

ZWROT KINEMATOGRAFICZNY W PRAKTYCE I TEORII SZTUKI / THE CINEMATIC TURN IN ART PRACTICE AND THEORY

FILIP LIPIŃSKI

CINEMATIC ART (HISTORY) AND MIEKE BAL'S THINKING IN FILM

Investigating the possible relations between the disciplines of art history and film studies, cinema scholar Angela Dalle Vacche stated that "art history as a discipline cannot afford any longer to ignore film studies, for the advent of cinema has forever changed the meaning of the word 'art' and the meaning of the word 'history'."¹ A possible opposite direction of influence was, in turn, duly noted by Donald Crafton: "if art history were to be useful for the study of film ... then it would have to become a completely new regime of knowledge. This is gradually happening..."² Some ten years prior to the above statements, in 1985, the necessity, and difficulty, of accounting for moving images in the field of art history was also noted by the distinguished German, Martin Warnke, who admitted that that

... research on film (not to mention television) has not found a strong foothold within art history; currently it is becoming a province of the emerging field of media studies. The question arises whether the discipline of art history will be able to survive if it does not take into account a medium formative of the visual experience; at the same time, one may doubt if the discipline has the methodological and educational resources to broaden its scholarly purview to the field of mass-media and if, in order to do that, it would not need to give up its key assumptions and objectives.³

¹ A. D. Vacche, *Cinema and Painting. How Art is Used in Film*, Austin 1996, p. 2.

² D. Grafton, *Foreword w: The Visual Turn. Classical Film Theory and Art History*, ed. A. Dalle Vacche, New Brunswick-London 2003, p. xii.

³ M. Warnke, *Gegenstandsbereiche der Kunstgeschichte*, in: *Kunstgeschichte. Eine Einführung*, ed. H. Belting, H. Dilly, W. Kemp, W. Sauerländer, M. Warnke, Berlin 1985, pp. 21–22 (translation mine).

The above quotes signal a number of crucial interdisciplinary and methodological issues which will, at least to some extent, be addressed in this article and, as I hope to demonstrate, solutions to some of them can be found in the scholarship and artistic practice of the renowned Dutch scholar, Mieke Bal, the main protagonist of my discussion. I believe that Bal's writing on art, her scholarly identity as an interdisciplinary thinker and her artistic practice as a filmmaker, respond to those urgencies. However, before I focus on her multifaceted employment of cinematic thinking about art and its contiguous areas, I wish to sketch a broader picture of cinematic impulses in art history and identify the basic coordinates within which Bal's ideas can be located.

The history of the complicated relations between art history and film cannot be fully addressed here and deserves a separate study which would take us back to the moment of the curious overlap between the first successful attempts to register and reproduce moving images in the late 19th century and the full-fledged establishment of art history as an academic discipline around the same time. This synchrony was marked by a tension between the rather elitist, conservative domain of art history, a academic field in its own right with "high" art as its object and cinema as a new, still emerging visual practice appealing to the masses, originating from experimentation and entrepreneurial initiative. Movement and time inscribed in images, with the attendant change in modes of reception (mass "reception in a state of distraction," as noted by Walter Benjamin⁴), posed a challenge to accepted methods of investigating and regarding a visual work art, based on a reflective mode of sustained observation, the detailed scrutiny of an immobile and materially present object. While different forms of film were practiced by some members of the avant-garde from the 1920s, the stakes became even higher in the second half of the 20th century when many artists took up video as a medium of choice, and first art critics, and with time, historians of contemporary art needed to confront that and other time and motion-based art practices. That said, Warnke's dilemma was symptomatic: it indicated both a strong attachment to art history as a separate discipline with clearly delineated competences and the awareness that the disciplinary boundaries had become porous, and there was a necessity to take into account the broader aspect of the visual experience and cultural construction of perception affected by moving images. Embracing

⁴ W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, in: idem, *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections*, trans. H. Zohn, New York 2007, p. 240. Benjamin explains the basic difference mentioned here as follows: "The painting invites the spectator to contemplation; before it the spectator can abandon himself to his associations. Before the movie frame he cannot do so" (p. 238).

a broader field of visuality as an environment for artistic practice, production and circulation of images comes at a cost, or rather should we say, with the benefit of redefining art history, its objects, aims and methods. This is where Dalle Vacche's remark comes in handy: in the 20th century, cinema not only became a defining element of visual culture at large, but it also pushed hard at the established definitions of the constituent notions of art history – art and history – the location of art within history, and history within art. This is also where the acknowledgment of the aforementioned new regime of knowledge, or what Michel Foucault called *episteme*,⁵ is necessary to account for the mobility in time and space of both objects and subjects, the resulting spatial and temporal complexity of images and the way they are experienced as well as for their mutual agency, power, and the potent virtual infrastructure of memories and other imaginary/affective domains underlying the visible.⁶

⁵ See: M. Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, London–New York 2002. Foucault admits elsewhere that “The episteme is the ‘apparatus’ which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may from what may not be characterized as scientific” (M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. C. Gordon, New York 1980, p. 197). If so, the episteme indicates the conditions of possibility within given historical paradigms of knowledge; it is an apparatus of policing, excluding and including different domains, procedures or theories from/in the recognized sphere of science. In our discussion, the first issue could initially be the inclusion of film in the domain of art, art historical discourse and adjusting its methods to the analysis of moving images. Film, however, eventually found its own institutional framework in the 1970s. At the same time, it was the artistic practices, developed with increasing intensity from the 1960s on, which gradually pressured art historians of contemporary art to accommodate them in their discourse. More importantly, though, I claim (and, as I hope to demonstrate, Bal's “thinking in film” corroborates that) that film was not just a new object of research, but a “theoretical object,” which generated new paths and mechanisms of thinking, opening up fields such as art history to a broader field of visual culture, engaging art into social and cultural contexts. Following Bal's work, it is my contention that film/cinema offers a model of thinking about images and art which is capable of disrupting and reevaluating existing models in favor of a new epistemological, much more inclusive and flexible approach. This can be also said about the technological revolution of circulating and processing information, which resulted in media arts and media studies, but this exceeds the scope of this discussion.

⁶ Throughout the text I use the notion of the virtual with reference to the immaterial but effective, activated in perception, expanded field of any physical image. It refers to the dimension of memory, fantasy and other mind-produced images which have the ability to affect material and visible reality. Generally, the virtual designates a certain potency or power and effectiveness without the agency of matter (Webster's Third New International Dictionary Unabridged, 1993), that is “in essence, potentiality, or effect, although not in form or actuality” (Oxford English Dictionary [online], 3rd edition, 2013). Bergson, who is

From the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, we witnessed a lively debate concerning the status of individual disciplines, such as art history or film studies, within the larger domain of visual culture studies.⁷ While Mieke Bal, as an author and the founding member of the first U.S. graduate program of Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester in 1989, was at the forefront of this discussion, it was spurred on particularly by scholars such as W. J. T. Mitchell and Gottfried Boehm, who came up with the notions of pictorial and iconic turn (respectively). They both, albeit somewhat differently, noticed the importance of the image as an object of study (in different academic fields) and its pivotal role in contemporary culture.⁸ While announcements of such turns, including the sometimes-evoked cinematic turn, should be analyzed with caution and not taken for granted, they surely function as signposts, not necessarily exclusive ones, for certain currents of thinking and

important for Bal's argument presented below, regarded memory as the domain of virtuality which gets actualized in perception, always infused with memories. Deleuze, and later Brian Massumi, saw the virtual as having more agency, and contended in various texts that the virtual and the actual coexist as layers of one object or one perceptual "event." Importantly, affect is also ascribed to the domain of the virtual, as potential and effective but not yet coded or put into a form. See: G. Deleuze, "The Actual and the Virtual," in diem, *Dialogues*, trans. H. Tomlinson, B. Habberjam, New York 1987, p. 150; B. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual. Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham-London 2002. In general, as we will see later in the text, I argue that what Bal describes as "contact zones" between the object and the spectator, in which immaterial images, memories, associations and affects are produced and fluctuate, are largely a virtual extension of an object, activated by the viewer. Film or video installations are particularly successful in the concretization or visualization of this virtual traffic of images. In her analyses, Bal managed to do justice to this extended, virtual sphere of images, always already in motion. I discuss in detail and theorize the virtual, the way it functions in art historical discourse and its consequences in: F. Lipiński, "The Virtual as the 'Dangerous Supplement' of Art (History)," in: *DeMaterializations in Art and Art-Historical Discourse in the Twentieth Century*, ed. W. Bałus, M. Kunińska, Cracow 2018, pp. 171–189.

⁷ See, for instance: "Visual Culture Questionnaire," *October* 1996, 77, pp. 25–70 and the article by Bal, followed by responses to it: M. Bal, "Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture," *Journal of Visual Culture* 2003, 2(1), pp. 5–32; "Responses to Mieke Bal's Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture," *The Journal of Visual Culture* 2003, 2(2), pp. 229–268; see also: "The Object of Visual Culture Studies and Preposterous History. Interview with Mieke Bal," in: *Visual Culture Studies*, ed. M. Smith, Los Angeles-London 2008, pp. 206–228.

