An Analysis of the Motifs of Light and Shadow in *Arabesque* (Germaine Dulac, 1929), *Pharmacy* (Franciszka and Stefan Themerson, 1930) and *Wavelength* (Michael Snow, 1967) in the Context of an Associated Practice-Based Research Project

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby certify that this material which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed:

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Date:

16.03.2021

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Abstract

This thesis is inspired by my practice, which involves two kinds of work: firstly, videos based on mobile objects constructed by me, which produce shadow-play, secondly, videos based on the shadow-play observed in the everyday environment. Light and shadow, being the source of images in my work, inspire in turn reflection on their relation to matter. This reflection is led by such concepts as the Neoplatonic idea of light as a source of matter developed by the Medieval metaphysics of light, the tradition of mystical light in the Byzantine icon, the animistic tradition of shadow theatre, shadow as a visualisation of higher dimensions of space, contemporary concept of the light–matter relationship, Henry Bergson's idea of the universe as metacinema, and Kazimir Malevich's writings on *Black Square* and commentary on his *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (1918). To contextualize my work, I use *Arabesque* (1929) by Germaine Dulac, *Pharmacy* (1930) by Franciszka and Stefan Themerson, and *Wavelength* (1967) by Michael Snow), in which the motifs of light and shadow occur in such a way that they create visual and intellectual link to my own works. I juxtapose these films with still works, namely: *Wavelength* – with Snow's *Walking Woman* (1961-1966) and *Atlantic* (1967); abstract images in *Arabesque* – with Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* (1915); and *Pharmacy* – with Jerzy Nowosielski's *Still Life* (1986) and *Portrait* (1978). The rationale behind this strategy is that film criticism has worked out medium-specific concepts of light and shadow, different from those developed around these two motifs in traditional, static art. However, the exclusion of the centuries-long tradition of the presence of light and shadow in art and philosophy leads to a reductionist perspective. So, to give a broader reading, I analyse the abovementioned films from the two points of view: that of critical commentary developed around these motifs not only in film but also around still works, and from the perspective of my own practice. To do this, I use two styles of narration: academic and poetic, to reflect two different approaches: historical-critical and affective. In effect, I argue for *Wavelength* as a work concerning the whole of reality, transcending the definition of structural film and revealing a poetic character. Nowosielski's painterly works – so far commented on from the vantage point of their relation to the Byzantine icon, thanks to this research reveal their pagan, animistic threads. *Pharmacy,* lost in WW2 and therefore rarely commented on at all, is analysed here from the contemporary perspective (for this work I used the re-make of *Pharmacy* by Bruce Checefsky from 2001), whereas *Arabesque*, regarded as touching upon sociological and psychological issues, is shown as responding to the contemporaneous scientific findings on the light-mater relationship and to Bergson's idea of the universe as metacinema.

Introduction

The aim of this research is to produce experimental films in which the main leitmotif is the play of shadow and light. My films then serve as a visual and intellectual starting point for a reflection on works by other artists. This reflection, in turn, inspires the written part of this project, the ultimate purpose of which is to offer an in-depth analysis of the motifs of light and shadow in specific films, namely: *Pharmacy* (1930) by Stefan and Franciszka Themerson, *Arabesque* (1929) by Germaine Dulac and *Wavelength* (1967) by Michael Snow. As a result, it offers a departure from the singular reading that has dominated the critical discourse developed around these three works for decades. To build my argument, I delve into Medieval metaphysics of light,[1] the mythical associations of shadow, the scientific concept of the relation between light and matter, and the higher dimensions of space. This creates a new perspective on these films and constitutes an original contribution to the knowledge in this area. This, however, would not be possible if it weren't informed by my art practice, which in this thesis plays a crucial role as a research method. This method makes it possible to bring to view aspects of these works which so far have been unexplored in the literature.

The fascination with the motif of light and shadow, which has driven my practice since the early years of my career, inspire me to look for similar motifs in the films mentioned above. My specific engagement with these motifs has been stimulated equally by my cultural background, in which the tradition of mystical light in Orthodox icons plays a significant role, as well as my fascination with light as a physical phenomenon and with the meditation of light, which I started to practise later in my life. My first contact with mystical light visually

[1]Especially through the thinking developed by Robert Grosseteste, Johannes Scotus Eriugena and Plotinus, which allows me to reflect on light as a powerful, mystical entity with the ability to call material forms into existence.

expressed as an abstract square of gold happened through the Byzantine icon. The icon is present in the majority of Polish houses, and in many cases, this is the first image one comes into contact with in the earliest stages of childhood. Its meaning is usually explained by grandparents and other family members, and through them, the idea of light, and a specific way of reading it, is implanted in the mind of a young person. Through this first image in which abstraction and figuration mingle, in which physical, abstract light acquires a mystical sense, other images of light are perceived. Through this first image, symbolic reading becomes a way of reading other images of abstract light.

Light is still a mystery, even to scientists. I learned about it not so much through my formal education, but through conversations with my father. This was my second meeting with light, revealing a different side of its nature. For the thirty years of my life I lived under the rule of the Communist Party, when materialism was the obligatory worldview. My father, being an academic, had to find a way to negotiate his beliefs and the rational, materialist perspective expected from him for his profession and equally for the political situation. He found it in his interest in physics and its discoveries about the nature of reality. In the lectures he gave us during our dinner-table conversations he was reflecting on metaphysical questions using scientific language and enlivening it with theological explanations. Science and belief do not have to be contradictory.

My third meeting with light happened when I was in my early twenties, a year before I commenced my master's course in painting. At that time I started to practise meditation of light. This experience shaped my visual sensitivity and resulted in the three series of paintings: *White* (1993-1995), *Black* (1995-2004) and *Green-and-Blue* (2004-2010), see https://www.joannaroy.co/paintings. In parallel with the *Black* series I started to produce shadow-play objects, which were a response to the need for ephemerality and phenomenality, which static, material paintings lacked. This created the further need to use the filmic medium to document them, and soon I realised the value of these filmic documents as independent artworks. I began not only to document my objects but also to use a camera to shoot observed shadows. This performance, which happens in the most unlikely places and times, leaves one with the experience of "profane illumination". Its powerful beauty opens up one's eyes to other realms and let one stand face to face with the "transformative potential of the present" (Skoller 2005, p. xviii). The experience of "profane illumination" (Skoller, ibid) evoked by accidentally observed shadow-play is the real reason

why I became fascinated with light, undertook the effort to record light and shadow phenomena, and build mobile shadow-play objects.

The presence of these three different perspectives yields unexpected results when I use them to scrutinise works by other artists.

Searching for a context for my studio work, I realised, however, that in many of the films I looked at, light and shadow are treated from a materialist perspective.[2] After careful consideration I chose these three films specifically because they each present a different approach to shadow and light, while at the same time they all reach beyond a purely materialist approach, and remain within the parameters of ideas which influence my studio work. This variety allows me also to showcase the diversity of intellectual threads which inspires my practice. As my research is led not by theoretical and historical reflections (although these have also been studied and are referred to in this thesis) but by my studio work, I manage to approach the subject unburdened by the historical discourse on film. Being a light-and-shadow medium, film developed its own concepts of these motifs, frequently disregarding the intellectual tradition that developed in other forms of art.[3] However, as I started my career as a painter, and later adopted the practice of moving image, broadly understood ideas of light and shadow in painting eventually enriched my thinking on my films. For this reason, the argument I build around the film works referenced above is underpinned by the concept of light and shadow developed around paintings, photography, and sculpture. My justification for this approach also comes from the fact that the filmmakers analysed in this thesis frequently also work in other media: the Themersons practised graphics, photography, and drawing, while Snow is well known for his paintings and photographic and spatial installations.

Another method of scrutinising and revealing the link between my work and the artworks

[2]In very significant works such as *Lichtspiel Schwartz, Weiss, Grau* (1930) by László Moholy-Nagy, or *Le Retour á la Raison* (1924) by Man Ray, which come to mind as emblematic examples of the use of shadow-play in film, it has been treated from a materialist perspective. On the other hand, mobile objects performing shadow-play have been known in art since *Licht Raum Modulator* (1930) by Moholy-Nagy. They, however, are usually mechanical, fully controlled devices, such as Julio le Park's and Anthony McCall's works. In the 1970s shadow-play performances became popular among artists (for example, Annabel Nicolson and Malcolm Le Grice); however, they were designed as live events that aimed to re-discover the invention of cinema. The presence of an artist (sometimes in the form of a shadow) undertaking specific actions, static artificial light, gallery space, and the presence of viewers, which allowed a discourse with the traditional, passive mode of spectatorship, were crucial for the events of those times. Twenty-first -century shadow-play works usually stay close to these experiments and are similar in character, for example Neil Henderson's *Black and Light Movie* (2001) and Jan Berdyszak's *Density of the Shadow* (2012).

[3]This is most obvious in the case of *Wavelength,* where they both are seen as constructive elements only.

and films examined in this thesis hinges on the two different styles of narration used in the chapters. They are each constructed around factual, academic writing intertwined with poetic fragments. This not only allows intellectual insight but also provides an opportunity for intuitive and affective reading of the works examined, unlike purely theoretical analysis. Creative writing fragments indicate moments when viewing of the related work would be helpful, as their purpose is to render the ambience of these works. This can give a sense of the kinship between the paired works, which otherwise might seem unrelated at first glance. Ambience may elude formal analysis, yet precisely because of it, its rendition constitutes an important part of this research, bringing to the fore the non-rational and intuitive elements that come into play in the perception of an artwork. Placed alongside rigorous academic analysis it enriches this paper.

Thus, the construction of the chapters can be seen as triple-layered: in addition to the factual and poetic writing (different font used in the latter stresses their different character), there is a layer of extensive footnotes, which deepens the factual content. Each chapter is also accompanied by a section entitled 'Review of My Practice', in which I develop further the thread of the relation between my studio work and the artworks chosen, and concentrate on revealing details about how my practice influences my understanding of the pieces selected as their context. Thus, as a further consequence, juxtaposing my films with the artworks that have been analysed, reveals visual parallels through which I highlight the often-neglected importance of the motifs of light and shadow that are present in the latter. By positioning the examined pieces in a broader philosophical, intellectual and cultural context, they earn another reading, one that is different from the traditional interpretation.

The chapters are not organised chronologically; rather, they unfold according to the argument. The first chapter highlights the animistic character of shadow in the work of the Themersons and evokes Medieval metaphysics of light. Although *Arabesque* was released earlier than *Pharmacy*, I analyse it in the second chapter. I draw on contemporaneous ideas, in particular, the scientific reflection on light and matter developed by Albert Einstein and

Henri Bergson's[4] philosophical thoughts on the cinematic image. Virginia Woolf's essay *The Cinema* (1926) discusses the ambiguity of the cinematic image. While she does not touch on any of the main issues discussed in the chapter, she serves as a bridge between it and the following one, where fragments of her novel *The Waves* (1931) are used to illustrate the motifs in *Wavelength*. The application of an impressionist approach to the materialist, structural work questions the status quo of Michael Snow's film. The argument on light and shadow in *Wavelength* draws from the ideas discussed earlier in this thesis, namely, the mystical character of shadow, the Medieval metaphysics of light, and the scientific understanding of the light-matter relation, but it is developed further through a consideration of the higher dimensions of space.
The thesis concludes with Annexe, which contains pictures of my shadow-play objects, to which occasionally I refer in the text.

Chapters:

1. ***Pharmacy* by Franciszka and Stefan Themerson and Jerzy Nowosielski's *Still Life* and *Portrait*: Between the Internal Glow and the Shadow of Spirit**

Pharmacy by Stefan and Franciszka Themerson is an example of a film built entirely on photograms. As an early twentieth-century avant-garde film, it has thus far been analysed from the perspective of the issues popular at that time in film criticism, such as synaesthesia, photogénie, and "rhythm-montage" relationships. As the goal of this thesis is to analyse the motifs of light and shadow in the context of my films, I juxtapose it with my work *Kitchen Still Life* (2011). This is supposed to result in revealing previously unnoticed features of the work analysed. In this chapter, *Kitchen Still Life*, built around similar motifs to *Pharmacy*, provides a contemporary backdrop, not only visually and technologically (my film is a digital work), but also in terms of a different set of ideas, which had not previously been associated with the Themerson's work. Thus, the chapter considers how the Medieval metaphysics of light, which has inspired my films, is also refracted through *Pharmacy*. This allows me in consequence to place *Pharmacy* in the context of an unusual counterpart – J.

[4] This is discussed further in Chapter 2, p. 64.

Nowosielski's painterly practice. Thanks to this juxtaposition, which could not have happened if my practice had not served as a bridge between the two, this analysis offered unexpected readings of both works.

When juxtaposed, Nowosielski's painting reveals aspects which had not previously been identified, such as magic and pagan threads, while *Pharmacy* departs from the popular critical analysis that mainly sees it as yet another work structured around the idea of visual rhythm, offering the possibility of perceiving it as responding to earlier Symbolist concepts and to the ancient tradition of animism and shadow theatre. James Roger Brandon's *Theatre in Southeast Asia* (1974) gives me an understanding of the relation between magic rituals, shadow and artistic expression, while Eriugena's and Plotinus' writings help me to look into the relationship between matter, shadow, and light from a philosophical perspective. These two literary approaches create a common ground for reflecting on both the above works. Adriana Adamska's *Metafizyczny wymiar w malarstwie Jerzego Nowosielskiego* (2012) and catalogues of Nowosielski's exhibitions lead to a review of the sacral and metaphysical background of his work, while A.L. Rees' *The Themersons and the Polish Avant-Garde* (1993) and Kamila Kuc's *Visions of Avant-Garde Film: Polish Cinematic Experiments from Expressionism to Constructivism* (2017) provide a historical and critical background for the Themersons' practice.

In the respective 'Review of Practice', I use the ideas analysed in the chapter to show how my video *Kitchen Still Life* compares with the visual and intellectual threads in Nowosielski's paintings and *Pharmacy* by the Themersons. To do this I reflect on the images in *Kitchen Still Life*, looking closely at the occurrence of shadows, their variety, behaviour, and relation to the object. I scrutinise the realm of shadows through the perspective of Roy Sorensen's reflection in his book *Seeing Dark Things* (2008). The result of this observation is then compared with the thoughts developed in the chapter. Although there are significant similarities arising from the specific use of light, my work *Kitchen Still Life* can be seen as tracing consecutive steps from pure light to the state of matter through shadows and 'filtows'[5] of various densities, *Pharmacy* concentrates on uncovering an animistic 'soul' of objects through their shadows, while Nowosielski's works refer to the material world, presented as an amalgam of spirit and light-constructed matter. This analysis culminates

[5]See 'Glossary': filtows and shadows.

with a reflection on the role of illumination in contemporary art practice.

2. Metaphysical Dimension of *Arabesque* by Germaine Dulac in the Context of *Black Square* by Kazimir Malevich

In this chapter, I examine Germaine Dulac's film *Arabesque* (1929), which marks a shift in the artist's practice from narrative to pure cinema. Its rhythm and movement—subjects that critics were most interested in at the time—attracted a great deal of attention (see 'Literature Review'). However, I analyse the film from the perspective of the visual and intellectual issues that inform my practice. I therefore examine Dulac's use of light and shadow, arguing that my in-depth analysis of these motifs frees it from the critical concepts of the early twentieth century that saw pure cinema as the visual equivalent of a piece of music. I show that *Arabesque* is rooted in broader intellectual and philosophical reflections on the relationship between light and matter initiated by the scientific discoveries that overturned our understanding of reality.[6] In short, the film can be read as a response to the revolutionary transformation of the contemporaneous worldview.

To arrive at this new reading of *Arabesque*, I investigate how Dulac used light to build images and draw the reader's attention to her tendency to transform objects into abstract spots of light and shadow. In my work *Table* (2015), the object appears in the form of a shadow and reflected light, thus presenting material reality as built of light. This, in turn, serves as a bridge between *Arabesque* and *Black Square* (1915) by Malevich. Juxtaposing Dulac's work with *Black Square* has, to the best of my knowledge, never been undertaken. When the perspective on the motif of shadow and light in Malevich's work presented by Victor Stoichita in *A Short History of The Shadow* (1997) is applied to *Arabesque,* an ontological[7] transformation of the objects therein takes place; they become shadow-and-light entities devoid of particularity. This is a newly identified feature of the film and the lack of commentary on it prompted me to probe further. Seeing it as a serious omission and an untrodden path in the reflection on this work, I examine these images through the ideas of

[6]One of the consequences of Albert Einstein's Theory of Special Relativity, published in 1905 in the paper 'On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies', is the equivalence and transmutability of mass and energy. More about it in fn. 89

[7] Devin Singh (2015, p.241) explained the notion of "ontology" as the "discourse on the thing in itself, its being, materiality or substance".

light in the cinematic image as developed at that time through the prism of scientific revelations on the relation between light and matter, namely, Bergson's understanding of cinematic movement in *Matter and Memory* (1896) and his reading of Einstein's Theory of Special Relativity in *Duration and Simultaneity* (1922), later revisited by Deleuze in his book *Cinema 1* (1983). In doing so, I demonstrate that *Arabesque* not only responds to psychological and sociological issues, as critics have frequently proposed, but also to changes in the understanding of reality, thus bringing into focus both scientific and philosophical reflections.

In the 'Review of My Practice' associated with this chapter I position my film *Table*, based on one of my objects, within the context of Dulac's *Arabesque* and Malevich's *Black Square*. I draw on the early influence of Symbolism which, together with the Orthodox spiritual tradition, permeated Malevich's Suprematism and gave his reflection on non-objective art a mystical overtone (*Non-Objective World*, 1927, *God is Not Cast Down*, 1913). The elements occurring in *Arabesque* and *Black Square*, namely, shadow, light, and the relation between abstraction and object, govern the process of reflection. Neoplatonic ideas of light, which were embedded in the tradition of the Orthodox icon, later inspired the symbolic mysticism of *Black Square* but also found their way into Dulac's fascination with light. At the same time, these ideas, through the tradition of the icon, are still present in the wider cultural context of Eastern Europe, and they resonate with my own attitude. *Black Square*, and the critical discourse developed around its symbolism, provide an intellectual grounding for my thinking about Dulac's abstract images in *Arabesque*. My discovery of the confluence of Suprematism and abstract imagery in *Arabesque*, which is not evident at first glance, enables me to find a deeper understanding of the elements that elude visibility in my work.

3. The Physics, Metaphysics and Poetics of *Wavelength* by Michael Snow; the Motif of Waves, Light and Shadow in the Context of the Light-Matter Relation, Higher Dimensions of Space and *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf

The chapter on *Wavelength* by Michel Snow differs from the rest in both its length and its inclusion of fragments of the novel *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf. The length is the outcome of the very complex nature of *Wavelength* and the range of issues I analyse within it, while the introduction of *The Waves* helps to discover an affective link between these two works.

It brings together the leitmotifs of waves, light and a female figure that occur in both Woolf's novel and *Wavelength*, thus broadening its context and showing Snow's work to be rooted in a tradition much deeper than merely the structuralist and materialist concepts.

Snow's reflection that his film has more affinity with Vermeer than Cézanne (Snow and Dompierre, 1994, p. 45) and its 'metaphysical' quality (Mekas and Sitney, 1967, p. 44), encouraged me to follow this direction, one that has been neglected by mainstream critics, strengthening my conviction that looking at *Wavelength* from a painterly perspective is justified. Although unidentified by other commentators, Vermeer's presence in Snow's reflection reassured me that searching for the symbolic sense of the motifs in *Wavelength* and seeing the specific arrangement of images as metaphorical is justified.[8] The light that permeates the interiors in Vermeer's paintings inspires me to think about it as yet another feature to consider in the juxtaposition with *Wavelength*. Interestingly, the comments on light in Vermeer's work point in two directions: scientific and mystical.[9] Thus, the intellectual threads, such as the mystical and scientific character of light mentioned above, as well as the metaphors and symbols in the analysis of *Wavelength*, find their pertinence through the figure of Vermeer. In addition to this, Vermeer's artistic positioning as a predecessor of Impressionism and as an alleged user of the camera obscura[10] means that he plays yet another role – that of mediator between Snow's work and fragments of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves,* and between painterly and cinematic works. These apparently distinct figures, which found their way into the intellectual and visual circle within which *Wavelength* exists, suggest a much broader relation than just the structural ideas inscribed into the latter.

[8] Many commentators have reflected on the hidden meaning in the objects and scenes in Vermeer's paintings. These include, most notably, Erwin Panofsky (1970), Mark Roskill (1989), and Laurence Gowing (1997). Edward A. Snow, in *A Study of Vermeer*, argues that Vermeer's works were supposed to be "read," and that they "demonstrate that he [Vermeer] had a taste for the metaphorical, even the arcane" (Snow, 1979, p. 128).

[9] Robert D. Huerta (2003), in *Giants of Delft: Johannes Vermeer and the Natural Philosophers, the Parallel Search for Knowledge during the Age of Discovery*, quotes Descarque's: "each [of Vermeer's] painting[s] seem to be the sum of various analytic experiments with light and with the microscopic observation of matter" (p. 102); this places his work close to scientific reflections on the relationship between light and matter. Mark Stevens (1995) observes a very different aspect of this connection, claiming that "the relation in Vermeer between material and light . . . is a spiritual proportion. . . . in Vermeer, whatever is material . . . seems . . . an offering to the light" (p. 142).

[10] Many commentators, including A. Hyatt Mayor, Charles Seymour and Heinrich Schwartz, claimed that Vermeer's work shows evidence of the use of the camera obscura: "These include Vermeer's blending of colours, his use of halation highlights to suggest depth, and his practice of painting near objects bigger and far objects smaller than if he were [!] painting direct from nature." (Huerta, 2003, p. 102)

The set of concepts that informs my view of *Wavelength* is novel in the body of critical commentary on this film, and, as in the cases of the two previous works I reflect on in this thesis, it originates from the intellectual threads present in my studio work. The images occurring in my films also serve as a key which allows me to recognise the common characteristics of the images in *Wavelength* and, as a result, to divide them into three groups: 1. images of pure, abstract light; 2. shadow-based; and 3. illusionistic images of material reality.[11] This, in effect, allows me to form a link between these and the three images on the wall appearing in the last few minutes of the film: (1) the image of waves (one of the series *Atlantic* (1967), which I later refer to as "*Atlantic* picture", or a "photograph of waves") which I relate to category 1 and reflect on from the perspective of the Medieval metaphysics of light and twentieth- and twentieth-century scientific discoveries on the relation between light and matter; (2) *Walking Woman* (1961-1966), which I relate to category 2 and propose to read as indebted to *Flatland* by Edwin A. Abbott (1884), the concept of the higher dimensions of space and the idea of shadow as a visualisation of the world of spirits; and (3) a double photograph of a woman linked to category 3, which brings a reflection on the relation of the two motifs (light and shadow) to material reality. Looking at the motif of waves, I observe their appearance throughout the film in various shapes and forms: as pure light, as a sine wave, as a closing up movement of zoom, creating visual equivalent of tidal wave, as a still image of waves on the wall, and in verbal form as the title of the film. This in turn reveals a specific bridge between the first and the last few moments of the film, where pure light and the image of waves occur.

Thus, my practice as a research method yields the discovery of elements that have not previously been noted: the threefold division of the filmic images in *Wavelength*, their link to the three pictures on the wall and the introduction of the pictorial, literary, philosophical and scientific tradition of thought on the motifs of light, shadow and waves while the

[11]This classification differs from the one I came across in other analyses of *Wavelength*. Usually, two groups are mentioned. Bruce Elder (1989) refers to these as "two different cinematic styles" (p. 189). The first, which is related to conventional cinema, embraces the scenes referred to by Snow as human events, and are thus shown using realist imagery. The second, which is related to artists' films, encompasses the other images in the film. Both draw attention to the "film's material nature" (Elder, 1989, p. 190). However, I propose that the images should be grouped not according to their similarity to one of these cinematic styles but according to the level of their abstraction. Thus, within Elder's second group, I differentiate flashes of light as separate. This is why the "shadow-based" category includes images executed with the use of many different techniques. They offer a recognisable image of the loft, yet they are far from the illusionism of the human events shots.

presence of Woolf and Vermeer enables a new perspective on this film as a work crossing the boundaries of a purely structural narration, revealing its poetic character that harbours metaphorical meaning and is deeply rooted in a multi-faceted and a centuries-long tradition of the presence of light in Western culture.

In the Review of Practice, I offer a detailed demonstration of how my films *Air* (2016) and *Kitchen Wall* (2016) each inspire a reflection on one of the still images that feature in Snow's work. Thus, the shadow of waves on the wall transforming into pure light in *Air* enables me to adopt a specific perspective on the *Atlantic* image in *Wavelength*, and, as a further consequence, on the flashes of light and the motif of waves. It allows me to recognise them as a separate group of images in *Wavelength* and to reflect on them from the perspective of the Medieval metaphysics of light, and of physics. The film *Kitchen Wall*, by introducing the shadow of a female figure, allows me to delve deeper into ideas about higher dimensions and the invisible worlds of spiritual entities, and to use this in a reflection on *Walking Woman,* and further, on shadow-based images. The distinct changes of colour occurring in both of my works, although achieved in a different way and create a different ambience, resonate with the colour effects in *Wavelength* and become an inspiration to draw a link between Snow's film and *The Waves.*

My way of looking at *Wavelength* is illuminated by two other versions of the work (*Wavelength,* 1967 and *Waivelength,* 2019) that were screened at Tate Modern in 2019. These also form part of my analysis.

