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A COGNITIVE EXPLORATION OF THE VISUAL METONYMY OF HANDS IN KRZYSZTOF KIEŚŁOWSKI'S "THREE COLOURS: WHITE" (1994)

KOGNITYWNA ANALIZA METONIMII WIZUALNEJ RĘKI W FILMIE KRZYSZTOFA KIEŚŁOWSKIEGO „TRZY KOLORY: BIAŁY” (1994)

Abstract: This study examines the cognitive function of visual hand metonymy in revealing the characters' inner states, intentions and actions in Krzysztof Kieślowski's *"Three Colours: White"* (1994). The study employs CONTAINER image schema (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) to examine film frames as bounded spaces of meaning (Coëgnarts, 2019/2020; Coëgnarts & Kravanja, 2016a). Drawing on the concept of "dynamic patterns of containment" (Dewell, 2005; Coëgnarts, 2020), it investigates how metonymic representations emerge through close-ups of body parts following Forceville's (2009/2023) analytical framework. An analysis of long sequences of close-ups shows that prominently featured hands serve as metonymic vehicles for power and control, highlighting the PART-FOR-WHOLE metonymy (Radden & Kövecses, 1999/2007). This aligns with Forceville's (2009, 2023) account of metonymy as a strategic communicative choice within relevance-guided multimodal communication. The study contributes to multimodal discourse analysis and suggests avenues for future research on visual metonymy in different cinematic genres and cultural contexts.

Keywords: visual metonymy, CONTAINER image schema, close-up, inner states

Abstrakt: Artykuł zawiera wyniki badań nad wizualnymi realizacjami metonimii rąk, które funkcjonują jako „przełączniki” stanów wewnętrznych, zamierzeń i działań bohaterów w filmie Krzysztofa Kieślowskiego „Trzy kolory: Biały” (1994). Do analizy wykorzystano pojęciowe schematy wyobrażeń POJEMNIKA (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) oraz koncepcję „dynamicznych wzorców zawierania” (Dewell, 2005; Coëgnarts, 2020) w badaniu metonimicznej reprezentacji w zbliżeniach części ciała w ujęciu Forceville (2009/2023). Analiza ujęć wykazuje, że wyeksponowane w ujęciach dłonie pełnią funkcję metonimicznych nośników władzy i kontroli, wzmacniając metonimię CZĘŚĆ ZA CAŁOŚĆ (Radden & Kövecses, 1999/2007). Wyniki badania są zgodne z ramami teoretycznymi Forceville (2009, 2023), podkreślającymi metonimię jako świadomy wybór

komunikacyjny oparty na teorii relewancji i wspólnych ramach uwagi. Badanie przyczynia się do analizy dyskursu multimodalnego oraz proponuje kierunki przyszłych badań nad metonimią wizualną w różnych gatunkach filmowych i kontekstach kulturowych.

Słowa kluczowe: metonimia wizualna, schemat POJEMINKA, zbliżenie, stany wewnętrzne

1. Introduction

This study offers a cognitive investigation of how the visual metonymy of the hand highlights the inner states, intentions and actions of film characters within a film frame (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008), treated as a CONTAINER in Kieślowski's *Three Colours: White* (1994) according to the logic of the CONTAINER image schema Coëgnarts & Kravanja (2016a) & Coëgnarts (2019). It draws on the embodiment thesis (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1987; Johnson, 1987; Lakoff & Turner, 1989; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Gibbs, 2005) linking meaning-making to embodied sensorimotor experience, Radden & Kövecses' (1999/2007) PART-FOR-WHOLE and EFFECT-FOR-CAUSE / RESULT-FOR-ACTION metonymy, Kövecses' (2000, 2010) work on emotion concepts, Wierzbicka's (2000) findings on facial expressions as emotional indicators as detailed by Dale (2023), Kövecses's (2023) idea of "context-induced" metaphorical creativity, Coëgnart's (2020) use of Dewell's (2005) "dynamic patterns of containment" in film, and Forceville's (2009/2023) approach to identifying metonymy in visual discourse. Following Forceville (2009), this study assumes that a communicator (e.g. a film director) deliberately chooses a particular metonymy over alternatives to achieve a desired effect, which conforms to Sperber & Wilson's (1995) *principle of relevance* also applicable to visual and multimodal communication¹. As Forceville (2009, p. 2) argues, discourse is seen as a collaborative process in which participants exchange beliefs, background knowledge and assumptions that develop during communication. It emphasises the importance of a shared focus of attention known to both the speaker and the listener. Thus, communication involves not only the exchange of words, but also shared attention to the same objects, events or ideas in context. Finally, Gibbs' (1999, pp. 4–5) notion of "the retrieval of communicative intentions" is seen as central to the cognitive processes that underlie human action (Forceville, *ibid.*).

