"The Cinematic Novel" and the Materiality of the Text:

Jan Brzękowski's *Bankructwo profesora Muellera* [Professor Mueller's Bankruptcy]

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Blaise Cendras thus writes about the new art in *The ABCs of Cinema* (1926): "[t]he latest advancements in the exact sciences, the great war, the concept of relativity, political convulsions, all this foretells that we are on our way toward a new synthesis of the human spirit, toward a new humanity, and that a race of new men is going to appear. Their language will be the cinema." He further added that "[t]he floodgates of the new language are open. The letters of the new primer jostle each other, innumerable. Everything becomes possible!"[1] Such a statement was characteristic of the atmosphere of the 1920s: it was believed that the development of cinema and the gradual development of a new language, which could compete with literature, were interrelated. Heated debates sometimes crossed the boundaries between analysis and prophecy, with critics and artists arguing about the decline of drama (replaced by script-like forms), the need to reform the novel, and the need to create a new poetry, one that would correspond to the goals of contemporary directors.[2]

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[1] Blaise Cendrars, "The ABCs of Cinema", in: S. MacKenzie (ed.), *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014), 22.

[2] See: texts collected and edited by Marcin Giżycki in the anthology *Walka o film artystyczny w międzywojennej Polsce* [The fight for the artistic film in interwar Poland] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwa Naukowe, 1989), in particular: J. Kurek, *O filmie "artystycznym" i "stosowanym"* [The "artistic" and "applied" film] (pp. 138-140) oraz *Kino – zwycięstwo naszych oczu* [Cinema: The victory of our eyes] (pp. 137), A. Stern, *Uwagi o teatrze i kinie* [Remarks on theater and cinema] (pp. 82-85) and *Malarstwo a kino* [Painting and cinema] (113-115); T. Czyżewski, *Krajobraz w kinie* [Landscape in cinema] (p. 52).

According to contemporary enthusiasts, film – like a miraculous modern substance – transformed literature, advancing its break with traditional forms of expression and providing it with new possibilities. The history of these transformations has been described by scholars – they have drawn attention to a number of cinematic features that could be found in the literature of the 1920s and the 1930s. The list is long and includes, among others, abandoning the ballast of descriptiveness, narrative experiments, imitating film editing, and, finally, various literary allusions.[3] This led to the creation of the hybrid "cinematic novel:" a form that is difficult to define. As Steven G. Kellman writes in "The Cinematic Novel: Tracking a Concept," it developed concurrently with the art of cinematography: "'cinematic' does not mean the same thing in 1987 as it did in 1950, before wide-screen technology, as it did in 1940, before color became commonplace, as it did in 1925, before movies could talk, or as it did in 1900, before cameras became mobile."[4]

In this article, I shall focus on one of the possible relations between the literary text and the cinematic image, one which developed when the silent film was already in decline, namely Jan Brzękowski's *Bankructwo profesora Muellera (powieść sensacyjno-filmowa)* [Professor Mueller's Bankruptcy (a crime cinematic novel)]. The novel was published in 1932 by the Dom Książki Polskiej [Polish Book House] publishing house.[5] It was the most experimental, particularly in terms of visuality and typography, text in Polish interwar avant-garde prose; however, it did not attract the attention of contemporary writers.[6] Adam Ważyk, Jalu Kurek, Anatol Stern, Bruno Jasieński boldly attempted to create avant-garde prose; however, even though it may be a simplification, they focused primarily on stylistic and compositional experiments. Typographic innovations, unlike in poetry, were for the most part unaccounted for.

Bankructwo profesora Muellera was exceptional in this respect. A number of artists worked together on the visual form of the novel. The cover was designed by Henryk Stażewski. Sophie Taeuber-Arp's photographs were used as illustrations throughout the book and Brzękowski's portrait by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz was also reproduced in it. At the heart of the experiment was the typography: the layout referred to cinematic conventions but (as I shall explain later) it was by no means limited to them. To define its nature, let me draw on George Bornstein's *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page*. Bornstein argues that "the literary text consists not only of words (its linguistic code) but also of the semantic features of its material instantiations (its bibliographic code). Such bibliographic codes might include cover design, page layout, or spacing, among other

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[3] Cf. e.g.: Jan Nepomoucen Miller, "Dyktatura wzroku" [The rule of the eye], *Wiadomości Literackie* 1933, no. 17; Stefania Zahorska, "Co powieść zawdzięcza filmowi?" [What the novel owes to the film?], *Kurier Literacko-Naukowy* 1934, no. 29; Alina Madej, "Między filmem a literaturą. Szkic o powieści filmowej" [Between film and literature: On the cinematic novel] in "Film polski wobec innych sztuk" [Polish film and other arts], ed. Alicja Helman, Alina Madej (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1979); Maryla Hopfinger, *Kultura audiowizualna u progu XXI wieku* [Audiovisual culture at the turn of the 21st century] (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1997).

