena. Thus, e.g., the mentioned signpost with an angel in Dreyer's *Vampyr* may well activate in the viewer's mind different images of angels in painting, all of which bring their own semantic connotations, not necessarily related to the idea of death. This potential pluralism is determined by the original pluralism of meaning concerning the cited image. The latter is conditioned, in turn, by the image being *wide-spread* in culture, which gives opportunities for a wider dialogue with the visual tradition and creates a kind of field of possible meanings. One can say that the structural anomaly mentioned by Iampolski⁷⁷ does indeed indicate the quotation-like nature of the image, but the origin of the quotation remains in the realm of interpretation. One could even say that here the viewers are dealing with the sign-symbol as an open structure, which they themselves are invited to complete.

However, *Le Brasier ardent* obviously constitutes a different case, based on the opposite principle of the ultimate *individualisation and recognisability* of the quoted visual text. The reference made to *The Nightmare* seems to be the only possible one, because among the artists who might have been known to Mosjoukine and "quoted" by him, willingly or unwillingly, only Füssli associates the state of sleep with a nightmare and the image of a convulsing body. In all other cases, sleep is represented either by the serene position of a relaxed figure stretched out on a bed or on the ground (as, e.g., in Botticelli's *Venere e Marte*,⁷⁸ Raphael's *Sogno del cavaliere*,⁷⁹ or Giorgione's *Venere dormiente*⁸⁰), or by a seated figure (Domenico

77. See Iampolski, *The Memory of Tiresias. Intertextuality and Film*, 1998, 30, 33, 52-53, 58, 74, 83, 93-94, 100-102, 125, 174, 201, 251. Iampolski means both the redundancy with which the hotel's signpost appears on screen and the illogical nature of its alternating with other images as regards narrative.

78. Ca. 1483, *Venere e Marte*. Wood (poplar), tempera, oil. 69 x 173 cm. The National Gallery, London.

79. Ca. 1504, *Sogno del cavaliere*. Wood (poplar), oil. 17.1 x 17.3 cm. The National Gallery, London.

80. 1508-1510, *Venere dormiente*. Canvas, oil. 108 x 175 cm. Old Masters Gallery, Dresden.

Fetti's *Sleeping Girl*).⁸¹ There are also examples of a bent figure, frozen in an uncomfortable pose and obviously dreaming about something frightening (the most striking example is *El sueño de la razón produce monstruos* by Goya).⁸² But even in the latter case, the very posture of the sleeping remains, if not calm, at least immovable and stiff. It is only Füssli who endeavours to capture the moment of convulsion, to show the most unstable position of the body (in all versions of *The Nightmare*), i.e., to make the viewer sense *movement*. And since it is only cinema that can in fact not only mentally recreate, but actually represent this movement, the scene of the Women's nightmare is logically perceived as a painting by Füssli brought to life, modernised and included in a different semantic context.

Here, we are dealing with a special variant of the "stratification" of the signified (the visible in the shot and that which is left beyond it) and the creation of multiple additional meanings. While the "second text" to which the screen image refers is obvious, these additional meanings are created by the totality of meanings of the quoted text together with the individual variants of its reading, i.e. by the totality of interpretations. The circle of these interpretations becomes the factor that influences both the perception of the context surrounding the screen image and the very *semantic core of the quoted image*.

The reason for this is that the inclusion of this image in the context of the film is done with the help of the already mentioned visual *connector*. This structure unites the quotation and the shot, but is not absolutely identical to the structure of the quotation (otherwise, the director would have to show a full-screen reproduction of the chosen painting). Thus, Mosjoukine replaces the figure of the sinister incubus with a lamp. This decision, on the one hand, can be interpreted as an anticipation of a happy end: the nightmares dissipate; the final scene is partly a reversal of the nightmare as regards modality and genre (a melodramatic-comic episode). The Woman dreams of the Detective in various guises, while the Detective, thinking about the departure of his beloved, falls asleep on his grandmother's shoulder and, suddenly, waking up, discovers the Woman instead.