2. Film Frame as a CONTAINER

Johnson (2007, p. 154) argues that recurring interactions with containers motivate the CONTAINER image schema inferential structure. Through repeated everyday experiences, we gradually learn the meaning of "in" by observing how

¹ According to the principle of relevance in communication, people assume what is communicated is worth processing without additional effort (Forceville, 2020, pp. 33-35).

objects move from outside a container, cross its boundary and settle inside. Thus, we instinctively understand that something that is inside a container is not outside it. Similarly, we learn that an object that moves towards and crosses the boundary exists, at least briefly, outside the container (*ibid.*). For example, if a credit card is placed in a wallet (container A), which is then placed in a handbag (container B), it logically follows that the card is in both the wallet and the handbag (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 32 cited in Coëgnarts, 2019, p. 43). In film, the logic of the CONTAINER/CONTAINMENT image schema (together with *mise en scène*, sound and editing) can be leveraged through framing, a key technique of cinematography (Dale, 2023, p. 84). Bordwell & Thompson (2008, pp. 182–183) describe the film frame as not just a “neutral border” but one that “imposes” a particular point of view on what it encloses. Like a container, the frame has boundaries and “holds” the cinematic world visible on the screen, its interior, while the invisible set represents the exterior. The two “spaces” are intrinsically interdependent and fulfil the *gestalt structure* of the CONTAINER image schema only when considered as a unified whole (Coëgnarts & Kravanja, 2016a, p.115).² The aspect of framing that creates the illusion of being close to or distant from the captured scene makes the NEAR-FAR image schema productive. This is referred to as camera distance, defined concerning the human body (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, pp. 190–191).³ Filmmakers use standard shots to draw the viewer’s attention to important details or “partial representations” within a scene (Forceville, 2009, p. 11). Forceville (*ibid.*) identifies five traditional framings that can be interpreted metonymically depending on context with Bordwell & Thompson’s (2008, p. 191) descriptions:

- i) Extreme close-ups emphasise facial features or enlarge individual objects.
- ii) Close-ups show the head, face, hands, feet, or a small object.
- iii) Medium close-ups frame the body from the chest upwards.
- iv) Medium shots capture the body from the waist up.
- v) Medium long shots (*plan américain*) show the body from the knees up.

Based on differences in camera distance, this study examines metonymy in extreme close-ups and close-ups of human hands. These hands, which do not belong to Karol (the main character) but to others, signify control or dominance and evoke his humiliation. Nelissen & Van Beest (2016, p. 2) define humiliation as the loss of self-esteem, helplessness and inferiority experienced when publicly belittled. This sense of injustice evokes a complex emotional response including disappointment, anger and shame. The authors note that while humiliation overlaps with shame, it also contains elements of anger, depending on the context. In this study, this psychological model is applied to filmic representation.

² A *Gestalt structure* refers to a perceptual or cognitive whole that goes beyond the mere collection of its elements and is based on the principles of *Gestalt psychology*. It explains how elements are perceived as an integrated, unified configuration rather than as separate, discrete components (Wertheimer, 2020).

³ See Dale (2023, pp. 85–86) for other features of framing and the corresponding image schemas elicited through them.

3. A Long Shot as Dewell's (2005) "Dynamic Pattern of Containment"

Coëgnarts (2020, p. 31) highlights Lakoff and Johnson's (1999, p. 183) claim that humans routinely conceptualise the abstract idea of "a change of state" by mapping it onto the more familiar notion of "movement" or "change of place". Coëgnarts (*ibid.*) writes that the fundamental CHANGES ARE MOVEMENTS metaphor enables the interpretation of statements like:

vi) "He transitioned into a state of rage.

vii) I emerged from my depression.

viii) His emotions were somewhere between frustration and full-blown anger."