[4] Steven G. Kellman, "The Cinematic Novel: Tracking a Concept", *Modern Fiction Studies*, 33, no. 3 (1987): 471.

[5] Jan Brzękowski, *Bankructwo profesora Muellera (powieść sensacyjno-filmowa)* [Professor Mueller's Bankruptcy (a crime cinematic novel)] (Warsaw: Dom Książki Polskiej, 1932).

[6] See further: Aleksander Wójtowicz, *Cogito i "sejsmograf podświadomości". Proza Pierwszej Awangardy* [Cogito and the "seismograph of the subconscious:" The prose of the First Avant-garde] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2010).

factors. They might also include the other contents of the book or periodical in which the work appears (…).” The American scholar reads these material features in the context of “aura;” even though Walter Benjamin claimed that it was absent in works that were created by means of mechanical reproduction, in the case of literature, “original mechanical reproductions can create their own aura” and it can be revealed in the material features of the text.[7] Such an interpretation of *Bankructwo profesora Muellera* is additionally justified by the fact that the book is a *rara avis* among avant-garde publications. Fifty years ago, Brzękowski wrote that copies of the book “can be found in Poland only at the National Library, and abroad – at the Polish Library in Paris.”[8] It is still true today (the book occasionally appears at antiquarian auctions; it is usually an expensive lot).

It should be emphasized that Brzękowski paid (perhaps the greatest) attention (among all avant-garde writers of the interwar period) to the visual form of the text. He had lived in Paris and had established close contacts with representatives of the local avant-garde, whom he asked to design his poetry collections. The cover of *Na katodze* (1929) was a reproduction of a gouache by Fernand Léger. A drawing by Hans Arp was reproduced on the cover of *W drugiej osobie* [In the second person] (1933). The collections *Zaciśnięte dookoła ust* [Clenched around the mouth] (1936) and *Spectacle métallique* (1937) published by “a.r.” were illustrated with collages by Max Ernst.[9] Indeed, all the books were designed and produced with great care in terms of the format, typographic layout, and lettering (supervised by, among others, Władysław Strzemiński). It can be said that they were created in a dialogue with the contemporary modern concepts of unique graphic design, the “new typography,” functional printing, and above all, avant-garde transactions between literature and the fine arts.[10]

The experiments in *Bankructwo profesora Muellera* were guided by similar notions. However, their nature changed, because while the attempts of the above-mentioned schools and movements were connected with the avant-garde *livre d’artiste*, Brzękowski in his prose referred to contemporary popular culture, as the subtitle “a crime cinematic novel” suggests. However, unlike many other contemporary authors, who focused mostly on sensational and adventurous storylines (as was the case, for example, with Jerzy Bandrowski and his *Po tęczowej obręczy. Film awanturniczy* [On the rainbow circle: A crime film] or Leo Belmont), the writer was not so much interested in the plot as the possibilities which open up at the intersection of avant-garde prose and cinema.

This was achieved in and through the “cinematic novel.” In *Psychoanalityk w podróży* [A travelling psychoanalyst] (1929), published three years earlier, designed in accordance with the principle of “formal heterogeneity,” one of the characters argued, in a metaliterary fashion, that: “Three hundred pages in the same format and style demonstrate that the author is not

[7] George Bornstein, *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 6.

[8] Jan Brzękowski, *W Krakowie i w Paryżu* [In Krakow and in Paris] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1963), 49.