⁸ On pictorial and iconic turns see: W. J. T. Mitchell, *The Pictorial Turn*, in: idem, *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, Chicago 1994, pp. 11–34; G. Boehm, *Was ist ein Bild?*, Munich 1994.

interest, and serve as convenient starting points for critical debate.⁹ Generally speaking, visual culture studies as an academic support for the analysis of the broadly defined domain of images, have embraced a number of fields, previously regarded as distinct, such as history of art or film studies, shifting their focus to broader, cultural and social aspects of their objects – which themselves often belonged to more than one domain anyway (for instance, video art, art films etc.) – and have become a shared, interdisciplinary area of interest. That, in turn, has called for increased diversity of the shared methods and theoretical perspectives used by the disciplinary actors involved.

One of the results of this complicated debate that is of particular interest in this article is the acknowledgment that so-called new technologies, including the not-so-new medium of film, not only affected the ways art was produced, but also the ways it was received and interpreted. Even though, as noted by Warnke, it concerned not only cinema but all branches of the new audiovisual media technologies, I will focus here on film, understood broadly as the mobile and temporal image (or cinema as an institutional mode of reception and distribution). Film and the numerous theoretical issues it entails, including the medium, apparatus, ideological critique, models of spectatorship, aspects of mobility and temporality, offer a way to rethink art history, its epistemology, methods and theoretical paths to follow. This opportunity was (and still is) also regarded as a threat, depending on the position one takes. It was not only necessitated by the new object of contemporary art – works of art that employed the medium of film (analog, video, digital, interactive, internet-based), or more generally a moving image, but also the effects of the scopic regime produced by the dynamics of such images, the technologies that propelled them and the resulting discourses. As a result, as Margaret Dikovitskaya wrote about the position of art history in the wake of these shifts, visual culture studies "... has not replaced art history or aesthetics but has supplemented and problematized them both by making it possible to grasp some of the axioms and ideological presuppositions underlying the past and current methodology of art history."¹⁰ One of the important aspects of film (studies) penetrating into the scope of art history (and other fields, for that matter) was the special attention given to the psychological, cultural and ideological effects the moving image had on its viewers, both as individuals and as collective communities. Furthermore, the temporally complex, crystalline –

⁹ For a useful overview of different cultural turns see: D. Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns. New Orientations in the Study of Culture*, trans. A. Blauhut, Berlin–Boston 2016.

¹⁰ M. Dikovitskaya, *Visual Culture. The Study of the Visual after Cultural Turn*, Cambridge 2006, p. 72.

to use Gilles Deleuze's term – filmic structure also encouraged a rethinking of the questions of chronology, linear time and history at large. The thrust of film is in fact at least two-directional, prospective and retrospective, but, importantly, always informing and informed by the present. In consequence, film with all its constituent dimensions, has the potential to serve as a frame or screen,¹¹ for viewing and thinking, which may not only generate new approaches but become a trigger for the archeology of possibilities hitherto suppressed by other, dominant regimes of knowledge and academic paradigms (e.g. Panofsky's iconology, his interest in film notwithstanding, formalism, connoisseurship etc.).

Before concentrating on Bal's idea of 'thinking in film' and 'the cinematic,' I will point to two cases of using cinema as a conceptual resource and frame for art history, which seem to me symptomatic of a certain "movement" in this field, which is in synch with Bal's writing. First would be the case of the French scholar and curator Philippe-Alain Michaud's work on images in motion. In 1998 he published a book called *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, in which he revisits Warburg's writings and theoretical framework from a cinematic perspective.¹² While there are references in Warburg's writings to the cinematographic (this is the exact term he used), Michaud points out that it "seems to designate not a material apparatus of projection but a mental apparatus, a dynamic manner in which to apprehend the works."¹³ The prominent place of images in motion (in the domain of mind and culture across ages), montage and temporal anachronism seems one of the factors responsible for the long suppression of Warburg's expanded version iconology. The spatial, temporal and interdisciplinary mobility it entailed must have been, to put it mildly, suspicious to art history, entrenched in its disciplinary paradigms. For Warburg, the mobility of images in time and space required, on the part of the spectator/interpreter, the ability to work between the material and the mental, individual and collective memory-images. Thinking of represented bodies as images in motion, traversing time and space, anachronistically emerging as carriers of cultural memory and emotional states, one can indeed be reminded of the medium of film, especially as discussed by early commentators, for whom cinema was like an endless gallery of artworks in

¹¹ For an excellent discussion of screen and frame, in philosophical, cultural and technological terms see: A. Friedberg, *The Virtual Window. From Alberti to Microsoft*, Cambridge, MA 2006.

¹² P.-A. Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, trans. S. Hawkes, New York 2007. Originally published in French in 1998.

¹³ Michaud, *Aby Warburg...*, p. 38.

motion,¹⁴ a crucial emotive aspect of the art experience. Michaud postulates throughout his book referring to cinematic concepts that if we abandon the technological and material determination of the cinematographic

... and instead consider it, in a more unusual and larger framework, as a conceptual interrelating of transparency, movement, and impression, we will discover, within the field of cinema, the same categories used in the history of art ... Under the intersecting light of texts and films, a shift occurs in the order of discourse that will lead us to see cinema less as a spectacle than as a form of thought and to see art history as practiced by Warburg as research directed less toward a knowledge of the past than toward its reproduction.¹⁵

The familiar tropes of a "form of thought" and "reproduction" directed toward repetition – and inevitable difference – as well as, potentially, unending actuality prone to revisions, come to the fore as operative in rethinking art history and its categories.¹⁶

In 2006, Michaud curated and co-authored the catalog of the exhibition *Le Mouvement des Images* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, in which he framed diverse art practices of moving and still images with cinema-based movement.¹⁷ While the general interest in intermedia and the interdisciplinary relations between art and film have been visible in numerous exhibition events and accompanying publications taking place over a period of circa thirty years,¹⁸ Michaud's conceptualizations seem to be most compelling for our discussion and expand his work on Warburg.¹⁹ He not only deals with aspects of cinema and the moving image *per se* but the "aim is to show how the 'seventh art' now irreversibly conditions our experience of both artworks and images," i.e. how the cinematic mode of vision becomes operational, and how it determines perception and shapes subjectivity. Following the theoretical

¹⁴ See for instance: V. Lindsay, *Art of the Moving Pictures*, New York 1922.

¹⁵ Michaud, *Aby Warburg...*, p. 40.

¹⁶ Giorgio Agamben discussing Warburg's Atlas also used cinematic terms: "Inside each section, the single images should be considered more as film stills than as autonomous realities." G. Agamben, "Notes on Gesture," in: idem, *Means without End. Notes on Politics*, trans. V. Binetti, C. Casarino, Minneapolis 2000, p. 54.

¹⁷ *Le mouvement des images / The Movement of Images* (exhibition catalogue, published both in French and English), Paris 2006.

¹⁸ See for example: *Peinture, cinéma, peinture*, ed. G. Viatte (exhibition catalogue), Paris 1989; *Hall of Mirrors: Art and Film Since 1945*, ed. R. Fergusson (exhibition catalogue), Los Angeles 1996.

¹⁹ Bal acknowledges Michaud's catalogue in: M. Bal, *Double Movement*, in: *2MOVE. Video Art + Migration*, eds. M. Bal, M. Hernández-Navarro, Murcia 2008, p. 19, ft. 5.

developments concerning the object of visual studies rather than film studies or art history, he writes that film/cinema should not be regarded narrowly, within its own domain, but rather as a phenomenon “at the crossroads of live spectacle and visual art, from a viewpoint expanded to encompass a general history of representations.”²⁰ He proposes, in the wake of his articulations concerning Warburg’s iconology, a broad definition of cinema which comes somewhat closer, as we will see below, to how it is defined by Bal:

... over and above the material elements of the film – the strip, the camera, the projector and the screen – the cinema is gathered within the general parameters of space and time. Consequently, all art which triggers an interaction of space-time effects can be regarded as cinema, even beyond the film’s material presence.²¹

Cinema as a specific mode of representation with particular types of dispositives, invented in the late 19th century and developed throughout 20th and 21st centuries, is then but one, technological manifestation of “the cinematic” or “the filmic.” In consequence, cinema should be “a way of rethinking images no longer on the basis of concepts of uniqueness and immobility ... but on the basis of notions of mobility and multiplicity.”²² Here, he touches upon some essential issues: first, it is the idea – and activity – of “rethinking images,” as seen through the lens of what was introduced, made visible or felt by the technologies of moving images that develop in time. This is not just an arbitrary decision or willed imposition of a schema on otherwise unrelated spheres of inquiry. It is a response both to a constituent aspect of lived experience and formative element of cultural screens: the diverse technologies of image in motion, the umbrella term for which could be “the cinematic,” to a great extent inform our visual reception of time and space, model vision and paths of thinking about art past and present, and ways of making it. Michaud’s perspective was in a way congruent with and responsive to the aforementioned discussions concerning visual culture and more general tendencies such as postmodernism, favoring the multiple and mobile rather than singular and static, interdisciplinarity in academia and intermediality in art practices.²³ Importantly, though, it exemplified the opening up of the con-

²⁰ P.-A. Michaud, “Le mouvement des images / The Movement of Images,” in: *Le Mouvement des Images*, p. 16.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 28.