Literature Review

Studying experimental films created by the first and second avant-garde, in which the interaction of light with objects creates the phenomenon of a shadow-play, I particularly wanted to discover how the images of light and the shadow-play set up a dialogue with the images of matter. However, finding examples of such a dialogue is one thing and finding examples of critical writing which would take on the issue is quite another. The same set of images seen through another pair of eyes gets a different reading. These disparate readings result not only from the differences in these "visual dialogues" but also from the popularity of certain ideas in the times when a given work was created. These trends seem to depend on specific circumstances influencing the development of film at that time on the one hand, and, on the other, are a consequence of the opinions of the most influential critics, who determine the tone of the discourse for the rest of the critical environment, creating the situation in which certain aspects of filmic works come strongly to the fore, while others seem to be neglected.

1. Pharmacy by Franciszka and Stefan Themersons and Jerzy Nowosielski's *Still Life* and *Portrait*: Between the Internal Glow and the Shadow of Spirit

At the time of the creation of *Pharmacy*, the commentary around artists' films was strongly influenced by the ideas of the relation between film and music. The extent of this phenomenon became very clear to me when I was conducting research on *Arabesque* by Dulac. As the Themerson's works were executed in the same epoch, this approach, not surprisingly, plays also an important role in the commentary developing around their work. For example, in Stefania Zahorska's article, we can read that cinema should "abstract the texture and light of the objective reality caught by camera-eye and edited by montage methods derived from the musical form" (Kuc and O'Pray, 2014, pp. 23-24). Karol Irzykowski, another important figure in Polish art criticism, opposed this point of view and insisted that film "should have its own autonomy and rhythm, and should not be merely an illustration of music" (Kuc, 2016, p. 129). Thus, as the issue of light seems to be secondary for art critics, I expected difficulties in finding appropriate material on the subject. The lack of material on *Pharmacy*, however, is caused not only by the specific slant of the critical

discourse, but also by the film's very short physical existence.[12] So it is not surprising that it was difficult to find any analysis which would be specifically devoted to this work.[13] As far as the original criticism is concerned, having no direct access to press reviews from the 1930s, I relied on later texts incorporating fragments of the original sources and contemporary comments. Kamila Kuc (2016) in *Visions of Avant-Garde Film, Polish Cinematic Experiments from Expressionism to Constructivism* briefly reviews main voices taking part in the discussion about *Pharmacy* in 1930. To quote just a few: Seweryn Tross was of the opinion that *Pharmacy* was a new and interesting experiment showing Polish public the value of the cinematic image in itself; Zahorska exulted the film's beauty belonging to the abstract imagery of everyday objects; Jadwiga Migowa described it as a play with various light compositions, in which photograms were used for the first time in a film; and Tadeusz Kowalski praised the formal associations and the mixture of real and abstract shapes (p.121). Kuc also mentions the reaction of French critics who compared *Pharmacy* to Moholy-Nagy's and Man Ray's experiments (ibid., pp. 121-122). Another title edited by Kuc (2014) *The Struggle for Form. Perspective on Polish Avant-Garde*[14] includes A. L. Rees' article *The Themersons and the Polish Avant-Garde.*[15] Here I found information about Stefan Themerson's particular interest in shadow and his reaching to the traditions of other cultures in search for its relation to magic and animism.

The Themersons and the Avant-Garde (Polit et al., 2013) – an extensive monograph on the Themersons brings contemporary voices to the equation. And so, in the chapter *Kinetic Collages* Tadeusz Majewski (Majewski, 2013) quotes Stefan Themerson's own reflection on a "photogram in motion" (which places *Pharmacy* in the discourse on the dualism of perception and presentation) – it became my starting point in thinking on Themerson's intellectual attitude to shadow and light and opened a space for discussion on those issues in Jerzy Nowosielski's works. Paweł Polit's essay *The Avant-Garde According to the*

[12] It perished in WW2 as did three other pre-war filmic works of theirs; to this day, only three of their films have survived.

[13] Kamila Kuc explains the situation, which concerns not only the Themersons' output, but embraces a significant number of the first avant-garde films lost in WW2, or not executed. All these works were marginalised "because most assessment in film histories takes as their main criterion only films that existed only in their material form" (Kuc, 2016, pp. 10-11).

[14] For example, Kuc analyses *Europa* and *Calling Mr Smith* as part of the reflection on futuristic experiments (Kuc and O'Pray, 2014).

[15] One of the most important sources turned out to be English magazine PIX (winter 1993/94), which featured a 60-page insert wholly devoted to the Themersons' life and work.

Themersons, from the same monograph, which analyses the Themersons' place within the historical process of creating visions, deepened my perspective on Stefan's understanding of the shadow–object relation. Polit mentions that "he [Themerson] suggests that culture can articulate nature by echoing, as it were, its spontaneous phenomenon of objects and shapes being impressed or multiplied by light" (Polit, 2013, p. 32). These books, though helpful, did not provide any analysis of Themersons' work from the perspective of light and shadow. However, the most important source, Stefan Themerson's *The Urge to Create Visions* (1937) keeps coming back as the main point of reference in all the critical works reflecting on the couples' practice. Luckily for this thesis, Stefan Themerson acknowledges – and reflects on – the importance of light and shadow in *Pharmacy*. Thus, Themerson's observations on the photogram included in his writings turned out to be invaluable in grasping his attitude.
In the case of Nowosielski, there is an abundance of commentary about the role of light in his work. Two monographs: Adraina Adamska's *Metafizyczny wymiar w malarstwie Jerzego Nowosielskiego* (2012) and Mieczysław Porębski's *Nowosielski* (2003) helped me to understand the influence of Russian icons on his practice, showed philosophical influences which shaped his thinking and explained the spiritual ambience around his paintings. However, in both of these monographs the artist's intellectual approach to light, although acknowledged as an important feature in his practice, was narrowly commented only from the point of view of its relation to sacred art and Neoplatonic ideas. The juxtaposition of his artworks with *Pharmacy* suggested a possible presence of a different source of inspiration which was unnoticed in the reflection on his work. Especially the notion of "magic" recurrently applied by Nowosielski himself in relation to his practice, as mentioned by Krystyna Zwolińska in her essay *Malarstwo osobne* (2003) and Adamska's monograph, drew my attention to shadow theatre, in which art merges with certain forms of magic. James Roger Brandon's *Theatre in Southeast Asia* (1974) examining interdependencies between shadow, magic rituals and artistic expression, provided a link between *Pharmacy* and the analysed works of Nowosielski.

2. Metaphysical Dimension of *Arabesque* by Germaine Dulac in the Context of *Black Square* by Kazimir Malevich

The discourse developed around the French pure cinema of the 1920s and 1930s was set, on the one hand, against other traditional performative temporal arts like theatre, opera and ballet, on the other – against Symbolist aesthetics, significantly influencing the creative environment of those days. The idea of synaesthesia came very strongly to the fore, bringing musical language to film criticism. Dulac's *Arabesque*, which I decided to take as a context for one of my studio works, being one of many films of those days structured around musical motifs,[16] has been prevalently commented on from the perspective of film as visual music. The language of critical reflection on film of that epoch was, and still is, dominated by notions from the writing on opera and ballet. Words like rhythm, movement, symphony, describing films keep coming back alongside the notions of life, truth, sincerity and beauty. To give just a few examples: Louis Delluc's description of Cecil B. DeMille's *Joan the Woman* seems to be more appropriate for a light-and-music performance than for a narrative film: "Everything is alive and lives according to an imposed rhythm. Just as in a symphony each note contributes its own vitality to the general line, each shot, each shadow moves, disintegrates or is reconstituted according to the requirements of a powerful orchestration" (McCreary, 1976, pp. 22-23). Émile Vuillermoz similarly commented *Le Coupable* (1917) by André Antoine, which he "described as a symphony . . . in which the images 'of the great, grim maternal city' of Paris created an accompaniment of 'deep and moving bass chords' to the 'brave, noble melody' of the drama" (Abel, 1985, p. 24). However, what drew my attention to *Arabesque* by Dulac was not the musical issues but the process of abstracting figurative images by the specific use of light and their similarity to Malevich's Suprematist paintings. To understand the possible relation between Suprematist painterly work and Dulac's pure cinema, I needed to delve deep into the understanding of light in the works of both of these artists. However, the subject of light in avant-garde films is rarely explored, and when it is mentioned, it refers back to the rhythm. To give an example: David Bordwell mentions Riccioto Canudo's claim that the film "captures the rhythm of light" (1980, p. 99), according to Elie Faure it "unrolls in a musical space" (ibid. p. 100), while "Gance announces . . . that rhythm makes cinema the music of light" (ibid. p. 124). Bordwell himself gives the

[16] E.g. *La* Dixième *Symphonie* by Abel Gance, see McCreary, 1976, p. 22.

most all-encompassing outlook on the theory of Impressionist cinema and the importance of rhythm: “Impressionist theory rests its idea of filmic construction almost wholly upon the rhythmic relationships between images” (ibid.).

To my knowledge, Dulac’s work has never been interpreted exclusively in these categories. Many records[17] of the artist’s inspirations stress a strong influence of Symbolism and this served as a point of departure for my research on light in her work. Tami Williams’ in-depth study on Dulac’s life and work (2007a, 2014) served as a source of information for my understanding of critical writing developed around her filmography in the 1920s and 1930s, although this eminent critic and expert on Dulac did not analyse the artist’s non-narrative work from the perspective of light. Speaking about Dulac’s narrative films, Williams (2014) remarks that her use of light to express human emotions, spirituality and sublimity is rooted in the theatrical mise-en-scène[18] and Symbolic inspirations. Importantly, Williams also briefly mentions Dulac’s encounter with sacred Medieval paintings, in which “beauty and divinity merge” through the use of light (p. 14); reputedly, this fact had a bearing on Dulac’s future work.

Interestingly, Myroslava M. Mudrak in the essay *Kazimir Malevich, Symbolism and Ecclesiastic Orthodoxy* (2017) mentions Malevich’s inspirations not only with the Russian icon but also with Symbolism, particularly with its French version. The discovery of Malevich’s and Dulac’s intersecting fascinations helped me to find the background against which I could place these two artists. As I have already mentioned, I did not come across any critical writing which directly analysed abstract imagery in Dulac’s work. Jurg Stenz (2014) mentions vaguely that “In recent years the significance of the four music-related films she [Dulac] made in 1928–1929 – a sort of counterweight to Germany’s ‘absoluter Film’ – has . . . been recognized” (p. 221), but he does not provide any details. Considering his interests, I have reasons to believe that this remark does not concern the similarity of abstract imagery occurring in absolute cinema and *Arabesque* but its musical layer. For my comparison of her works with Hans Richter’s *Rhythm21* and *Black Square* by Malevich I relied on Esther Leslie’s *Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-Garde*, in which the author looks into how void in the form of a white and a black screen was adopted to painterly and

[17] See fn. 97, Chapter 2, ‘Review of My Practice’.
[18] I write about it in more detail in Chapter 2.

filmic images by the first avant-garde. The process of abstracting a figurative image, essential for achieving the shadow-and-light pictures in *Arabesque,* is analogous to Malevich's approach to the process of liberating images from attached signification, which was explained by Olga Bulgakova (2002) in her essay *Malevich in the Movies*. The over-exposure used by Dulac inspired me to search for the possible understanding of her abstract images in the ideas of the relationship between light and matter, which emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century and which influenced strongly thinking on cinema. Bergson's two seminal works turned out to be crucial for my reflection: *Matter and Memory* (1896) and *Duration and Simultaneity* (1922). Together with their revival through Deleuze's *Cinema1: The Movement Image* (1983) they helped me to argue for the importance of light in creating the metaphysical character of *Arabesque*.

3. The Physics, Metaphysics and Poetics of *Wavelength* by Michael Snow; The Motif of Waves, Light and Shadow in the Context of the Light–Matter Relation, Higher Dimensions of Space and *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf

The greatest influence on the reading of *Wavelength* was exerted by two eminent British film critics contemporaneous with the creation of the film: Peter Gidal and Malcolm Le Grice. They both present a materialist outlook; as Bart Testa (1995) claims, they "recast Snow interpretatively, molding his films to their theory of avant-garde film" (p. 45). Their perspective got strongly asserted and turned out to dominate reflection on *Wavelength* for many decades to come. Testa believes that "Their success in doing so is perhaps proven by the speed with which their critical account of Snow was rapidly inserted into a wider Structuralist debate" (ibid., p. 44). Many critical works on *Wavelength* to these days echoes their position. Also, Jonas Mekas and P. Adams Sitney's (1967) interview with Snow and their structural perspective on *Wavelength* became later a basis for the reflections of Bruce Elder (1989), Louise Dompierre (Snow and Dompierre, 1994), and William C. Wees (1992) among others. For Elder, for example, the role of sudden changes of light in *Wavelength* is to stress its material nature. However, despite the strong materialist reading of Gidal and Le Grice, *Wavelength*'s ability to take vision beyond visible reality has been noticed by many critics, but it has been perceived mainly through the interpretation of the zoom

movement.[19] The reflection on the use of light to create a variety of images in *Wavelength* and their relation to painting and other static visual arts has been mentioned in the critical commentary but not analysed to any great extent. And so, Scott MacDonald (1993) in his later text brings to our attention the influence of Snow's earlier sculptural, painterly and photographic work on *Wavelength*[20], and Regina Cornwell (1980) notes the steady movement of the zoom as an analogue for the "non-relational . . . form in painting and sculpture" (p. 73), but they both miss the opportunity for a deeper analysis which, for this research, turned out to be a way to discover a possible alternative to the materialist reading of *Wavelength*.

Very valuable for my study was Elizabeth Legge's (2009) *Michael Snow: Wavelength*. Legge frequently touches upon the issues which are important for my thinking. For example, she introduces into her analysis the perspective of contemporary physics: "Wavelength's incremental adjustments of the lens also open into the paradoxes of time-space in the quantum physics of the 1960s: is each moment defined by new lines of time or space, into parallel worlds?" (p. 30). She also reflects on Snow's attempt to achieve something like "stereometry" by the superimposition of images (ibid. p. 10). These issues have been developed in my reflection from the perspective of the scientific concept of hyperspace and higher dimensions as illustrated by Edwin A. Abbott (1884) in *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* and further explained by the physicist Michio Kaku (1994) in *Hyperspace: A Scientific Odyssey Through the Parallel Universes, Time Wraps and Tenth Dimension*. William C. Wees' mention (in *Light Moving in Time,* 1992) of Stan Brakhage's and Hollis Frampton's interest in Medieval metaphysics of light gave me an idea that it would be worthwhile to explore this philosophical thread in *Wavelength*. Wees' (1981) *Prophecy, Memory and the Zoom* brought the vision of zoom building the impression of "infinite depth" in Snow's work and creating (with the use of white light) a "new beginning", where one would expect the

[19] See Chapter 3, 'Review of Practice', section 'Zoom'. Zoom's movement earns also an existential and psychological meaning (Michelson, 1971, Potempski, 2013). However, the role of light in creating meaning which exceeds visibility was in these articles almost completely omitted.

[20] Scott MacDonald mentions that before *Wavelength* Snow "had made non-filmic works that prefigured cinema" (MacDonald, 1993, p. 28), and says that in *The Walking Woman Works* "the basic idea of using the same figure over and over, always in a changed context, has a good bit in common with a film strip" (ibid. p. 29). He also mentions Snow's photographic works with serial images: *Atlantic* (1966-67) with waves (later used in *Wavelength* together with *Walking Woman*), *A Wooden Look* (1969), *Of a Ladder* (1971), *Glares* (1973), *Light Blues* (1974); all these pieces bridge his static and filmic works. Also *New York Eye and Ear Control* (1964), being a filmic documentation of Snow's *The Walking Woman Works* is quoted as an example of a strong relationship between painterly and filmic work in his creativity.

end of the film. All this deepened my interest in exploring the relationship between abstract light in *Wavelength* and the idea of mystical light. I managed to develop this thought thanks to Amelia Carolina Sparavigna's (2014) *Robert Grosseteste's Thought on Light and Form of the World*, which gave me an understanding of Grosseteste's reflection on the light–matter relationship and allowed me to link it with contemporary scientific ideas. Testa (1995) in *Axiomatic Cinema* offers detailed knowledge not only on *Wavelength*, but also on Snow's other filmic and static works. Thus, his reflection on *Walking Woman* provided an intellectual ground for the analysis developed in this work. It not only gives a contemporary outlook on Snow's practice, but also has an extensive review of critical commentary on it to date. I got a much better understanding of the discussion developed around *Wavelength* thanks to Ryszard W. Kluszczyński's *(Audio)-Visual Labyrinths. Non-Linear Discourses in Linear Media,* (1997) in which the author analyses these audio-visual media which reject narrativity. His definitions of structural and poetic cinema, and the explanation of the strategies used to transcend the linearity of the medium turned out to be very useful for my argument on *Wavelength* as stepping beyond the definition of a structural film.

Glossary

Figure – Ground Relationship

Sidney J. Blatt mentions that “Arnheim, like Gombrich, considers the figure–ground relationship a basic dimension in perception. Figure–ground contours define flat, two-dimensional space parallel to the frontal plane. This can give the appearance of objects at different levels of depth – usually, however, at only two levels. Thus, figure–ground relationships are a fundamental perceptual factor in defining levels of depth. The negative space between figures is important not only in defining the relationship between the figures but also in establishing depth. Development proceeds from the figure–ground relationship to a ‘stacking of frontal visual objects’, to overlapping and superimposition, to transparency, and to deformations involving perspective and the oblique. All these factors contribute to the creation of depth, volume and three-dimensionality” (Blatt and Blatt, 2009, pp. 32-33). “According to Arnheim (1954/1974, p.218) extension beyond the three dimensions of space can be achieved only by ‘intellectual construction’ since visual imagery is insufficient” (ibid., p. 33).

Filtows and Shadows

The term “filtow” is a neologism coined by Roy Sorensen and compounded from the words “filter” and “shadow". He explains their ontological differences, saying that a “filtow is a body of light rather than a shadow. In addition to having a different genesis, a filtow stands in a different relation to the photons it contains. The photons in a shadow are contaminants. . . . The photons in a filtow are constituents” (Sorensen, 2008, p. 176). So, in the most general terms “filtows are weaker than shadows” (ibid.). For the shadow to exist, he continues, it “must plug all the light. . . Shadows cannot beget shadows. . . . Shadows are absences rather than positive entities. [They] cannot do anything on their own. Nor can they be projected or directly acted upon. When I cast a shadow [Sorensen says], I interact only with the light” (ibid. pp. 171-172). Finally, “a shadow can penetrate a filtow but cannot penetrate another shadow” (ibid. p. 170).

The History of Real Light in Art – a Short Overview

The Byzantine icon was the first example of European art in which real light was adopted. Light reflected by the golden background assumed symbolic meaning and referred to the mystical light, being in a way a visualisation of the ideas developed by the Medieval metaphysics of light. In the Renaissance the presence of the real light of the Byzantine icon was replaced by its illusion, only to come back to art in the 20th century, though frequently losing its philosophical and symbolic sense. Peter Weibel in the catalogue *Light Art from Artificial Light* says that the real revolution in the 20th century was not the introduction of abstract art – which was a revolution of visual form within the traditional medium, but "in developing panel painting into a screen" (Weibel, 2006, p. 96). He also gives a brief overview of the history of real light in contemporary art, claiming that the re-introduction of other media than paint to Western art happened only in the 20th century. "This transformation of the representation of light into the reality of light was anticipated and supported by the shift from the representation of movement (Futurism and Cubism) to the reality of movement (Constructivism, Kinetic Art). This turn away from strategies of representation to reality programs was . . . reinforced by the introduction of real . . . objects such as Duchamp's ready-mades into the system of art" (ibid. p. 95). In 1912-1914 Tatlin, after visiting Picasso in his studio, started to use real material, giving them absolute status. In 1913 in the relief *Bottle* he used metal and carpet. Weibel claims that Tatlin's reliefs were not "something he had learned from Picasso, instead Picasso's doctrine fell on especially fertile ground . . . because the terrain for painting with materials had already been nurtured by the Russian tradition of icon painting" (ibid. pp. 98-99). In 1914 Vladimir Markov in his *Principles of Visual Arts. Texture* comes back to icons, referring to the use of real materials in paintings (ibid. pp. 99). Interestingly, in that view the icon can be seen as an inspiration equally for the materialist ideas (by incorporating real materials other than pigments), as well as mystical ones in contemporary art.

Medieval Metaphysics of Light

From the earliest times of humanity and in every culture, light has been treated not only as a physical phenomenon but also as a philosophical entity. In Western philosophy, the

metaphysics of light was developed for the first time by Plotinus, who claimed that "From the One emanates immaterial light, radiating outward, growing dimmer and dimmer until it shades off into darkness (a privation of light), which is matter." He draws from earlier Greek ideas of Heraclitus (fire as the first principle of the world) and Plato, who compared Good with light. This idea was later developed mainly by such Medieval philosophers as Augustine, John Scotus Eriugena and Bishop Robert Grosseteste. In Eriugena's works we can find that "All things that are, are light".[21] Grosseteste's treatise *De Luce* (c. 1230) (Lewis, 2019) is based on Neoplatonic ideas that God is pure light and all the created world is "light's outermost extension", where it "becomes most completely corporeal" (Wees, 1992, p. 100). In the Renaissance the metaphysics of light came back in thoughts of among others Jakob Bohme and Giordano Bruno, but not much philosophical work on light has been done since later scientific discoveries (Schültzinger, 2002).

Peter Sloterdijk claims that in many cultures the very "reason of existence" is shown as light, and this idea permeated into religions. Thus, in the Bible it is said that "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (J 1,5), while in the Koran we can find that "Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth" (XXIV, 35). Sloterdijk says that "There are . . . good grounds for claiming that Occidental metaphysics (owing to its consistent fascination with ocular motifs) was in essence a meta-optics" (Sloterdijk, 2006, pp. 45-46). Also, light is shown as an attribute of the Absolute in poetical (Dante in *Paradiso Cantos*) and mystical visions (*Apocalypse* of St. John).

Metaphor

According to Gerard Genette "metaphor is the privileged expression of a profound vision: a vision that goes beyond appearances and penetrates to the 'essence of things'" (Bird, 2007, p. 1). It is based on "a transference of a word (i.e. the meaning of a word) to something else" (IJsseling, 2012, p. 115). Thus, a metaphor is a way of seeing one thing or reality in terms of another that creates something different in the very act of seeing. Yet the metaphor is stubbornly paradoxical (Voss, 1995, p. 29). Carl R. Hausman claims that "One of

[21] Translation of Eriugena's (c. 800 – c. 877) words from *Expositiones in Ierarchiam Coelestem*, I 76 – 77 (n. d.) (Olejniczak-Lobsien, 2010, p. 15). Artists like Stanley Brakhage and Hollis Frampton used Ezra Pound's translation of Eriugena's words from Pound's *Pisan Cantos*, 'Canto LXXIV' (1945).

the marks of a metaphor is that its peculiar conjoining of terms is integral to its significance." He mentions that the terms 'symbol' and 'metaphor' can be sometimes used interchangeably, yet there are some differences, like the repeatability and stability of the symbol (Hausman, 1989, pp. 14-15).

Myth of the Beginning of Arts

Pliny the Elder mentions in the myth of the beginning of arts that the first image was created as an outline of a shadow of a man who was leaving his loved one for a journey. When he died, the "fixed shadow" became a way of immortalizing him (Stoichita, 1997, pp. 153-157). Thus, the absence becomes the presence through the shadow.

Poetic Film

Kluszczyński (1997, p. 2) defines poetic film as the one which "arranges the images in poetic structures, linking them together either with metaphoric relationships based on associations and antitheses (semantic links), or references to symbolic, mythical and archetypal meanings. The poetic film has been developing since the twenties (e.g. dadaist and surrealist-oneiric cinema), assuming always newer forms".

Profane Illumination

Walter Benjamin in his book *Reflections* explored the concept of a "profane illumination" – a possibility of profound and enlightening experiences that can be had in the everyday environment (Skoller, 2005, p. xviii). John Joseph McCole claims that "Like religious illuminations, it suggests the sudden insight that reveals the true face of worldly affairs. Yet profane illumination . . . [is] to be 'materialistic', or 'anthropological'. There could be no recourse to an outside standpoint such as the authority of revelation . . . 'profane' means not only 'worldly' but 'mundane'. Not just the nature of the illumination but its objects as well would have to be profane" (McCole, 1993, p. 227).

Structural Film

There are many definitions of structural film, including the two best-known: by Peter Gidal (*Anthology of Structural Film*, 1976) and by P. Adams Sitney (*Visionary Film*, 1974). However, I would like to bring to the fore the definition given by Ryszard Kluszczyński in his paper *Audio-Visual Labyrinth. Non-Linear Discourses in Linear Media*, in which he not only reflects on the structural film but puts it in the context of other types of experimental films, shedding light on their relation. Kluszczyński (1997, p. 3) claims that structural film "break[s] down and abandon[s] the narrative structures, focusing the audience's reaction on the ontological representation of the cinema, analysing film as a medium. The processes take place against the background of conceptual art.

Symbol

Gilbert Durand claims that the notion of "symbol" is close to the notion of "sign". However, in the case of signs "the signified can be present or verified. . . . When the signified cannot be represented in any way and the signifier refers only to the sense and not to the physical object, then we are dealing with symbol" (Durand, 1986, pp. 21-22). Durand (ibid., p. 23) also evokes Andre Lalande's claim that "symbol is every specific sign which evokes, through the natural relationship, something absent or alluding perception". Many researchers draw attention to the fact that most symbols can be understood only within a specific cultural context.[22]

Thing

The difference between an object and a thing was reflected upon by Martin Heidegger; later Bill Brown developed this idea in his essay *Thing Theory* published in *Critical Inquiry* in 2001. He argues there that things are unspecific while objects are specific, things are irreducible to objects, while objects are reducible to things (Brown, 2001, p. 3). In his opinion we can "look through objects", because, thanks to their specificity, they disclose information, and so we

[22] E.g. see Fridman, 2004, p. 161.

can use them as facts. We cannot however “look through a thing” because a thing carries a sense of ambiguity within itself (ibid. p. 4)

Chapter 1.