[9] Joanna Hałaczkiewicz writes about this issue in “Jan Brzękowski i jego emigracyjne spotkania z piękną książką” [Jan Brzękowski and his emigration meetings with the beautiful book] [date of access: Jan. 10, 2021]: https://jhalaczkiewicz.pl/jan-brzekowski-i-jego-emigracyjne-spotkania-z-piekna-ksiazka/

[10] Paulina Kurc-Maj, “Nowe widzenie – język nowoczesnej typografii w międzywojennej Polsce” [New vision - the language of modern typography in interwar Poland], in *Maszyna do komunikacji. Wokół awangardowej idei nowej typografii* [Communication machine: Around the avant-garde concept of the new typography], ed. Paulina Kurc-Maj, Daniel Muzyczuk (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2015), 421-439.

creative when it comes to style. Worse, they indicate that the author is limited in his emotional perception, that he cannot see the connection between the psychic reality and the form. The so-called authorial style, unchanged and unchanging, opposes progress and the twentieth century."[11] Consequently, the respective chapters were written in different conventions: the *Künstlerroman*, the novel of manners, the travel novel and the detective novel. The last and the most experimental part was an attempt to create the "cinematic novel." It was characterized thus: "The cinematic novel, which is not synonymous with the script, is worth exploring. It allows for speed. The pace of life. It emphasizes the need for abbreviations, uniform directional tensions. The cinematic novel is delightfully technical. It separates feelings, speech and facts perceived by the senses. It separates certain wholes. Several plotlines may develop simultaneously because we can quickly move from place to place. It rejects the cult of details. It brings out the visual elements of the whole. And most of all: it produces a different way of approaching and producing concepts."[12]

"Bringing out the visual elements" could be achieved either by imitating film techniques or experimenting with page layout and typography. The former primarily related to creating a storyline on the basis of the most popular (quite literally – the most entertaining) mechanisms found in contemporary silent films. Brzękowski knew these conventions well. Indeed, unlike in the script of the abstract film *Kobieta i koła* [Woman and circles] (1931) written more or less at the same time,[13] he focused not so much on artistic experiments as on imitating the most recognizable narrative patterns. In practice, it looked thus:

(1) **At the inn**
   (2) the professor was amazed by his brother's gluttony, again.
At home, he thought about it for a long time, surrounded by vaporous spirals of blue cigar smoke.
(3) **In the evening ...**
   (4) He did not go to bed. With a gun in his pocket, he awaited midnight, or rather a secret march of ghosts dressed in white.
(5) **Then**
   (6) a row of white figures came (...), the professor came out the house unnoticed and followed the ghosts from a short distance. Mysterious figures approached Mr. Westergreen's inn and, after opening the gate, they carried the crate to the shed next to the Boardinghouse. (...)
(7) **At home**
   (8) He thinks about it for a long time. Suddenly he gets up and, walking around the room, happily repeats:
- Of course. Yes. Certainly. I must be right.
   He flips through the book. Finally, he finds it. He points to it with his finger: - - Yes.
(9) TOMORROW
   (10) the professor arrived earlier than usual at Mr. Westergreen's inn.[14]

[11]Jan Brzękowski, *Psychoanalityk w podróży* [A travelling psychoanalyst] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo F. Hoesicka, 1929), 70-71.
[12]Brzękowski, 71.
[13]Jan Brzękowski, "Kobieta i koła" [Woman and circles], *Linia* 1 (1931).
[14]Brzękowski, *Bankructwo*, 38-9. This and subsequent passages from *Bankructwo* were translated by M.O.

The typographic layout differed from contemporary conventions. Cinematic inspirations were of a twofold nature: Brzękowski imitated both film editing and intertitles. The former points to the widely discussed relationships between the literary and the cinematic modes of depiction, which were already considered alike at the time. In Brzękowski's "cinematic novel," such an approach manifests itself in the form of short paragraphs, scenes, that were connected in keeping with the principles which also governed silent films.

A potential key to describing this technique is Christian Metz's concept of the "great syntagmatic of film narration" (*la grande syntagmatique du film narratif*).[15] Metz wished to find a code that would define the framework for constructing a cinematic narrative. He analyzed works from the classical period of cinema and focused on the mechanisms of constructing a storyline. This allowed him to define the basic unit of film – the "autonomous syntagma" – and then distinguish its types, thus creating a systematic "palette of all forms of representing temporal relations in a feature film, from among which the director can choose at their leisure."[16] Metz's theory was criticized, among other reasons, because it focused on images and ignored sound.[17] However, what was considered a drawback in film studies may, somewhat paradoxically, be considered a considerable asset in the analysis of the "cinematic" novel. The "great syntagmatic" focuses on the semantic mechanisms governing the juxtaposition of images, i.e. on a technique developed in silent films, to whose unique nature Brzękowski referred.