²³ At this point, it should also be added that, especially since the beginning of the 21st century, we have a whole new set of VR and internet-based art practices, which add another dimension to the idea of motion, temporality, multiplicity and connectivity. However, regardless of its relevance, this exceeds the scope of this discussion.

cept of an image in motion to a multifaceted analysis broadening its heuristic, conceptually productive potential.

Another example of resorting to the cinema/the cinematic as a vehicle of thinking about art history, but also a telling contrast to cinema as what I consider an emancipatory force for art historical narratives proposed, for instance, by Michaud, and as I will demonstrate, Bal, could be Donald Preziosi's 1989 book *Rethinking Art History*. Even though cinema is just one of many references in his study, Preziosi noted that "... it could be argued that in the twentieth century all of the traditional pictorial arts have been subsumed into the discursive frame of the cinematic apparatus. The academic discipline of art history has never, or only rarely, dealt with the cinema"²⁴ He used the notion of cinema as a metaphor for the formative structure of art historical discourse, which, in his view, had always been cinematic, by virtue of the central role of slide projection and the structuring of art historical discourse around sequences of images. In this sense, the cinema as a technological and epistemological apparatus is nothing new to art history but has always informed it. The cinematic metaphor, however, serves to reveal the technological and ideological formation of art history, the "cinematic panopticon," rather than disrupt the recognized paradigms:

... the entire disciplinary apparatus as it exists in the twentieth century would be unthinkable without a correlative technology – that of the cinema. In a number of important respects, modern art history has been a supremely cinematic practice, concerned with the orchestration of historical narratives and the display of genealogy by filmic means. In short, the modern discipline has been grounded in metaphors of cinematic practice to the extent that in nearly all of its facets, art history could be said to continually refer to and to implicate the discursive logic or realist cinema. The art history slide is always orchestrated as a still in a historical movie.²⁵

A slide in an art history lecture, like a still from a movie or a photogram taken out of its visual and auditory context by virtue of its fragmentary nature, requires complementation, a verbal commentary which embalms (and, paradoxically, anchors) it, pretending to locate it within a missing movie. In his project of archeological rethinking of art history, Preziosi tries to demythologize the discipline, reveal its constructedness and political premises, as opposed to the allegedly solid, objective and disinterested knowledge grounded in the

²⁴ D. Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History. Meditations on a Coy Science*, New Haven–London 1989, ft. 69. p. 207.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 73.

reflective mode of rational thinking. In this account, cinema becomes, as it seems (he does not put it that way), an underlying but repressed model for the constitution and operation of art historical methods, always already a part of the field. Preziosi's vision of cinema is very instructive, but he regards it as an instrument of ordering and control, rather than one which has an emancipatory potential and can serve as an alternative to the familiar art historical models. This remains in telling contrast to the account of film favored in this article and in Bal's texts, whose potential, if activated within the domain of art history, should be seen as critical and disruptive of the existing state of the field.

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The above-signaled issues, in their diverse aspects, have been addressed and expanded in the past two decades by the leading cultural theorist writing extensively on art – Mieke Bal. In addition to her influential theoretical work, in 2002 she took up making documentaries, videos and multi-screen video installations, which also became the object, and an extension, of her “auto-theory,” a way of developing ideas, or thinking with art.²⁶ Here, however, let alone a rather general reference to her art practice towards the end of this article, I will concentrate on Bal's rich body of writing concerning film, moving images, video and the cinematic.

Since the beginning of her career, Bal's theoretical paths have fluctuated across disciplines, but her involvement in the visual arts remains the most consistent and prominent. She has always been vocal about her interdisciplinary position (as opposed to a transdisciplinary one), which has enabled her to come up with unorthodox ways of using concepts, approaching an object of analysis or, indeed, producing a new one. As Roland Barthes wrote: “Interdisciplinarity consists in creating a new object that belongs to no one.”²⁷ One of the main vehicles of her interdisciplinary perspective are concepts which, as the title of one of her best known books indicates, travel across different fields, disrupt, differentiate and displace disciplinary doxa to produce of profound and always subjectively framed analyses, i.e. focusing on her own expe-

²⁶ More on “auto-theory” see: M. Bal, “Documenting What? Auto-Theory and Migratory Aesthetics?” in: *A Companion to Contemporary Documentary Film*, eds. A. Juhasz, E. Lebow, New York 2015, p. 125.

²⁷ R. Barthes, *Research: The Young*, in: R. Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. R. Howard, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1989, p. 72. The quote was used as an epigraph in the introduction to Bal's book: M. Bal, *Emma & Edvard Looking Sideways: Loneliness and the Cinematic*, (exhibition catalogue, Munch Museum), Oslo-Brussels-New Haven-London 2017, p. 9.

rience of the object under discussion.²⁸ Although visibility became the object of particular interest to Bal, she has been adamant about not essentializing vision and the immanent aesthetic impurity of images.²⁹ Similarly, in her more recent work on diverse aspects of film and the cinematic, nowhere can one find any attempt to either universalize or historicize the impact of cinema on arts and its theory, not to mention according it the umbrella term “cinematic turn.”³⁰ However, if we tentatively agreed that there is a tendency, even if not a dominant one, to think cinematically, to “think in film,” and to “practise film,” as both an artistic and theoretical endeavor, it is difficult not to “frame” Bal (again, one of her preferred concepts), even against her will, into some kind of theoretical and practical “movement” around what is broadly defined as film, of concepts and practices leading to rethinking art and its histories. What follows, then, is an attempt to trace the ideas related to film and the cinematic in Bal’s writing and point to the most productive aspects of her “thinking in film,” especially the diverse ways of understanding movement and the question of temporality. Even if Bal often uses art history as a negative point of reference, exemplifying a conservative field, entrenched in its own convictions and procedures of evaluating and analyzing art objects, I would like to believe that her work is in fact also one of an art historian, one who agrees to the necessity of operating within the transformed regime of knowledge and to a redefinition of what art and history mean today. Implicitly, her publications testify to the challenges and benefits of an encounter between art history and film (studies). As Deleuze remarked in a quote aptly used by Bal in a chapter on “cinematic” aspects of Edvard Munch’s painting, “The encounter between two disciplines doesn’t take place when one begins to reflect on another, but when one discipline realizes that it has to resolve, for itself and by its own means, a problem similar to one confronted by the other.”³¹

²⁸ See M. Bal, *Traveling Concepts in the Humanities*, Toronto–Buffalo–London 2002.

²⁹ See Bal, *Visual Essentialism*...

³⁰ The notion of the cinematic or cinematographic turn has been more and more often used to describe the more intensive interest of visual artists in film and cinematic aesthetics, especially since the 2000s, as well as in the field of curating, e. g. the transition from the white cube to the black-box format of exhibition space. It also entails theoretical interest in film in contemporary art history/criticism. See for instance: *Kino-Sztuka. Zwrot kinematograficzny w polskiej sztuce współczesnej* [includes English translation: *Cine-Art. The Cinematographic Turn in Polish Contemporary Art*], eds. J. Majmurek, Ł. Ronduda, Warszawa 2016; *Exhibiting the Moving Image*, eds. F. Bovier, A. Mey, Zurich 2015.

³¹ G. Deleuze, “The Brain is the Screen. An Interview with Gilles Deleuze,” in: *The Brain is the Screen. Gilles Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema*, ed. G. Flaxman, Minneapolis–London 2000, p. 367. Bal cites this fragment in: Bal, *Emma & Edvard*..., p. 25.

From the very beginning, since the early 2000s, Bal's interest in film was coordinated around aspects of movement and temporality, with diverse aesthetic and political implications. Rather than present her works chronologically, I will focus on notions and conceptualizations which arose from a number of different objects of her inquiry, which she calls "theoretical objects" – objects which generate theoretical investigation, activate or produce theory as "seeing through," pose a "challenge to what we (think we) know."³² In most general terms, such a theoretical object is film – "a shorthand for audiovisual, moving images, no matter whether analog or digital."³³ Film incites "thinking in film," rethinking concepts and artworks within the theoretical and practical framework of moving images. She borrowed this phrase from the Finnish artist, Eija-Liisa Ahtila, whose video-installations became the subject of Bal's most sustained study on the art of moving images, the book also titled this way. Thinking in film can be characterized by a variety of facets. Firstly, it is "what the artworks and their critics do in interaction with each other."³⁴ The question of mutuality and openness to change is crucial, even though it is the viewer/listener who thinks, and not the object, there is a transference of agency on the artwork which is never passive or besieged by the interpreter, but both unfolds in front of us and, one could say, enfolds us with itself, in a two-directional movement. The "in" contained in the phrase, with reference to video installation connotes "an otherness that comes with a certain familiarity, as, for instance, the phrase 'in a foreign language' intimates, as well as to the spatial situation, physical and relational, of video installation as an art form."³⁵ we (and the artist) think in film, which means "by means of" film, through our senses, aesthetically, but also affectively, for instance, via projection and identification; we are also physically locating ourselves within it, especially when dealing with the spatial arrangement of a video installation. Importantly, thinking in terms of film does not exclusively concern video or images which move in a literal sense. For instance, according to Bal, even some of Edvard Munch's canvases, "in all their painterliness ... compel

³² M. Bal, *Thinking in Film. The Politics of Video Installation According to Eija-Liisa Ahtila*, London–New York 2013, p. 4. Elsewhere, in the context of thinking in film she adds "A theoretical object is not exactly an object that thinks, but an object that solicits, entices, co-produces thought." See: "Cinematic Thinking with Mieke Bal. On Mind's Eyes and Tools. A Conversation between Mieke Bal and Anna-Helena Klumpen," available online: <http://media.withtank.com/d967091987/anna-helena_klumpen.pdf> [accessed: March 14, 2020].