In these examples, *change of state* is envisaged as a movement through different locations, which follows the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL image schema. Linguistic evidence for this conceptual mapping is provided via different meanings of movement-related verbs and prepositions such as *go, come, enter, fall, from, to, into*, and *between* (Coëgnarts, 2020, p. 31). Grounded in the logic of the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL image schema and the conceptual metaphor CHANGE OF STATE IS CHANGE OF LOCATION (Lakoff, 1993; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), Coëgnarts (*ibid.*) organises and applies an embodied image-schematic framework for understanding relationships that arise when the concept of movement is combined with the concept of a container/containment⁴. The scholar argues states that this integration leads to what Dewell (2005, pp. 369–384) calls "dynamic patterns of containment". Depending on which entity the movement is attributed to, the container or the object, two idealised groups of patterns can be distinguished: one in which the container moves while the object remains still, and another in which the object moves while the container is stationary. The first group leads to patterns of INCLUSION and EXCLUSION, whereas the second defines patterns such as ENTRY and EXIT. Coëgnarts (*ibid.*) highlights that two film techniques, fixed-frame movement and camera movement, illustrate the "dynamic patterns of containment" by evoking CONTAINER image schema within the frame. This alignment is evident in the spatial reasoning applied to frames (e.g., "something is in the frame" or "something is out of the frame") and the inferences associated with delineated regions or containers also applicable to frames (Coëgnarts, 2019, pp. 74–79). Coëgnarts (2020, pp. 32–33) emphasises that the two techniques differ due to the origin of the movement. In fixed-frame movement, the filmed object (e.g. the actor) is relatively mobile, while the frame remains stationary. In a mobile frame, the frame moves while the object remains relatively still. Thus, EXIT and ENTRY refer to movement within a fixed frame, while INCLUSION and EXCLUSION apply to a mobile frame. In contrast to the static medium of painting, film is a temporal art form because it allows for the exploration of dynamic patterns over time (Coëgnarts, 2019, pp. 99–108). This is realised through film-medium-specific

⁴ Coëgnarts's (2020) model builds directly on Dewell's (2005) foundational treatment of containment and its dynamic variants.

techniques such as the long take (or a continuous shot) and the cut. As perceived by the viewer, the paradigm of an entity entering or exiting a CONTAINER-FRAME involves, in line with Langacker's (1993, p. 4) terms, "the process of mental scanning through the space" of the CONTAINER-FRAME. The entity or "trajectory" (i.e. a body part) deliberately chosen (by the film director) to enter the frame (or a "landmark") owing to a certain, contextually dependent cognitive salience, crosses the boundary of the CONTAINER-FRAME, follows a path, and reaches the target (ibid, p.6). This process also activates, on top of the CONTAINMENT, the workings of a range of SPACE, FORCE, BALANCE, and LOCOMOTION image schemas (Coëgnarts, 2019, pp. 41–42).

4. Metonymy from a Cognitive Linguistic View

Metonymy entails invoking one entity to provide mental access to another that is conceptually related to it, thereby foregrounding its referential function (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 36). Thus, it embodies a conceptual "stand for" relation or acts as "a reference point" (Langacker, 1993, p.30) between concepts and does not serve as a simple linguistic device to replace words (Kövecses & Radden, 1998, p. 38).⁵ In this context, the conceptual link arises when a word or phrase associated with a particular concept is used to refer to the concept itself (Littlemore, 2015, p. 4). For example, *Netflix* often stands for a subscription-based streaming service, while *Hitchcock* can stand for the director's entire oeuvre. Metonymy arises within a single domain of experience between a *vehicle* concept and a *target* concept, unlike metaphor, which involves a mapping between two conceptual realms (Lakoff & Turner, 1989, p. 103; Gibbs, 1994, p. 322). However, as Barcelona (2003, 2011) argues, this boundary can be blurred. Barcelona (2011, p. 52) claims that the mapping in metonymy is "asymmetric" as it involves correspondence between structures that lack significant structural similarity (unlike in metaphor, where similar structures in the source and target domains allow for the projection of elements). Radden & Kövecses (2007, p. 3), following Langacker (1993, p. 30), characterise "metonymy as a cognitive process in which the vehicle provides mental access to [...] the target." The scholars (ibid.) see it as an operation of a vehicle concept and a target concept within the same *Idealised Cognitive Model* (or ICM) that encompasses an individual's "encyclopaedic knowledge" of a particular domain together with the idealised cultural framework they are a part of. Metonymy occurs within three "ontological realms" and the ICMs with which these "realms operate" (Radden