Pharmacy by Franciszka and Stefan Themersons, and *Still Life* and *Portrait* by Jerzy Nowosielski: Between the Internal Glow and the Shadow of Spirit

The first part of this chapter 'Pre-WW2 Era and the Themersons', is devoted to the historical image of the era of Stefan and Franciszka Themerson. I illuminate the historical and political situation in which they lived and analyse some of the main intellectual and artistic ideas existing in those days and influencing their work. Then, in the poetic fragment 'Three images: *Pharmacy* by the Themersons, *Still Life* by Nowosielski, *Kitchen Still Life* by Rojkowska', I introduce the three above-mentioned works which are analysed in this chapter, exploring their similar ambience. 'Post-WW2 Era and Nowosielski' brings the figure of Jerzy Nowosielski to the fore, presents his roots, cultural background and influences, as well as sheds light on the historical and political atmosphere of post-WW2 Poland, when Nowosielski was starting his career. The section 'Magic, Art, Invisible Realms and Shadow' delves into the history of shadow theatre, examining the relations between shadow and the realm of magic, with the help of James Brandon's book *Theatre in South East Asia* (1974). With this knowledge I look at *Pharmacy* to discover the roots of the Themersons' inspirations: animistic beliefs, Symbolist and Romantic European tradition and Jean Epstein's notion of photogénie. Then I find and demonstrate those threads in Nowosieski's works and thoughts which, against the popular idea of his work, can be seen as carrying elements of magic, occultism and non-Christian spiritualism. In the section 'Space' I observe a specific way in which cast shadows build depth in *Pharmacy* and in the two works of Nowosielski analysed here, and point to significant similarities between them. However, the fact that

Pharmacy and Nowosielski's paintings were executed in different media stresses their ontological difference. I ponder upon indexical character of shadow in *Pharmacy* and the representational character of its creative rendering in Nowosielski's work. This thread is followed and deepened in the section 'Source of Light', in which I reflect on the fact that light in Nowosielski's works – although static and representational – is sometimes described as "pulsating" and bringing "life" to the image. This resonates with the effect achieved by the movement of the source of light in *Pharmacy*. Characteristically, the source of light in both works seems to be placed inside the objects, which results in the effect of "internal glow" of the images. The difference in medium underlines the difference between representation and presentation. This finally leads me to the realization that through this specific way of showing reality both the Themersons and Nowosielski attempt to express a feeling of a **deeper structure of the world** (which is also the title of the last section).The Themersons do it by evoking a scientific vision of the world, while for Nowosielski this deeper structure refers to invisible spiritual dimensions.

Pre-WW2 Era and the Themersons

The Themersons lived in the times which could be called "the age of utopias".[23] The beginning of the 20th century experienced an unprecedented development of science and technology, which encouraged the ideas of a new beginning for humanity and attempts to break with the past. This situation led to the creation of utopian political and social concepts resulting in the rise of communism and fascism. Art movements not only reflected the atmosphere of the epoch, but often almost prophetically anticipated the emergence of these systems.[24] Daniel Herwitz notes that "the avant-garde position of [modern art] movements, their utopian desires to bring about a new and perfect world order by erasing excrescences of the European past . . . by starting from scratch and building this new future,

[23] Richard Rinehart (2020, p. 2) claims that what defines utopia is the break with the past civilization: "Modernism created at least two breaks of this sort . . .. First, modernism constituted a break with pre-industrial, pre-Enlightenment, agrarian societies that preceded it and second modernism, in the form of cultural avant-gardes attempted to break with bourgeois society in its own time; both breaks sought to create a more ideal society".

[24] For example, Futurism is seen as anticipating and even encouraging the rise of fascism: "While Futurism helped define twentieth century modernism, it's glorification of violence, war, and it's call for a new ordering of society positioned it as a building block for fascism" (Rinehart, 2020, p. 4).

all of this demanded the search for a theory about what the new utopian world would be like and how the artwork . . . would play a crucial role in stimulating the prospect of this new world order" (Herwitz, 1993, p. 33). This fascination with the power of the human mind, machine and technology promoted a materialist attitude. In this atmosphere, some groups of artists sought rescue from the soulless reality in spiritualism[25]. Thus, for example, Wassily Kandinsky believed that materialism brought by modernity is harmful for the human soul and creates a necessity for a "greater spiritual regeneration, which could only happen through art". Art, he claimed, could have a "widespread and prophetic" effect (Kuc, 2016, pp. 63-64). The approach of other artists resonated with this: Piet Mondrian, initiating Neoplasticism, was looking for the "spiritual world of a perfect cosmic harmony" (Hammer and Rothstein, 2013, p. 432) based on a balance between opposite forces. This was expressed visually in the vertical and horizontal lines (Veen, 2017). However, as these new ideas brought new ways of expression, far from the traditional ones and often rooted in other than European cultures, there was a growing need for a return to well-known, classical aesthetics, which would bring back the feeling of stability and proven values. This Return to Order – as it was termed – became especially strong after WW1.[26]

At the same time, on the wave of new technologies in the 1920s and 1930s, many artists became fascinated with the new phenomenon of film and the opportunities it opened. Within this group there were painters who became interested in the idea of enhancing their

[25] The notion "spiritualism" refers here to the attitude which stands in opposition to materialism. In art it is frequently used to describe the desire to express things which elude visibility. In his *Cinema1: The Movement Image* Deleuze (1986, p. 84) says that "It is through the spirit that man goes beyond the limits of perception", while André Bazin mentions two ambitions in art: "one, primarily aesthetic, namely the expression of spiritual reality wherein the symbol transcended its model; the other, purely psychological, namely to duplicate the world outside" (Bazin, 1960, p. 6).

[26] Return to Order – a term coined by Jean Cocteau, meant the return to the France's classical past. As a style it started after WW1 and spread to Italy and other European countries. It became visible even in the works of such avant-garde artists like Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. Classical models drawing on the tradition of ancient Rome, which glorified the power of the Empire and the ruler, later became attractive for the totalitarian systems arising at that time in Europe. Thus, calling for the "purification of art" from all excesses, classical models were embraced quickly by fascism in the form of Nazi art, and later – after WW2, by communism, demanding art which would be realistic in form and socialist in content. In Poland Socialist Realism became an official style in 1947, after the speech of the first secretary of the communist party Bolesław Bierut made on the occasion of the opening of the radio station in Wroclaw (Whitam, 2013, p. 101, Jones, 2013, p. 187, Meecham and Sheldon, 2000, p. 111, Leśniewski, 2017, p. 56).

static work with movement, inaugurating a new perspective within visual arts.[27] In 1919 Hans Richter and Viking Eggeling made a film composed of their drawings (Kuc and O'Pray, 2014, pp. 44-45) and in 1924 Fernand Léger created a filmic work, *Ballet Mécanique*, in cooperation with Dudley Murphy, George Antheil and Man Ray. In Germany, a group of artists engaged in the search for the relationship between the moving image and musical rhythm, developed absolute (abstract) cinema[28] (Kuc, 2016, pp. 19-21). A few years later, Kazimir Malevich, after watching Hans Richter's *Rhythm* series, embarked on the project to produce a film in co-operation with the German artist. The project had never been completed but the series of Malevich's drawings, a script for the film and correspondence between the artists prove this attempt (Tupitsyn, 2002, pp. 57-57). In Poland, early avant-garde films were strongly influenced by the Constructivist ideas promoted by such artists as Władysław Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro. However, graphic abstract cinema failed to earn much interest, especially that in the face of the growing fascism in the early 1930s even German artists involved in the development of absolute cinema abandoned these ideas and turned to social and political subjects (Rees, 1993, p. 87). In this situation, the young Themersons, living in Warsaw,[29] created their first films. Although they were linked to, or at least aware of various avant-garde groups active at that time in Warsaw, they didn't belong to any of them, but rather freely moved around various movements, utilizing them for their needs.[30] Like the Impressionists, the Themersons employed a subjective and poetic

[27] For example, Kandinsky and Arnold Schönberg developed a concept for the filmic compositions: *Der gelbe Klang* (1911, Kandinsky), and *Die glückliche Hand* (1913, Schönberg), whilst Léopold Survage created a series of drawings for the first graphic movie *Le Rythme Coloré,* 1914, which unfortunately was never completed because of the outbreak of the war (Kuc and O'Pray, 2014, pp. 44-45).

[28] German abstract cinema was developed by Viking Eggeling, Hans Richter, Walter Ruttman and Oskar Fischinger.

[29] Early Polish avant-garde was strongly influenced by the specific political and historical situation of the country. From 1795 until 1918 Poland was partitioned between Prussia, Austria and Russia, and so did not exist as a state. Thus, during that time Polish art and culture wasn't homogenous and developed differently in each of these states. For that reason, there wasn't any single avant-garde city centre in Poland but each of these regions had their own "cultural heart" influenced by different traditions. Kraków – home of the first Polish artists' films and first Polish modern movements such as Formism, Expressionism and Futurism — was in the Austrian Empire and had a strong connection with Vienna, Poznań – with Berlin, while Warsaw and Łódź were under the influence of Russia. Łódź also had an artistically active Jewish minority. Moreover, Warsaw played the role of a bridge between the East (Russia) and West (France and Germany), and a point of convergence for all the above-mentioned avant-garde ideas (Kuc, 2016, pp. 24-25).

[30] The comment of Rees on their film *Europa* created in 1932 can serve as a very good explanation for this attitude. In his words, *Europa* "is a combination of Constructivist form and Dadaist iconoclasm with Surrealist irony" (Rees, 1993, p. 91).

approach to filmmaking,[31] often using musically derived narrative structures. The Themersons were typical of the avant-garde artists in the way that they fused various types of media into their film-work, from poetry to painting and photography (Kuc, 2016, pp. 117-118).

Three images: *Pharmacy* by the Themersons, *Still Life* by Nowosielski, *Kitchen Still Life* by Rojkowska

In the creative text below (which is differentiated from the academic writing by the contrasting font used), I compare the works analysed in this chapter, trying to discern the features they share. In the first paragraph, based on *Pharmacy,* I show shadows as animated entities endowed with life resembling that of living organisms. To understand it better, I recommend to watch the film while reading this fragment. The reflection of Stefan Themerson on photogram as an independent reality accompanies it. The second paragraph refers to my work *Kitchen Still Life.* I advise to watch my film at this point. The numbers in the round brackets that follow the work's title indicate the exact fragment of the film referring to the given paragraph. In it I reflect on the realm of shadows drawing attention to the richness of their tones, subtle colours and to the variety of their density. I think of it as of the realm of matter converted into light and shadow governed by rules different to the ones we know in everyday reality. In the third part I deliberate on the phenomenon of light making the impression of being solid and giving shape to matter which, in the painting *Still Life* by Jerzy Nowosielski, seems to be subservient to light. These three texts complement each other and show light and shadow as an independent reality attached to matter, a different version of matter which reveals its unknown, mysterious nature.

[31] Fil Ieropulos (2008) claims that "Germaine Dulac, Henri Chomette and Louis Delluc tried to establish the notion of pure cinema (cinéma-pur) and found the poetic analogy useful to strengthen their position". To explain what "poetic approach to filmmaking" meant for the Impressionists, he draws from McCreary's work: "When Delluc referred to film as . . . 'visual poetry' he was . . . invoking . . . the creative act of isolating and stylizing the significant detail" (pp. 3-4). On the other hand, he mentions Rees' argument: "What really makes it [a film] a poem . . . is its stress on rhythm as an aspect of form, expressed both in variable shooting speeds and in the pace of cutting" (ibid., p. 4). Hence for the Impressionists the notion of the "poetic" was primarily useful as a stress on rhythm as an aspect of form (ibid., p. 5).

Pharmacy (00:56 – 1:16)

What we see is a graphic, flat, monochrome composition: circles, cones, stripes, dots arranged in perfect harmony; the shapes suggest objects looked at from underneath, yet without giving any sense of certainty. Dispersed shadows make the spatial entities appear flat, whereas the flat elements suddenly earn volume and seem to be three-dimensional. Dark, grey tones brighten up, giving the whole image a less dramatic appearance. Some elements only now emerge from darkness and become visible. The source of light comes closer and changes direction, causing long shadows to dance around their stable feet attached to the ground like treetops moved by violent gusts of wind. Rhythmical movements of light reveal unexpected abilities of objects. They move, pulsate, shrink and expand rapidly, take shape and dissolve into abstract spots.

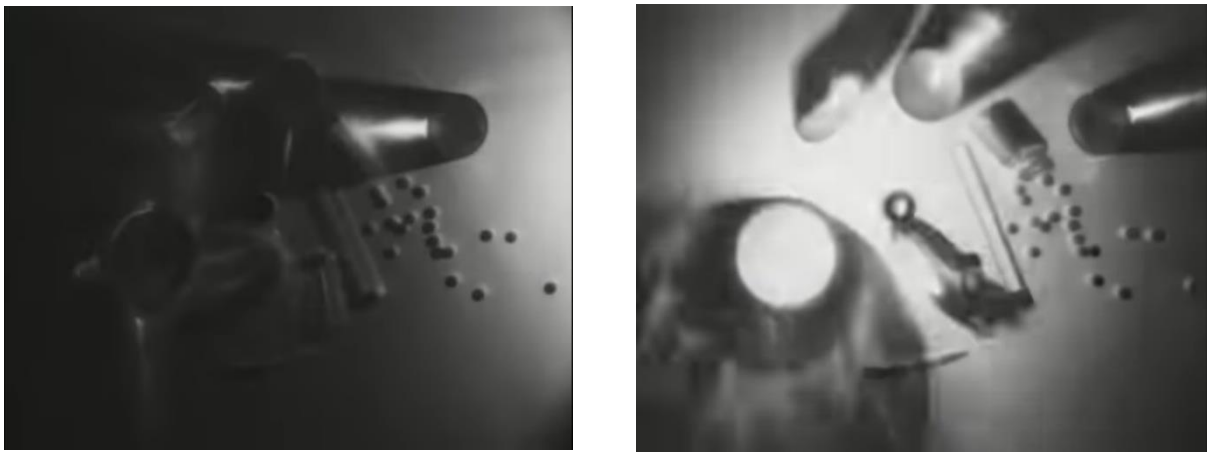

Fig. 1 B. Checevsky's remake of the Themersons' *Pharmacy* (2001).

"You are going to call it an abstract picture. And it isn't. It is something unique. It is a photogram. It doesn't represent anything. It doesn't abstract anything from anything. It is just what it is. It is reality itself" (S. Themerson, after: Majewski, 2013, p. 74).

Kitchen Still Life (00:00 – 00:40) https://vimeo.com/409775412

A table with a cup and a pot cropped by the frame. Double shadows cast on the wall in a larger number than objects visible in the picture reveal other objects, hidden behind the

frame. Shadows, although deprived of the details characteristic of the objects, divulge their density. Some of them seem to be solid and black, while others – soaked with light. Some of them obscure light, while others let it through. In tone and temperature they range from dense, dark grey through bright blueish to beige. The double image of shadows draws two different planes of perspective. Though unlike the Renaissance perspective, or optical illusion of convergence, these ones don't create an illusion of three-dimensionality. They are unstable, flickering and revealing a very dissimilar space-time continuum, related not to the material world but to the world of light. It uncovers different rules and paradigms governing the realm of light, of which the human eye cannot make any sense. In this juxtaposition a rare phenomenon takes place when the material reality steps back and helps us to see its substance translated into light and shadow. When seen as a function of light and energy, matter suddenly stops being unanimated and dull. It becomes alive.

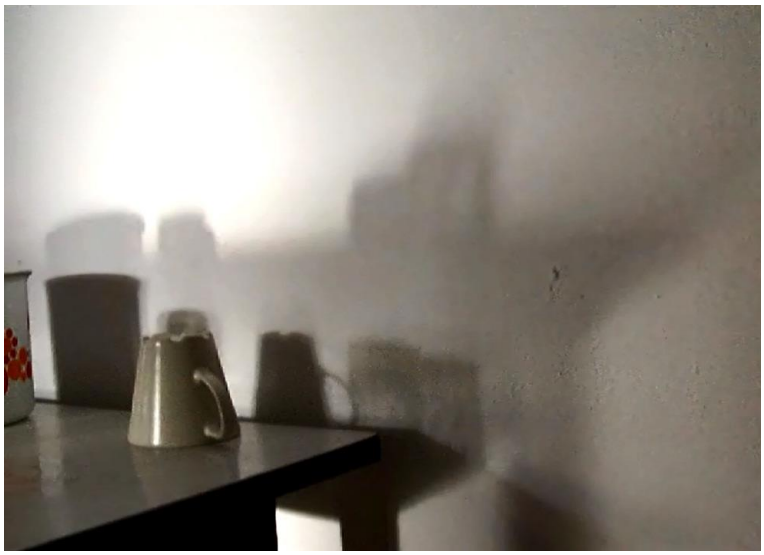

Fig. 2 J. Rojkowska, *Kitchen Still Life* (2011)

Still-life

Shadows and lights created by brighter and darker spots of colour form shapes. "Weights and dimensions disappear, while golden rays penetrate everything ... spiritualizing the body" (Adamska, 2012, p. 83). Spots of reflected light in the picture seem to be the most tangible and solid and thus assume the most distinct and shapely appearance. Matter, although it does not exist as a visible element, gives shape to light and helps us to see it as a THING.[32] "Everything that exists – all being – is light. What is not light, is not real, as . . . everything that exists is endowed with the energy of life" (ibid. p. 85)[33]. The more intense light is, the more substantial it becomes. Whereas the background is a shapeless, soft, undefined abstraction, "murky water" through which light cannot penetrate to give away any detail. "Minute differences within areas of colour produce subtle vibration of the surface, lit by the streaks of subdued glow. . . The whole composition is based on a certain rhythm" (Zwolińska, 2003, p. 4).

Fig. 3 J. Nowosielski, *Still Life* (1986[34]) and *Portrait* (1978[35])

[32] The notion of a "thing" is related to the notion of a "figure". The difference between those two hinges on their relation to time. The definition of the figure (see p. 61) stresses the process of becoming – thus, it refers to the changes taking place in time, while the definition of a thing stresses its static character. For that reason, I decided to apply the notion of a thing to the static medium such as painting, while the notion of a figure – to the temporal medium of film.

[33] His words resonate with the claims expressed by John S. Eriugena: "All things that are, are light". Eriugena *Expositiones in Ierarchiam Coelestem*, I 76-77 (Olejniczak-Lobsien, 2010, p. 15).

[34] Source: Art (2020).

Post-WW2 Era and Nowosielski

The Themersons and Nowosielski lived in different epochs, yet their lives overlap in terms of the time frame and socio-political situation. When *Pharmacy* was created, Nowosielski[36]was already seven years old. However, if the Themersons enjoyed the freedom of experimenting with new media in pre-WW2 Poland,[37] Nowosielski started his career when communism was tightening its grip. Soon figurative imagery became the obligatory style of artistic expression. The second wave of Return to Order was rolling through Eastern Europe in the form of Socialist Realism. Nowosielski, influenced by his early experience as an icon painter, started his artistic career with figurative images. They gradually evolved thanks to his interest in lyrical Geometric Abstraction and Surrealism.[38] The evolution in his work was also a result of political changes, and so for example, in the 1950s, on the wave of Socialist Realism the slender female figures of his earlier works were replaced by strong silhouettes of female workers. Abstract geometric images occurred in his practice occasionally, but, interestingly, they were triggered, as he claims, not by intellectual impulses but by a spiritual state which carried within itself a specific concept of painting. This spiritual state in

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[35] Source: Artnet (n.d.).

[36] a) Nowosielski was brought up at the intersection of two cultures: Eastern and Western. His mother was Polish with German roots, his father was Lemko (an ethnic group related to Ukrainians). As a teenager, he travelled to the Ukrainian Museum in Lvov, which boasts a very rich collection of icons. Thinking back, he claimed that every painting he had produced during his life was defined by this first meeting in the museum in Lvov (Kitowska-Łysiak, 2012). He commenced his studies during WW2, in 1940, at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Kraków. The school, however, got closed two years later, and to avoid being deported to Nazi Germany as a forced labourer, he joined the Orthodox monastery in St. John The Baptist Lavra in Lvov. There he learned the art of icon-writing, yet even this place did not protect him from the traumatic experience of the war. During a few months' long stay there he became a witness to the liquidation of the Jewish ghetto in Lvov, which is regarded as one of the most brutal slaughters in WW2. This brought about religious doubts which led to a decade of atheism and alcoholism resulting in violence.
b) He resumed his studies in 1945, and later worked as an assistant to prof. Tadeusz Kantor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków. He quit this job in 1950, when Kantor was sacked for not adhering to the requirements of Socialist Realism. As Nowosielski's wife got a job as a theatrical production designer, they moved to Łódź. There he worked as an art director for the General Management of Puppet Theatres and a contributor to the Puppet Theatre magazine (he published articles and illustrations, also designs of puppets). Although his work is mainly figurative and develops around the subject of a female figure, the influence of Surrealism, Cubism and lyrical Geometric Abstraction is noticeable. Regarded as one of the most original and influential artists of Polish 20th-century art scene and a prominent Orthodox theologist, he produced a vast number of icons, but also – on the other side of the spectrum – erotically bold nudes and scenes of sadistic rituals. He claimed that his work "reflects the struggle between an angel and a devil in a man" (Kitowska-Łysiak, 2012, Ciosek, 2018).

[37] See fn. 29.

[38] Throughout his career he was so strongly influenced by the iconic paradigm of painting that even his portraits and nudes ultimately became associated with it (Kitowska-Łysiak, 2012).

conjunction with automatic drawing resulted in abstract works.[39] Thus, according to the artist, his abstractions are the record of a direct contact with the world of subtle entities, namely, angels (Porębski, 2003, pp. 116-117).[40] He calls them "angel's icons" (ibid. p. 117). In the terms of form, abstraction brought to his figurative painting the flattening of space and the freshening up and brightening of colours (Kitowska-Łysiak, 2012). The flatness of abstract images and the shallow depth of the icon influenced also the relation between light and space and defined the role of light in his images.[41] Already in his early paintings from the turn of the 1940s one can observe pure colours, which give the impression of an internal light. "The dark outline of figures juxtaposed with luminescent colour, whose intensity brings out the internal glow of the form, produce the illusion of a space transcending the surface of the canvas, going beyond 'the visible' and opening the door to the extrasensory experience" (ibid.). Because of the specific use of light, many of Nowosielski's works come visually close to film and photography, with some of them strongly resembling photograms.[42] It is not surprising, considering that he drew his inspirations from the Byzantine icon. The Byzantine icon and shadow theatre are probably the only ancient techniques which use real light to create an image. In the case of the icon, golden background brings real light into play by reflecting it. However, in the icon, the real shadow, which appears in shadow theatre, is rendered by paint. It occurs there as a flat, dark silhouette of a body, on top of which brighter spots of colour are placed to render the detail.

[39] The notion of automatism originates from the psychology and psychiatry, where it is used to denote a type of behaviour dissociated from conscious reflection. This term was adopted by Surrealism, Dada and some form of abstraction at the beginning of the 20th century and refers to the use of the subconscious mind in the creation of an artwork or else indicates a chance character of the work. (Guter, 2010, p. 25, Danto, 1999, p. 28). However, automatism in Nowosielski's work, apart from the above influences, can be seen as having roots in occultism because of its being a result of the communication with the realm of spirits.

[40] This contact with spirits through automatic drawing brings his practice close not only to occultism but also to the animistic performances of the shadow-theatre, which I discuss later in this chapter in relation to *Pharmacy*. This, not very often explored thread of Nowosielski's practice, uncovers yet another, deeper confluence between his work and the Themersons' film.

[41] Initially, his compositions were close to the poetics of Mondrian, while in his last period they approached the monochromes of Rothko (Kitowska-Łysiak 2012). Interestingly, Rothko's works have also been known for their "internal glow" which, as some critics suggest, indicates an inspiration with the TV screen (Howard, 2015, Hilton, 1998).

[42] In a way, the icon can be seen as being akin not only to the photogram, but also to film. Although it is a static medium, time quite frequently features in the icon in the form of a border with small pictures running around the main one located in the centre. The pictures in the border usually illustrate Biblical scenes or the scenes from the life of a saint, resembling – to employ the language of film production – a storyboard. Thus, the icon can be seen as a light-and-shadow technique with a timeline as its integral part. Nowosielski's works, although maintain the "light-and-shadow" paradigm of the icon, in most cases have lost the relation to time. Also, in some cases in his works, light in the background is replaced by darkness, marking even more deeply their departure from the iconic paradigm and placing it close to pagan and magic iconography.

In effect, the body seems to be lit from within. This, on the one hand, resonates with the theological idea of saints reflecting the light of God, on the other hand, it brings the icon visually close to the slide.