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

'thinking in film'³⁶ due to their multiple spatiality and temporality. Hence, film can serve as an operative and conceptual model for our experience of art.

Bal's writing, and the concepts with which she confronts art, is a force which foregrounds the dynamics, actual and virtual, that is often a suppressed aspect of the way we perceive and experience images and objects, full of diverse modalities of movement themselves. Her scholarly approach aims at bringing out the actual, multifaceted, relational experience of artworks, the intellectual, bodily and affective frisson of such an encounter, rather than deciphering their allegedly hidden meaning in a gesture of taking control over them. That would mean stopping them in their tracks, immobilizing what is, as Bal claims, inherently moving, elusive, unfolding in space and time, always already in a state of becoming (important) in the present. Theorizing this mutuality of thinking, she uses Christopher Bollas' idea of the "unthought known" – something that we know but which has never been the object of our conscious reflection. "I often find that although I am working on an idea without knowing exactly what it is I think, I am engaged in thinking an idea struggling to have me think it," says Bollas in Bal's favorite passage.³⁷ There is an analogy between ideas struggling to enter one's thinking and images which, as memories or fantasies, are activated, "developed" by perception and/or other sensations, and virtually inform our vision, struggle to come to visibility to become significant. Such a model of vision was called by another scholar Bal refers to, Kaja Silverman, the "productive look" (or "remembering look"): "productive looking necessarily requires a constant conscious reworking of the terms under which we unconsciously look at the objects that people our visual landscape," which also involves activating within vision the domain of memories and its attendant affects.³⁸ If Bollas talks about the "unthought known," one could come up with the phrase "unperceived seen." Thinking in film is then generated by such a productive look when perception of an image is infused with memory-images, informed by a work of imagination and fantasy, complicating the temporal and spatial dimension of vision. "Thinking in," implying a certain "insideness" is, according to Bal, "a bodily process," based on our responses to an object, e.g. a film, and is comparable to dreaming: "A dream is something that is both physical and psychological, theatrical and cinematic; done but not mastered, artistic in its fictions and political

³⁶ Bal, *Emma & Edvard...*, p. 42.

³⁷ C. Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known*, New York 1987, p. 10, quoted in: Bal, *Thinking in Film*, p. 12.

³⁸ See: K. Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, New York-London 1996, p. 184.

in the mechanisms of censorship that rule the dream as a staged, audiovisual mis-en-scene.³⁹ Thus, thinking in film is not anchored in the rational, separated from the body and controlled mind of the Enlightenment (to some extent continued in late modernity), but belongs to the mind and the body, which thinks and experiences its unstable, “moving” relation to the object/image, always in motion. Such uncontrollable domains like dream or fantasy, appreciated and recaptured by Bal for serious consideration,⁴⁰ are not only the best analogies to the cinematic experience, but become models for a different order of visuality, of an image in flux with ontologically diverse, coexisting strata and temporalities.

Film has been metaphorically described as a machine – “a time machine,”⁴¹ but also machine of thinking. Gilles Deleuze, in a commentary to his brilliant *Cinema* books, asserts:⁴² “What I call ideas are images that make me think,”⁴³ believing that cinema, in most general terms consisting of movement-images and time-images (and not images of movement or time), offers ways of thinking irreducible to other means and media. Discussing Deleuze, John Rajchman poses the question about the consequences of such an apparatus of thinking for other domains of visuality, especially “how, starting in the nineteenth century, it [cinema – F.L.] helped to transform what we think art is, and in particular, how one thinks in the arts or with the arts.”⁴⁴ Deleuze’s books on cinema, with the essential underpinning of Henri Bergson’s *Matter and Memory*,⁴⁵ are an extensive, sustained philosophical inquiry into images, images in motion, that make one think but also reflect on the structure of thought, reveal the underpinnings of thinking as a bodily process: the brain, not necessarily in a neurological sense, but rather as an engine of human thinking, becomes the screen, to use Deleuze’s metaphor, for images project-

³⁹ Bal, *Thinking in Film*, p. 9.

⁴⁰ For an inspiring discussion of fantasy see: M. Bal, *Loving Yusuf. Conceptual Travels from Present to Past*, Chicago–London 2008, esp. chapter “Dreaming Away: On Fantasy,” pp. 53–76.

⁴¹ See for instance: D. N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze’s Time Machine*, Durham–London 1997.

⁴² See: G. Deleuze, *Cinema 1. The Movement-Image*, trans. H. Tomlinson, B. Habberjam, Minneapolis 2006; G. Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, trans. H. Tomlinson, R. Galeta, Minneapolis 2007.

⁴³ G. Deleuze, “Cinema-I, Premiere,” in: idem, *Two Regimes of Madness. Texts and Interviews 1975–1995*, ed. D. Lapoujade, trans. A. Hodges, M. Taormina, New York 2006, p. 210.

⁴⁴ J. Rajchman, “Deleuze’s Time, or How the Cinematic Changes Our Idea of Art,” in: *Art and the Moving Image. A Critical Reader*, ed. T. Leighton, London 2008, p. 307.

⁴⁵ H. Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N. M. Paul, W. S. Palmer, New York 1991.

ed from the outside, and the cinema screen, in turn, has a way of rendering the workings of the brain.⁴⁶ According to Deleuze, the crucial aspect that cinema has to offer, along with different modalities of movement, is of course non-linear temporality, with the prominent function of memory-images and affect-images, distorting chronological constructions of time, reflective of historical inconsistencies, discontinuous and fragmentary subjectivities which emerged in post-war philosophies, cultural studies and arts. Rajchman points out that for Deleuze cinema is not a self-contained domain but one which to a significant degree overlaps with other arts, and it should be viewed that way. As Deleuze writes, there is "no work that doesn't have a continuation or its beginning in others."⁴⁷ Another quote from Deleuze confirms the interdisciplinary, nomadic nature of practices and images which affect one's thinking, very much akin to Bal's approach: "it is on the level of interferences with many practices that things happen, beings, images, concepts, all kinds of events."⁴⁸ Cinema is a *dispositif*, Rajchman concludes, which goes beyond being a medium or technical support, but it offers a way "of disposing of our senses in such a way as to enable thinking, to make ideas possible," ideas which cannot simply be conveyed in terms of informational content or a narrative.⁴⁹

Bal's project of "thinking in film" can be seen as perhaps the most consistent and complementary response to Rajchman's question. Referring both directly to Bergson's ideas about movement, time, memory and matter, and Deleuze's reading of Bergson in the context of cinema, Bal makes them "operative" in the context of video, video installations and still images. The most important, recurrent aspects of Bergson's thought in Bal's texts are the bodily nature of perception inseparable from memory, multiple understanding of movement, complexity of non-linear time and complementary combination of time and space. Moreover, in her analyses of specific images, she activates a number of cinematic, often technical terms, such as montage, profilmic space, close-up, zooming-in, which work both descriptively and metaphorically. When applied to still images such as paintings, the use of film terms often renders displacements and shifts in the construction of the image, but also the movement and temporality of seeing.

⁴⁶ "Cinema is a way of having ideas with images that introduces a new 'psycho-mechanics,' a new way of affecting our nervous systems," senses, our bodies," Rajchman, *Deleuze's Time...*, p. 310.

⁴⁷ G. Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness*, p. 285, quoted by Rajchman, *Deleuze's Time...*, p. 324.

⁴⁸ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 280, quoted by Rajchman, *Deleuze's Time...*, p. 324.

⁴⁹ Rajchman, *Deleuze's Time...*, p. 326.

In different texts, Bal elaborates on her understanding of movement, in her view, not only the essential aspect of cinema (Gr. κίνημα – movement; cinematography – “writing with movement”) but of any image. As in cinema, following Bergson’s/Deleuze’s logic of movement which is not added to an image but constitutive of it, offering a movement-image, movement is embedded in a number of ways in all images, moving or still. “The movement of the image in film,” says Bal, “is a technical concretization, or even an embodiment, of the movement inherent in the image as such.”⁵⁰ This is the basic assumption underlying her interest in images and film, resulting in “thinking in film” about images in general. One could say that film “develops,” like in a photographic process, virtual levels of movement, enabling them to be seen and felt. Bal distinguishes four, complementary kinds and functions of moment, which she calls “Bergsonian movements,” related respectively to a literal or suggested motion, movement of perception, affective and performative/political action.⁵¹ Moreover, when discussing still images, for instance Edward Munch’s paintings, she uses the notion of “the cinematic,” designating an aesthetically, conceptually and politically moving set of qualities detached from or simply not determined by the technological aspects of the filmic dispositif.