⁵ Lakoff (1987), Langacker (1993), Kövecses & Radden (1998), Dirven & Pörings (2002), Fauconnier & Turner (2002). Barcelona (2003) and Panther & Thornburg (2004) share the view that metonymy serves as a "reference point".

& Kövecses, 2007, pp. 4–7)⁶. Considering that our understanding of the world is structured by ICMs perceived as holistic entities composed of parts, metonymy-inducing relations organised within two conceptual configurations: the Whole ICM and its constituent parts, as well as the relationships between the individual parts of an ICM (Radden & Kövecses, 2007, p. 7). The WHOLE-FOR-PART metonymy, considered by Langacker (1993, p. 31) as “discrepancies between active zone and profile” appears, for instance, in “The car needs washing”, where “the car” represents the whole, while implicitly refers to the part i.e., “the body of the car.” The metonymy called synecdoche, PART-FOR-WHOLE, in which a part stands for the whole, can be illustrated, for example, by “Who’s the head of the department?”, where “the head” (a body part) is used to refer to the person and their role or function performed by that person (ibid.). In films, it is common to use body parts such as the face and its parts, hands, legs or head to represent a person and actions or functions that are typically performed or associated with these body parts (Bordwell & Thompson 2008; Forceville, 2009; Urios-Aparisi, 2010; Coëgnarts & Kravanja, 2016a). Consequently, the most relevant body part/s and their function/role or action/manner in a given context emphasises the whole through metonymy. Panther and Thornburg (2004, pp. 95–96) stress that the conceptual link between the vehicle and the target is not a simple substitution process but a complex process in which new semantic value arises. Hence, the crucial feature of metonymy is not the “addition” or “replacement” of meaning but the relative importance of the target meaning within the conceptual domain (ibid.). Thus, the PART-FOR-WHOLE metonymy contributes significantly to understanding by emphasising a certain aspect or characteristic of the whole through the selected part. For example, when we say that a project needs *good heads*, the head is not simply replaced by “a person.” Rather, the quality of “intelligence” associated with the head is emphasised (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 36, cited in Bierwiazzonek, 2013, pp. 7–8). Barcelona’s (2011, p. 12) insights emphasise functional contiguity and the pragmatic functions underpinning metonymy, highlighting the need for the source and target to share significant experiential links within their functional domains. The relationship between “FACE” and “PERSON” is defined not just by belonging within the same domain (or *Idealised Cognitive Model*) but by an active pragmatic connection that enables the metonymic interpretation. Barcelona (ibid.) argues that sharing the same “pragmatic function” is necessary to use the SALIENT BODY PART FOR PERSON metonymy, as in FACE FOR A PERSON, where the face and the person exist in the same functional domain and are connected through their pragmatic function. This contrasts with a less effective pairing, such as “MOUTH” and

⁶ They include: (i) “sign metonymies” that rely on a sign ICM that links form and concept, (ii) “reference metonymies” that rely on a reference ICM linking “real entities” to concepts, forms, or signs, (iii) “concept metonymies” that entail a shift from concept A to an associated concept B within the same ICM. The shift in form may or may not occur.

“NOSE,” which might be part of the same functional domain yet lack a sufficient pragmatic link. Moreover, Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 39) claim that metonymy is motivated by physical or causal relations, usually characterised as contiguity, e.g. some proximity or other direct connection between one entity and another. This clarifies why a waitress in the well-known example, “The ham sandwich is waiting for its bill”, could use “the ham sandwich” to refer to the customer who ordered it as there exists a firsthand real-world link between the sandwich and the person. The metonymy is therefore motivated by communicative and referential needs. Finally, Panther and Thornburg (*ibid.*) state that the PART-WHOLE, PERSON-ROLE, CAUSE-EFFECT and REPRESENTATION-REPRESENTED conceptual metonymic relations play a crucial role in meaning-making, which applies not only to language but also to visual and audiovisual expression.