On the other hand, Mosjoukine's visual solution *changes* the meaning of the interior in which the protagonist finds herself. If Füssli's incubus and the white horse at the bedside of the reclining woman clearly appear to spawn from her hallucinating consciousness and are incorporated in the interior, Mosjoukine does not combine dream and reality in the same space, apparently due to the peculiarities of the genre itself. In the kaleidoscope of genres that Mosjoukine himself mentions,⁸³ there are no fantasies or romantic fairy tales which were alien to his nature. If he allowed the coexistence of such two worlds, it was justified not by the romantic *Weltgefühl*, but by the idea of a pathology or an insanity (as in *The Queen of Spades* and, apparently, in the lost film *Life in Death* (1914) of Yevgeni Bauer). Hence, in *Le*

81. Ca. 1620. Canvas, oil. 675 x 740 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.

82. 1797, metal, etching, aquatint, drypoint. 21.5 x 15 cm. National Library of Spain, Madrid.

83. Mitry, "Les idées d'Ivan Mosjoukine sur le cinema," 13.

Brasier ardent one can see another modus of artistic expression, one in which the nightmare is treated as an enciphered framework of future events and not as an independent hopeless state possessing so great a force that the phantoms of the consciousness penetrate the outer world and settle in it.

Future filmmakers would use the same semantic strategy, with the same principle of the unifying visual structure in the function of a connector. Van Gogh's *Prisoners' Round* in Stanley Kubrick's *Clockwork Orange*, Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss* in Martin Scorsese's *Shutter Island*, René Magritte's *Architecture au clair de lune* in Peter Weir's *The Truman Show*, Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* and Gustave Doré's engravings in Jean Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast*, Rembrandt's *The Return of the Prodigal Son* in Tarkovsky's *Solaris*, John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* in Trier's *Melancholia* are just some of the examples. Evidently, all these quotations are integrated into the film text by the semantic algorithms completely different from those of Mosjoukine, and with a different understanding of the cinematic message, the phenomenon of visuality, and cinema itself. But the very renewability of semantic strategy shows its powerful potential for generating intertext and including the viewer in the process of semiosis. Mosjoukine was one of the first to understand this potential.

The logical outcome of this semantic strategy is the integration of the quoted text directly inside the film text. The shot synthesises, within its structure, the quoting text (the screen image) and the quoted one, which is incorporated into it according to the principle of structural subordination. But since the quotation has its own semantic field, a semantic contradiction arises between it and the semantic field of the screen image, which the viewer is not always able to "neutralise" or "resolve into consonance", mean these two fields find a common denominator. *Pallas and the Centaur* by Botticelli becomes an example of such integration in *Le Brasier ardent*.⁸⁴ The painting is incorporated into the shot space as one of the elements of the bizarre interior of the Woman's room. On the one hand, one of the modern interpretations of the opposition between the aloof female figure and the mythological creature can be taken into account as a symbol of the confrontation between human dignity and animal energy, which should be restrained and tamed.⁸⁵ On the other hand, the distorted face of the centaur, whose hair is firmly twisted by the hand of the indifferent Pallas, reveals genuine suffering.⁸⁶ Can parallels be drawn between his torment and the Husband's experiences, which are of little concern to the Woman? Or is it a sign of the Husband's voluntary submission, an indication of the way in which he surrounds his wife with excessive

84. Or *Camilla and Centaur*, or — surprisingly — a personification of Florentia. The attribution of the female figure is disputable. See A. L. Frothingham, "The Real Title of Botticelli's 'Pallas'," *American Journal of Archaeology* 12, no. 4 (1908): 443; R. Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 146, 150-152.