First, then, there is a movement which is actual or implied in a still image, activated by the spectator’s gaze. The movement is related to the profilmic aspect of an image, to what is happening within the frame, but also to the mobility of the camera. In a multi-screen video installation, in addition to the screened images in motion, there is, of course, the spatial dimension of movement between screens enacted by the moving body (and the eye) of the viewer. As for still images, the cinematic qualities dwell in a represented movement, narrative potential, a perspective of viewing, and framing suggestive of the possibility of centrifugally oriented, diegetic space as well as a montage of often incongruous, out-of-synch elements which seem to belong to different temporal or/and spatial dimensions. As she writes about Munch’s work, “it is its internal lack of spatial coherence that brings movement into it. This is movement of a different sort: not profilmic but specifically filmic, and in that respect, examining the ins and outs of what the cinematic can be or do.”⁵² While interpreting Munch’s *Workers on Their Way Home*, she uses a set of filmic notions which activate the painting virtually, that is, through her discourse, and enable viewers to discern and feel the movement and “to look in

⁵⁰ Bal, *Thinking in Film*, p. 16.

⁵¹ The sequence of the classification of these movements in different texts by Bal varies a little.

⁵² Bal, *Emma & Edvard...*, p. 32.

time." This is also effected by montage: "Cutting up a film, then editing the clips so that the cuts are invisible is both foregrounding the materiality of celluloid (now of digital files) and then making it invisible, as a skill, an art. The painting *Workers on Their Way Home* is a masterpiece of cinematic painting in this respect."⁵³ She proves her point by indicating invisible cuts in the perspectival arrangement of the painting, spatial disjunctions, ways of framing the figures etc. The gaze implied in Bal's analysis combines an art historian's careful observation with the filmmaker's "surgical," Benjaminian approach,⁵⁴ to bring to light the perception-based infrastructure of the image, revealing its being always already set in motion, multiple and multifaceted.

The second Bergsonian movement is inherent in perception (but different from the movement of the eye or the gaze), which is a material and bodily act, involving time and space.⁵⁵ As this French philosopher elucidated in *Matter and Memory*, there is no perception without memory: memories, being the domain of the virtual, are activated in perception, by its objects. Hence, perceived images are always infused with intervening memory-images.⁵⁶ Seeing means selecting and triggering memories (memory-images), which co-constitute vision.⁵⁷ For Bergson, perception takes place in the body and for the body; it is extensive in its material or physical aspect, inseparably combining time (memories traversing temporal dimensions) and space. There is, then, a constant dynamic tension between the image and the body; the image, mobilized in perception, telescopically oscillates between the body and the perceived object. Images are always "on the move," the activated virtual (memory/fantasy) informs the actual/material and the other way round. Seeing is an archeological work of remembering which fuses different dimensions of time, forming duration, "defined less by succession than by coexistence."⁵⁸ The temporal complexity and spatial *extensity* (Bergson's term used in *Time and Free Will*⁵⁹) which "emanates from the subject" is called by Bal "timespace."

⁵³ Ibidem, p. 30.

⁵⁴ On the metaphor of a cameraman as a surgeon see: Benjamin, *The Work of Art...*, p. 233.

⁵⁵ Bal, *Thinking in Film*, p. 16.

⁵⁶ Bergson wrote: "In fact, there is no perception which is not full of memories. With the immediate and present data of our sense, we mingle a thousand details out of our past experience." Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 33.

⁵⁷ Esp. see the chapter "Of the Selection of Images for Conscious Presentation. What Our Body Means and Does," ibidem, pp. 17–75.

⁵⁸ G. Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, quoted in: Bal, *Thinking in Film*, p. 15.

⁵⁹ H. Bergson, *Time and Free Will. Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, Mineola 2001. See also: ibidem, p. 16.

This simultaneity of incongruous, plural moments acquires its spatial concretization in a heterogeneous, fictional and real, subjective and “extensive” space of video installation as spatialized and unfolding in time set-up but also in some more complex still images.

Bal’s interest in the problem of historical time experienced in a confrontation with a work of art, now addressed in the context of film, dates way back to her work on Rembrandt and, most explicitly on Caravaggio and contemporary art.⁶⁰ In the latter book, Bal makes an argument for the inevitability of a preposterous (art) history, which sets the horizon for looking at the works of the past (and thinking about them) through the lens of the present and the other way round (pre- and post-overlap, bringing preposterously anachronistic effects). In other words, as much as historical art is inevitably revisited from the viewer’s present-day standpoint, contemporary art is haunted by images of the past generated in the mind of the beholder. In the Caravaggio book, for a description of this process she invoked the logic of Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction and the dynamics of a trace, which always travels back and forth, marking, transforming and introducing difference into both the quoting and the quoted work. However, far from textual reductionism, in her rich analyses Bal combines intertextuality with the aesthetic, multisensory, anachronistic experience of the past in the present, which was reformulated in Bergsonian terms only later in her work on video.⁶¹ In a way, it seems that she found in the conceptual space of film a more concrete and perhaps performatively more satisfying model for her earlier conceptions. Film becomes, as was mentioned before, a “technical concretization” of the movement virtually (potentially) residing in a more or less explicit way in every image, which also involves non-chronological movement in time: “Images also move in time, since artworks not only emerge from a time (usually in the past) and reach us from that

⁶⁰ See: M. Bal, *Reading ‘Rembrandt’: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition*, Cambridge 1991; eadem, *Quoting Caravaggio. Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, Chicago 1999.

⁶¹ Incidentally, this is a perspective very close to the theoretical framework and interpretive strategy underlying my own book on Edward Hopper’s work in the context of often anachronistic, inter pictorial and intermedia relations. I combined intertextuality (also drawing on Bal’s book on Caravaggio) with a reading of Bergson, especially his emphasis on the connection between perception and memory. An important reference was also Kaja Silverman’s category of the remembering, productive look, which Bal refers to in her *Thinking in Film*. Even though our books came out in the same year, 2013, I was not aware of this particular work by Bal at the time. Hence, the above-discussed Bergsonian perspective which the Dutch scholar elaborates on seems to me now a very fortunate corroboration of some of my insights: See: F. Lipiński, *Hopper wirtualny. Obrazy w pamiętającym spojrzeniu*, Toruń 2013; idem, “The Virtual Hopper. Painting Between Dissemination and Desire,” *Oxford Art Journal* 2014, 37(2), pp. 157–171.

past in the present. Also, they function in the time of the encounter, hence, in the present, and orient us towards the future."⁶² In this quote, Bal not only encapsulated Bergson's idea of duration but also the whole spectrum of art historical discussions of the temporal status of both the object of art history and its consideration in the present.⁶³ We could say, then, following on from Bal's argument, that each image is full of virtual movement and layers which intermingle and get triggered in perception (involving sight, body, thinking). Film makes these virtualities and their mechanisms visible, or let us even say, actionable, expanding to what is to come. This also coalesced with her own practice as a visual artist using video, which definitely sets certain parameters for "performing theory" rather than just writing it.

The third dimension of movement of an image (or a layer, because all these movements coexist, even if with varying intensity, and are co-dependent), consists in the fact that images not only move but also "move us."⁶⁴ Images have a certain potency and agency; they affect us, pull emotional strings, "touch" us and make us re-act.⁶⁵ There is, then, an affective and, in consequence, performative aspect to a moving image. Affect, as proposed by Deleuze, is a kind of intensity that is not yet codified and cannot be properly represented or enunciated. Instead, it is acted upon.⁶⁶ We could say that images have a way of affecting us with this virtual intensity, which becomes more concrete once we react to them (all that depends on our individual predispositions etc.).⁶⁷ As Ernst van Alphen succinctly put it, "A person who receives the affect has to do something with it. It will be projected outwards or it will be introjected."⁶⁸ Affect is like hot, unformed matter, potent and potentially productive,

⁶² M. Bal, "Movement and the Still Image," *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma* 2016, 7(4), p. 25.

⁶³ The literature on this subject is vast. In particular, I happen to have in mind now such works as M. A. Holly, *The Past Looking. Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image*, Ithaca-London 1996; K. Moxey, *Visual Time. The Image in History*, Durham-London 2013.

⁶⁴ This formulation returns in most of the relevant texts under discussion.

⁶⁵ See also earlier text on affect by Bal, also with reference to Athila's work, see: M. Bal, "What if? The Language of Affect," in: *In(ter)discipline. New Languages for Criticism*, ed. G. Beer, London 2007, pp. 6-24.

⁶⁶ Deleuze's texts on affect include: G. Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. R. Hurley, San Francisco 1988; G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, "Percept, Affect, and Concept," in: idem, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. H. Tomlinson, G. Burchell, New York 1994, pp. 163-200.

⁶⁷ Bal regards the affective potential of artworks as "intensity without particularizing expression, enabling the viewer to experience the affect on her own terms," Bal, *Thinking in Film*, p. 53.