5. Visual Metonymy in Art Film

Partial representation of a person or an object in a film serves certain contextual or narrative purposes, such as attracting the viewers’ attention and curiosity in contexts where the viewer can infer the target (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008; Forceville, 2009), expressing the characters’ emotions through the metaphor BODY IS A CONTAINER (Kövecses, 2000; Forceville, 2009; Urios-Aparizi, 2010; Coëgnarts, 2019) or improving the thematic coherence of the film (Littlemore, 2015). Forceville (2009, p. 11) argues that film can represent an entity either completely or metonymically. Forceville (*ibid.*, p. 4) further asserts that cinematic metonymy should be analysed within a framework in which a vehicle concept allows the viewer to infer the target concept through cues from language, visual or moving images, music, sound, or gesture within the same conceptual domain. Finally, Forceville (*ibid.*) claims that the choice of a metonymic vehicle highlights certain aspects of the target that might otherwise remain implicit, thus enabling its conceptualisation through a specific interpretive lens. These highlighted features often have an evaluative meaning. Forceville (*ibid.*, pp. 13–17) presents two case studies from art films in which body parts serve as metonymic vehicles. He identifies metonymies such as “MOUTH (of the priest) FOR TALKING (PERSON)”, which emphasise the formal and distanced treatment of Joan, “CHAINED LEGS FOR JOAN-ON-TRIAL”, which emphasise her confinement and subjugation as well as recurring metonymies of hands holding pens or writing that evoke “the letter of the law” and institutional pressure, a row of metonymic hands that signals priestly approval and collective obedience; the hands of the soldiers placing “a crown” on Joan’s head that suggest mockery and derision. In each case, the hands convey negative actions towards Joan, which take on negative connotations. Conversely, Forceville (*ibid.*) notes in a war film that the metonymy “HANDS

FOR ESCAPE-PLANNING FONTAINE” signals the prisoner’s resourcefulness and drive, while “HANDS FOR PRISONER-GUARDING NAZIS” suggests anonymity and conformity to oppression. Urios-Aparizi (2010, pp. 186– 189) shows how Almodóvar uses BODY PARTS FOR DESIRE /SEDUCTION and (female) LEGS FOR POWER /DOMINATION /SEXUALITY, while male legs often stand for movement or rest. Finally, Coëgnarts & Kravanja (2016b, pp. 17– 18) analyse close-ups of the protagonists’ faces and show how camera pans from medium close-up to close-up emphasise the negative emotions of the characters through the FACIAL EXPRESSION FOR EMOTION metonymy.

6. Corpus and Data Selection

“*Three Colours: White*” (1994), the second film in Kieślowski’s “*Three Colours Trilogy*” follows Karol, a Polish hairdresser in Paris, as he experiences a humiliating divorce from his French wife Dominique, who claims the marriage was unconsummated. His humiliation begins when a pigeon excretes on his arm outside the court building. Struggling with the French language, Karol depends on an interpreter, which further strips him of his dignity. After the divorce, Dominique throws him an old suitcase with his belongings and drives off, leaving him to chase after her in vain. Karol’s situation worsens as his bank card is cut up, and he spends the night in his ex-wife’s salon. When Dominique finds him, an argument and a failed attempt at intimacy end with her threatening to set the salon on fire. Fearing prosecution, Karol flees to a subway station, where he meets Mikołaj, a Polish businessman who helps to smuggle Karol back to Poland in a suitcase. On arrival the suitcase containing Karol is stolen by airport staff misled by its weight. Beaten and robbed, Karol rebuilds his life for himself through shady dealings, gaining wealth and confidence. He fakes his death to manipulate Dominique, and when she mourns him, he reappears, now fluent in French and confident. They reconnect sexually. However, the next morning, Karol disappears and frames Dominique for his “murder”. In prison, Dominique signals her desire to marry him upon her release. The film ends with a close-up of Karol in tears.

