

SONG OF MYSELF: WOJCIECH BAŁKOWSKI'S FILMS AND VIDEOS

APRIL 3-5, 2015

I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul, / The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me, / The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I translate into a new tongue. —Walt Whitman

In the work of Polish poet, musician, and installation artist Wojciech Bałkowski, the self—as for Walt Whitman—is also the catalyst for transcendental expression. Sound and poetry are an essential part of his films. They build an ambiguous, but nevertheless harsh commentary on his daily life. His word-view manifests itself as a nausea monologue that takes inspiration in the grotesque, the absurd, and the surreal. Directly drawing, and using his own saliva on 35mm film stock, or making computerized, abstract animations, Bałkowski dives into his inner reality to express an existential tirade. In conjunction with Anthology Film Archives, Museum of the Moving Image presents the most comprehensive film retrospective of Bałkowski's films and videos in North America, and the first one in New York City.

Guest curator: Mónica Savirón

Organized in partnership with the Ann Arbor Film Festival, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., and Anthology Film Archives. Special thanks to the Polish Cultural Institute New York and the Audio Visual Arts (AVA), and Bureau.

PROGRAM:

Worsening Of Eyesight (2013, 6 mins.) Bałkowski reflects on the distortions of perception with an overtly colloquial speech that attempts to deconstruct time, focusing on what occurs in our lives at each and every second. The spectator is in the position of seeing and listening to the artist's nightmares. Our eyelids open and close to Bałkowski's internal "pixelated in emotion" world.

Spoken Movie 5 (2010, 6 mins.) In this camera-less animation, drawn directly on 35mm stock, Bałkowski expresses spiritual doubts in the way Samuel Beckett would: questioning himself, his memories, the instability of everything,

everywhere. The nonsense that surrounds us is made evident through ink drawings, cutouts, stencil graphics, the filmmaker's home-recorded voice, and music by Dawid Szczesny.

Sound Of My Soul (2014, 13 mins.) Referring to Marcel Proust, Bąkowski positions himself as an outsider within his own mind. Everything in our history and surroundings is an imposition, which the French novelist describes in *Swann's Way*: "...when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, still, alone, more fragile, but with more vitality, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and taste of things remain poised a long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection." The film takes on some of the same motifs and visual icons as *Worsening of Eyesight*, but in clear, "unblinking" color, and with a repetition of melodies—including cellphone rings, taped laughs from television shows, and other digital noise, as a way of ritualistic mantra.

Spoken Movie 6 (2011, 6 mins.) Employing puppet animation to impersonate himself, Bąkowski expresses a kind of existential boredom, mixed with a pessimistic accounting of his daily life. To his own composed music, the filmmaker performs his thoughts in the way of a bad-tempered poem:
Taxi driver shut your face! / and drive me. / I don't want to know anything. / I hang up cause the tunnel starts. / A family trunk without branches. / A deaf totem. / I'll learn nothing concerning my case. / I'll part nothing there, / no blood comforters.

Dry Standpipe (2012, 13 mins. New York premiere.) In this video collage, remembering becomes the way to try and understand the mundane of life. Bąkowski's inner experiences take shape in the form of a game-like world, where the most impersonal objects reflect intentions and affections. Despite an increased abstraction and a convoluted, sometimes surreal, monologue, the filmmaker's voice remains sarcastic, speculative, and lyrical.

Construction Of The Day (2013, 9 mins.) As other works by Bąkowski, this film reminds us of the discontent and defiance in the words of Polish poet Miron Białoszewski, as in his *My Jacobean Fatigues*, translated below:

*Higher clarion-calls of form habitations of touch, all serenities of senses./
Lowest of all, I From my breast they grow stairs of reality. / And I feel nothing.
Nothing of juiciness. Nothing of color. Not only I am not one of the Testament
heroes but worse than a flounder glued to the bottom to die with balloons of
breath fleeing up, worse than a potato mother who put forth enormous antlers
of tubes and herself is shrinking up to disappearance. / Strike me construction
of my world!*

Prospects' Overview (2013, 9 mins. New York premiere.) Filmmaker and viewer walk through virtual distances in a computer-generated world. Piano notes are meant to create a psychological space, a consciousness of being—the reign of free thinking. This time, there are no words, nothing is said. Instead, the sound of footsteps, breathing, and moving surfaces shape the mental reality.