⁶⁸ E. Van Alphen, "Affective Operations of Art and Literature," *Res. Anthropology and Aesthetics* 2008, 53/54, p. 24.

ready to be molded into the form of an emotion or action. It can also take the shape of an image, as a result of a necessarily failed attempt to grasp affect. Moreover, paradoxically, for Deleuze, affect rather than intellect is the most effective trigger of thinking.⁶⁹ If so, thinking in film would also be propelled by the acknowledged affective power of (moving) images – as opposed to “solid,” “fixed” knowledge deduced from them. This is another dimension of what was already stated above: images move us while perceived, because perception as an extension or *extensity* (intensity directed externally) of the human body and mind, directed towards its object, is infused with memories (affect and memory, as proposed by Bergson, are virtual) which are “virtualities on the move” or “in the act.” In consequence, their agency becomes ours: they make us act, as if from within; the affective potential becomes actualized as emotions, or motions.⁷⁰ This is how Bal takes us to her final step in describing the potential of “thinking in film:” the performative, and – ultimately, the political.

Before moving on to that, I wish to elaborate on Bal’s discussion of exhibitions in cinematic terms. The gallery space, with artworks and a moving spectator, is potentially a sphere where all the aforementioned aspects of movement have a chance to become active. In her 2008 text “Exhibition as Film,” Bal proposes that film is not so much a model (throughout here career she steers clear of imposing any formulas) but a conceptual frame and the most productive metaphor for her experience of a 2003 show called *Partners* curated by Ydessa Hendeles and organized at Kunst der Haus in Munich. Her analysis is “performed” or, let us say, “re-acted” by an engaged subject/ scholar/ art critic, who acknowledges her bodily and affective involvement in the confrontation with the works on display. Thinking actually starts with the movement of the body and hence, of the images, too: through juxtapositions, montage, interrelations, changes of perspective etc. These, in turn, may affectively move the spectator. Photography, as the dominant medium in that exhibition, can function as a kind of a “storyboard or visual scenario for a cinematic vision of art presentation.”⁷¹ The exhibition under discussion by no means con-

⁶⁹ Ibidem, p. 22.

⁷⁰ Affect is another dimension which has long been neglected by art history. As Bal and Norman Bryson noted quite a long time ago, “What art historians are bound to examine, whether they like it or not, is the work as effect and affect, not only as a neatly remote product of an age long gone.” M. Bal, N. Bryson, “Art History and Semiotics,” *Art Bulletin* 1991, 73(2), p. 175.

⁷¹ M. Bal. “Exhibition as Film,” in: *(Re)visualizing national history: museums and national identities in Europe in the new millennium*, ed. R. Rostov, Toronto 2008, p. 16.

sisted solely of photographs, though, and it was not the photographic medium which determined the filmic quality of the show. For Bal, cinema becomes a way to combine and make functional a number of aspects of experiencing and reading art in a gallery space,⁷² some of which have been identified above. "The thrust of the cinematic vision I see in this exhibition is to establish, or at least encourage, an affective relationship, not only between the art and the viewer but also among the artworks themselves. These relationships among the artworks constitute the exhibition's *syntax*, which is *affective* in nature. Between a perception that troubles us and an action we hesitate over, *affect* emerges,"⁷³ contends Bal. The relational aspect of artworks happen across the art-viewer and art-art axes, both of which are mediated by the viewer's perception and bodily action. The syntax consists in the spatial arrangement of artworks within a space where this multi-relational encounter takes place. The exhibition animates the visual "storyboard" through "cinematic strategies:"⁷⁴ constant dynamic combinations of space and time, shifting framing, change of focus, montage of items within a single and multiple spaces, but also in the bodily space of the spectator's mind, whose visual impressions of objects just seen mingle, clash and enter into dialogue with actual perceptions, and more distant memories, collapsing the past and the present. Bal does not shy away from comparing her changing position, from which she looks at works and reacts to them, to a camera movement: "The movement performed by the viewer is the kinetic equivalent of a zoom-in, from a long shot to a close-up."⁷⁵ Thus, viewing becomes a dynamic process in two, strictly connected ways: firstly, through the complex and changing relations in the triangular relationship between the artworks, the viewer and the space assigned to them; secondly, through the activity of the spectator's perception, when "the brain becomes the screen" gathering all the elements, the objects of actual vision, and those remembered but virtually still in play. All this happens in a space

⁷² "Reading art" is another notion introduced by Bal which comes in handy while talking about the cinematic mode of construction and reception of art. Reading does not mean that a linguistic model of interpretation is imposed on visual artworks. "The method, or, more modestly, procedure has in common with ordinary reading that the outcome is meaning, that it functions by way of discrete visible elements called signs to which meanings are attributed; that such attributions of meaning, or interpretations, are regulated by rules, named codes; and that the subject or agent of this attribution, the reader or viewer, is a decisive element in the process." M. Bal, "Reading Art?" in: *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts. Feminist Readings*, ed. G. Pollock, New York 1996, p. 29.

⁷³ Bal, "Exhibition as Film," pp. 16–17.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

physically and perceptually traversed by the visitor. Perception “on the move” enables anticipation or expectation, temporally infused tension, resolution or re-vision, followed by a subsequent reconfiguration as a result of what comes next. An example of a strong affective encounter – a Deleuzian affection-image⁷⁶ – is the close viewing, a close-up, of *Him* by Maurizio Cattelan, a small, otherwise hyperrealistic, sculptural portrait of a kneeling Hitler. Seen from afar, it is recognized as a boy, though once approached and viewed frontally from a close distance, the spectator realizes that the figure of potential innocence becomes the face (a synecdoche) of Nazi terror, one, let us add, all of a sudden opening the vast archive of traumatic, WWII-related memory-images inscribed in the cultural memory. This experience is even more powerful due to the sudden film-like cut between the intimately arranged rooms with the archive of photographic images by Ydessa Hendeles (*The Teddy Bear Project*) and the sudden confrontation with the sculpture from up-close. In Bal’s proposal, film is a productive vehicle of experiencing and thinking about artworks in exhibition, whose extended, spatial, temporal and relational field is materially laid out for the spectator and activated by her in a cinematic fashion. Exhibition as film spatially and temporally enfolds the visitor, not only enabling her to read the images but also perform the reading through bodily, incorporated vision and “affected” thinking.”⁷⁷

In fact, Bal’s account of *Partners*, which acknowledges the viewer in physical and perceptual motion in timespace, anticipates her discussion of Athila’s multi-screen installations. “Just as the installation form is a concretization of ‘thinking in film,’ an exhibition is a blown-up version of an installation.”⁷⁸ With reference to Athila’s *Where Is Where?* – a six-screen, monumental in-

⁷⁶ In the glossary included in *Cinema 1. Movement-Image*, Deleuze briefly and brilliantly defines the affection-image: “that which occupies the gap between an action and reaction, that which absorbs and external action and reacts on the inside.” See: Deleuze, *Cinema 1. Movement-Image*, p. 217.

⁷⁷ Such an account of an exhibition as a sphere of the cinematic is in a striking contrast to the aforementioned Preziosi’s take on museums and the cinematic, that is, an arrangement of images in space, viewed in time – the aspect of narratives they propose. Museums with their cinematic displays become apparatuses of power which impose narratives of art history on spectators: “The art museum is thus a panoptic apparatus that decomposes and rearranges the elements of Bentham’s Panopticon into a cinematic journey made up of *vedute* topologically equivalent to the views of individual cells in the house of surveillance.” Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History*, p. 70.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 19. Bal calls the process taking place when a spatial dimension is added to video in a video installation “spatialising film.” See: M. Bal, “Spatializing Film,” in: *Hunting High and Low. Festschrift for Jostein Gripsrud*, eds. J. F. Hodven, K. Knapskog, Oslo 2012, pp. 160–182.

stallation surrounding the viewer in a darkened room – Bal asserts: “In its enclosing format, this installation mimics the syntax of an exhibition; it creates a space, it combines and juxtaposes ‘works’ – the images on the respective screens – and it encapsulates the viewer as another image among the multiple images, in the whirlwind of which she moves along.”⁷⁹ An exhibition is always an expanded installation which, to a varying degree, depending on its constituent elements and their arrangement, has the potential to concretize and more effectively generate the cinematic reception. The cinematic (or filmic) mode of reception, in the light of Bal’s arguments, addresses and accounts for mechanisms active when dealing with any work of art or any image: perception and memory, body and movement, temporal complexity – anachronisms, preposterous relations and, as a result, what Bal calls heterochrony. It is simply up to us if we, just as Bal, allow them to become operative and meaningful – or not.

The notion of heterochrony appears in Bal’s ample writings on video in the context of the aesthetics and politics of migration. This was addressed in the exhibition *2MOVE. Double Movement, Migratory Aesthetics* (2007) and accompanying publications, a project she collaborated on with a Spanish scholar, Miguel Ángel Hernández-Navarro. The authors regard video as “a privileged medium to think and put the two parts of the sentence together – the aesthetic and the migratory.”⁸⁰ According to them, video, in a very broadly defined sense, has the potential to reflect aesthetically and affectively the complexity of contemporary migratory culture.⁸¹ Migration not only literally concerns migration and immigrants but offers a platform to reflect on and renegotiate the issues of movement (and its reverse, stagnation) in time, as a political aspect of today’s reality. Rather than just representing the actual experiences of migrants, “the migratory” describes the condition of “traces of movement of migration that characterize contemporary culture.”⁸² “Migratory aesthetics” – a term coined by Bal – can be characterized, as Hernández-Navarro summarizes it, by five basic traits: “everyday life, mo-

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 69.