85. F. Zöllner, *Botticelli: Images of Love and Spring* (London: Prestel, 1998), 71-72.

86. The reproduction of the image in the film is incomplete. The viewers see only the head of Pallas. However, if they are able to recognise the visual quotation, they at once "complete" the entire artistic image in their mind.

luxury and encompasses her with care and exaggerated attention (this can be indicated by the centaur's hands, folded in a supplicant gesture)? Interestingly, the reproduction of the painting itself in the film is shown cropped: it adorns a secret door, which can be opened with the help of special mechanisms. The Woman summons her spouse through it, and his head immediately appears. Thus, the Husband becomes a metonymic substitute for the Centaur. Or is Botticelli's painting rather just a tribute to a tradition? It is known that Botticelli's precise drawing, associated with the lines of *Art Nouveau* style, made him a fashionable artist in France of the *fin de siècle*.⁸⁷ The picture then is just a sign of good taste, nothing more.

It can be seen that in each particular case the meaning of the quotation is determined by the context of the screen image as much as it defines the context itself. This is a kind of mutually reversible and interdependent relationship. Due to the evident presence of *rational* narrative logic (albeit with a touch of absurdity in the plot), this kind of relationship turns out to be quite clearly defined in *Le Brasier ardent*, although this is not always the case.

The directors of the avant-garde and later of auteur sound cinema would make the semantic relationship between the quotation and the screen image increasingly vague, indeterminate, and unclear. Such a change was achieved by rejecting the rational manner of the unfolding of the visual text, the sequential narrative that structures the links between characters and events. Why is this particular picture chosen as a quotation? How does its appearance in the shot influence the process of semiosis? Sometimes there is no answer to these questions at all: neither concerning Vermeer's *Lacemaker* in Dalí and Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou*, nor, e.g., in relation to Bruegel's *The Hunters in the Snow* in Trier's *Melancholia*. The presence of the quotation becomes a self-sufficient, self-referencing meaning: it is a sign, a symbol of an "ouroboros" representation, whose signified merges completely with the signifier. The ultimate concreteness of meaning turns into its ultimate, postmodern closeness. Mosjoukine's film outlines this paradoxical vector of the semiosis of the cinematic text. And if the question that haunts a woman both in her dreams and in reality: "*Où vas-tu, femme? Arrête-toi!*" ("Where are you going, woman? Stop yourself!") hardly referring to the title of Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel *Quo Vadis*, extremely popular in the era (the parallels are too haphazard), then the aesthetic position of both Trier or Dalí does not prevent them from incorporating such concepts into a quotation to elicit all the meanings they wanted. The deconstruction of the meaning of a quotation turns out to be very close to the deconstruction of the quotation itself. But this path, outlined by Dalí in a painterly experiment on the pictures Vermeer and Jean-François Millet,⁸⁸ leads beyond the boundaries of visuality as an equivalent to language, capable of transmitting meaning, and cinema as a semantic double of a text.

87. J.-M. Nectoux, *Harmonie en bleu et or. Debussy, la musique et les arts* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), 98.

88. The experiment was continued by Picasso in his series on El Greco, Velázquez, Manet and other artists.

Mosjoukine certainly could not have imagined such a historical turn, which was (and there is a degree of cruel irony) in many respects defined by his art.

Conclusion

Louis Delluc praised *Le Brasier ardent*, but emphasised that it would have been an even better film if the author had not strived so hard for originality.⁸⁹ Probably the genre and style eclecticism of Mosjoukine's work was alien to Delluc's idea of "photogeny", i.e., in essence, the creation of the highest artistic integrity. As for Mosjoukine, he considered the variations on the chosen idea of the film, the change of its guises to be the most important means of creating cinema as a true art form, which is able to represent the same meaning in the most different of ways.⁹⁰ It was this kaleidoscope of styles that, according to Mosjoukine, would make cinema international in the future.⁹¹ It would be possible to develop this idea: an international language. And if cinema had remained silent, Mosjoukine would probably have achieved his goal, not least by consciously working out the principles of expressing all possible meanings through pure visuality. He would probably even have listened to Mitry's criticism of the unnecessary abundance of intertitles in *Le Brasier ardent*, compared to the films by Marcel L'Herbier.⁹² He could, in his endeavour to create his own *le scénario visuel*, turn to abstraction, similar to Fernand Léger, or to surrealism.