Zwolińska (2003) claims that "Even if dark, [Nowosielski's] paintings are woven with light, like a cinematic image or a slide" (p. 4), whilst the presence of rhythm draws yet another parallel between them and modernist films.[43] The closeness between Nowosielski's painting and film can be understood better if we evoke the attitude of some critics like Ian Christie, who challenges the traditional position that avant-garde films "can only be evaluated in terms of films achieved, or preserved, or indeed only by films per se" (Kuc, 2016, pp. 60-61), accepting the idea of cinema by other means. Pavle Levi's voice parallels the above one, mentioning such forms as: written cinema, scripts, photocollages, drawings, paintings and cine-poems as an important part of avant-garde film history (ibid., p. 61).[44]

Magic, Art, Invisible Realms and Shadow

For the Themersons, the elusiveness and volatility of shadow became a source of its visual attractiveness and inspired them to go even further than those artists who used photograms as still images.[45] Drastic changes of mood, shape and density as well as movement caused by the changes of the position of the light source replace action and plot – the two elements of film which usually attract attention. They were rejected by the Themersons in favour of a different kind of action: a shadow-and-light performance, an animistic "dance" produced by unanimated objects. This ability of an artwork to open our

[43] For the comparison between the rhythm in the temporal media and static art see Chapter 2, fn. 100.
[44] Nowosielski's paintings thus, although not claiming any official relation to film, constitute an interesting case which encourages the juxtaposition with the light-based medium like cinegram (in other words: photogram in motion). There are, however, significant differences between a cinegram and a painting to consider, which I will develop further in the later part of this work. For the purpose of this thesis, I would like to limit my reflection to the differences between the material trace of shadow which cinegram offers, and a painterly representation of it.
[45] *Le Retour à la raison* by Man Ray can serve as an example of an experimental film based on shadow. Also, Christian Schad worked with photograms extensively using them as a still work. Kuc notes that "the film [*Pharmacy*] also seems to have been reminiscent of some of the photomontages of Moholy-Nagy, whose 1930 film *Lightplay: Black-White-Grey*, influenced Stefan Themerson's experiments with photograms. Constructed within experimental Bauhaus circle, *Lightplay*, a semi-abstract film, constituted an extensive experiment with light. Moholy-Nagy was concerned with shadows, light and close-ups of details, and employed positive and negative images, fades, prismatic splintering of the image, dissolves, reflections, and distortions" (Kuc, 2016, pp. 120-121).

vision to the invisible life of things was noticed also by Nowosielski, who believed that "art acquaints us with the latent current of life and in that sense, it resembles magic activities" (Zwolińska, 2003, p. 3). The interest in the ability of the shadow-and-light performance (materialized in a photogram) to take vision beyond the visible, present in Nowosielski's and the Themersons' works, can be traced back to the beginning of human culture. Rees believes that Stefan Themerson was particularly fascinated with them, finding their origins "in Bushmen legends, in Eskimo poems, in Indian languages that used the same word for 'shadow, soul, echo and picture'" (Rees, 1993, p. 94). This resonates with the modernist tendency to research the inspirations and incorporate the traditions of other cultures into modern art. And yet, animistic tendencies can be found much closer to the Themersons' circle. This sort of inspirations already could be spotted in the films of Feliks Kuczkowski, a Polish filmmaker, predecessor of the Themersons,[46] and in the writing of Karol Irzykowski, one of the most prominent Polish art critics of the pre-war era. In his *Dziesiąta muza (The Tenth Muse*) published in 1924 Irzykowski depicts the elements as assuming human-like forms (Kuc, 2016, p. 61).[47] This scenario shows the influence of Arnold Bocklin's Symbolist paintings and Irzykowski's acquaintance with the writings of Epstein, whose critical texts were very popular in Poland in those days (ibid. p. 83). These Romantic and Symbolist tendencies can be found also in the Themersons' *Pharmacy.* Kuc comments on the film: "The way objects and body parts are filmed . . . is reminiscent of Epstein's notion of photogénie. Epstein believed that cinema operated with an animistic language, and for him, animism dramatized objects, thus giving them new meanings. Epstein represented objects as if they were characters in their own right" (ibid. p. 118).

To understand animism better, let me quote James Brandon, who claims that an animist believes not only in the spirits residing in unanimated nature, but also in "the existence of extraordinarily important 'magic power' which a person can gain control over" (Brandon, 1974, p. 10). He quotes Frits A. Wagner, who says that "[the] control over *mana* [magic power] and influence upon it require an external sign . . . 'magic ritual' . . . those

[46] These ideas found its way to the Polish early films of Feliks Kuczkowski – the first Polish avant-garde filmmaker. They were permeated with visionary, mystical qualities linked to Romanticism and Symbolism (Kuc, 2016, pp. 82-83). The Themersons were familiar with Kuczkowski's oeuvre (whose *Rocks* is particularly endowed with animistic features), as well as with Irzykowski's writing.

[47] In his short scenario *Miłość żywiołów* (*The Love the Elements*, 1916-1917) he writes: "One of the stones slowly becomes animate. It is transformed strangely. Something like a face and hands emerge" (Kuc, 2016, p. 83).

expressions of men who think and act magically and which can be termed 'artistic expressions' were originally firmly rooted in magic ritual" (ibid.). Brandon also mentions the opinion of Dutch scholar Rassers that "Javanese . . . shadow drama developed out of prehistoric, animistic rituals in which ancestors of the tribe were contacted through the medium of shadow figures" (ibid.). Brandon argues that "The shadows represent the spirits of tribal ancestors, and by producing the shadows on the screen the priest-puppeteer enables the living to communicate with their magically endowed ancestors" (ibid. pp. 42-43).

Visual and intellectual links to an animistic shadow performance are also present, although less obviously than in *Pharmacy*, in Nowosielski's work. One who is well acquainted with his narration developed around his practice will easily notice that despite the domination of theological language, the notion of "magic" is used repeatedly.[48] The method of "automatic drawing", mentioned earlier, which is driven, as he claims, by a direct contact with subtle entities, and the darkness of some of his works place them in an ambivalent position, where the purely iconic tradition can be questioned. These doubts grow stronger if we consider a wide array of his works; in the early ones, female figures are often shown taking part in some sadistic rituals, whereas in his later period there are frequent images of Black women. To prove my point, let us consider *Portrait* from 1978 (p. 33). The face with empty eye sockets and an open mouth, in which the golden iconic background of eternal light is replaced by darkness, resembles rather an African mask than an icon. This suggests Nowosielski's openness to the influences going beyond Christian tradition and placing his practice close to pagan performances, in which shadow, light, the world of spirits and magic rituals confluence in the creation of an artwork.

Space, Shadow and Object

Similarly as in Nowosielski's paintings, in which he "tries to render the space in such a way that it would be free from the 3D perspective" (Adamska, 2012, p. 99), Themersons' *Pharmacy* creates its own space. In a photogram shadow does not serve illusionistic

[48] "The property of an icon is to bring the elements of subtle reality to the level of empirical reality . . . and this is the core of 'quasi magic' performed by the icon painter" (Adamska, 2012, p. 99).

representation. Stefan Themerson's definition of a photogram (see p. 31) "contains the much-discussed modernist discovery of the reality of a medium and material;[49] on the other hand, we are confronted with the rejection of the dualism of 'perception' and 'representation'" (Majewski, 2013, p. 74). Stefan Themerson realized that this "independent reality" of shadows created a different relationship to the object, and it could not be considered in the same way as it had been since the Renaissance, when the shadow played a subordinate role to the object, serving the illusion of three-dimensionality. The cinegram, being a material trace of a shadow left on a filmstrip, sets shadows free from their subservience to the illusionistic demands, maintaining, however, their indexical character. In *Pharmacy* objects which cast shadows are not seen in the film. They are absent in the picture.[50] Visually, it creates the situation where shadows seem to be disconnected, independent from matter, which strengthens their ghostly character. For the issue of their indexicality, this situation broadens the frame of reference. Thus, from the materialist perspective, the shadows in *Pharmacy* point out to the presence of objects (invisible in the frame) and to their material trace left on the filmstrip, but if we adopt the animistic perspective, a shadow without its material counterpart can be seen as a visualisation of a spirit.

Space in *Pharmacy* in a way parallels the reflection on Nowosielski's work, whose words on the icon can be easily referred to the photogram as well: "The icon is . . . totally subordinated to the flat surface of a wooden board or a wall, which excludes emptiness" (Adamska, 2012, p. 81). He continues further: "The icon . . . lacks the third dimension, chiaroscuro and perspective" (ibid., p. 82). Although Nowosielski applies the iconic paradigm, he rejects the perspective used in it as unnecessarily yielding to a certain ideology. He rejects equally the Renaissance and iconic perspective, claiming that reverse perspective can lead to determinism,[51] while "an icon, similarly as any good painting, should

[49] The discussion on the reality of medium and material surfaced also in the writing of Malevich and the notion of the "new realism" related to his Suprematist works.

[50] In *Pharmacy* objects were placed on a glass table covered with paper and filmed from underneath while the source of light was placed above them. Thus, the shadows were visible for the camera, whereas objects were hidden from its view.

[51] Determinism, in the broadest understanding of the term, is a philosophical idea holding that "every event . . . in the world has a definite and necessary cause such that it could not have been otherwise" (Belo, 2007, p. 2). However, in this context it can be understood as an accepted, repeatable scheme of showing space, which does not allow a creative approach.

not carry a paradigm of certain optics, but should be free from the rules of any optics". [52] Thus, these three features mentioned above (a lack of the illusionistic perspective, chiaroscuro and the third dimension) play a crucial role in both *Pharmacy* and Nowosielski's work. In Nowosielski, however, shadow does not exist in the same way as it does in *Pharmacy*. It is present indirectly, through the iconic paradigm of showing figures as flat, dark silhouettes, which relates his work to the ancient tradition of painting based on the tracing of the outline of the cast shadow.[53] This places the figures in Nowosielski's images in the ambiguous position of being a combination between objects and their shadows. What is more, the object has been reduced to the scarce details created by brighter sparks filling a dark silhouette. Although the material world is in the centre of Nowosielski's interest, he shows it as having a double nature: physical and spiritual. The physical (material) nature is shown as a function of light, while the spiritual one – as a shadow.[54] And so, his world of matter resembles the weightless realm of shadows in *Pharmacy.*

Light Source

In *Pharmacy* the source of light moves around like the sun in the sky during its daily journey. It makes the shadows of objects short and sharp and reveals their hidden features. The interior of a glass starts to emanate laser-like beams of light, which fade into the darkness a moment later. Other objects accompanied by their wandering shadows create an unusual landscape. From being dead things (unanimated matter), a result of human industrial activity, they transform into elements of nature, "ostensibly or descriptively, referencing the biblical myth of creation" (Polit, 2013, p. 32). Pawel Florensky uses the Medieval metaphysics of light[55] to express the relation between matter and light: "All that exists, all

[52] He uses neither the Renaissance perspective, nor the iconic ones (i.e. reverse, or with many vanishing points), as they refer to the two different realities: natural and supernatural, and express opposite visions of the world. See Adamska, 2012, p. 99.

[53] See 'Glossary': myth of the beginning of arts.

[54] Thus, his paintings are an expression of the Neoplatonic views on the structure of the material world. See 'Glossary': Medieval metaphysics of light. This operation has been used traditionally in the icon.

[55] See 'Glossary': Medieval metaphysics of light.

being is light. What is not light, doesn't consist of reality, as . . . everything is endowed with the energy of acting" (Adamska, 2012, p. 85).[56]

Stefan Themerson's description of the process of creating a cinegram mentions the movement of the light-source, which brings the image to life:

> *Your light source has to be active, - it isn't it that 'paints' the picture. You can see a naked bulb, or a torch, or a candle, or a lit match, you can move it and observe the dance of the dark shadows . . . you can caress with it three-dimensional objects to make their shadows turn round, and elongate, and shrink. . . . We (Franciszka and I) decided to record the whole process as it takes place in time, to make 'photograms in motion'* (Majewski, 2013, p. 75).

The movement of light, and how it brings life to objects is mentioned by Adamska when she discusses Nowosielski's icons, yet it is also true of his other paintings. "Pulsation of light gives life to an icon. The icon dies when the understanding of its internal light dies and when it gets replaced by chiaroscuro commonly used in painting . . . The source of light is placed not outside, but inside the icon, which makes it in a way absent because everything in the icon is bathed in light" (Adamska, 2012, p. 85). Thus, pulsating light is present both in *Pharmacy* and Nowosielski's works, although again their ontological relation to light is intrinsically different.

Pharmacy not only brings the material trace of a shadow (which has been mentioned before), but also, unlike a photogram or painting, with every screening, it stages the real phenomenon, rejecting "the dualism of 'perception' and 'representation'" (in Majewski's words). This constitutes the situation of presentation. As Heidegger claims, the presentation (Vorstellung) places an object before us, while representation (Darstellung) stages the unfolding of the proposition and is thus an exposition, an exposing of the positing process. Azade Seyhan develops further the notion of representation, saying that "representation always involves the duplication or presentation of an object or a concept by means of something that it is not, which also means that representation begins with the duplication or repetition of identity" (Miles, 2019). Since painting renders the illusion of light and shadow with the use of paint, the difference between the internal glow in Nowosielski's

[56] He paraphrases Eriugena's claim. See 'Glossary': Medieval metaphysics of light.

paintings and in *Pharmacy* hinges on the difference between the presentation and representation of light.

Deeper Structure of the World

The performance created by the shadows and light recorded on a filmstrip with the consistent exclusion of material reality makes *Pharmacy* unique, even in the Themersons' practice. While the photogram (popular at that time in the practice of other artists) was an inspiration and an important technique in the intellectual and visual research on light, this particular "photogram in motion" opened the Themersons' work to the multiplicity of possible readings. Their cinegrams can be seen as materialist abstractions, yet at the same time they are endowed with lyricism (Rees, 1993, p. 94) and bring animistic ideas to mind. Thus, *Pharmacy* allows metaphoric reading and allures with a hidden meaning. Rees (ibid. p. 98) describes it as a combination of highly visionary images with quasi-scientific effect achieved "by using the shadows and reflections of real forms". This, in turn, points to "an alchemical theme, the blend of science and lyric". This resonates with Nowosielski's belief that "the real duty of art is to deliver such a reading of the world which would give a sense of its deeper structure – a spiritual one" (Zwolińska, 2003, p. 3). For Stefan Themerson, who claims that "close-ups of objects imply that the camera lens, like a microscope, is more perceptive than the human eye" (Kuc, 2016, pp. 121-123),[57] this structure can be discovered by science.

Although very dissimilar at many levels, *Pharmacy* by the Themersons and Nowosielski's works take up the issue of light and shadow from the perspective of an independent reality. The Themersons' film develops around the issue of the real shadow while in Nowosielski's

[57] This was also the claim of the Russian Constructivist filmmaker Dziga Vertov. This scientific undertone in their thinking on film and the camera becomes more understandable if we consider that both Vertov and Stefan Themerson had a scientific background. The former was a biologist, while the latter studied physics, so both (along with other filmmakers) were quick to notice the role which film and the camera were yet to play in the world of science (Kuc, 2016, p. 122). The scientism of *Pharmacy*, however, doesn't end here. Kuc further cites Marcin Giżycki and Themerson himself, claiming that scientific experimental approach could be seen also in Themerson's attitude to the relationship between the image and music in their various works. Stefan Temerson commented on film: "We can create musical sounds which were not in nature before and we may create visual sensations which are nowhere but on the screen" (Kuc, 2016, pp. 128-129). In film, rhythm was the element connecting visual and musical sensations.

paintings analysed here it is the material world which is in the centre of attention. This material world, however, is seen as an amalgam of matter and spirit; it loses volume, detail and weight for the benefit of the reflection on its ontological nature. For the abovementioned artists the world is a multi-layered place, in which material reality is just a surface. They try to reach beyond, using the shadow to build a visual bridge between the spiritual and material worlds. Although in Nowosielski's work the issue of light and shadow is frequently linked to theological narration, while in the case of *Pharmacy* this sort of connection has never occurred, my studio work helped to find common ground for this juxtaposition and to reveal and explore those threads in Nowosielski's work which went beyond Christian ideas and reached the realm of magic. Thus, putting aside the differences, the words of Porębski (2003), who claimed that Nowosielski's work can be seen as evolving around "crucial issues like shaping the direction from the world to its real, ontological centre" (p. 115), fit very well as a summation of both analyzed works.

Review of Practice

In this section I deepen the reflection on these elements of my studio work which link it with works analyzed in the chapter, justifying the pertinence of using it as a research method in this research. The whole text is divided into five parts. In the first part, entitled 'Image', I use a poetic form to analyse the variety of shadows occurring in *Kitchen Still Life* and bring to attention numerous dimensions of reality introduced by shadows and sound. Their role is to divulge information about those things which elude visibility. In the part 'Space' I analyse the strangeness of the optical space created by cast shadows and filtows with the use of natural light in *Kitchen Still Life* and compare it with the dynamism of space in *Pharmacy* and the rejection of the iconic perspectives in Nowosielski's works. 'Plotinus' Idea of Various Orders of Creation' includes observation how the presence of filtows, shadows and objects in my work reflects Plotinus' idea of light creating various orders of invisible and visible worlds, and see this phenomenon as loosely connected to Neoplatonic ideas behind Nowosielski's thinking about light, while the bodiless, volatile shadows in *Pharmacy* as related to animistic beliefs. I examine here also how these two different artistic approaches

to shadow relate to my own attitude. What differentiates *Kitchen Still Life* from the works of the other artists analysed here is a specific movement of light. In *Pharmacy* light is manipulated and controlled by the artist, which links the performance to magic rituals, while natural light in *Kitchen Still Life*, although bringing movement to the world of shadows, is uncontrollable. Natural light enriches my reflection with an element of profane illumination, as understood by Walter Benjamin.[58] In Nowosielski's works, on the one hand epiphany encouraged him to look at the light–matter relationship from the perspective of Neoplatonic ideas, on the other, magic rituals influenced his thinking about the act of painting. These differences and convergencies are looked at in 'Movement, Light and Filtow'. In the last part, 'Shadow and Its Relation to Ontology', I study the differences in the object–shadow–light relationship brought by the images in *Pharmacy*, in Nowosielski's work, and in *Kitchen Still Life*. I also analyse ontological disparities carried by various media: a cinegram, painting and a digital work. The poetic description of the images from the discussed works, interwoven into the text, serves the purpose of drawing reader's attention to the aspects they share, which will be analysed in detail in the further part of the chapter. It would be advisable to watch a given work while reading passages that relate to it. The numbers in the round brackets that follow the work's title indicate the exact fragment of the film referring to the given paragraph.

Image

Kitchen Still Life (00:00 – 00:18)

A cup and a pot placed on the tabletop are cropped by the frame. Their shapes mingle with their shadows – dark, inert, flat doubles. Shadows, for their opacity and massiveness pretend to be material and solid. The cup's edge touches the outline of the pot and obscures it slightly. A dim, sharp-edged form of the pot is reflected in the surface of the table, together with the cup and a colourful crock standing nearby. This dark silhouette of the pot has got its twin growing from its top, as if it were another, soft and slightly translucent layer. Although the silhouette is completely flat, it does not divulge easily the

[58] See 'Glossary': profane illumination.

secret of its essence. Is it a material object, a recess in the wall, or a dark hole? Only when looking at its bottom, at the place where it touches the table, the secret is revealed to the confused eye. There, where one would expect to see a rounded bottom of the dark shape touching the surface of the table, it turns out to be cut off at an oblique angle by the black edge of the tabletop, revealing its flatness and immateriality. Turning the gaze to its companion – a dark silhouette of the cup standing nearby, one realises that these two belong to different orders of things. Because of their block-like density and because they have got their own doubles – brighter, softer and fainter, they pretend to be material. However, they are not. They multiply objects, they echo them, being echoed themselves in turn,[59] but they do not copy them. They slim down the original things and show them from a different angle.

Kitchen Still Life (00:18 – 1:03)

Thus, the number of flat, grey forms exceeds by far the number of objects. The temporarily immobile image is accompanied by off-screen sound. The multiplicity of the shadow-and-light entities and the sound suggest objects and bodies existing beyond the frame but hidden from our view. These material objects reveal their presence, form and density only through these immaterial apparitions. The constant sound of the camera working creates background noise. The source of light changes its intensity in tune with the sound of steps. One can reckon that a large shape, obscuring occasionally the source of light and causing these changes, indicates the presence of a person moving in the background. Another sound can be heard – the sound of a television programme or a radio show. This introduces yet another reality, another mode of action and space to *Kitchen Still Life*.[60] However, what captures the attention, creates movement and invites the viewer to a different realm, are shadows.

[59] As it has been mentioned in the first part of this chapter, in many cultures the word "shadow" is related to the words "soul", "echo" and "picture". See p. 37.

[60] Although the presence of three different planes of sound opens up the possibility of reflection, I do not intend to develop this thread as it is not relevant to the argument.

Fig. 4 J. Rojkowska, *Kitchen Still Life*

Space

Kitchen Still Life (00:00 - 00:18)

To the right of the dark thing recognized as a cup's shadow, two other shapes appear—with a slight beige glow and a faint light sipping through them, suggesting a relation to a different type of matter. Together with the cup's shadow, they create some strange, confusing depth. Unlike the typical optical depth, which brings warmer tones forward while making darker and cooler tones retreat, the blueish shape of the cup's handle placed on the top of a brownish brighter spot suggests its closeness. A cool, soft cloud rises above the first two dark shadows assuming a blurred form of a tabletop. The intensity of the tones within the cloud varies from almost black at the bottom to luminous in the middle, embracing the dark shadow of the cup from both sides and getting gradually darker towards the top. The mapping of the tones opposes any logic inscribed in the three-dimensional optics. Even more so, the optics changes as soon as the vision transfers from the objects to their shadowy doubles. In the world of matter, the brightest stripe of reflected light on the surface of a cup brings this fragment forward and, when paired with darker tones of the rest of its body, accentuates the cup's convexity, creating the illusion of volume. Whereas in the world of shadowy beings, the brightest, overexposed spots seem to be the most distant, while the darkest shadows are the closest to the viewer.

This different depth existing in the world of shadows was observed and used by Nowosielski. Although icons are based on perspective with many vanishing points or on reverse perspective, he rejected them, claiming that "the presence of light stresses the disruption in the space-time cycle" (Adamska, 2012, pp. 84, 99) and chose freedom from the rules of any optics brought by the shadow-based images. In *Pharmacy* the objects were filmed from underneath through a glass pane covered with paper, which makes the visual space very dynamic and the depth changes rapidly with the movement of the source of light. It shrinks when the light illuminates the objects directly from above and stretches when the light moves aside.

Plotinus' Idea of Various Orders of Creation

Kitchen Still Life (00:00 - 00:18)

In *Kitchen Still Life*, the overexposed spot above the table disperses in all directions starting from the middle, assuming some undefined shape, darkening gradually on the edges, to create two qualities which can be differentiated and named as light and shadow. At the bottom of this formless background and closer to the viewer floats a fuzzy cloud soaked with light – a filtow of a table with hills of objects rising from its surface. Their bottom parts are sunken and dissolved in the shapeless cloud of the table, creating a very sketchy and vague form, which, as if emanating from the spot of light, seems to approach the viewer. Thus, light gives birth to immaterial reality – one of many realities created on its way from the shapelessness and omnipotence of wave towards the solidity and particularity[61] of matter.

This image of light spreading from one point and producing both immaterial and material forms, resonates with Plotinus' idea: "From the One emanates immaterial light, radiating outward, growing dimmer and dimmer until it shades off into darkness (a privation of light), which is matter" (Schültzinger, 2002).[62] This brings to mind *Still Life* by Nowosielski: objects shaped out from soft, dispersed light, and philosophical, Neoplatonic ideas behind his

[61] The word: "particularity" has got the same core as the word "particle", which indicates matter as distinct from wave.
[62] This image obviously rather suggests than illustrates faithfully Plotinus' idea.

works. In contrast to Nowosielski, in the Themersons' *Pharmacy* matter disappeared, leaving shadows on their own. Separated from the bodies, shadows became apparitions subordinated only to the rules of light. Bringing to mind animistic beliefs, they perform the most dynamic dance revealing, against any logic of unanimated things, the intensity of their ghostly life.

Movement, Light and Filtow

The movement occurring in *Kitchen Still Life* is different. Shadows have not lost their material "parents". In contrast to their filtows, they are clearly cut off from the background and sharply defined. Dense, almost tangible, touching the matter, they get easily mistaken for it. For their well-defined shapes, visual density and impenetrability they seem to stay one step closer to the material world than the filtows.

Kitchen Still Life (00:18 – 1:03)

A large filtow of an unidentified body passing in front of the source of light and obscuring it temporarily sets the immobile image in motion. Due to the movement, the tabletop looks like a rippled surface of water on which the shadowy shapes are floating. Interestingly, the shapes seem to belong to the same order of things as the invisible waves. They do not behave like a leaf floating on the surface of a stream which preserves its form regardless of the waves on the surface. On the contrary, they expand and dissolve when covered with a large filtow, like a splash of petrol spreading out when carried by the growing body of water. The shapes shrink and sharpen rapidly when the "wave" retreats, subjected again to strong light. Uncannily, the filtow of a body seems to have the power to disturb only the world of filtows. Even these which are sunken in the puddle of the table-top's shadow get affected by these changes. Thus, when the filtows grow and shrink, fluctuate, move smoothly and jump, radiate blueish glow to become grey again – the shadows stay still, unaffected, untouched, revealing their connection to the unanimated world of matter rather than to the dynamic world of light. The paralyzed matter at the same time stays withdrawn and seems to be redundant. Albeit similar to a shadow and

frequently mistaken for it, a filtow is "a body of light rather than a shadow" (Sorensen, 2008, p. 176).