“*Three Colours: White*” (1994), together with “*Three Colours: Blue*” (1993), analysed in Dale (2023), and “*Three Colours: Red*” (1994), forms a part of my PhD research project.⁷

This paper examines the role of the visual metonymy of hands in conveying the unspoken emotions, inner states and intentions of the protagonists in “*Three Colours: White*” (1994) in the long take scenes treated as “dynamic patterns of containment” involving the movement of hands from offscreen to onscreen space

⁷ The film stills cited in this paper are from the DVD edition of the “*Three Colours Trilogy*” (Krzysztof Kieślowski, France, 1993–94; Artificial Eye, 100 min).

and/or from onscreen space to offscreen space. In these scenes, Karol experiences humiliation (in the sense of Nelissen & Van Beest, 2016) induced by others, which is metonymically highlighted by their hands exercising dominance/control.

The Language Archive, Elan 6.9, an annotation software for audio and video recordings, was used to capture the movements of the hands in the close-ups. The process was done manually with an accuracy of 0.001s. I manually counted the scenes and established that the film contains twenty-four scenes out of the total number of thirty-eight, with long takes consisting of a series of close-ups of hands⁸. Thus, as in the case of Kieślowski's *"Three Colours: Blue"* (1993), it was confirmed that close-ups of hands are a prominent feature of the director's cinematic style in the film under study (Haltorf, 2004; Dale, 2023). I then found that thirteen of these twenty-four long takes include a moving hand or hands, representing possession, dominance, or exertion of control, interpreted as metonymic due to contextual cues. Four of these thirteen long takes contain sequences of close-ups in which the exercise of control correlates with Karol's metonymically represented humiliation⁹.

The analysis offered below discusses two long takes (due to the word limit imposed in this publication) from two scenes that precede Karol's return to Poland in which (in addition to the framing techniques) formal cinematographic techniques such as foreground occlusion and out-of-focus blur are used.¹⁰

7. Analysis and Results

In the first scene, Karol realises that his card is blocked and visits the bank to inquire. At the bank (Figures 1- 9), he learns that his account has been blocked. In Figure 1, the fixed frame encloses the bank employee's right hand in the upper left corner of the frame and Karol's chest upwards. Karol's eyes are fixed on a point in front of him. The viewer is not sure what Karol is looking at. His slightly open mouth indicates shock and/or surprise, which may be couched in terms of the FACIAL EXPRESSION (vehicle) FOR AN EMOTION (target) metonymy. The

⁸ 'Scene' is used to mean a coherent action segment, following Bordwell and Thompson's (2008) principles of film segmentation, in which boundaries reflect changes in location, time, or dramatic focus.

⁹ A 'long take' is a shot of unusually long duration without cuts, while a 'long shot' refers to camera distance, showing the full body and much of the setting. These terms describe different dimensions of film form: temporal and spatial, respectively (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). The present study examines 'long takes'.

¹⁰ 'Foreground occlusion' is used to create depth and refers to the visual obscuring of a distant object by another object in the foreground. The additional blur is created when a subject filmed is close to the camera. These techniques are used, for example, to create a dramatic effect, to draw the viewer's attention, to create suspense, or to draw the audience's attention to a particular object or detail (New York Film Academy at <https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/tips-to-create-depth/>; Super-resolution blog <https://superresolution.co/types-of-blurred-images/> accessed 5th February 2025).