Nonetheless, what Mosjoukine managed to do before the sound era was and remains impressive. One single film combines not only all the main national techniques of filmmaking, but also a variety of interesting technical solutions. *Le Brasier ardent* is also a synthesis of possible strategies for treating the screen image as a sign and a symbol, and cinema as an equivalent to a meaningful and structured statement. Remaining in line with a narrative-literary principle (which paradoxically contradicts the idea of a "visual scenario"), Mosjoukine anticipates those strategies of semiosis in cinema that would later be recognised as innovative, shocking, extravagant, and denying semiosis itself.

Are these strategies indeed similar to those used when creating a text? Are the principles of connecting elements proposed by Mosjoukine equivalent to those used in connecting corresponding elements in a spoken utterance? It is possible to answer these questions affirmatively? On the one hand, Mosjoukine develops his plotlines according to the classical principles of storytelling, from the initial situation to the peripeteia and the climax and then dénouement. However, it is worth pointing out that he also introduces absurd deviations from the narrative principle similar to

89. Delluc, *Cinéma et Cie*, 1986, 382.

90. Mitry, "Les idées d'Ivan Mosjoukine sur le cinema," 1923, 13.

91. Ibid, 14.

92. Mitry, "Le Brasier Ardent," 1923, 6.

those of a dream, which are, at the same time, necessary to make the plot cohesive. Paradoxically, these unrealistic episodes become key points for the film's development, due to the fact that they fix all the significant stages of the relationship between characters.⁹³ These scenes become crucial for the unfolding of the film as a visual correlation to a narrative, i.e., the logically coherent and grammatically uninterrupted process.⁹⁴ The nightmare and the following scene of the Woman waking up, which open the film, presuppose two modes of the director's approach: subjective (along with the Woman's dream, all the visualised thoughts of the Husband belong to this mode, as well as the Woman's memories from the past come to life) and objective (the reality in which the characters interact).⁹⁵

Nevertheless, the reality of the life attributed to consciousness (the first mode) does not counterpoint the reality of action (the second mode), but rather becomes its Doppelgänger, "encoding" the "real" events that happen to the characters. This "doubling" is achieved through a clear correlation between the images that belong to these two modes: thus, the guises that the Detective can take, and which are noted in a book about him, generate Doppelgängers within the Woman's nightmare. In turn, these Doppelgängers represent the psychological stages the Detective goes through in reality, as the relationship with the woman develops and affects his character.⁹⁶

Mosjoukine, a true classical author,⁹⁷ strived to control his films entirely: as co-author of the screenplay, director, and actor. Through the power of his intention, he combined the subjective and objective aspects related to the characters and turned them into two interrelated sides similar to those of the Möbius strip, i.e., an artificial, "constructed" world in which visual doubles function as structural and semantic images that appear on both sides of this "strip".⁹⁸ The film reel itself can be considered as a counterpart of this strip, not metaphorical but something all the more tangible. It consists of a series of still images, the order of which follows the unspoken rules of "visual syntax", developed by Mosjoukine who cleverly treated the principles of cross-cut and associative editing. In this sense, *Le brasier*

93. The guises of the Detective in the Woman's nightmare define the twists of the characters' relationship, while the scene in the Agency establishes the idea for the detective story line.

94. The post-modern practices of approach to a text are not considered, because they do not correspond to Mosjoukine's film chronologically.

95. The above-mentioned fact that Mosjoukine rarely shot outdoors, but preferred to work indoors, introduces elements of artificiality and "construction" into the reality depicted. The latter makes it similar to the realm of dreams and fantasy, which can also be "constructed" from quite realistic elements, albeit in an unrealistic combination.

96. The uncanny and sinister inhabitants of the den-like cabaret from the nightmare are reflected in the dancers and visitors of the Montmartre cafe.