Sorensen explains that, in addition to having a different genesis, the filtow stands in a different relation to the photons it contains. "The photons in a shadow are contaminants . . . The photons in a filtow are constituents. They compose the filtow in the way water molecules compose a cloud. If all the photons are subtracted from the shadow, then the shadow remains. If all the photons are subtracted from the filtow, the filtow ceases to exist". Thus, light interacting with the body standing in front of it, uses it to reveal a "latent current of life" (Zwolińska, 2003, p. 3), usually hidden from the human eye, and lets one peep into the life of the elusive and immaterial entities. This revelation happens in the everyday environment and takes a physical form[63] – unlike in Nowosielski's practice, where the past experience of illumination is expressed by the iconic paradigm used to visualise the ideology adopted by the artist.[64] Light used in his works springs from the idea of mystical light, yet the artist's rendering of it has representational character.[65] In the Themersons' *Pharmacy* it is the artists themselves who control the phenomenon of light and shadow. Stefan, like an alchemist, forces the artificial light to move according to his will to set the shadows in motion. Like a magician, he conjures up the spirits of the objects and makes them perform an animistic dance, and finally, like a pharmacist, he gives the prescription for a cinegram: "Your light source has to be active . . . you can move it and observe the dance of the dark shadows (which will become white), you can caress with it 3-dimensional objects to make their shadows turn round, and elongate, and shrink, you can move it near the paper and brighten it . . ." (Majewski, 2013, p. 75).

Natural light illuminating the interior in *Kitchen Still Life,* however, cannot be subjected to one's wishes. It is the light itself which uncovers its own secrets while getting into the dialogue with a moving body. The light changes its colour and density, intensity and angle, playing with the images while uncovering the mysterious life of the immaterial worlds,

[63] Benjamin in his *Reflections* explored the concept of a "profane illumination"– a possibility of a profound and enlightening experience that can be had in the everyday environment (Skoller, 2005, p. xviii).
[64] Interestingly, Nowosielski experienced an epiphany, which resulted in his conversion to Orthodoxy. This happened in 1954, when after a decade of being an atheist he was passing by an Orthodox church in Łódź. He mentions: "I looked at it and suddenly everything turned around, it was a certainty". This event started his deep interest in the Orthodox theology (Obarska, 2020).
[65] See Chapter 1: 'Light Source'.

leaving the viewer of this elusive performance with the experience of a profane illumination.[66]

Shadow and Its Relation to Ontology

Visually, *Kitchen Still Life* shows a close kinship to *Pharmacy*. They both reveal the unusual world of cast shadows and their volatile beauty. They both return in a way to the origin of the filmic medium and reflect on its basic building elements. However, any attempt to delve into the pre-cinematic technique of shadow theatre opens up a gate to the world of animistic rituals and myths, exceeding far beyond the materialist reflection. The Themersons were aware of *Pharmacy's* linkage to animistic ideas in a double way: on the one hand – through the Far East ancient tradition of shadow theatre, on the other – through the European reflection developed around Romantic and Symbolist painting.[67] Thus, these two different threads: one referring to the temporal medium (shadow theatre), and the other one – to the static medium, converge in *Pharmacy*, regardless of the fact that painting and shadow theatre (similarly as film) occupy different ontological positions to the world of shadow and light.[68] *Kitchen Still Life*, unlike *Pharmacy*, brings to view also material objects. Although in *Pharmacy* matter does not appear, the relationship between an object, shadow and light occurs there through the indexical character of shadow. Shadow, without a visible link to the object casting it, creates an image of a bodyless realm of spirits. Since Nowosielski's works, in turn, concentrate, as it was mentioned above, on the material world perceived through the perspective of the Neoplatonic thought, these two approaches allow me to contextualize my thinking on light from two different vantage points: Nowosielski's works evoke the Medieval metaphysics of light, the idea of light being the source of matter, and the double character of the visible world: material and spiritual, touching also on the question of the magical connotation of shadow[69] while *Pharmacy* brings the idea of shadow as a visual manifestation of the world of spirits.

[66] See 'Glossary': profane illumination.
[67] See Chapter 1, 'Magic, Art, Invisible Realms and Shadow'.
[68] For the development of this thought, see Chapter 1: 'Space, Shadow and Object'.
[69] Although I did not come across any mention of the animistic threads in his creativity, the "expression of the dark forces" (Kitowska-Łysiak, 2012) has been noticed in his works (e.g. *Krzyk,* 1943). His paintings themselves give some hints to such a reading: dark tones and black backgrounds in his non-sacral works may indicate

In *Kitchen Still Life,* unlike in the works of the Themersons and Nowosielski, the relation of the object to light is negotiated by various orders of shadows bridging these two realms. The presence of matter, shadow, filtow and light allows me to analyse the consecutive steps of transformation of pure light into the state of matter.[70] This happens in neither of the discussed works. All the discussed works are devoted to shadow and light, *Kitchen Still Life* differs from them because it combines the image of material reality, light and shadow. From the ontological point of view, although *Kitchen Still Life*, like *Pharmacy,* is a record of a shadow performance, being a digital work, it doesn't create a material trace of shadows. In *Kitchen Still Life* light exposes the construction of reality showing the diversity of the orders of existence. Thanks to the sound and multiple shadowy shapes, it touches upon the issues of those numerous realms which elude visibility. Loosely using Plotinus' philosophical ideas, my work re-interprets Medieval metaphysics of light, formulating some sort of personal mythology. Although the epiphanic character of the shadow-and-light performance might seem lost in the repeatable medium of film, yet the elusive, original phenomenon which inspired this work was "given" to the artist recording it, and was not "conjured up" as the shadow play in *Pharmacy*. This freely links *Kitchen Still Life* with Neoplatonic ideas rather than with magic rituals or with an iconic paradigm. Natural light introduces an element of surprise and brings the idea of a profane illumination into the reflection on this work, making it part of the broader interest present in the contemporary art, arising from the recognition of the illumination as an important element of the intellectual and creative endeavour.

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darker inspiration, while the presence of Black women in his later works may point out to the interests in other than Christian spiritual traditions. There is a possibility that Nowosielski's theatrical episode also might have been a source of the animistic inspirations (see 'Magic, Art, Invisible Realms and Shadow'). His short adventure with theatre started in Łódź in 1950, but even earlier he co-operated and stayed in the close professional relation with Tadeusz Kantor – one of the most influential artistic personalities in Poland, a painter and a creator of an experimental theatre in Kraków (Kitowska-Łysiak, 2012).

[70] Plotinus claimed that "From the One also proceeds Nous (thought, mind), which knows all things simultaneously in an eternal now. From Nous emanates the world soul; from the latter emanate human souls and finally material beings. They do not lack light completely, for they are illumined by form, which is considered the exteriorization of the intelligible. Here light starts its ecstatic return to its origin and proves that the sensible and the intelligible are bound together. Such unity allows for mystical and prophetical experience and knowledge" (Schültzinger, 2002).

Chapter 2.

Metaphysical Dimensions of *Arabesque* by Germaine Dulac in the Context of *Black Square* by Kazimir Malevich

In this chapter I follow the visual similarities between abstract images in *Arabesque* by Dulac and Suprematist paintings by Malevich. In doing so, I try to find out if the meaning of the first ones can go beyond psychological and social meanings usually attributed to them and enter the sphere of metaphysical issues. To answer this question, I examine the role of light and Dulac's method of using it in abstract images. In 'Background, Inspirations, Early Work' I briefly present her life, art circles she was involved with, and influences which inspired her work. I define the main sources of her creative impulses and crucial points of interests, stressing the specific use of light, whose power of expression she discovered in Symbolist theatre and Pre-Raphaelite paintings. This is illustrated with the examples of films in which she uses light to render emotions, reveal the inner world of the protagonists and create the ambient of her works. In 'Motif of Light' I start with her earliest works, where one can already notice a tendency to use light for abstracting the image. Her ultimate turn towards pure cinema in 1929 brings the change of optics from figurative to abstract. I argue that it is not rhythm, as usually suggested, but a specific use of light which plays a crucial role in this shift. In '*Arabesque*, *Black Square* and *Table*', a piece of poetic text helps me to look at the three different images: *Black Square* (1915) by Malevich*, Arabesque* (1929) by Dulac and my own film *Table* (2015), dwelling on subtle relations between these artworks and setting up a common ground for reflection. What comes to the fore in these pieces is the role of light in changing an object into a "figure". Dulac's method of abstracting objects understood as

means of “translating certain ideas” (Williams, 2007a, p. 94) is contrasted then with the idea of freeing an object from the indexical bonds, which happens in Malevich’s *Black Square* (Bulgakova, 2002). This strategy lets me examine if abstract images in *Arabesque* transcendent the previous indexical attachments. The section ‘Light and Matter’ concentrates on the analytical character of Dulac’s works. To understand this issue, abstract images from her film are placed against a broader intellectual background of the epoch. I analyse the idea of the identity of image and movement (Bergson*, Matter and Memory,* 1896), and Einstein’s equation between light and matter developed around that time and later adopted to the reflection on cinema (Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity*, 1922; Deleuze, *Cinema 1,* 1983). The idea of the ontological unity of these elements, when applied to the Dulac’s images, stresses their metaphysical character.

Background, Inspirations, Early Works

Germaine Dulac started her artistic career in France after WW1, quickly becoming one of the most recognisable figures in French avant-garde circles, not only as a director of silent films, but also as a theatre and film critic, journalist, film producer, a head of the French Film Club Federation, and a leading member of the Committee against Film Censorship (Stenzl, 2014, p. 221). In effect of her various activities, she was one of the most influential figures in the French film culture of the time. However, her greatest impact on the artistic and intellectual milieu of the first avant-garde was through her film works. Her ability to show psychological states of characters has been frequently commented on. In this sense Dulac’s films can be seen as part of the so called French school, which, in the opinion of Deleuze, is associated with the phenomenon of spirituality and sublimity expressed through such cinematic techniques as lighting and superimpositions.[71] And yet, Dulac’s work was strongly indebted to the theatre, namely, her use of light, mise-en-scène, as well as thematic and

[71] Deleuze in his *Cinema 1* mentions that the same cinematic techniques, e.g. superimposition, were used in the French school to give expression to the soul, while in Vertov’s films they served to express a materialist perspective. “[W]ith the French these [montage techniques] show primarily a spiritual power of the cinema, a spiritual aspect of the ’shot’. It is through the spirit that man goes beyond the limits of perception . . . Vertov’s use of these procedures [on the other hand] was to express the interaction of distant material points” (Deleuze, 1986, p. 84). Deleuze mentions Gance, Herbier and Epstein as the representatives of the French school, but considering her work and background, it is evident that Dulac also belongs to this group.

stylistic choices and a "remarkably modern style of acting" (Williams, 2007a, p. 53) can be traced back to her involvement with such important figures of the stage as Aurélien Lugné-Poe and Suzanne Despres. [72] Spirituality and sublimity, frequently attributed in her films to movement and rhythm, are regarded as the artist's inspiration with not only Symbolist theatre but also contemporary ballet. This is also true of her narrative and abstract films. According to Tami Williams (2007b, p. 125), "while in her narrative films Dulac often expresses emotional and spiritual states of her characters through the movement and symbolism of dance, it is in her . . . experimental films (1929) that dance took on its full significance on a formal level".

Motif of Light

The issue of light occasionally emerges in the critical writing on Dulac's films, yet its role has never been analysed in depth. Commentary evolving around *The Smiling Madame Beudet* (1923) can serve as an example. Williams mentions the use of light for producing a specific mood and expressing psychological states of the protagonist, but she disregards the role of light in the artist's later, integral (other words, pure) cinema work:

> *Dulac evokes Madeleine's melancholy by following these shots* [M. playing the piano] *with images of nature, light and water . . . these images associated with Debussy's composition can be seen to correspond to Madeleine's inner world, as well as the space of her imagined liberty. This sequence also anticipates Dulac's conception of a pure or integral cinema based exclusively on life, movement and rhythm . . .* (Williams, 2007a, p. 194).

Although Dulac repeatedly experiments with light, making it an important means of expression, predominant comments concentrate on the use of light in connection with her narrative work, [73] without seeing it as a leading element in her evolution from narrative to pure cinema. However, although this issue does not occupy any significant place in critical writing, its importance for Dulac's later turn towards pure cinema can be noticed even in

[72] T.M. Williams mentions that "Dulac's contact in 1907 with the stage actress Suzanne Despres and her husband, avant-garde director, principal creator and the promoter of the French Symbolist theatre, Aurélien Lugné-Poe (1869-1940), greatly impacted her cinematic approach, and particularly her thematic and stylistic choices" (Williams, 2007a, p. 53).

[73] See 'Literature Review': Chapter 2.

her earliest films. Thus, in 1915 the artist produced *Les Soeurs Ennemies*, in which she deliberately used the power of light to create the ambient of the shots. Williams mentions that

> *Dulac . . . employed numerous techniques . . . to create psychological effect. For example, in the first scene of* Les Soeurs Ennemies*, she used the light and shadow cast by a mobile lamp in order to express the worry of the older sister . . . Later in the film, she used the light and shadow of a lamp and a gas stove . . . to show Lucille's evolving psychological state* (Williams, 2007a, pp. 93-94).

Although the understanding of light as a conveyer of emotions – a lesson learned from her theatrical experience – found its expression in *Les Soeurs Ennemies*, this was not Dulac's ultimate goal. The exploration of cinematic possibilities in creating abstract images and the development of her work leading towards it can be spotted already in her next film, *Âmes de fous.* Created in 1918, it was "mildly criticised" (Williams, A., 1992, p. 146) for the overuse of back lighting, which reduced actors to dark silhouettes. From the wider perspective of her works, however, it was not a mistake but a first step towards the images of pure cinema. For Dulac, this film was an attempt to explore the potential of light as one of cinematic image-building elements. She wrote: "Lighting, camera position and editing seemed . . . more important than the simple workings of a scene played in accordance with the laws of the stage" (ibid.), thus, acknowledging the importance of light in the process of the evolution towards artists' (pure) cinema. The unique ability of the cinematic image to create abstract images without loosing connection with the known world has been noticed by the filmmakers and critics alike. This could be achieved by the specific filmic means, like lighting among others, and could open up an enormous richness of the possibilities of expression. Louis Delluc, who was not only a film theoretician and a film director but also Dulac's friend and scriptwriter for one of her films, wrote: "All could be made to speak in a film: an object, a landscape, the quality of light (McCreary, 1976, p. 17). Mc Creary develops his idea: "For 'the secret of the inexhaustible in expression' is never completely saying everything. Rhythm and light were not thought, but they incited to thought" (ibid. p. 20). Delluc was not alone in this conviction but rather expressed a popular belief. Virginia Wool in her essay *The Cinema* written in 1920, published for the first time in 1926 in *The Nation and Athenaeum*, gives a similar commentary. She accentuates the possibility of cinematic image to create ambiguity through abstract or semi-abstract symbols: "Something abstract, something which moves

with controlled and conscious art, something which calls for the very slightest help from words or music to make itself intelligible, yet justly uses them subserviently—of such movements and abstractions the films may in time to come be composed. Then indeed when some new symbol for expressing thought is found, the film-maker has enormous riches at his command" (Woolf, 2007, p.843).

In 1927 Dulac began using her previous experiments with the cinematic image to create non-narrative films. This new approach was based on her conviction that "the lines and forms of gesture and figuration, central to . . . narrative films could move the spectator without actors and characters" (Williams, 2007b, p. 125). Thus she produced three filmic works inspired by music: *Arabesque,*[74] *Disque 957* (1929) and *Themes and Variations* (1929).[75] In *Arabesque* images are endowed with various degrees of abstraction, yet at the same time they differ significantly from the abstract works of so-called absolute cinema created at about that time in Germany.[76] Although absolute cinema was also often inspired by music (e.g. *Diagonal Symphony* (1924) by Viking Eggeling), it was based on frame-by-frame animation and was fully controlled by the artist, while *Arabesque* is a result of Dulac's discerning observation of nature, which puts them close to the Woolf's vision. Williams claims that this difference springs from the fact that for filmmakers like Eggeling or Hans Richter "a non-figurative and non-referential approach derives from painting [while] for Dulac, cinégraphie remained present in . . . the visualisation of movement and rhythm" (Williams, 2007b, p. 125). Nell Andrew's commentary resonates with the above: *"*Her [Dulac's] abstraction . . . is importantly born not from a will to form but from a will to enact . . .. This link between gesture, movement, and rhythm will be central in her move towards abstraction as a means of social expression" (Andrew, 2020, p. 142).[77]

[74] Dulac's film was inspired by *Two Arabesques* by Debussy (Meeker and Szabari, 2020).

[75] Although some sources give 1928 as the date of the production of the two latter films, I am following the dating provided by Tami Williams (2007a).

[76] "Unlike the surprise of fragments and montage in the avant-garde cinema of Richter, Eggeling, Leger or Clair, Dulac's abstraction is created by rhythms that unite art and life, an abstraction that moves the viewer" (Andrew, 2020, p. 142). See also fn. 100.

[77] Importantly, next to "gesture, movement and rhythm" – elements which are repeatedly analysed, Andrew mentions the social and feminist dimension of Dulac's pure cinema work: "Addressing this topic [the place of a woman in the society after WW1] from outside the gendered hegemony at the moment of high national spirit, Dulac began to lean on modes of abstraction to make room for alternative realities and interpretations" (ibid.). Such social reading of her abstract works can be found also among other critics, e.g. Williams (2007b), Dozoretz (1982).

Andrew expounds the view (which agrees with the opinion of a number of critics) that it is the employment of specific movement which allows the transformation of the optics in Dulac's work from figurative to abstract:

> *Despite their* [serpentine films] *varying levels of formal abstraction or representational imagery, they are united in conveying abstraction through a sense of movement without beginning or end, that is in continuous gestures designed to stimulate the precognitive sensorium . . . real bodies, objects and images become abstract by negating their availability to be fixed, formed or captioned. . ..* (ibid. p. 145).[78]

In *Arabesque*, however, if we were to separate abstract images and look at them as stills, we could notice that what links otherwise completely abstract images with the system of signification attached to the initial, figurative picture, is movement. Yet, the element which allowed the shift from the figurative to the abstract optics is not so much movement (mentioned above by Andrew), as light.

Arabesque*, *Black Square* and *Table

In this text I compare a few images from *Arabesque* with my work *Table* and with *Black Square* by Malevich. In the first paragraph I reflect on the objects in *Arabesque* losing their details because of overexposure. (While reading I would suggest to watch *Arabesque,* 0:13-0:29 min.) My reflection is accompanied by a quote from Malevich's *Non- objective World* (1927). The quote, originally referring to *Black Square*, proves that the idea of non-objectivity can be also applied to the images in *Arabesque*. The second and the third paragraphs develop the idea that vision can happen only within specific, narrow section within the strength of light. Here I concentrate on the borderline between vision and non-visibility, the place which although brings objects to vision, renders them unrecognizable, deprived of detail, detached from the system of signification. The second paragraph bridges *Arabesque* and *Table,* while the third one refers to *Table*. (I would recommend watching *Table* at this point.) The next paragraph is devoted to another image from Dulac's work (see *Arabesque* 0:30 – 0:32 min.), which shows even stronger visual kinship with *Black Square*,

[78] Andrew (2020, p. 142) goes on: "Dulac's idea of integral cinema is found in the abstract in-between where the self and the world are synthesized through feeling".

being almost its negative. Another quote from Malevich (referring to *Back Square*) stresses the relevance of the Suprematist ideas to *Arabesque's* images. The purpose of this text is to change the perspective on *Arabesque* by, firstly: to stress the role of light in the process of rendering images abstract, secondly: to reveal their relation to Suprematist ideas.

Arabesque (0:13 – 0:29)

Black arcs of lines placed against the sky.[79] Thicker branches interweaving with a net of thinner ones. Scarce leaves still holding to them show it is wintertime. They move rhythmically against the background of soft shapes of floating clouds. The image changes suddenly and without any warning as if taken by surprise by yet another image. The edges of the frame get stained with mysterious black dye. From them, a chaotic net of thicker and thinner lines spreads in all directions. The closer to the source of light, the fainter they seem. Light dematerialised parts of the net, rendering some of the lines barely perceptible. What are these shapes? Are they a maze of roots, or veins conveying blood, a microscopic image of neurons or a watercolour pigment spreading chaotically in a puddle of a liquid? A sudden flash of blinding glow spreading concentrically burns out a hole in the middle of the net, engulfing fragile shapes located close to it. The bush in the desert does not burn up, though it is on fire. The bush consumed by fire comes back to existence, being – through the power of light – in a constant state of transcending its own ontological status from being an object to being pure energy. "No more 'likeness of reality', no idealistic images – nothing but a desert! But this desert is filled with the spirit of non-objective sensation which pervades everything" (Malevich, 2003, p. 68).[80] But this abstract image comes back to the world of objective associations.

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Fig. 5 G. Dulac, *Arabesque*[81] (1929)

Thanks to the gentle trembling motion we can see the convoluted pattern of lines and spots as branches moved by the breeze.

Table https://vimeo.com/456888106

A piece of a shabby white board with lumps of soil adhering to it, burn marks, scratches, and dust. Soft, greyish nebula of chiaroscuro covers the central part, leaving the edges of the board brighter and cooler. Lighter spots at the bottom and the top of the cloud become discernible. Specks of reflected light move gently, gradually getting arranged in a shape of glowing, trembling strings. They move vivaciously propelled by invisible energy, to fade away a moment later, stopping half-way to non-existence. They exist there precariously for a while, struggling with the rude materiality of the white board, which they manage to seize for a while before they disappear.

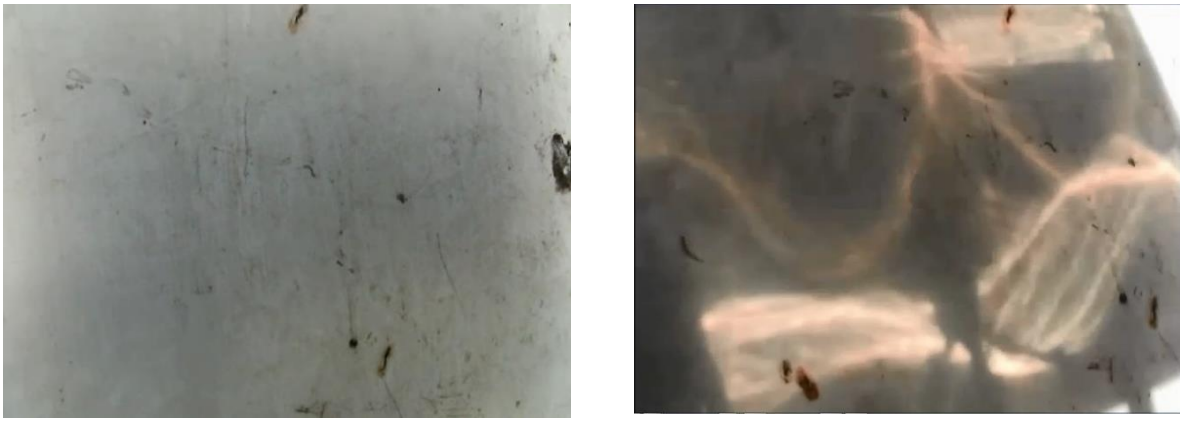


Fig. 6 J. Rojkowska, *Table* (2015)

When light gets stronger, it brings to view elements which have been so far hidden from sight, which – dissolved in the ocean of non-existence – have eluded perception. When light gets stronger, it gradually lets us sense something coming in a foggy cloud of indefinite shape. This "something" remains for a while between the state of being and non-being. Our brain and eyes cannot define what they see. Its existence in our consciousness hinges

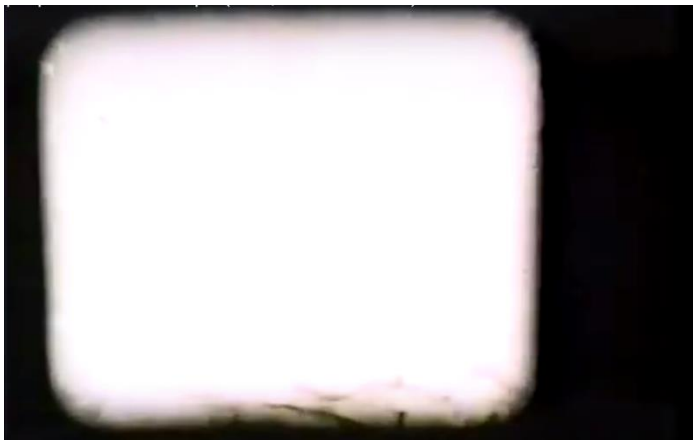
[81] Source of stills from *Arabesque*: Max (2013).

on a feeling, emotion, intuitive sensation of some presence. It still can step back to non-existence, leaving us with uncertainty and doubts. Light is a means of transport between worlds and dimensions. One strong flash of light brings invisible things close to the seeable world. Now we can measure their size, define the shape, tone and colour. We can give them a name.

With a one strong flash, the image, which has just entered the world of our consciousness, dissolves into a blinding glare. Losing details, it fades into non-existence. We live in a narrow reality of transitory light, which, while on its way between one invisible realm of "too little light" and another invisible realm of "too much light", inadvertently casts to our place things and objects of vision.

Arabesque (0:30 - 0:32) and *Black Square*

A white rectangle with soft, rounded edges placed against a black background. There is no recognizable value except these three: light, darkness and shape. Some faint remnants of texture at the bottom of the rectangle reminds us of its material, objective origin. The shape grows and in a few "jumps" ultimately fills the whole frame with white light. "This was no empty square [though] but rather feeling of non-objectivity. I realized that the 'thing' and the 'concept' were substituted for the feeling and understood the falsity of the world of will and idea" (Malevich, 2003, pp. 67-68).