exaggerated size of the hand shot using foreground occlusion and an out-of-focus blur evokes the NEAR/FAR, and BLOCKAGE/REMOVAL OF RESTRAINT image schemas. This results in the creation of salience, drawing the viewers' attention to the overpowering, dominant hand. In Figures 6–9, the bank employee's hand(s) have the power to deny Karol access to his bank account and make payments with his card. In Figure 2, the hand moves further from the left towards the centre of the still and covers part of Karol's face. This further underscores its importance through the blockage it creates, as only part of Karol's face is visible to the viewer. Furthermore, it seems that the longer the official's explanation lasts and the louder he speaks, the larger and more dominant the hand appears, even though Karol barely understands it. This metonymically emphasises its power, control, and dominance (A CLOSE-UP OF A HAND FOR POWER, CONTROL, DOMINANCE metonymy). The concepts of power, control and dominance are also portrayed in Figure 3, where the hand recedes to the upper left corner, removing the blockage of Karol's face and suggesting that the official's upper body is above Karol's plane of vision. This positioning makes the official appear superior, metonymically manifesting that the UPPER POSITION STANDS FOR HIGH STATUS/DOMINANCE. This is reinforced by the physical distance created between Karol and the official, who remains off-screen. Karol's facial expression in Figure 4 and his hand gesture in Figure 5 again indicate that he wants his card back. However, his pleading actions go unnoticed. In Figure 5, although the official's hand leaves the frame, the viewer is aware of the official's presence off-screen. This is made clear by the direction of Karol's gaze and the hand gesture pointing towards the official. Figure 6 shows the official's left hand appearing from the left side of the frame. Karol's eyes are focused on the hands of the official, who is about to cut up Karol's card. While the clerk's left hand is holding Karol's card, the right hand, although not yet visible to the viewer, has a pair of scissors ready to destroy it. The official seems to completely ignore Karol's presence and his desperate plea to retrieve his card. This disregard is reinforced by the official's body position, turned away from Karol, while his controlling hands remain prominent in both the viewer's and Karol's visual fields. In Figure 7, the controlling hands continue moving along a path towards the centre of the CONTAINER-FRAME, finally reaching it in Figure 8, thus triggering the workings of the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL image schema. In Figure 9, the cutting hands of the all-powerful official, exercising his power over the powerless Pole, retreat along the same path while completing the act of destroying Karol's bank card. Karol's inner turmoil, visible on his face, is metonymically emphasised by the EFFECT-FOR-CAUSE ICM and FACIAL EXPRESSION FOR AN EMOTION ICM. Furthermore, in Figures 1- 9, Karol's sense of humiliation is intensified by the pronounced spatial distance between him and the off-screen official figure. This is evidenced by the operation of the FAR-NEAR image schema, aligning with the underlying context-induced conceptual metaphor LACK OF INTIMACY IS DISTANCE. Finally, as demonstrated in



Figure 1: The official's hand is enclosed in the upper left corner of the frame.



Figure 4: Karol is astonished/shocked.



Figure 2: The official's hand reaches the centre of the frame, covering part of Karol's face.

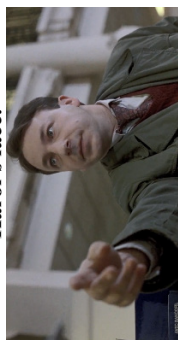


Figure 5: Karol wants his card back.

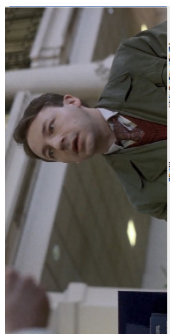


Figure 3: The hand retracts into the top left corner. Karol's gaze is directed upwards.

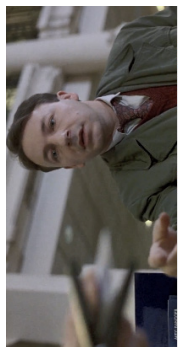


Figure 6: The official's hand re-enters the frame from its left edge.



Figure 7: The official's hand intending to cut Karol's card, moves towards the centre.



Figure 8: The official's hand reaches the centre of the frame.



Figure 9: The controlling hand has cut Karol's card and exercised its power. Karol realises the implications of this act.

Figure 1–9: At the bank scene. Karol is deprived of his bank card. K. Kieslowski's "Three Colours: White" (1994) ©WFDiF

the analysis, the HANDS are a metonymic vehicle for the bank employee, the metonymic target. More importantly, they highlight the social and professional role of the target – the bank employee whose authority is being abused. Karol is denied a proper hearing in the presence of an interpreter or even a sympathetic explanation. Instead, the interaction becomes an act of CONTROL EXERCISE in which Karol's dire situation is disregarded: He has just been divorced without his consent, is homeless and struggles to communicate in French.

The dominant and authoritative character of the bank clerk's actions, visually conveyed by the size of his hands, their movements and the effect in Karol's facial expressions and gestures, is gradually established in the course of the scene, as the analysis shows.