97. Roland Barthes's concept of the "death of author" was completely strange to him, he could not even think of something similar.

98. A similar function is played by the above-mentioned "visual ideas" and repetitive symbolic images (flames, stairs).

ardent is entirely *textual*.

Yet, in an attempt to control all aspects of the visual narrative, Mosjoukine does not allow complete freedom to the viewer: the film, with its absurd plot twists, includes elements of an intellectual conundrum, the solution to which is encoded already in the initial episode. Solving this riddle does not involve joining the process of semiotics by creating one's own interpretations. Even the use of open-form elements in the final scene reflects the anticipated future of the characters (which can be imagined in the form of a narrative sequel) and does not imply a plurality of interpretations of the conclusion and, correspondingly, all significant images which contribute to its meaning.⁹⁹

Therefore, any interpretive strategies employed by the viewer to understand the semantic ambiguity of the film's visual layer can be seen as incidental. This includes the cultural connotations and connections the viewer might draw with other works, films, cinematic styles, or traditions. All these references, which contribute to the intertextual field, are merely semantic accidents or fluctuations of *le fond*, as defined by the author. The author's intentions did not involve a genuine dialogue with the intentions of other authors or cultural traditions. For a dialogue on equal terms to occur, it is necessary to treat another person's utterance as a complete and inherently meaningful entity.

Mosjoukine created *le fond* as a derivative of his own *visual idiolect*,¹⁰⁰ drawing on both the general cinematic *sociolect* of the era and the stylistic and creative practices of other artists (including other styles). It resulted in their adaptation to the goals he had set for himself. Therefore, it is not possible to discuss *true* intertextuality in the case of *Le brasier ardent*: even if there are intended references to other authors' words (as in *Der Student von Prag*), they assume its complete assimilation, not an articulation or emphasis on its specificity. This absorption is not intended to refer to cinematic or cultural codes, commonplaces, genres, or styles.¹⁰¹ Correspondingly it does not imply the appearance of implicit meanings

99. A brief encounter on the ship deck between the ex-husband of the Woman and an unknown female character may represent the beginning of a potential new development in the plot. A possible further evolution of the relationship between the Woman and the Detective has a similar meaning. As regards significant imagery, all the guises of the Detective, including his perception by the Woman, determine the course of events and the outcome.

100. On sociolect and idiolect see M. Riffaterre, "Interpretation and Undecidability," *New Literary History* 12, no. 2 (1981): 228, 231, 233, 236-239, 241; Riffaterre, "Intertextual Representation: On Mimesis as Interpretive Discourse," *Critical Inquiry*; Chicago 11, no. 1 (1984): 148, 152, 160.

101. A scene from Godard's *À bout de souffle*, which the director himself considered to be an element of "pure film" can serve as an example of such a reference. Patricia looks at Michel through the poster, rolled up into a tube, that depicts the following scene of the characters' kiss. This episode is a variant of the scene of Samuel Fuller's film *Forty Guns*, in which a barrel of a gun substitutes the poster. See: Iampolski, *The Memory of Tiresias. Intertextuality and Film*, 1998, 31-32.

or elements of representation that encode significant aspects of the cinematic tradition.¹⁰² This absorption leaves no gap between one's own word (Text 1) and that of the others (Text 2), which is essential for their interaction as separate elements and, consequently, for creating an intertextual field of meaning. In summary, it is complete and unconditioned. Mosjoukine was prevented from entering the sphere of avant-garde experiments due to his past, which was primarily associated with Russian pre-revolutionary theatrical practice. This period was distinguished by realistic traditions that left no place for playing with quotations and associations. They did not presuppose an active viewer who could create intertextual connections together with the author on the basis of his "visual suggestions".