⁸⁰ M. Bal, M. Á. Hernández-Navarro, “Introduction,” in: *2MOVE*, p. 10. After the catalog publication, the discussion of migratory aesthetics was continued and extended in: *Art and Visibility in Migratory Culture. Conflict, Resistance, and Agency*, eds. M. Bal, M. Á. Hernández-Navarro, Amsterdam 2011.

⁸¹ “However, we do not consider video as a one-to-one medium, but as a plurality: from intimate video to performative documentary, also including ‘docufiction,’ the tradition of aesthetic video art, animation, installation or video-essay.” *Ibidem*.

⁸² Bal, “Double Movement,” p. 19.

bility, multi-temporality, memory, and the politics of affect."⁸³ Movement, for Bal, becomes a medium, which, in specific works, becomes denaturalized as a result of the confrontation, or superposition, of aesthetics as a domain of sensate experiences and migration in a broad cultural context.⁸⁴ But "Migration is also the experience of time as multiple, heterogeneous. The time of haste and waiting, the time of movement and stagnation; the time of memory and of an unsettling present not sustained by a predictable future, the phenomenon I call multi-temporality, and the experience of it, heterochrony."⁸⁵ Hernández-Navarro sees in these heterochronic practices a mode of political resistance to the ordered, linear, global and technological time of Western progress which, as he points out, was described by Antonio Negri as the time of capital.⁸⁶ The revealed temporal complication and its appreciation therefore eludes the hegemonic capitalist system, where, one might say, "time is money." Thanks to its properties, video and video installation, becomes the perfect vehicle for an encounter, head-on, with the complexity of experienced time, individually and collectively, and thus as a political tool of resistance, albeit a vehicle acknowledging imperfection and lack of mastery. For instance, in video, spectators can deal with the memories of other people, often those left outside of dominant cultural narratives, which, visualized in video works, cannot be recalled by viewers, happen for the first time. In consequence, a stage for the work of hetero-memory is created – a sphere where memories and experiences can be shared.⁸⁷ Video provides for a unique possibility to embrace otherness and change, with multiple, discontinuous temporalities, full of delays, slowed down and accelerated movement, which makes up the tissue of individual and collective experiences, as opposed to constructions of ordered, capital-driven, managed and mastered time, sameness and stable identity; video as the art of movement and time, of (re)construction of memory and (re)tracing of movement, becomes the medium which offers a possibility to partake and (affectively) engage in the social and cultural dynamics that are a part and parcel of contemporary culture and cultural memory. Migratory aesthetics, "is clearly linked to the creation of a relational field between aes-

⁸³ M. Á. Hernández-Navarro, "Migratory Aesthetics," *Oxford Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics*, vol. 3, ed. M. Kelly, Oxford 2014, p. 344.

⁸⁴ Bal, "Double Movement," p. 19.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 34. The notion of heterochrony / heterochronicity was also addressed in: K. Moxey, *The Visual Time. The Image in History*.

⁸⁶ Hernández-Navarro, "Migratory Aesthetics," p. 345.

⁸⁷ Bal, "Double Movement," p. 21. The "stage" can be compared to what Bal, in the context of Athila's work later called "contact spaces."

thetics," as a sphere of sensations and affect, "and the political."⁸⁸ Quite on the mark, the scholar Giordana Bruno also noticed the relationship between movement, emotion and migration, writing that "the Latin root of the word emotion speaks clearly about a 'moving' force, stemming as it does from *emovere*, an active verb composed of *movere*, 'to move,' and *e*, 'out.' The meaning of emotion, then, is historically associated with 'a moving out, migration, transference from one place to another.'"⁸⁹

More generally, the political aspect of Bal's thinking in film is another step she takes, following Bergson's idea of "creative evolution," which she interprets as "readiness to act:"⁹⁰ this is the aspect of the fourth Bergsonian movement that, in her view, "lies at the heart of the political potential of the image, film, and video installation, on the condition that it works together with the other three."⁹¹ Bal "travels" with the concept of the political referring to the theory of Chantal Mouffe, in which the political (in contrast to the politics as the domain of the institutional) is the sphere of social antagonism and conflict which can "turn enemies into adversaries," and enables one to communicate difference, acknowledge collective identities as opposed to an individualist approach.⁹² For Bal, the crucial aspect of activating the political dimension within the framework of motion and the cinematic, is the creation of spaces for enacting the political, where the above-mentioned hegemony of individualism can be disarmed, and democratic, pluralistic acts performed.⁹³ Such spaces, which Bal calls "contact spaces" or "contact zones," of democratic agency, facilitating the formation of judgments, enabling effective adversarial debate that triggers social change, can be produced via art, in art and in art institutions. Importantly, we can talk about the political force and agency of these spaces only when the productive encounter between the artwork and

⁸⁸ Hernández-Navarro, "Migratory Aesthetics," p. 345.

⁸⁹ G. Bruno, *Atlas of Emotions. Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*, New York 2002, p. 7.

⁹⁰ See: Bal, *Thinking in Film*, pp. 16–17; this argument returns in Bal, *Emma & Edvard...*, p. 42; H. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. A. Mitchell, New York 1944.

⁹¹ Bal, *Emma & Edvard...*, p. 58

⁹² See: C. Mouffe, *On the Political*, New York–London 2005. For a slightly more extensive discussion than in her regular books of the political dimension of movement and the cinematic, see: Bal, "Movement and the Still Image," pp. 34–38. Bal sees such a "tension between individualism and the recognition of the multiplicity," in cinematic paintings by Munch (montage in *Workers on Their Way Home*, see: Bal, *Emma & Edvard...*, p. 59) but also in video installations by Athila.

⁹³ Bal, *Emma & Edvard...*, p. 60. Bal follows another theorist, Wendy Brown, on that. See: W. Brown, "Postmodern Exposures, Feminist Hesitations," in: *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, Princeton 1995, pp. 30–51.

the spectator takes place and the multilayered dimensions of movement effectively complement one another. However, the political can take effect in small, sometimes intimate steps, also in works which do not have any overtly political content, through the spectators' willingness to see and engage, act, open up to difference, move and be moved by artworks on a variety of levels.

Thinking in film as a practice of thinking and making visible (migratory aesthetics being one of its facets) is a way of bringing to the fore the aspects of images and works of art in general, which are often repressed (especially by modernity and its exclusivist disciplinary paradigms), and whose spatial and temporal characteristics can be most productively made visible and felt via the technologies of film, and re-thought through the conceptual framework of the cinematic. Importantly, the cinematic quality of images and attendant thinking (in film) is not another trend in the humanities which happens to be en vogue. Bal's texts demonstrate that it has always been there but, akin to the Freudian logic of *Nachträglichkeit* (the deferred action), it needed propitious conditions to emerge and become operative; in the arts, for its full disclosure, it needed works such as video installations functioning as aesthetic, actionable, visualized forms of thought, which most productively engages the mobility and agency of both images and those who confront them. In fact, as I pointed out earlier, Bal has always been a cinematic thinker and spectator, even before she started to openly acknowledge "thinking in film." This is so because – one might say echoing Martin Heidegger – there is nothing essentially technological in the technology she refers to, but the technology enables one to put in operation what used to be virtual, suppressed, kept "undercover" by dominant paradigms of knowledge and academic procedures or sometimes due to unfavourable, ideological agendas. Bal's daring conceptual travels across humanities enabled her to be an uncompromising, migratory thinker who, with no remorse, points to the pressing necessity of scraping the appearances of objective, ordered and stable knowledge in favor of much more adventurous, more responsive and responsible engagement in art and writing about art, in the mode of "critical intimacy," as a lived practice open to apparently non-art experiences.

From the very beginning, alongside reproducing reality, film was believed to make visible the virtual spheres of the human psychological apparatus – fantasy and memory – and concretize the complex manners of their functioning. If the camera was sometimes identified with the human eye, that eye was equipped with the means of constructing and externalizing embodied vision. Such concretizations provided tangible models for thought and in the domain of art history, possible tools for revealing the always existing but virtual (invisible) expanded field of an artwork and its reception. Film was also considered

by some, for instance, the Italian art historian, Carlo Lodovico Ragghianti, who in the post-war period, produced so-called critofilms, to be a medium which could, potentially, complement the inadequacies of language in the description and elucidation of a visual and spatial artwork, due to its analogical, visual properties, characteristic of movement in space and time.⁹⁴ Also certain more complex, creative films on art testify to the potential of filmic *écriture* to visualize art and concretize the virtual spheres of an artwork.⁹⁵ Since the 1960s, expanded definitions and practices of art, which opened onto the cultural, social sphere and political agency, have found in the art of the moving image a "natural" ally, albeit one not readily acknowledged by art historians. This is also why it was not until the 1980s that Aby Warburg's iconology's as *Kulturgeschichte* or *Kulturwissenschaft*, which significantly expanded the purview of art history, became regarded as a legitimate predecessor to the much broader domain of visual culture studies, as opposed to the more "static" iconological method of Erwin Panofsky.⁹⁶ In order to emerge and be noticed, Warburg's image in motion, affective and, to use Bal's term, heterochronic, required different conditions of possibility in terms of theory and practice – a different *episteme*.