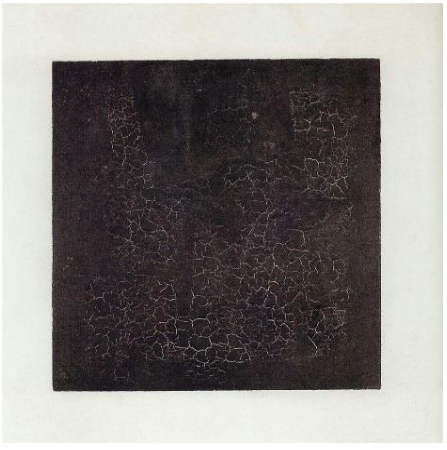


Fig.7 G. Dulac, still from *Arabesque,* left and K. Malevich, *Black Square* (1915), right. [82]

Fig.8 G. Dulac, *Arabesque,* left and K. Malevich, *Eight Red Rectangles,* (1915), right.[83]

Many images in *Arabesque* were created using overexposure, back lighting, or reflected light. This allowed objects to move from the sphere of recognizable things to the sphere of figures. This technique employed by Dulac was noticed by Williams, who comments:

> *For Dulac, naturalistic techniques, which she used as a means of representing the interior or psychology of the character, gradually gave way to more specifically symbolist tendencies. To this end she employed figures and objects, as well as known cultural references (e.g., to painting and music) as a means of translating certain ideas* (Williams, 2007a, p. 94).

To understand the process of abstracting taking place in *Arabesque* it is important to understand what figure is. "Figure is something in-between not being and being: a becoming that disrupts the rule of representation. . . [Figures] mark a resistance to the idea that an object is contained within a system of signification" (Miles, 2019).

[82] Source: America (n.d.).

[83] Image source: Artdone (2013). Although here I juxtapose stills from *Arabesque* with two of Malevich's works, I conduct an in-depth analysis of *Black Square* only, bringing *Suprematist Composition with Eight Red Rectangles* exclusively as another illustration of visual links between abstract images in *Arabesque* and Suprematism. Such links of her work can be also found with other painterly works of the period, e.g. Giacomo Balla's *Materiality of Light +Speed* (1915). This fact strengthens my conviction that Dulac's abstract images have much deeper, so far unexplored layers reflecting more than just feminist or psychological issues.

The transformation from figuration to abstraction, as an artistic method, emerged before *Arabesque* and was created by those artists who developed abstraction in painting. To mention only two of Dulac's contemporaries: Piet Mondrian used the process of abstracting an object through the series of drawings and simplified it gradually to vertical and horizontal lines to express the basic order of the universe, while Malevich employed among others the technique of aerial photography.[84] For neither of them, however, was abstracting a process of "translation" of ideas (as Tami Williams formulates it), but rather a way of liberating objects from the existing indexical bonds. Olga Bulgakova explains: "For Malevich the ultimate meaning of this process [evolution from figuration to abstraction] is not abandoning the imitation of nature but liberating thought from the bonds of developed categories and existing forms, including the mimetic dogma" (Bulgakova, 2002, p. 19).

This transcendence, this ability to open up for a new, broad understanding through the rejection of the mimetic dogma or system of significations attached to the figurative image is what constitutes the power of abstraction. *Black Square,* the first Suprematist painting, was created by Malevich fourteen years before *Arabesque.* Victor Stoichita in his book *A Short History of the Shadow* (1997) acknowledges the importance of transcending the representational image. He claims that as *Black Square* was at first a design for a stage curtain, its role was not to represent but to cover representation, or by raising it, to make representation possible. Thus, suggesting that *Black Square* was born out of the idea of a curtain, the scholar admits its anti-representational character. Similarly, as a stage curtain, *Black Square,* by covering the representation, became "an indeterminate image: the image of the representation's infinite possibilities" (Stoichita, 1997, p. 184). Malevich said of *Black Square* that "in this terrible power lies the sum total of all the images of the universe waiting to be formed. The zenith of the mimesis kills the mimesis" (ibid. p. 189). Stoichita takes this quote and uses it to forge a connection between this description and a 19th-century caricature of a photographer staring at an overexposed, completely black photograph, thus through a technical failure achieving a "prophetic" image in the form of a photographic version of the first Suprematist painting (a black square against a white background). It is worth noticing that Dulac's abstract images in *Arabesque* also were frequently achieved

[84] For example, "In his *Suprematist Painting: Aeroplane Flying* [1915] Malevich reduces the landscape seen below into abstract geometric forms of colour" (Cheung, 2020, p. 166).

through the manipulation of light:[85] too much light passing through the lens makes the illusionistic image abstract and unrecognizable. The question is, then, if these images can also be regarded as a kind of curtain: covering what was represented, they become – to paraphrase Malevich's words – an indeterminate image of infinite possibilities. And so, instead of being narrowly understood through the perspective of Dulac's earlier narrative works, can they – similarly to Malevich's works – go beyond the previous indexical attachments?

Light and Matter

The difference between a still image and a filmic image relies on movement, and movement can be understood as a key element in this dialogue between Dulac's and Malevich's abstraction.[86] In *Arabesque* this is the element, as I have already demonstrated, which holds the abstract image attached to its previous meaning. Let me quote Akira Mizuta Lippit (2005) on the role of movement in Dulac's films. He repeats her words as follows: "Cinema . . . by decomposing movement, makes us see, analytically . . . the psychology of movement". (p. 62) And later he continues: "Dulac's idiom, which synthesizes metaphors of corporeality, psychology, and perception, reflects the profound dilemma that cinema poses with regard to the rhetoric of visuality. The penetrating visuality of film pierces the surface and exposes 'the psychology of movement,' the interiority of things" (ibid.).

[85] It is not the only technique used by Dulac to achieve abstract images, but the one which she applied in a large number of images in *Arabesque*, endowing them with various degrees of abstraction. In this thesis I concentrate on the use and role of light and therefore I do not mention other techniques used by her for abstracting figurative images.

[86] Oksana Bulgakova mentions that "In Russia, the discourse on the representation of motion in film was influenced by Henry Bergson as he was perceived by Formalist circle . . . Bergson uses film as a metaphor of human consciousness which creates a model of the metaphysical sensation of movement that does not correspond to reality . . .. Film is not a material reproduction of movement; it transmits the idea of movement. Malevich supports this view and believes that motion is as illusory in film as in painting." In general, the attitude of Russian filmmakers differed from the French ones. According to Bulgakova (2002) "The Russian film avant-garde treated film analytically; it was concerned not with the synthesis of motion but with the realisation of the gap, an interval, a moment of stasis between the photograms" (p. 27).
The difference between the Soviet and French schools is also an outcome of the immediate cultural and political context. The dialectic which has been developed for decades around these two works (*Black Square* and *Arabesque*) is shaped by two various backgrounds. The reading of Malevich's work is strongly influenced by Russian Constructivism and materialist outlook, whereas Dulac's work – belonging to French school – is seen as "an expression of a soul" (Deleuze, 1986, p. 84).

Dulac herself mentions the analytical character of movement and connects it with the psychological dimension; Lippit simply repeated this idea. However, in view of the fact that in Dulac's times the philosophy of cinema was writing its revolutionary chapter, in which both movement and light played a key role, I think that *Arabesque's* reading would not be complete without a close look at this intellectual thread. So, I would like to propose a new perspective taking into account both the analytical character of movement and its ability to expose "the interiority of things", while still connecting the figurative image and its abstract version "born of light".

In 1896, in the wake of the birth of the cinema, Henry Bergson published *Matter and Memory*, in which he claims that there is an identity between the image and movement. The greatest revolution in the understanding of the relation between man and the universe came, however, in 1905, when Albert Einstein formulated the Theory of Special Relativity, followed by the Theory of General Relativity published in 1915.[87] This idea influenced science, philosophy and art alike. In 1922 Bergson reflected on Einstein's discoveries in *Duration and Simultaneity*.[88] This in turn became an inspiration for Deleuze to integrate the ideas formulated in these two books and to create the idea of the universe as meta-cinema. Paul A. Harris (2010) says that Deleuze "deduces that 'the identity of the image and movement [in *Matter and Memory*] stems from the identity of matter and light [commented in *Duration and Simultaneity*]' (C1, 60)"[89] (p. 117), while Ronald Bogue (2004, p. 117) explains how Deleuze translated Bergson's understanding of Einstein's theory into the cinematic reflection:

> *Bergson posits a primal "world of universal variation, universal undulation, universal rippling: no axes, no center, neither right nor left, neither up nor down" (IM86/5-59). This world "constitutes a sort of plane of immanence" (IM 6/5-59)*

[87] In 1905, Albert Einstein published the theory of special relativity, in which space and time are interwoven into a single continuum known as space-time. The most important outcome of this theory was the notion of the equivalence of mass and energy, expressed in his famous formula $E=mc^2$. It was a marked departure from Newtonian physics and laid the foundation of modern science (Redd, 2017, Fernflores, 2019).

[88] This work turned out to have a great impact in the world of culture, e.g. it inspired such writers as Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, Virginia Woolf and T.S. Eliot in the way they broke up with the 19th-century depiction of time in literature (Harris, 2010, p. 117).

[89] Paola Maratti (2001), on the other hand, claims that in his *Matter and Memory* (1896) Bergson sought to move beyond the dualism of classical philosophy. For him "the opposition between consciousness and the thing rests largely on the opposition between the image and movement. Images seem to be found in consciousness, whereas movements take place in space". These ideas have been later developed by Deleuze in the context of cinema and led him to formulate the understanding of the material universe as meta-cinema (pp. 233-234).

> *in which things are indistinguishable from their movements and even from each other, a molecular, gaseous realm of fluxes. But . . . it is also a world of images-in-motion or movement-images, for "the* ***movement-image*** *and the* ***matter-flow*** *are strictly speaking the same thing" (IM87/59). The reason for this is that "the plane of immanence in its entirety is Light. The totality of movements, of actions and reactions is light which diffuses, which spreads" (IM 88/60). In this plane of immanence, then, matter=light=image=movement*.

Bearing in mind that in Dulac's work movement is the last link between the figurative image and its abstract version, the link which she never rejected, we are coming face to face with the consistent presence of those elements which are used to build abstract shots in *Arabesque*: on the one hand, light, which abstracts the figurative image, and on the other, movement, which has the power to expose, to use her words, "the interiority of things" and frequently is the last element which allows us to identify the abstraction as linked to the recognizable entity. Deleuze's words: "The identity of image and movement stems from the identity of matter and light" (Zepke, 2005, p. 82) signalise the ontological unity of these elements, and a shift in the meaning of the image, which this unity entails. The vision of the creation of matter from light brings to mind the images from *Arabesque* made with the manipulation of light, which puts the imagery in the state of flow between figuration and abstraction:

> *The plane of immanence as pure light would have been an initial condition, when the rippling, undulating universe (plane of immanence) was "too hot" for bodies to emerge. After this stage, "One should conceive of a cooling down of the plane of immanence . . . It is here that the first outlines of solids or rigid and geometric bodies would be formed"* (Harris, 2010, p. 119).

Dulac decomposes the visible world of matter like a physicist splitting it into particles of energy. Matter broken down into light and energy becomes, in turn, recognizable by the characteristics of its movement. In this perspective we can see that "Images, as luminous moving matter, are 'vibrations' (C1, 8/19), movements that express the infinite connectivity and creativity of the open and immanent plane of duration" (Zepke, 2005, p. 82).

The reading of abstract images in *Arabesque* as conveyers of social and psychological ideas, although justified to a point, seems to be too narrow if we look at them from a wider

perspective – that of early 20th-century abstract art[90] and science. The decomposition of the object into its formless state of light and movement in Dulac's works can be rather seen as a response to ontological[91] questions raised by scientific discoveries, which changed the understanding of matter and light, and through the unity these two categories turned the universe into a meta-cinema (Zepke, 2005, p. 82).

Review of Practice

My work *Table* was an inspiration for the juxtaposition of *Arabesque* and *Black Square*. As *Table* shares the features of the above two works, it allowed me to notice relationship between them, which has been unnoticed by art commentators. Led by this elusive relationship, which I sensed rather than understood, I decided to delve into Dulac's and Malevich's works and lives. I divided the reflection on how my studio work influenced my research into a few sections. 'Images' is a formal analysis in which I continue my poetic musing on the similarities between abstract pictures in my own works and those of Dulac and Malevich, concentrating on the potentiality of Malevich's *Black Square* and *White on White* (1918). Investigating these relations in the section 'Inspirations', I discover similarities in early influences, which shaped Dulac's and Malevich's practice, namely French Symbolism and fascination with light occurring in sacred art. In the case of Malevich, the latter has its roots in the Orthodox tradition of the icon, which permeated later to the symbolism of his *Black Square* and *White on White* (Petrova, 2003). The idea of mystical light found its way to Dulac's work through Medieval iconography. The discovery of common intellectual roots of both artists strengthens my argument about a deeper relationship of *Arabesque* and Suprematism. Simultaneously, these ideas, through the tradition of the icon, are still present in the wider cultural context of Eastern Europe and they resonate with my own attitude. Since the notion of rhythm, so important for the narration on *Arabesque,* occurs also in the reflection on *Black Square,* I examine it in the next section – 'Rhythm'. There, I rely on Ernst

[90] Futuristic images dealing with speed bear distinct resemblance to some images of the movement of machinery in *Arabesque.* In Balla's painting *Velocity of Cars and Light* (1913) the issues of light, movement and the abstracting of an object carry physical and metaphysical consequences.
[91] See fn. 7.

Toch's definition to establish a common ground for the notion of rhythm in temporal media and in static arts and to see it as a "distribution of shadows and lights". This opens the possibility to move abstract images occurring in *Arabesque* from the sphere of social and psychological expression to the sphere of scientific and philosophical reflection and to endow them with ontological meaning. I also investigate Malevich's idea of rhythm and dynamism in painting and reflect on the closeness between Suprematism and film. These two different ways of thinking on rhythm converge in *Table,* which is a shadow play combined with a static image, thanks to which it can be a bridge between Malevich's and Dulac's works. In the last section, 'Geometry, Interiority of Things and Soundless Music', I examine the presence of the iconic paradigm in my work, which – when detached from any philosophical system – makes the work universal. The materialist reading of Suprematist paintings inspires me to see *Table* as a realism of shadow and light. Movement and rhythm are said to uncover the "interiority of things" in Dulac's films and to have a social dimension. This inspires me to observe an ultrasound scan-like effect of the working of light, which reveals a kind of "anatomy" of objects in my film. Simultaneously, narration developed around Dulac's films makes me aware of extrasensory experience evoked by my work and allows me to notice the analogous phenomenon of "super-vision" referred to Malevich's paintings. The poetic description (formal analysis) of the images from the discussed works, interwoven into the text, draws the reader's attention to the aspects they share, which are examined in detail in the further part of the chapter. Watching a given work while reading passages related to it would be advisable. Numbers in the round brackets following the title of the work indicate the fragment of the film relevant to the text.

Images

Table (0:00 – 0:10)

Enticing with the subtleties of blueish greys, the chiaroscuro gives the impression of being an artwork of an unknown painter. Occasional marks, dark dots and warm brownish spots bring energy and add drama to the subdued background, contrasting with its cool, soft, dispersed tones. They are complemented by a razor-sharp diagonal line running upwards, standing out from the rest of the elements, which through the variety of their sizes, shapes, directions and locations introduce a dynamic interplay, while maintaining perfect equilibrium. This monochrome image doesn't seem to be completely still and unchangeable, though. The tones within it mutate and fluctuate in a state of some uncanny balance which for a few seconds makes me ask if I am watching a still work or an empty space awaiting a moving image to be displayed on it. It hangs in this state of ambivalence for a while, like a bird, which appears motionless floating in the air, while sustaining its stillness by minute, yet precise movements of its muscles. Finally, the balance tilts and, gradually, the image starts forming due to the changes in the intensity of tones. It sharpens, revealing – hidden so far within the blurred spots – a rectangular, massive dark shape cutting off diagonally a bright margin of the background. Then the dark square appearing on the surface becomes a screen for moving strings of reflected light.

Fig. 9 J. Rojkowska, *Table*

Esther Leslie mentions Moholy-Nagy's comment on Malevich's *White on White*, which its iconoclastic reductionism turned to a positive value: "His [Malevich's] last picture: a white square on a white, square canvas is clearly symbolic of the film screen,[92] symbolic of a transition from painting in terms of pigment to painting in terms of light. The visible surface can serve as a reflector for the direct projection of light and, what is more, of light in motion" (Leslie, 2002, p. 35). Thus, the greyish monochrome, which serves as a screen, can be seen as a distant relative of *White on White*, yet it comes from a different lineage. *White on White* is a product of an intellectual, philosophical reflection and its shape was carefully designed by the artist. The monochrome in the video *Table* is a random, found object, a discarded product of human activity marked by time and erosion. It became a "cinematic screen" by the power of natural light and a shadow-play.

Table (0:03 – 0:10), and *Black Square*

The black, rectangular, massive shape which appeared on the monochrome, reminded me of the one which hid in itself the potentiality of all possible images. This one, however, instantaneously specified the image lurking within. Some wavy shapes of reflected light meandering inside the dark shape formed a well-pronounced, although still picture. The wavy shapes, divided into individual strings of light, started trembling as if touched by an invisible force. *Black Square* by Malevich remained for decades "the sum total of all the images of the universe waiting to be formed" (Stoichita, 1997, p. 189). For decades, slowly and gradually, it has been revealing the specific image hidden behind the dark curtain. Black squares and rectangles, crosses and lines within the net of white cracks – the visible image of invisible forces[93] working within the paint and canvas, the record of the powers to which the painting was subjected through decades – have been forming another Suprematist picture within the Suprematist picture. Realism of material[94] as well as mysticism.

[92] Moholy-Nagy referred to Malevich's painting *White on White*.
[93] M. Snow in the interview with S. Hartog (1994, p. 51) defined the image of waves in his *Wavelength* as "visible registers of invisible forces".
[94] Linda D. Henderson (2019) quotes Malevich declaring in 1921: "Solid matter does not exist in nature. There is only energy" (p. 53). She claims that Malevich was also "profoundly interested in energies and invisible realities and his writings and art reflect the new conception of matter and space" (ibid). Malevich's scientific

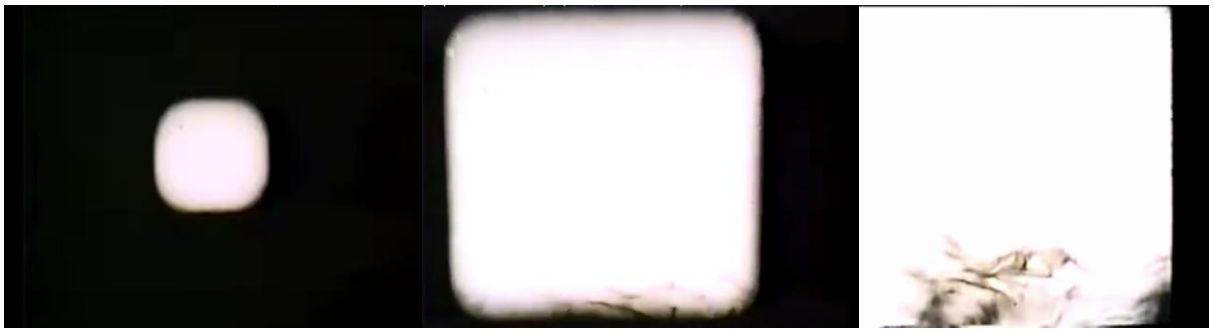


Fig. 10 G. Dulac, *Arabesque.* This sequence illustrates how the abstract images in *Arabesque* on one hand bring to mind Malevich's Suprematist compositions, on the other – maintain link with figurativity.

Arabesque (0:30 - 0:32)

A white rectangular shape on a black background. The simplest form, light and darkness. The rectangle changes its size, approaching the viewer in a few jumps. The black screen gradually gets reduced to a narrow margin, receding before the light, which grows bigger and bigger engulfing finally the whole screen, itself becoming a screen.[95] Only now can one see the overexposed fragments of some unrecognizable texture at the bottom of the screen. Light reveals and conceals at the same time.[96]

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perspective earns an overtly mystical tone in his letter from 1920 to Mikhail Gershenzon. He states there that "the black square is the image of God as the essence of his perfection" (Petrova, 2003, p. 57). It differs significantly from the materialist stand he took in his 1915 manifesto *From Cubism to Suprematism, A New Realism in Painting*, where he called Suprematism "the new painterly realism", referring it to the "painterly, coloured units" (LCC, 2020).

The interest in light from the point of view of science was popular in those days among Futurists, and Malevich was not the only one fascinated by this subject. Mikhail Larionov can serve as another example; he coined the term Rayonism for his style of painting exclusively devoted to the rays of light: X-rays, UV-rays, reflectivity and other related aspects (Henderson, 2019, p. 53).

[95] At about the same time Hans Richter created his abstract films conceived as a light play between the negative and positive. Leslie (2002) notes: "[His] *Rhythm 21* opens with a shot of a dark film screen, and then it is pressed together from the sides until it is completely white. The process reverses, until the surface is completely black" (p. 35). Richter used rectangular and square shapes, arguing that such is the shape of a canvas or a screen and it does not connote any mystical sense (ibid.).

[96] Richter's *Rhythm 21* (1921) is one of the films which, although visually similar to my works, does not delve into the tradition of mystical light but comes close to the later materialist cinema. For that reason, I did not consider it as a possible context of my studio work, which was explained in detail in the 'Introduction'.

Inspirations

Although intellectual attitudes of Malevich and Dulac, their cultural backgrounds, political and social circumstances and the critical narration developed around their works seem to be very different, yet looking through the perspective of my own studio work I discovered an uncanny convergence between them. Although Dulac's inspirations are regarded as associated with Symbolist paintings and theatre,[97] while Malevich's ones are seen as connected with the tradition of the Russian icon, I found out that these two had a lot in common. Myroslava M. Mudrak (2017) in her essay mentions the early involvement of Malevich with Russian Symbolists, which played a crucial role in awaking his spiritual perspective. She says:

> *Malevich's reputation as a forward-looking abstract painter is rarely associated with the brief duration of Symbolism in Moscow. Yet, as a discrete body of early work linked directly to the esoteric themes, ephemeral style, and philosophical turn of Symbolism, his long unstudied fresco designs of 1907–08 appear to have been instrumental in shaping and supporting the futuristic drive of Russian modernism from the 1910s through the early 1930s* (p. 110).

Later she concludes: "Undeniably, Malevich's early period showing a growing predilection for the oneiric themes of the Symbolists would seed and crystallise the spiritual dimensions of his later art" (ibid. p. 109). What is even more interesting, this was particularly French Symbolism, namely religiously coloured works of Maurice Denis, which drew his attention to the spiritualism present in the Eastern Orthodox church. Mudrak analyses Malevich's colour palette during his Symbolist period and sees it as coinciding with that of Maurice Denis. This harmony between line and colour achieved by Denis resonated with spiritual, or to be exact,

[97] Painterly Symbolist influences are very well pronounced in Dulac's inspirations, which found their expression not only in the choice of subjects, but also in her stylistic approach. Williams on numerous occasions mentioned the presence of Symbolist influences in the artist's work: "Dulac quite often employs symbolist tools and techniques to her work – as thematic references, visual motifs, and as a structuring system" (Williams, 2007a, p. 194). Williams claims that many of the Symbolist inspirations in Dulac's mature work were taken from "literature, painting, music and opera (apparent in her frequent references to Baudelaire, Pre-Raphaelite painting and Debussy", for example *La Souriante Madame Beudet*, where there are references to Pre-Raphaelite paintings. In the same film the leitmotifs of light and water work as visual equivalents of music played by the protagonist, her inner world and her imagined freedom. This sequence anticipates Dulac's turn to pure cinema, in particular *Arabesque* inspired by two arabesques by Debussy (ibid., p. 194).

with Catholic subject matter. Malevich, Mudrak claims, followed a similar path both in his style of painting and in theme:

> *Like Denis's Catholic imagery, Malevich's work is imbued with a profession of faith, it seems, but of a secular order. Retreating into themes of ritual and mystery and associating them with Orthodox liturgical practice, Malevich deviates from the oneiric to embrace an Orthodox sensibility, setting out on an aesthetic pathway rooted not in the intellect, but in the senses, which the example of Eastern Orthodoxy offered him* (ibid. p. 100).

The Symbolist's influence made an impact not only on Malevich's intellectual approach, but also on his stylistic choices, which later permeated Suprematism. According to Mudrak, the shift in his aesthetic interests can be spotted already in the design of the abovementioned murals, made when studying at the Rerberg School in Moscow. She says that "Here he began to lay the foundation for an approach that would reach ultimate expression in his mystical cruciform compositions of later years. This would be achieved by an increasing compression of the picture space, approaching the flatness of mural painting" (Mudrak, 2017, p. 95).

On the other hand, Dulac, although this thread is not often analysed in her work, drew from the religious inspirations and from the idea of mystical light in Medieval art. Williams (2014) mentions that

> *In 1904 . . . she* [Dulac] *expressed a deep admiration for the classical and religious works (painted panels, illuminations, tapestries, needlework, and stained glass) that she viewed at the Exposition des primitifs held at Paris's Pavillon de Marsan that spring. These medieval works were known for their masterful use of light to link beauty and divinity, aestheticism and the sacred – a conception that would have bearing on the spiritual and mystical components of Dulac's artistic sensibility*. . . (p. 13).