The problem of textuality and intertextuality in *Le Brasier ardent* can be solved as follows: the creation of an inherently valued visual text with an obvious intention for intertextual ideas and practices without the possibility of realising them — an opportunity that in the case of the French avant-garde was prepared culturally and historically, but for Mosjoukine, a representative of another tradition, turned out to be foreign. Apparently, he did not interpret the problem of intertext as a problem. It did not exist for him at all, as well as the idea of a deliberate playing with the artistic ideas of other artists in order to confound the educated public.

The analysis of Mosjoukine's acting and the contribution his art had on the easy change of guise in terms of the realisation of the visual message could become a further "plot" to be studied. Mosjoukine's famous eye play, a trademark of his acting talent, is emblematic in this respect.¹⁰³ It would be interesting to find the point where the gaze of the tragedian, comedian or demonic romantic turns into a gaze-symbol, a gaze-sign, as in German Expressionist films — a symbol of a fundamentally unrepresentable idea and, ambivalently, a symbol of representation *per se*. Moreover, this transformation is connected, perhaps, with the unification in *Le Brasier ardent* of all the previous roles of Mosjoukine, from the grotesquely comic (*The Little House in Kolomna*, 1913; *The Night before Christmas*, 1913) to the darkly demonic (*The Queen of Spades*, 1916) and tragic (*Father Sergius*, 1917). Keith A. Reader considers such roles of one actor, migrating from film to film, as a means of creating intertextuality (see: (Allen, 2022: 170)).¹⁰⁴ Developing this idea, all the films with Mosjoukine can be represented as individual texts that add up to a special mega-project of his acting work and the "common denominator" of which is *Le Brasier ardent*.

Another important point for further interest with the art of Mosjoukine (as an actor and director) is to determine the place of *Le brasier ardent* among his few authorial experiments (*L'angoissante aventure*, 1920, directed by Protazanov, Mosjoukine as scriptwriter; *L'enfant du carnaval*, 1921, director, together with Alexander Volkov), as well as analyses of those expressive means whose modification under the

102. For example, the typical Yevgeni Bauer's structure of shots with interiors.

103. It was Mitry who noted the eye play regarding *Le Brasier ardent* (Mitry, "Le Brasier Ardent," 1923, 5).

104. See: G. Allen, *Intertextuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2022).

influence of European cinema gradually led Mosjoukine to the idea of the “visual scenario”.

This idea can be seen as one of the links between the pre-revolutionary Russian cinema and the Soviet film *avant-garde*. For example, when the textologist Boris Tomashevsky became interested in *Le brasier ardent*, the film was perceived as a sample of a new approach to the structural and expressive possibilities of cinema. In December 1923, the film was shown to students of the State School of Cinematography, and the newspaper *Kinonedelya* published a review by Leonid Trauberg, who was able to express his admiration for Mosjoukine in person when he met him in Berlin five years later. Originating in Griffith's works, the discoveries of Mosjoukine's film would later be developed by Eisenstein in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), and similarly with Dziga Vertov in *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). On the one hand, the increase in the speed of the editing, which in the scene in the café in Montmartre depicts the acceleration of the pace of the dance, resembles the conclusion of Griffith's *Intolerance* (the scene of the car chasing the train). On the other hand, it anticipates the experiments with the rhythm of the alternation of shots in the famous scene on the Odessa staircase or in the finale of “an experimentation in the cinematic communication” (as it designated in the intertitles of Vertov's experimental cinema).

The entire range of this rhythm, on the verge of permissible persistence, becomes, in Vertov's film, a self-valuable, pure structure, which can be isolated from the content of the shots and presented as an abstract sequence in space. Something similar was realised by Germaine Dulac, who tried to embody the musical idea of pure, non-mimetic development through musical means in *Étude cinégraphique sur une arabesque* (1928). Again, in *Le brasier ardent*, Mosjoukine outlined this idea of visualising music in an attempt to make perceptible to sight its form, which is inaccessible to hearing in silent cinema, or perhaps the very inaudible numerical structure. These intersections of Mosjoukine's ideas with the European *avant-garde* also await further research.

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