In the second scene, penniless Karol hangs up after listening to Dominique's ecstasy on the phone in a subway station and goes to the ticket office to retrieve his unused 2F change. As he approaches the ticket counter, he notices that the clerk is going through a large stack of banknotes. However, when Karol reaches the counter, the employee continues counting and deliberately ignores him, which irritates Karol, who now demands his money back in an angry voice. His facial expression expresses anger and shows that he has lost control. Thus, his body can be conceptualised as a pressurised container (ANGER IS HEAT/PRESSURISED FLUID, Kövecses, 2005, p. 26) while his emotions can be interpreted as those of an opponent. In contrast, the clerk remains fully composed. Protected by the window that separates his "space" within the CONTAINER-FRAME from Karol, the clerk maintains both physical and emotional distance, taking his time to react. Having located the right coin, he throws it into the metal tray wordlessly and with unimpressed physical calm. Figure 10 shows his hand, still out of focus, entering at the top centre of the fixed frame, evoking the UP-DOWN and CENTRE-PERIPHERY image schemas, and thus, metonymically suggesting dominance (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Figure 11 shows the employee's hand holding a coin and aiming toward the centre of the frame. This approaching hand holding the coin is now the main focus in both the viewer's and Karol's field of vision (previously, we saw a medium close-up of Karol looking down and following the movement of the employee's hand). In Figure 12, the hand (the trajectory) stops its movement (reaches the target) and releases the coin. Figures 13-14 show the brash nature of the hand movement as it releases the coin, indicating the employee's condescending attitude towards Karol. Figure 15 shows the employee's hand retracting upwards to exit the frame. The operation of the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema is clearly illustrated in Figures 10 to 15. However, the act of humiliation is completed when Karol's hand enters the frame from the bottom left corner (Figure 16) and slowly moves towards the coin (Figure 17) before grasping it (Figure 18). As he turns away, placing the 2F coin in the pocket of his shabby coat, he is juxtaposed in one shot with a beggar sleeping on a bench. Any sense of control Karol might have regained by reclaiming his change fades as he realises the tragic reality of his current situation.



Figure 10: The employee's hand enters from the top of the CONTAINER-FRAME.



Figure 11: The employee's hand is about to release the coin.



Figure 12: The coin is released.



Figure 13: The flippant manner of the hand/fingers is revealed.



Figure 14: The flippant gesture is complete.



Figure 15: The employee's hand retreats.



Figure 16: Karol's hand enters from the bottom left corner.



Figure 17: Karol's hand moves towards the coin.



Figure 18: Karol's hand reaches the coin.

Figures 10–18: At the subway station scene, K. Kieslowski's "Three Colours: *White*" (1994) ©WFDiF

Karol's attempt to maintain his dignity is overshadowed by the silent but deeply humiliating treatment he receives. The clerk's dismissive return of the change is more than a financial exchange. The analysis highlights Karol's loss of control and how his sense of self-worth is overwhelmed by humiliation. This is conveyed through the long take, which functions as the "dynamic pattern of containment", facilitating the viewer's inference of the director's intended emphasis.

8. Conclusion

This study investigated the cognitive role of visual hand metonymy in conveying the inner states, intentions and actions of film characters in Kieślowski's *"Three Colours: White"* (1994) using a framework from cognitive linguistics and film studies. Drawing on the CONTAINER image schema and on the "dynamic patterns of containment", the research shows how the framing of moving hands in extreme close-ups serves as a metonymic device providing mental access to power dynamics, control, and humiliation. It also reveals a recurring pattern in which prominently framed hands act as metonymic vehicles for social power, reinforcing the metonymy PART-FOR-WHOLE. The interactions between Karol and the figures in the bank and the subway station underscore the importance of metonymic framing for the expression of psychological oppression and emotional distress. The bank employee's oversized, exaggerated hands and the subway employee's brash gestures embody authority and control, depriving Karol of agency and reinforcing his humiliation. These findings support Forceville's (2009/2023) view that metonymy is a relevance-guided communicative choice. The study confirms Kieślowski's distinctive cinematic style in which the visual emphasis on hands serves as a thematic and narrative device. Through strategic framing, occlusion and camera movement, *"Three Colours: White"* (1994) effectively utilises visual metonymy to construct meaning and enhance emotional resonance, demonstrating that metonymy extends beyond language into other forms of discourse. Ultimately, the study advances research on visual metonymy in film and demonstrates that cognitive linguistics can offer valuable insights into cinematic meaning-making. Future research may investigate metonymy in different film genres and cultural contexts, further enriching our understanding of the cognitive processes involved in visual storytelling.

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