This, in turn, translated into fragmentation and unique layout: the elements that imitate the intertitles are clearly marked in bold (or capitalized) and fragmented, so that the text is divided into lines (paragraphs marked with odd numbers). They were meant to render the represented events more coherent by locating them in time and space, which was common in the "silent" years, when "movement-image" (Deleuze) was dominant.[18] Respectively, longer sequences, in accordance with the typology proposed by Metz, can be described as literary equivalents: scenes (*une scène*), where space-time unity is achieved (paragraphs 8 and 10); episodic sequences (*une séquence par episode*), which summarize events to come (paragraphs 2 and 4); and ordinary sequences (*une séquence ordinaire*), where episodes irrelevant to the plot are omitted (paragraph 6). Moreover, the novel also experimented with simultaneous composition, modeled on D. W. Griffith's parallel montage, which in Metz's typology corresponds to an alternating syntagma (*une syntagme alternant*). The word "meanwhile" (in bold and in a separate line), which connects two adjacent paragraphs, is an equivalent an alternating syntagma.

Such solutions influenced the typography. Brzękowski's experiments with film techniques were not limited to the visual sphere and visualization in general. They also included the

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[15]Christian Metz, *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, vol. 1 (Paris: Klinksieck, 1968), 212-234.

[16]Alicja Helman, Jacek Ostaszewski, *Historia myśli filmowej* [The history of film studies] (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo słowo/ obraz terytoria, 2007), 202. See also: Zbigniew Czeczot-Gawrak, *Współczesna francuska teoria filmu* [Contemporary French film theory] (Warsaw: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich - Wydawnictwo PAN, 1982), 264-295.

[17]In later works, Metz considered it to be one of many cinematic codes (*des codes cinématographiques*), See: Christian Metz, *Langage et cinéma* (Paris: Albatros, 1971), 143-4.

[18]Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 1: The movement-image, Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 140-180.

use of intertitles, which were at times rather elaborate, and quoting, *in extenso*, entire letters and press articles. Such experiments were characteristic of modern avant-garde prose writers, who believed that heterogeneous composition would help them avoid the limitations of realistic prose. However, in Brzękowski's novel, they were additionally "filtered through" a cinematic way of seeing.

This affected the materiality of the text. From today's perspective, this is one of the most interesting aspects of Brzękowski's experiments, which were conducted in the greater context of avant-garde experiments with the visual form of literary text. The "cinematic novel" was heading in a direction similar to the futuristic "words-in-freedom" and Apollinaire's calligrammes, but it used cinematic means of expression. They inspired the use of a number of typographic solutions, including different typefaces, fonts, characters. There were many of them indeed and they were often used interchangeably. For example, in the opening pages of the novel (Fig. 1, p. 16), the layout was neither vertical, horizontal, nor diagonal. The page resembled a poetical collage. Different fonts (both lowercase and uppercase) and typefaces (sans serif, sans-serif bold, and serif Excelsior, first introduced in 1931) were used.[19]

These typefaces were used throughout the entire novel. Such typography was quite a challenge, so we cannot really tell whether the final result was what the writer intended. For example, let us examine the paragraphs which imitate intertitles. At the beginning of the novel, capitalized Excelsior font was used (Fig. 1, p. 17). The same font was also used in a rectangular frame, imitating an inscription on a suitcase. Subsequently, however, uppercase and lowercase sans-serif font was used, which rendered the layout of the page very complex (judging by contemporary publishing standards). In general, Brzękowski probably wished to use the Excelsior typeface as his "basic" typeface and use the uppercase Excelsior or bold sans-serif typeface (both lowercase and uppercase letters) for intertitles. We cannot tell whether so many different typefaces were used because the author was not consistent or because some changes were introduced by the typesetter. Moreover, and this is yet another possibility, perhaps Brzękowski was not so much looking for consistency but testing new possibilities.