The similarities of the influences and inspirations, and their immersion in the spiritual realm resulted in repeatedly expressed interest to render sensations and feelings by the language of abstraction. Dulac wrote: "Lines and surfaces evolving at length according to the logic of their forms and stripped of all meanings that are too human to better elevate itself toward

the abstraction of sentiments leaving more space for sensations and dreams: integral cinema" (ibid., p. 158). Malevich's text resonates with the above: "But the blissful feeling of liberating non-objectivity drew me into the 'desert' where nothing is real but feeling and feeling became the content of my life. This was no 'empty square' which I had exhibited but rather the sensation of non-objectivity" (Malevich, 2003, p. 68). The notion of feeling and sensation seems to be integral to the Suprematist expression. Later in the same text about *Black Square* Malevich says: "The black square on the white field was the first form in which non-objective feeling came to be expressed. The square = feeling, the white field = the void beyond this feeling" (ibid. p. 76). Interestingly, although *Black Square* is not often analysed from that point, "rhythm" and "feeling", so often associated with Dulac's work, also come to the fore in his own reflection. He says: "The square of the Suprematists . . . can be likened to the . . . (symbols) of aboriginal men which represent, in their combinations, *not ornament but a feeling of rhythm*" (Malevich and Hilberseimer, 1959, p. 76).[98]

Rhythm

As Dulac and Malevich operate within different genres of art, it is important to define rhythm. To make it relevant to the static arts as well as to the temporal, I decided to use the definition coined by the Austrian composer Ernst Toch, which embraces both kinds of art. In his opinion, rhythm "is the right distribution of light and shade, of tension and relaxation that is formative in every art, in music as well as in painting, sculpture, architecture, poetry" (Toch, 1977, p. 156). Rhythm in Dulac's work usually has been linked to movement and gesture. Williams says: "This link between gesture, movement and rhythm will be central in her move towards abstraction as a means of social expression" (Andrew, 2020, p. 142). This opinion has been repeated by other critics; however, if we look at rhythm in *Arabesque* as "distribution of light and shade", the film earns a different perspective – it moves away from

[98] There are various views on rhythm in art, however most of them favour temporal, sound-related arts as the subject of their reflection, e.g. Victor Dura-Vila quotes Andy Hamilton's understanding of rhythm as "an essentially musical feature of apparently non-musical, but incipiently musical, events or processes" (Dura-Vila, 2019, p. 333) and, thus, refers to the temporal phenomena only. Jason Gaiger (2019) argues for graphic art not being endowed with rhythm at all, as being non-sequential and non-temporal. As this chapter considers a film based on a musical piece, I found it relevant to delve into Toch's definition of rhythm, especially as this definition points out to the role of shadow and light – which fits the subject of this thesis.

the purely social or psychological issues and find its place within a circle of ontological questions. (Arguments in favour of this position are put forward in the chapter devoted to the artist's work.) Also, this point of view more strongly relates her work to that of Malevich. But despite their similarities, these two works would probably never be found juxtaposed if it weren't for their intersecting in my studio work and my thinking. The resemblance between abstract images in *Arabesque* and – indirectly – Suprematist paintings was noticed by Williams (2014), who reflected on their relation to absolute cinema. She, however, concentrated on differences:

> *Contrary to other filmmakers of the abstract movement, such as Viking Eggeling and Hans Richter, who long defend a nonfigurative and nonreferential approach derived from painting, for Dulac (who was inspired by pre-cinema, time-lapse scientific films, as well as by the medium's experiential approximations of duration), cinégraphie remained present in its most tangible forms: the visualization of life itself, in movement and rhythm* (pp. 153-154).

Thus, abstract images occurring in *Arabesque* maintain a recognizable link to "life itself", namely, to their figurative counterpart. Movement and rhythm in Dulac's work are frequently related to natural phenomena, like water moved by breeze or the germination of plants.[99]

Malevich repeatedly voiced his opinion on rhythm in painting and in film. It echoes a very popular at that time outlook inspired by Bergson's view that film is "an art of conceptual motion" (Bulgakova, 2002, p. 27). The artist "defines cinema as a 'running' motionlessness; . . . in his view, only painting had successfully conveyed real dynamics, the sensation of speed detached from corporeality" (ibid). He developed this idea in *The Non-Objective World,* claiming that suprematist square represents "a feeling of rhythm" (see page 73). Thus, even though *Black Square* and *White on White* are static, the sensation they evoke is similar to the one induced by temporal media and places these two painterly works close to

[99] In his desire to depart from the natural world Malevich was in accord with the makers of absolute cinema: "According to Malevich, the superiority of Suprematism consisted in overcoming the idea of mimesis, setting itself free from plot and depiction of objects of reality. Malevich saw his compositions, which were based on monochromatic geometric shapes, as autonomous from nature, where every painting created a sovereign ideal world: 'Our world of art has become new, nonobjective, pure. Everything has disappeared; a mass of material is left from which a new form will be built. In the art of Suprematism, forms will live, like all living forms of nature'" (Taidre, 2014, p. 116).

film. It is Malevich's perspective on the relationship between film and painting Bulgakova has in mind when she writes: "Suprematism creates new models of 'super'-vision, for abstract essences. Film is a continuation of Suprematist painting, in another medium" (Bulgakova, 2002, p. 28).

My film *Table*, being a combination of static and mobile images, incorporates two different ideas: the "super-vision" of rhythm brought by painterly composition of spots and scratches on the board – related to the one mentioned by Malevich, and the "visualisation of life itself in movement and rhythm" – brought by the images of shadow play, linking natural phenomena and existing objects with abstraction. For that reason, my film was able to bridge the works of Malevich, who rejected any form of mimeticism in art, and Dulac's films, rooted in life.

Geometry, Interiority of Things and Soundless Music

Visually, my video *Table* shares certain features with *Arabesque*: it was shot in natural settings and is based on the shadow play evoked by a casual stroke of sunlight. Gentle breeze introduces movement to the image. Subtle changes in lighting and in the strength of the breeze create calming, soothing rhythms running through this work, while a narrow, almost monochrome palette brings it visually even closer to the aesthetics of *Arabesque*. The idea of reducing the cinematic image to the shadows of objects evokes the methods used in *Arabesque* to achieve abstraction, and Dulac's predilection for monochromes.[100] Yet at the same time monochromatic tones and philosophical reflection on light and darkness constitute the intellectual ground of the most iconic Suprematist works by Malevich. My own attitude is closer to his thinking, rooted in the mysticism of the Orthodox icon and symbolism of geometric figures, than to the ideas associated with Dulac's work, namely

[100] Williams (2014) mentions that "early painterly influences [Picasso's blue period and the use of monochrome colour] anticipate her [Dulac's] symbolist exploration of natural settings and lighting sources, as well as monochromatic tones (for instance, the use of sun-drenched yellow in the tinted *La Fête espagnole*, 1920; bitter wintry whites enveloping a bleak château in *Malencontre*, 1920; an array of suburban greys in *La Souriante Madame Beudet*, 1923)" (p. 13).

psychological or social.[101] Mudrak summed up the relation between the tradition of the Orthodox icon and Suprematism:

> *Malevich was, in essence, creating a new type of icon. Unlike Russian Orthodox icon painters who illustrated biblical texts, however, Malevich excluded all narrative from his compositions. He minimalized the images, reducing them to pure forms, and he monumentalized the squares, circles and crosses employed by icon painters in the clothes of the saints, elevating them to the level of independent, multi-significant symbols. By placing a square, circle, or cross on a white or grey background, Malevich was returning to the canons of Old Russian art, reinterpreting them in his own original manner . . . Malevich's oeuvre was reclaiming the icon for art, in a new, updated form* (Petrova, 2003, pp. 59-64).

Such refraining from illustrationism is also important in my practice. In the icon, the figurative layer, although its role is to help to understand the message, can obscure the icon's deeper meaning expressed in symbols by stopping the gaze on the most superficial layer of the image. At the same time, the figurativeness of the icon links it with specific philosophical and theological concepts. The icon belongs to the particular cultural and intellectual tradition and for that reason its understanding requires encoded or situated knowledge;[102] without it, for people from beyond that cultural circle it remains more or less inaccessible. The icon does not encourage multiple readings, on the contrary – it provides univocal answers. Although in my video *Table* one will not find pure geometric forms – intellectual products – yet my perspective on light is rooted in Neoplatonic ideas: the same ideas which resulted in the mixture of abstraction and figuration expressed in the golden background and figurative elements in the Orthodox icon. Thus, in *Table* narration is replaced by light and shadow, while materiality is paralleled with elusive phenomena. Now

[101] Nell Andrew evokes reflections of Tami Williams: "As Williams tells us, Dulac believed that the social reality underlying her films could be conveyed by gesture and movement" (Andrew, 2020, p. 142). She claimed: "these can reveal the 'inner life' of characters, and consequently, their social conditions" (ibid). As it has been already mentioned, Andrew is convinced that "This link between gesture, movement and rhythm will be central in her move towards abstraction as a mean of social expression" (see p.73).

[102] Encoded knowledge – "information that is conveyed by signs and symbols". It requires knowledge of symbols to decode them. In the case of symbols occurring in icons this knowledge can be earned either from books or passed on by the society one was brought up in, being an example of situated knowledge. "All knowledge involves a position or perspective that results in . . . situated knowledge" (McHugh, 2020, p. 217). This "position or perspective" depends on such factors as the social, intellectual, ideological setting one was brought up in.

the shadow play, now the corporeality of the board (which is a screen for the appearance of shadows) comes to the fore; the alternating visibility/invisibility of the board and the shadows is caused by the changes of the intensity of natural light. These visual elements create spiritual ambience, yet do not link it to any specific cultural or philosophical context. Rather, they encourage an intuitive reading. This makes the work universal, because the meaning of the work is not hidden in the symbols which must be deciphered, but allows a subconscious, emotional reading.

In *Table* the source of light is not directly seen, but rather sensed when shadows sharpen in an occasional strong shine. This for a while lifts an invisible curtain, enabling the viewer to peep into the realities of pure energies. A constant interplay between an empty screen and a shadow-play brings to mind Malevich – it seems as if his *Black Square* and *White on White* were merged in one film-work.[103] The very rich symbolism of these two pieces[104] outlines a possible reading of *Table*. But though Malevich's works encourage a symbolic reading, they also inspire materialist commentary. I have already mentioned an ontological difference between the digital medium and cinegram in the previous chapter, noting that my films, being digital, do not exist in a material form. However, in my work there is also an ontological closeness between the real phenomenon of a shadow play and the phenomenon of a screened film. Malevich's description of *Black Square* as "the new painterly realism . . . of. . . coloured units" (Malevich, 1976, p. 133) could be in an altered form adapted to the description of *Table* as the realism of shadow and light.

[103] As it has been mentioned before, Malevich's *White on White* was commented by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy as "symbolic of the film screen, symbolic of a transition from painting in terms of pigment to painting in terms of light", see fn. 92.

[104] One way of reading he provided was mentioned in this thesis on page 73. To give a few more examples: "Wear the black square as a sign of world's economy, . . . red square . . . as a sign of the world revolution in the arts" (Forgacs, 2003, p. 54). In other places he claimed that *Black Square* is "a living royal infant"(Taidre, 2014, p. 120). In *Suprematist Mirror*, 1923 he described zero: "God, The Soul, The Spirit, Life, Religion, Technology, Art, Science, The Intellect, Weltanschauung, Labour, Movement, Space, Time, equals zero" (Monoscop, 2012). This could as well refer to *White on White.*

Table, see p. 68

Shadows of objects get reduced to the simplest geometric shapes: a dark rectangle with a smaller, bright, horizontal spot at a top corner and strings of light crisscrossed by dark shapes. The original meaning attached to the objects gets replaced by ambiguity. Stillness and motion, light and shadow, solidity of matter and the elusiveness of shadow-play encourage a multi-significant reading, while mystical light breaks out from the narrow, philosophical context of the icon and allows a broader, intuitive understanding. The seed of spirituality planted originally by the tradition of mystical light in the Orthodox icon, which inspired *Black Square* and *White on White,* germinated yet again in a more universal form.

Although in *Arabesque* cast shadows occur frequently (on the veil of a sleeping woman, on the sole of her shoe), they appear as a small part of a bigger material world. They are nothing more than just cast shadows in the realm of objects, and as such they do not form an independent realm. In my film shadows are shown as a sovereign reality, ambiguous and mysterious. The moment they emerge on the screen, they push materiality into a temporal visual non-existence. The shadow play in *Table* resembles X-ray image or an ultrasound picture, which makes it possible to see "objects' anatomy", their "internal organs" at work. It recalls Lippit's (2005, p. 62) reflection on Dulac's work mentioned earlier in this chapter: "The penetrating visuality of film pierces the surface and exposes . . . the interiority of things." The scholar referred to the effect achieved by the artist through movement and rhythm, while in the case of my film the unveiling of the "interiority of things" is the work of light and shadow.

The unstable world of light waves, trembling and vibrating, sharpening and dissolving, slowing down and speeding up under some invisible power, brings strong sensations of musicality of *Table*. Movement, although silent, activates some extrasensory hearing allowing music to be sensed by vision. The extrasensory experience was noticed by Lippit in Dulac's films:

> *Dulac's visuality comes to resemble something other than a conventional economy of vision. It suggests a form of penetrating visuality that deflects the look away from the register of vision and returns it to the subject as another*

> *sense. It transforms the field of visuality into a broader sensual order . . . Surface and depth, body and psyche dictate the dual registers of Dulac's visuality* (Lippit, 2005, p. 62).

Lippit discovers in Dulac's works the sense of touch stimulated by visual experience. His words, however, allow reflection on the rhythm of waves in *Table* and encourage me to think of "soundless music" not only in my film, but also in *Arabesque*. In my brief correspondence with Tami Williams (2021) I learned that *Arabesque*, although based on the piano works (two *Arabesque*s by Claude Debussy), not only had been a silent movie, but also, in the opinion of Williams, against the fashion of the epoch, was screened without an accompaniment.[105] Thus, *Arabesque* was designed to evoke the experience of sound through the sense of vision. This kind of extrasensory experience was not alien to Malevich's work either. The notion of "super-vision" referred to feeling of dynamism present in painterly works. Thus, although in my film the extrasensory experience is a side product of the shadow play, it is a shared feature of all the works analysed in this chapter.

[105] The original text of the correspondence: J.R.: "as [Dulac's] three pure cinema works were produced in 1929 – which is the time when the era of silent movies was coming to its end (1927 is mentioned as the date of production of the first sound movie), I wonder if these films (*Themes and Variations*, *Arabesque* and *Disque 957*) were produced originally as silent? T.W.: You are correct, as sound did not arrive in France until 1929 and these films were designed to be shown silent and, my hypothesis is, even without accompaniment.

Chapter 3.

The Physics, Metaphysics and Poetics of *Wavelength* by Michael Snow; The Motif of Waves, Light and Shadow in the Context of the Light–Matter Relation, Higher Dimensions of Space and *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf

Wavelength (1967) by Michael Snow[106] has attracted much by way of critical commentary but despite the extent of the discourse, it appears to be predicated upon similar aesthetic schemas. They usually develop around the use of the zoom and the materialist character of this work. Because of the overwhelming variety of techniques and approaches, *Wavelength* has been regarded as a kind of exploration of filmic elements and the most iconic example of structural film. I wish not only to propose a different reading of this paradigmatic work in order to advance another trajectory but also to show how such a critical understanding coincides with my artistic practice. The combination of these two registers makes it possible to undo the binary logic of only-criticism/only-practice and creates a third space, the space of poetic writing. It is within these passages that I am able to find a relationship to *Wavelength* that is close to my own aesthetic standpoint. This in part is also a resistance to the over-determination of materialist readings. In short, my strategy is the following: instead of seeing the images in *Wavelength* as random exemplifications of the filmic possibilities (see 'Introduction'), I divided the images into three groups: flashes of light, images based on shadow (flat ones), and illusionistic images. Each of these groups is related

[106] Although many versions of *Wavelength* have been created (see fn. 125) I have taken as a subject of my analysis the version from 1967, which can be found under the link: https://www.cda.pl/video/8687112a7.

to one of the still images seen in the last minutes of the film.[107] To give clarity to my argument, I structured my ideas around the three main issues referred to in the sections: 'Light', 'Shadow' and 'Hyperspace'. 'Light' concentrates on the occurrence of light in *Wavelength*. I follow it intertwining throughout the film: 1) in verbal form – as the title of the film, 2) as flashes of light, 3) as sine wave, 4) and as a still image of waves on the wall. Then I analyse these ways of occurrence of light in three subsections: 'Wave', 'Metaphysics of Light' and 'Photo of Waves'. In the first one, on top of the scientific understanding of wave referred to in the part 'Light', I bring up contemporary ideas of wave mentioned by Elizabeth Legge in her book *Michael Snow: Wavelength* (2009). In the following two subsections I consecutively look at the Medieval metaphysics of light and its contemporary understanding, and in the third subsection, taking up the last image in the film, I analyse the visual symbols of wave and light. The section 'Shadow' is devoted to the motif of shadow in *Wavelength* and is divided into the three subsections: 'Flatland', 'Meditation' and '*Walking Woman*'. 'Flatland' approaches the still image of a loft through mathematical ideas of higher dimensions of space and how they can be visualized by shadow (Edwin A. Abbot, Thomas Banchoff). In 'Meditation' I draw attention to the meditative character of the immobility of the image of the loft. The subsection '*Walking Woman*' points out to Snow's earlier experiments with space and time, and the recurring confrontation of the three-dimensional, temporal reality with the two-dimensional one. This also brings into the equation the juxtaposition of this work with the illusionistic image of a walking woman, and a frequent situation of a "double vision", as Legge calls it, which creates a "hyperspace" transcending the three-dimensional one. This is analysed in the last section of this chapter ('Hyperspace').

[107] The image of waves transforming into pure, abstract light shows kinship with the flashes of light occurring throughout the film. If we adopt the perspective of the Medieval metaphysics of light and view the illusionistic images as pointing out to material reality, the flat, half-abstract images can be seen as referring to the realms between pure light and materiality. Although referring illusionistic images to the material realm might seem a tautology, in the case of *Wavelength* it is justified, as they have been read in numerous ways. Thus, Elizabeth Legge (2009) claims that they are "about narrative or about structuralist account of narrative" (p. 47) and compares them to the "actant" – activities prolonging suspense in the narrative movie, whereas for Elder their being juxtaposed with the rest of the film shows the duality of the modes of experience (Testa, 1995, p. 36).

Does Wavelength *somehow constitute an ontology of film, or does it just raise the idea of ontology*? (Legge, 2009, p. 18)

Wavelength *had originated as a summation of "everything that I've thought about everything", but . . . in fact "it doesn't really mean anything" – that is, it does not mean any one thing* (Legge, 2009, p. 22).

Light

In the text below I compare two filmic works: *Wavelength* (1967) by Snow and my *Kitchen Wall* (2016). Describing the images occurring in them, I introduce fragments of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (1931). The first paragraph, which depicts the phenomenon of light consisting of energetic particles, refers to my work. (I would advise to combine the watching of the film with the reading of the passage that refers to it). The motif of golden light and the image of a female arm occurring in Woolf's text serve as a bridge between *Kitchen Wall* and *Wavelength*. The third part of my creative writing concentrates on the first few frames of *Wavelength* and their specific order, which I read as a meaningful integral part of the work, in opposition to the commentators for whom the film starts with the first human event. (At this point it would be recommendable to watch the beginning of *Wavelength.*) Next, there comes another fragment of *The Waves*, which displays striking similarities with the sequence of the first images in *Wavelength*: yellow, then red light followed by sound (which finds its equivalent in the title: *Wavelength*) and then, as the last one, comes the image of materiality accompanied by a stomping sound. The juxtaposition of *Wavelength* and the quoted fragment of *The Waves* reveals a strong visual bond between them. As in the previous chapters, the numbers in the round brackets that follow the work's title indicate the exact fragment of the film referring to the given paragraph.

Fig.11 J. Rojkowska, *Kitchen Wall* (2016)

Kitchen Wall (00:00 – 00:04) https://vimeo.com/122086539

Evening light crept into the kitchen. The visibly rough texture of a white, dull wall unexpectedly earned colour and tone. Murkiness gradually started to embrace its edges, leaving a radiant concave rectangle of light in the middle. It looked as if it emanated white light which, shattered on the edges and dispersed into prismatic colours, created a faint rainbow. Light cast on the grainy wall took on a physical body. Tiny dots, particles of colours and tones like living organisms under a microscope seemed to be in constant flux, to move around and mix together.

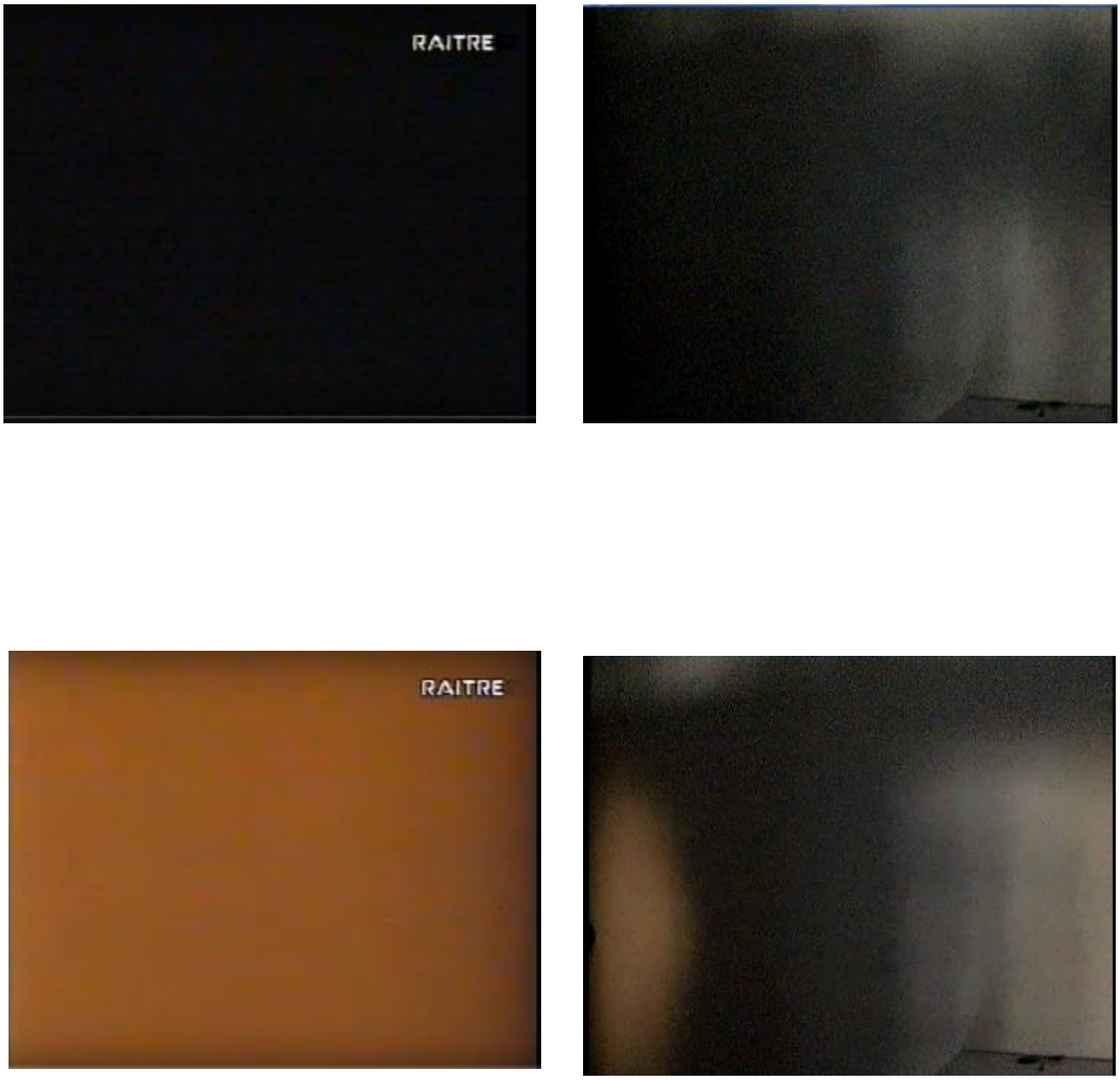

Fig. 11 M. Snow, The first images of *Wavelength,* (left, top and bottom) and J. Rojkowska, *Kitchen Wall* (right, top and bottom). These images refer to the paragraph below and illustrate similarity to each other and relationship to Virginia Woolf's text.

"Slowly the arm that held the lamp raised it higher and then higher until a broad flame became visible: an arc of the fire burnt on the rim of the horizon, and all around it the sea blazed gold" (Woolf, 1931, p. 3).

Wavelength (00:00 – 00:15) https://www.cda.pl/video/8687112a7

Total darkness broken into by a sudden spark of amber glow. Blindness, nothingness changed into a spark. Golden light, neither still, nor frozen in time but living, changing, fluctuating, dense with energy. The first change, light from darkness, initiates all the changes which come after. Every shape becoming visible, identified and named, does it by the virtue of this first change. Matter from pure light.[108] Wavelength. The first thought specified, the first sense given. The beginning of creation – the moment when the idea, still hidden in the all-potentiality of thoughts, gets articulated and becomes a noun: *Wavelength.* The totality of reality.[109] The summation of the nervous system, religious inklings, esthetic ideas. A statement of space and time, beauty and sadness. The balancing of illusion and reality.[110] Light, sound and matter. The mathematical formula of *White on White* and a "poetic oceanic coming up against a breakwater of structural, scientific rigour."[111]

[108] In this experiment, I try to convert the perspective on *Wavelength* by applying a very different, non-materialist tradition of thought on light. I draw from the Medieval metaphysics of light and the 20th-century discovery of the equation between light and matter to uncover a possibility of another reading of this film. In my thinking about light, I am guided by Grosseteste's words: "The first corporeal form, which is also referred to as 'corporeity', is ,in my opinion, the light, because the light, lux in Latin, due to its very nature, diffuses itself in every direction in such a way that a point source will give instantaneously a sphere of light of any size unless some object producing shadows is obstructing its rays" (Sparavigna, 2014, p. 5).