It is no wonder, then, that Bal, being a daring writer on art and culture, simultaneously resorted to making videos and video installations, film essays and, earlier, films on art. She also included some of these in larger exhibition set-ups which questioned the boundaries between theory and practice, thinking, writing, making, arranging and visualizing, between artist, curator, art historian/critic and spectator. That was the case with the aforementioned exhibition *Emma and Edvard Looking Sideways: Loneliness and the Cinematic* in Oslo, which featured *Madam B.* by Bal and Michelle Williams Gamaker.⁹⁷ While I do not intend to and cannot discuss her artistic activ-

⁹⁴ See: *Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti and the Cinematic Nature of Vision*, ed. M. Scotini, London 2000.

⁹⁵ See: F. Albera, "Études cinématographiques et histoire de l'art," *Perspective* 2006, 3, pp. 433–460, esp. pp. 15–20. I presented this argument in more detail in: F. Lipiński, "Czynić widzialnym. Film jako poszerzone, wirtualne dzieło sztuki," *Kwartalnik Filmowy* 2017, 97–98, pp. 250–262.

⁹⁶ Agamben put it more radically "It is as if Warburg was interested in this discipline solely to place within it the seed that would cause it to explode." G. Agamben, "Aby Warburg. A Nameless Science," in: idem, *Potentialities*, trans. D. Geller-Roazen, Stanford 1999, p. 90.

⁹⁷ See: Bal, *Emma & Edvard...*; on *Madame B.* as a separate project, see for instance: D. Filipczak, "Mieke Bal – 'Writing with Images.' A Conversation," *Text Matters* 2014, 4(4), pp. 15–27. A very competent discussion of Bal's videos see: M. Á. Hernández-Navarro,

ity in detail here, it is enough to say that her video installation functioned both as an individual work of art and as a stage for the enactment of multidimensional movement, creating a contact space for potential interaction between Munch's works, Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary*, who is addressed in *Madame B.*, Bal, as a theorist, curator and artist, and any spectator visiting the museum. This is also why Hernández-Navarro called the Munch/Bal/Flaubert exhibition "a device for thinking."⁹⁸ The multi-screen video installation is a gallery film (as opposed to theater film); it enables the movement of spectators and the possibility of making individual decisions as to how to enter and perceive it, emphasizing the viewer's physical agency (as opposed to traditional cinematic apparatus immobilizing the viewer). *Madame B.* is not just added to a Munch exhibition but interacts with it, shapes its narrative, its spatial organization and arrangement of works, supplements it in Derrida's sense of the term, blurring the distinction between the supplement and the supplemented.⁹⁹ In this particular context, it functions as a concretization of Bal's response to Munch's paintings, of their virtual, expanded field generated in her mind, producing a new narrative about Munch but also about Flaubert and, in the end, inevitably, about Bal herself as a creatively, intellectually and affectively engaged subject. Through that audiovisual timespace, she enacted, acted and performed her auto-theory, not as a ready-made frame but as a heterogeneous sphere of discourse in the making, emerging along the way, moving from one aspect, from one medium to another and hence blurring any such distinctions, indicating the potential of the nexus of the cinematic in forms, concepts, meanings, references and responses to them.¹⁰⁰

By way of conclusion, I propose to think of Bal's writing as rendering the unconscious of contemporary art history and her thinking in film as a step

"Moverse en el tiempo. Apuntes sobre la obra en video de Mieke Bal," in: idem, *El arte a contratiempo. Historia, obsolescencia, estéticas migratorias*, Madrid 2020, pp. 111–128. Also see the latest catalogue of Bal's exhibition with texts by herself, Miguel Ángel Hernández-Navarro, Jill Bennet and Aurora Fernández Polanco: *Mieke Bal. Contaminaciones: leer, imaginar, visualizar*, (exhibition catalogue), Centro Parraga, Murcia 2020. I thank Miguel Ángel Hernández-Navarro for making the last two publications available to me.

⁹⁸ See: M. Á. Hernández-Navarro, "Timespace for Emotions: Anachronism in Flaubert, Bal/Williams Gamaker, Munch and Knausgård," *Text Matters* 2017, 7(7), p. 99. This is also a text which focuses on *Madame B.*

⁹⁹ On the logic of supplement see: J. Derrida, "...*That Dangerous Supplement*," in: idem: *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Charkravorti Spivak, Baltimore 1997, pp. 141–164.

¹⁰⁰ More on her own work as both an artist and thinker, see: M. Bal, "Travel Companions," in: *The Ashgate Research Companion to Memory Studies*, ed. S. Kattago, London 2015, pp. 145–161.

forward towards conceptualizing what has long tended to be immobilized by disciplinary procedures and epistemological doxa. Bal theorizes and practises something that could be called "cinematic art history," disruptive and mobile, limitless and multiple, constantly questioning received formulas and fixed paradigms. She has managed to address, theorize and, in some cases, perform the unavoidable contemporaneity of framings and encounters with art, presentness of the past and the preposterous character of history, the instability of reference, multiplicity of time and space, affective impact and, eventually, performative, political potential of artworks. While many of these factors were also signaled by diverse scholars along the way, as inevitable to be confronted by art history, though to a different extent and in different, usually more general ways, Bal's special position is that she has done it all: as a consistent theorist and practitioner. Bal fills in the pronominal shifters (I, you, s/he, them etc.) in yet another movement: playing different roles (of theorist, curator, artist, viewer) and setting the stage for others; becoming a double (or multiple) agent, just to demonstrate the inevitable blurring of positions, as well as the perpetually unclear boundaries between different fields and disciplines – or altogether denying them. This is not to say that art history, our point of reference here, is no longer needed or "ended," as some scholars have claimed (Bal might agree with such a proposal, though);¹⁰¹ on the contrary, it just needs to realize that its object – the work of art – is in constant motion, as an image it is multiple, consisting of and producing a whole new (but in fact always already, potentially, there) sphere of virtualities which matter and produce meaning, fluctuating in time and space, changing the existing parameters of perception and experience, of art and its historical study.

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¹⁰¹ See for example: H. Belting, *The End of the History of Art?*, trans. C. Wood, Chicago 1987.

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Filip Lipiński

Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

CINEMATIC ART (HISTORY) AND MIEKE BAL'S THINKING IN FILM

Summary

The article focuses on Mieke Bal's theoretical considerations of art in terms of film and movement in general. This cinematic frame offers her a conceptual framework for "thinking in film", a way to rethink not only diverse forms of art, moving and still images, but also, as I argue, methodological models for art history. The text begins with a general outline of the tensions and relations between art history and film/film studies, with a discussion of several cases of the theoretical application of film in the field of art history. Bal's case, the main subject of the article, is perhaps the most con-

sistent and theoretically advanced attempt at reconceptualizing diverse aspects of art in interdisciplinary, cinematic terms within a larger phenomenon which might be called a theoretical dimension of the "cinematic turn". While I acknowledge the importance and complementary nature of Bal's artistic practice as a video artist with her theoretical work, due to the limited space of this article, the focus of my text is on her writing. I closely trace and discuss a variety of Bal's texts, predominantly written over the last 20 years, in which she theorizes and analyzes works in which movement is either explicit, such as video or video installation or implicit, such as painting. In her crucial, relevant books, *Thinking in Film. The Politics of Video Installation According to Eija-Liisa Ahtila* (2013) or *Emma&Edvard Looking Sideways: Loneliness and the Cinematic*, Bal, referring to a number of scholars and thinkers, but most prominently and consistently to Henri Bergson, points to four kinds of movement: literal or represented movement of/in the image, movement related to perception, affective movement and, finally, its political dimension, all of which are discussed in this article. Video installation is an art form which for Bal becomes the best concretization (a contact space) of all of the above aspects of movement, activating "thinking in film". This involves new reformulations of spatial and temporal dimensions of art, with such concepts as heterochrony and timespace. Moreover, with reference to video art, Bal coined the notion of "migratory aesthetics", where migration not only literally concerns migrants and immigration but offers a platform to reflect on and renegotiate the issues of movement, stagnation, the everyday and their political dimensions. Last but not least, film, according to Bal, also offers a useful framework for analyzing the experience of art exhibitions. In discussing Bal's work, I argue that her "cinematic", conceptual travels in art offer a radical opening of a number of art historical categories and procedures, and I propose to regard her project of "thinking in film" as indicative of a larger change across disciplines already visible in her earlier work in the 1990s, which involve the productive redefinition of historical and temporal experience, mobilization of perception and the body, relational mode of thinking and vision, affective dimension of experiencing art and the acknowledgment of agency both on the part of the viewer and the artwork.

Keywords:

the cinematic, art history, Mieke Bal, film, image, movement, interdisciplinarity