The author played with publishing conventions on the page. Such experiments were part and parcel of avant-garde literature, as evidenced by a long list of experimental works, especially by Polish futurists and, later, by artists from the "Nowa Sztuka" [New Art] circles and Polish constructivists. As printing techniques and the Polish school of graphic design developed, these artistic experiments became even more interesting, as exemplified by Julian Przyboś's *sponad* [over] (1930), designed by Strzemiński, or Brzękowski's works. To draw on Bornstein's distinction between the "linguistic code" and the "bibliographic code," it can be said that in Polish avant-garde texts the "linguistic code" was more innovative than the "bibliographic code." However, Brzękowski's novel differed in that respect. In terms of its plot and structure, it was an adventure/crime/detective novel. What was innovative was the (not always consistent) imitation of filming techniques and experiments related to the materiality of the text. Thus, typefaces, fonts, and letters became the elements of a visual composition, which meant to transgress contemporary publishing conventions. Importantly, not only the writer but also

[19]Alexander Lawson, *Anatomy of a Typeface* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1990), 282.

the typesetters had a say in the novel's final form. The success of the project was, quite literally, in their hands. It can therefore be said that the novel was a product of collective authorship, because the professional typesetter played an important role in the whole process.

Let me comment on one more important aspect of the typography in the novel. It was the use of round brackets in which the narrator commented on the plot, emphasizing the schematic nature of events, the shortcomings of the storyline and the naivety of the characters. Thus, the text in brackets was metafictional in nature, drawing attention to the pastiche-like character of the whole. The narrator narrated the story and questioned it, using ironic remarks or literary allusions: "Larsen Ulupin thinks about how he fell in love with the 17-year-old Elly Larsen for the first time in his life (The reader may find similar psychological states in T. Mann's *Tonio Kröger*)."[20] At times, multi-level structures were used, where one comment triggered another:

The road to India

leads through Egypt.
You know: Thebes, the Sphinx, the Pyramids, the curse of the pharaohs, the mummies…

(The author refrains from describing the country. It is not because he has never been to Egypt, for this would make his description even better. (Evidence: the terrible description of the Canary Islands and Marseilles, which the author has visited). It is to speed up the erotic and dramatic plot and render it more exciting. If you want to experience the ambient of Egypt and love under the pyramids, my dear Reader, you should go to the cinema and see "Water of the Nile" or "Revenge of the mummy from the 14th dynasty" or something like that).[21]

The text in the brackets was in fact ironic a meta-comment on the plot of the novel. The narrator's self-referential comments clearly suggested that the novel was a joke: such meta-referentiality was often found in the works of contemporary avant-garde writers. *L'ésprit ludique* (playful ingenuity),[22] which manifested itself in the use of pastiche and fascination with popular culture (which often made its way, transformed and altered, into avant-garde texts), was one of the characteristics of the avant-garde.

The very first pages of the novel make it clear that it is a pastiche. Their design is modeled on popular advertisements which inform the reader about the author and the work. Such publications were very popular at the time: "in cinemas in the 'silent' years, booklets were sometimes sold; apart from the detailed plan of the evening, they also featured descriptions of the plot of the movie and often included photos."[23] *Bankructwo profesora Muellera* made

[20]Brzękowski, *Bankructwo*, 97.

[21]Brzękowski, 72.

[22]A. Marino, "L'art et l'esprit ludique" in: *Les avant-gardes littéraires au Xxe siècle*, vol. 2, *Thèorie*, publié par le Centre d'Étude des Avant-gardes Litteraires de l'Université deBruxelles; sous la direction de Jean Weisgerber (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986), 753.

[23]Janusz Dunin, *Rozwój cech wydawniczych polskiej książki literackiej XIX i XX* wieku [The development of publishing features of *livre d'artiste* of the 19th and 20th centuries in Poland] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2018), 191.

reference to such ephemeral publications. The author's face (cut out of a photograph taken in 1930) appeared first (p. 2),[24] The words "JAN BRZĘKOWSKI" (3) "has the honor to present" (5), the title of the novel with information about the publisher (7), and a list of the four most important "characters" (8) followed. Then, the reader could see the portraits of these characters (pp. 8-11; Fig. 2), including the portrait of Brzękowski made by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (the painting was lost during the war)[25] and three photographs of the writer taken by Sophie Taeubert-Arp. "Photographs of Dr Strumień, Prince Larsen Ulupin and Ingeborg Held (...) were taken by Sophie Taeuber-Arp; she also made Ingeborg Held's hat," wrote Brzękowski in his post-war memoirs.[26] The photo session, cross-dressing and Chaplinesque stylization reflected well the specific atmosphere of the Parisian international avant-garde. It seems that today these photographs are more than just illustrations. Over the years, they have gained additional value not only as a testament to the writer's artistic affiliations but also the only material documentation of a lost portrait by Witkacy.

Importantly, a photomontage made by Henryk Stażewski is reproduced on the cover.[27] It refers in part to the convention indicated in the subtitle: photographs of two people, a plane and a map (attention should also be paid to the hand-drawn letters, clearly referring to the Futura typeface designed by Paul Renner) are clearly visible. However, the photomontage mostly makes use of the photographs of crowds. In one photograph, the crowd is standing in a long geometric line which breaks at some point. In the other photograph, the crowd is cropped so that only a small part of it is visible. This corresponds to the theme of the novel, namely anthropophagy and global riots and revolts caused by the operation of a company established by the title character. Professor Mueller sold canned meat of unknown origin. The food was highly addictive, which lead to the suspicion that it was made of human flesh. The novel drew on absurd and playful stories by Apollinaire and Aleksander Wat but also commented on the actual social problems caused by the Great Depression. Although Brzękowski's novel encoded it in the form of the "cinematic novel", with some elements of crime drama, the vision of societies devouring each other and torn apart by atavistic instincts was reminiscent of contemporary cultural fears.[28]

The "cinematic novel" was the most radical experiment with the materiality of the text in the history of avant-garde prose. It was not continued, however, because in his next novel, Brzękowski returned to more traditional forms of expression. His ideas were not taken up by other avant-garde artists: at that time, they were gradually turning to social themes, and thus paying more attention to facts and reportage than typographic experiments. Moreover, the writers who made their debuts in the 1930s, the "Gomborowicz generation," were not interested in avant-garde innovations.

[24]The photograph was reproduced in *W Krakowie i w Paryżu*.

[25]Brzękowski, *W Krakowie i w Paryżu*, 49.

[26]Brzękowski, 230.

[27]Jan Straus, *Cięcie. Fotomontaż na okładkach w międzywojennej Polsce* [Cut: Photomontage on book and magazine covers in interwar Poland] (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie 40 000 Malarzy, 2014), 35.

[28]In the following years, Brzękowski returned to "engaged" themes, writing a poem devoted to the expulsion of Polish miners from France (*Leforest*) and the novel *24 kochanków Perdity Loost* [24 lovers of Perdita Loost] (1939), in which the title character is killed in street riots.

In a broader perspective, what made *Bankructwo profesora Muellera* so innovative, i.e. the silent cinema code, proved to be a drawback. The novel was written at a turning point in the history of cinematography. The "talkies," which appeared a few years later, changed the forms of cinematic expression, thus irreversibly rendering obsolete the means of expression to which Brzękowski referred. Indeed, Brzękowski consistently minimized his use of dialogue – conversations between the characters were laconic and most often presented in a typographic layout reminiscent of intertitles – which demonstrates just how obsolete the text must have read after some time. Indeed, already in the 1930s, "cinematic" prose often used dialogues, adapting more and more to the convention of a script.

Paradoxically, the "cinematic novel" did not give rise to cinematic but typographic and visual experiments, which exposed the materiality of the text. Brzękowski attempted to transfer contemporary cinematic techniques into literature. Although they were somewhat outdated – because they referred to forms that were ousted with the development of the "talkies" – they shaped the novel's "bibliographic code." They determined the typographic layout, the graphic design, and the choice of illustrations, i.e. the material aspects of the novel which determine its "aura." Ultimately, the novel was created (and perhaps conceived) by typesetters, Taeuber-Arp (photos), Witkacy (portrait) Stażewski (photomontage). Indeed, *Bankructwo profesora Muellera* was (let us point to this analogy in the end), like the films that were being made at the time, a collaborative endeavor: the atelier was replaced by the workshop of a graphic designer and a typesetter.

<div align="right">translated by Małgorzata Olsza</div>

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KEYWORDS

avant-garde

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ABSTRACT:

The article analyzes Jan Brzękowski's cinematic novel *Bankructwo profesora Muellera* [Professor Mueller's Bankruptcy] from the perspective of avant-garde experiments with novelistic conventions. It demonstrates how the imitation of silent film forms was translated into the "bibliographic code" (G. Bornstein), giving rise to an innovative typographic layout, thanks to which the materiality of the text (typographic composition, different typefaces, fonts, and letters) became one of the key aspects of the work. Moreover, the article draws attention to graphic design created by other artists (Witkacy, S. Taeuber-Arp, H. Stażewski).

The materiality of the text

Typography

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