[109] The physicists Roger Colbeck of the Perimeter Institute in Waterloo, Ontario, and Renato Renner based at ETH Zurich, Switzerland, argue that the wave function is an optimal and a complete description of reality. According to them, "there is a one-to-one correspondence between the wave function and the elements of reality" (Zyga, 2012). Considering the above, I propose that the title *Wavelength* does not refer only to a sine wave appearing in this film, nor does it describe the elements constructing filmic medium in general but, in a much broader sense, refers to the total and complete reality.

[110] "I wanted to make a summation of my nervous system, religious inklings, and aesthetic ideas. I was thinking of, planning for time monument in which the beauty and sadness of equivalence would be celebrated, thinking of trying to make a definitive statement of pure Film space and time, a balancing of 'illusion' and 'fact', all about seeing". A Statement on *Wavelength* for the Experimental Film Festival of Knokke-Le-Zoute by Michael Snow (Snow and Dompierre, 1994, p. 40).

[111] Paraphrase of the words of E. Legge (2009, p. 18).

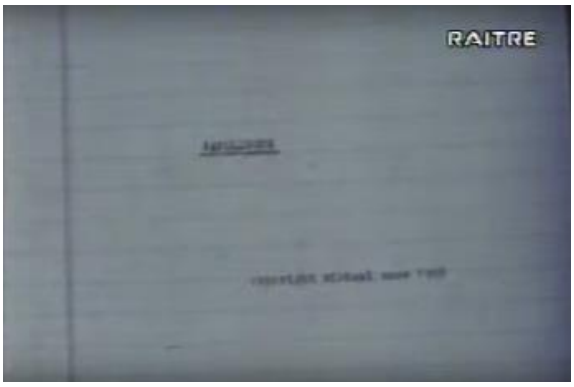

Fig. 13. M. Snow, *Wavelength*

Wavelength (00:00 – 00:15)

"I see a slab of pale yellow", said Susan, "spreading away until it meets a purple stripe." ...

„I hear a sound," said Rhoda ..."going up and down."

„I see a globe" said Neville, "hanging down in a drop against the enormous flanks of some hill." ... .

"I hear someone stamping," said Louis. "A great beast's foot is chained. It stamps, and stamps, and stamps" (Woolf, 1931, p. 4).

Wave

In the first poetic paragraph in the section 'Wave' I develop further the idea touched upon in the previous part – of a gradual emergence of the visible realm, which started with a flash of light from darkness. Then the flash is differentiated respectively into: various colours, sound, space and matter, and finally into intelligent life. This reading stresses yet again that the sequence of the first images in *Wavelength* is meaningful. In this context, the flashes of light occurring throughout the film can be interpreted as a reminder of the first flash of light from which everything came into existence. The figures of *White on White* and *Black Square* mentioned here bridge the issues discussed in this part with those researched in the previous chapter.

Wavelength (00:00 – 00:51)

Living, golden, abstract light, pure potentiality, changes into earthy red colour. A wave of light becomes an idea of soil or blood, a colour of all living organic forms which are yet to come into being.[112] The moment when the wavelength[113] gets its first particulars. From everything it becomes something: a colour, a sound, a scent. It acquires weight and volume, thickness, texture and shape. The word from the realm of ideas comes down to the realm of materiality. Wavelength becomes an interior but also an exterior. In this knotted sense it forms a closure and at the same time an opening that announces itself as four windows on the opposite wall with the sound of a busy street bursting into the loft. It turns into the sound of footsteps of two people entering the room and then it becomes the two people themselves. It doesn't stop though being unnamed, pure light, creative power, pure energy, and absolute potentiality. Recurring short, blinding flashes remind us of this fact. Within a fraction of a second, the loft becomes again nothing and everything: *White Square* of all-potentiality and *Black Square* of blindness.

William C. Wees (1992) comments on these sudden changes of the image, flashes of light, and various modes of perception on which *Wavelength* is built:

> *With their many brief and unexpected changes in light, colour, and texture, they engage the viewer's perception in the moment-by-moment experience of the film . . . At the same time, they act as 'intimations of other ways of seeing', as Snow has put it. They subvert the conventional 'illusory space' of the cinematic image by calling attention to the filmmaker's equivalent of the painter's 'coloured goo.' They encourage the viewer to look at the image as well as into it* (p. 156).

[112] Earthy red can be associated with the earth /soil as an element of the creation of bodily forms. In Barnet Newman's painting *Adam* earthy red refers to the Jewish myths of Creation, in which man and God appear as single beams of light (Tate Modern, 2004).

[113] Elizabeth Legge (2009) mentions "fundamental allusiveness" of the word "wavelength": "As a disturbance whose pattern depends on the properties of the medium it traverses, 'wavelength' worked as a metaphor for a number of contemporaneous ideas, which might include Modernist medium-specificity (since film is made of wavelengths of light and sound), Marshall McLuhan's world-as-radio, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological account of the 'gesture' that marks our immersive communication with the world, reformulated in popular culture terminology as 'being on the same wavelength'" (p. 17).

Most of the critics do not go any further than this,[114] reflecting neither on the presence nor on the role of abstract light in *Wavelength*, its historical and philosophical context, or relation to other images in it. For Wees the flashes of pure light and the variety of used images and techniques stress the material characteristics of the filmic medium.[115] Abstract light does not bring any other connotation but the reflection on film as a projection of light. In his opinion, flashes of coloured light keep coming back throughout the film to interrupt the illusion created by filmic images.

Metaphysics of Light

Although it can be understood in accordance with the abovementioned comments, pure, abstract light was known in art long before the structural film, and it entailed philosophical ideas going far beyond the materialist views. The first example of its presence, in the form of a background made of gold leaf (whose role was to bring real light into the image), was the Byzantine icon.[116] However, it was not only a tribute paid to the Divinity by the offering of precious metal, but a way how the Medieval meta-optics found its visual expression through the image. In the icon, the golden background was associated primarily with the symbol of heaven and God who himself is light,[117] yet through the Medieval metaphysics of light[118] it earned a lot more complex meaning and made the icon not only a religious artwork but in a much broader sense – a metaphysical, theological, and cosmological treatise on light.[119] In the perspective of Grosseteste's and Eriugena's teaching, light is the

[114] See 'Literature Review' pp. 17-19.

[115] Bart Testa (1995) claims that "The structural simplicity of *Wavelength* [made critics] to associate it with artistic and intellectual movements from Russian formalism to post-modernism, phenomenology to Marxist materialism, Minimalism to Structuralism" (p. 36). To mention some of the comments on the use of light in *Wavelength*: Bruce Elder (1989) associates it with "the film's material nature" (p. 190), while Annette Michelson (1979) in her essay *About Snow* calls *Wavelength* "a celebration of apparatus" (p. 118). Scott MacDonald (1993) believes that *Wavelength* is "a movie about motion pictures, just as much as late-1960s paintings and sculpture was about painting and sculpture – particularly its material and conceptual foundations" and about the flashes of light he only says that "moments of flicker assault the eye" (p. 31).

[116] See 'Glossary': the history of real light in art.

[117] See 'Glossary': Medieval metaphysics of light.

[118] See 'Glossary': Medieval metaphysics of light. The discovery of the equation between mater and light revived the idea brought by the Medieval metaphysics of light in a new form (A. Einstein, Theory of Special Relativity, 1905) which managed to soak into Bergson's and Deleuze's writing on cinema (see Chapter 2, fn.: 89, 90 91).

[119] See 'Glossary': Medieval metaphysics of light.

beginning of the whole visible and invisible realms and a building element of matter[120]. These ideas, though ancient, found resonance in contemporary art and thought, all the more so because the beginning of the 20th century brought their revival through physical discoveries.[121] Artists, even those from Snow's closest environment, retrieved Medieval thoughts to draw inspiration from them.[122] Thus, I argue that abstract flashes of light in *Wavelength* carry not only reflection on the material elements of the filmic medium but also much deeper, historically and philosophically founded metaphysical ideas. However, my argument is not based exclusively on the presence of flashes of light. In a later part of this work, I will show the validity of the idea that *Wavelength* is based on three types of images and the importance of this specific division being recognized and acknowledged within the construction of the film itself. A short fragment from *The Waves* included below brings poetic description of the wave-particle duality of light in the vision of atoms and waves. This takes us to the image of the ocean and the waves broached in the later sections.

Air https://vimeo.com/453275677

"Gradually the fibres of the burning bonfire were fused into one haze, one incandescence which lifted the weight of the woollen grey sky on top of it and turned it to a million

[120] See 'Glossary' Medieval metaphysics of light.

[121] The interchangeable nature of matter and energy, Einstein, 1905, see Chapter 2, fn. 89. Later the discoveries on light guided physicists to the theory of higher dimensions (Kaluza-Klein theory 1920, Lisa Randall and Raman Sundrum's brane world theory, 1999), which brought the idea of hyperspace – the universe consisting of 10 spatial dimensions plus time. See fn.: 133b and section 'Hyperspace', p. 102).

[122] Hollis Frampton, who appears in *Wavelength* in one of the "human events", used the fragment of Grosseteste's *De Luce* recited in the third part of his film *Zorn's Lemma* (1970) (Weiss, 1985). A few years after *Wavelength,* Stanley Brakhage executed a series of films, in which "techniques such as extreme soft-focus, over and underexposure, flicker effects, negative and solarized images, flared frames, clear leader, and refractions of light in the lens have produced intermittent glimpses of light as a meaningful subject in its own right" (Wees, 1992, p. 100). Wees also claims that "In addition to its physiological, psychological, and cinematic significance, light has a metaphysical dimension in Brakhage's visual aesthetics. He [Barkhage] frequently draws attention to Ezra Pound's translation of 'Omnia quae sunt, lumina sunt' – 'All things that are are lights' (*Canto LXXIV*)—from the writings of the ninth-century philosopher and theologian Johannes Scotus Erigena, and he often refers to the later school of English 'light philosophers', in particular to Bishop Robert Grosseteste, whose treatise *De Luce* was an important source for Pound's – and hence Brakhage's – ideas about light" (ibid.). Some of Brakhage's works, according to Wees (1992, p. 101), can be seen as "concrete, literal documentaries of the physical and metaphysical light invoked by Erigena and Grosseteste". Wees mentions here *Text of Light* (1974), two series of short films with Roman and Arabic numerals as titles (1979–1982), *The Egyptian Series* (1984), and *The Babylon Series* (1989–1990).

atoms of soft blue. The surface of the sea slowly became transparent and lay rippling and sparkling until the dark stripes were almost rubbed out" (Woolf, 1931, p. 3).

Fig. 12. J. Rojkowska, *Air* (2016)

Photo of Waves

The passage below on my film *Air* (2016), in which the image of waves is created by the shadow of the masses of hot and cold air mixing together, plays several functions: it introduces the idea of infinity (carried by the figure of waves) and the concept of shadow as a visualization of the invisible realms. (I would recommend watching my film *Air* at this point.) This fragment works also as a bridge between this section and the section 'Shadow' devoted to the shadow-based images in *Wavelength.* The poetic vision of the repeated movement of sea waves in Woolf's work resonates with the concept of timelessness brought by the image of ocean in Snow's film. The white tonality of this literary image is echoed by the last few seconds of *Wavelength*, stressing the closeness of these two works.

Air (00:00 – 00:30)

A rectangle of light moved through the kitchen wall changing its shape on its way. Before it touched the darkest corner, it split into three shapes overlapping one another. Its edges got blurred and delaminated into prismatic afterglow and, as if stripped of its skin, the rectangle revealed its anatomy. The light sharpened, transforming the middle of the figure into a radiant pool. Its surface, so far still, got rippled with shallow wrinkles playing with one another. As if moved by the quiet breath of an invisible sleeper, the shape got still with every cloud, which dispersed light, changing it again into a fixed, immobile rectangle, and transformed back into a wrinkled surface of a serene lake with every shot of sunshine.[123] For a few seconds, just before sneaking out into the darkness, the white rectangle revealed this part of reality which escaped equally vision and consciousness. A small pool of light, like a keyhole to the other world, opened up our perception to something

Fig. 15 M. Snow, *Wavelength* – final seconds. This image refers to the next paragraph, where the ambiguous nature of the image of waves is analysed.

[123] In the case of a rectangle of light in my work *Air*, this ambiguity of a still image transforming into a cinematic one comes from its periodical immobility and "emptiness" (characteristic of the traditional still image) intertwined with moments of a shadow-play (typical of the cinematic images projected on a screen).

vast, endless, and escaping vision – to the waves of air: cold and warm mixing on the edge of a half-opened window. Although the rim of the rectangle is cut off by the darker space surrounding it, its vastness spreads beyond it, spreads beyond the visible.[124]

This specific ambiguity of a still image transforming into a cinematic one happens also in *Wavelength* in its last frames. In the majority of the film, the image of the waves is seen as a picture on the wall. However, once the zoom brings the picture close enough for it to fill the whole screen, we become aware of the infinity spreading beyond the frame. Thus, the image combines the features of a cinematic screen and of a traditional still image. This echoes Andre Bazin's words that "screen's masking action is like that of the window: we don't see the space which extends on all sides of the screen, but we never doubt the existence of that space" (Nichols, 1985, p. 521).

"Now the sun had sunk. Sky and sea were indistinguishable. The waves breaking spread their white fans far out over the shore, sent white shadows into the recesses of sonorous caves and then rolled back sighing over the shingle" (Woolf, 1931, p. 144).

The last image brings the memory of the first frames of the film (pure light) and of the title of the work. The leitmotif of waves, however, does not occur only at the beginning and the end but keeps coming back in various forms throughout the whole film: the inside and the outside space, action and stillness, flatness of the image and the illusion of the depth, narration and experimental style – they retreat and come back, replacing each other in shifts like waves. Similarly, light creating the cinematic image as well as sound in the physical sense are both waves, which is acknowledged by the use of abstract sound – a sine

[124] The cinematic screen in the understanding of André Bazin plays the role of a window not only because it masks the reality spreading beyond, but also because it shows another reality. In the case of my film *Air* – it reveals layers of hot and cold air mixing, otherwise invisible for the human eye, which can be only observed through their shadows. This experience of coming-to-vision of the invisible is as much mystical as it is scientific. This method, called shadowgraph technique, was invented in 1672 by Robert Hooke and used for flow visualisation. Shadowgraph technique is one of many examples of the use of shadow in science, serving to unravel things eluding visibility. In a later part of this work, I will evoke other methods used by scientists in which shadow plays the role of an agent allowing visualisation of the invisible things, like e.g. higher dimensions. This is exactly this ability which stands at the core of shadow's myth-creating power and explains its eternal presence in culture and mysticism. More about shadowgraph technique in science: Hargather and Settles, 2009, p. 1, Thermopedia, 2011.

wave, and pure light (flickers). The sine wave sound gradually increases throughout the film and is accompanied by the constantly closing movement of the zoom, which reminds us of yet another wave – the tidal one (MacDonald, 1993, p. 36). Finally, the picture on the wall – the only immobile wave in this film – read as a symbol rather than just an object. This single picture is the most commented image in the whole film, and there hasn't been probably any essay on *Wavelength* which wouldn't mention it. To quote from two of them.

> *Waves are a common image of flux and change. Here flux is transcended (and the idea of transcendence is suggested by the fact that the ocean is also an image of wholeness) by being converted into an image. Timelessness and changelessness are achieved, but at the cost of reality; this is the price that must be paid – the length that must be travelled – to reach the wholeness symbolized by the waves*[125] (Elder, 1989, pp. 207-208).

These words of Bruce Elder are echoed by Wees. His longer description of the last sequences of the film reiterates the main notions used by Elder:

> *The photograph is literally the center of the film's projected image from beginning to end, and at every moment it embodies, in Snow's phrase, "prophecy and memory"; or, to modify a line from Yeats, it tells us what is past and passing and to come . . . As soon as the borders of the photograph disappear beyond the borders of the projected image, the perfectly flat and rather dense and uninteresting photograph suddenly "opens" to reveal what manufacturers of*

[125] a) In my conversation with Snow, I learned that there have been many versions of *Wavelength* made in the 1960s and that the one on the Internet is not the only one existing. The version screened during the event at the Tate Modern in February 2019 varies slightly from the Internet one, and the differences between them are worth mentioning. In the Internet version, flashes of light are colourful, while in the Tate version they were white only and lasted sometimes as long as 5–10 seconds each. So, the static image of the loft gradually emerged from whiteness. The white flashes anticipate the last few frames into which the image of waves dissolves. In the Tate version, the relation between the last image and the flickers is stressed, while in the Internet version the link between them is not so clear.

b) At the event in the Tate Modern, there was also a new (2019) version of *Wavelength* presented, entitled *Waivelength* (Tate Modern, 2019). In it the surface of a lake is shot at sunset. There is no horizon and the changes of colours occurring there, although almost as intense as in the version from 1967, come gradually and are caused by changes in natural light. The film has the original soundtrack from the 1967. *Waivelength* is close to the poetic ambient of *The Waves* (1931) by V. Woolf. Unlike in the earlier pieces, the image gradually darkens into black (which resonates with the natural process of getting dark at sunset). Then the light of the projector is switched off and the empty cinematic screen can be seen, yet the sound is still on. However, it is not dis-synchronicity but the incorporation of the screen as a meaningful image and part of the work.

> *lenses like to call "infinity." . . . It* [zoom] *briefly shifts to a slightly wider angle, as if gesturing toward its beginning, and then the whole image goes out of focus and washes out into white: the clean slate of a new beginning. . . . By the same token, the film does not simply reduce itself to the materiality of the screen and the flat image projected on it. It ends by suggesting that its materiality is not "the end" at all. At least, that is what I take to be the implications of the "flattening" effect leading to, and being superseded by, the perception of "infinite" depth, and the increasingly blown-up image of the photograph being erased by a final vision of pure, unobstructed light. Where the film ends, the imagination is encouraged to carry on, free of material constraints* (Wees, 1981, pp. 81-82).

What strikes me in these comments are repeatedly used notions of timelessness, changelessness within flux, infiniteness, wholeness, and a symbolic understanding of the image of waves. This goes far beyond the definition of a structural, materialist film.[126] The photo of waves – the only immobile wave among the variety of waves towards which everything is heading – an unmoved mover,[127] pure white light – a "new beginning", which brings to mind the infiniteness of the golden background of the Byzantine icon and the timelessness of metaphysical light, from which all reality starts and in which it finally dissolves.

The image of waves also unites the beginning and the end of the film.[128] The title *Wavelength* and the photo of waves create a bridge, and the whole film happens between these two flashes of light: the golden one – followed by the title *Wavelength*, which is mirrored then at the end of the film by the image of waves followed by white light.

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[126] Definition of the structural film, see 'Glossary': structural film.

[127] The idea of an eternal, invariable "unmoved mover" was first formulated by Aristotle in Book 8 of his *Physics* and 12 of *Metaphysics.* He claims that "the necessity that there should always be motion makes it necessary that there should be some mover that is either unmoved or moved by itself" (Barnes, 2016, p. 142). This idea was then adopted by Thomas Aquinas in his *First Way* as proof for the existence of God (Elders, 1990, p. 96).

[128] Wees noticed the role of zoom in the context of its creating a "new beginning" in *Wavelength*. He described it by comparing it to another of Snow's film, *Breakfast*: "Because its [zoom's] approach [in *Breakfast*] is mechanical not optical, physical not perceptual, it is trapped in a three-dimensional world of temporally ordered cause-and-effect events. It can continue to repeat itself or it can stop, but it cannot unite beginning and end, nor break through to a new perception of space. It cannot produce 'ripples' past the end" (Wees, 1981, p. 82).

Everything that happens between them: be it human life[129] or the whole of reality – starts from light and dissolves into light. This suggests that the reflection on light in the film thus was not only led by the reflection on the materiality of the medium but, delving into the tradition of Western philosophy, it introduced a much broader context.

Shadow

The quote from *The Waves* (below) reveals further similarities between the motifs in it and images in *Wavelength*. It helps, together with the previous fragments, to place Snow's work in a broader cultural context, exceeding the materialist and structural tradition. This passage refers to the particular group of images in *Wavelength* which I have called shadow-based.

"All for a moment wavered and bent in uncertainty and ambiguity, as if a great moth sailing through the room had shadowed the immense solidity of chairs and tables with floating wings" (Woolf, 1931, p. 111).

Fig. 13 M. Snow, *Wavelength*

"The evening sun, whose heat had gone out of it and whose burning spot of intensity had been diffused, made chairs and tables mellower and inlaid them with lozenges of brown and yellow. Lined with shadows their weight seemed more ponderous, as if colour, tilted, had run to one side" (Woolf, 1931, p. 127).

[129] Although *Wavelength* is regarded as a non-narrative film, it does seem meaningful that the last two of the human events involve death.

Flatland

If we divide the images in *Wavelength* into three types: flashes of light, illusionistic images, and flat, shadow-based ones, it turns out that the last category (shadow-based images) takes the majority of the film time. Within the 42 minutes of the film, flashes of light last anything from a fraction of a second to a few seconds each. Moments when the illusionistic images occur take a few minutes altogether. For the rest, which is more than half an hour, the viewer gazes at a flat, barely moving image of the loft. A variety of techniques was used to get the impression of flatness: underexposure, negative film stock and coloured filters, all in the purpose of creating images which are almost monochrome, based on shadows and filtows[130] and in which illusory three-dimensionality is purposefully swapped for two-dimensionality. This means the rejection of Renaissance mimeticism and the placement of them half-way between the abstraction of pure light and the illusion of reality.[131] During these moments the motion is scarce and mainly involves the outside space. Although it lacks the ability to create any sort of action, thanks to the sound of a busy street, co-related with the movement, the images preserve for a while a relationship with the mimetic picture.[132] About 8:14 min. into the film, the natural sound gets replaced by a rising sine wave and the image changes into the negative. Due to the unrealistic sound, it loses yet another reference to reality. Now, the negative reveals some details which were not noticeable in the dark, positive shot. It resembles an X-ray scan, which shows internal organs, i.e. things otherwise eluding visibility. It seems to open the door to a new dimension inaccessible to sensual vision. The lack of action not only distances the film from the traditionally understood movie but also suggests a different register of time. [133] As in the traditional film or, for that matter,

[130] See 'Glossary': filtows and shadows.
[131] A similar situation happens in Nowosielski's painterly work. See Chapter 1.
[132] It is worth noticing that the "left–right" movement, although giving the impression of dynamism, and being – in the traditional cinema – associated with action, in *Wavelength* is superficial, while the "fake" movement – the closing up of the zoom – preserving the stasis of the image, turns out to have the constructive power for the film.
[133] a) The room, although maintaining familiarity, seems like an alien place. Its flatness, abstract colour, unreal sound accompanying it, and its being suspended in the moment create an impression as if we were looking at it from a different space-time dimension. Elizabeth Legge (2009, p. 30) notes a different status of these images: "*Wavelength's* incremental adjustments of the lens also open into the paradoxes of time-space in the quantum physics of the 1960s: is each moment defined by new lines of time or space, into parallel worlds? In the film, each turn of the lens seems both decisive and optional, as if marking not only its own moment, imposed by Snow's turn of the wrist, but also by the turn not taken".

in reality, time is measured by the succession of events, there is always some "before" and "after". In the unreal world we are introduced to by these ghostly images, time in that sense does not exist. We find ourselves in an unchangeable "now", in a fixed moment. The past, present, and the future are merged and indistinguishable. The duration is stressed by the persistence of the image and, although there are changes (of colour and tone, positive and negative, etc.), they do not shift the mode of our perception from what could be called "gazing" into the "expectation of action" – related to the moments when the illusionistic cinematic picture appears. Bruce Elder analyses the difference in the viewer's reaction to this type of image:

> *At first, we respond much as we would to any traditional illusionistic drama. This response, however, is soon undercut. The use of intense changes in the qualities of the colour and light, the extended duration of the zoom and the absence of dramatic action (or, at least, dramatic action as we usually conceive it) cause the audience to redirect its attention in the second section of this portion of the film to the film's material nature. . . . At one level, the differences in response to the two cinematic styles points up the crucial difference between the way we respond to a work belonging to the static visual arts and the way we respond to a moving picture* (Elder, 1989, p. 190).

Meditation

Elder's reflection on flat images as well as on the flashes of light is reduced to the most external, material layer[134] and is related to the mode of perception typical of static arts (Elder, 1989, pp. 189-190). What is, however, interesting about the viewing of static art is

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b) E. A. Abbott in his book *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (1884) illustrates the idea of the existence of multiple dimensions of space through the image of Flatland – a two-dimensional world visited by a three-dimensional visitor. Michio Kaku (2018) mentions other attempts to visualise higher dimensions with the use of shadow, like computer programs written by the mathematician Thomas Banchoff, which "allow us to manipulate higher-dimensional objects by projecting their shadows onto a flat, two-dimensional computer screen" (p. 11). He concludes that "the growing realization among scientists today is that any three-dimensional theory is 'too small'" to describe the forces that govern our universe" (ibid. p12). Considering that shadow has been used consistently to create models of higher dimensions, one may ask if flat, shadow-based, immobile images of the loft do not refer to the invisible higher dimensions of reality, and if their juxtaposition with the illusionistic ones does not repeat in some ways the story of Flatland.

[134] Similarly, Testa(1995): "the viewer is compelled to redirect attention to perception of the filmic technical process itself" (p. 37).

that the type of perception, normally associated with gallery space – where the viewer spends as much time with each artwork as he wishes, Snow transferred to the cinematic theatre, taking control over the time the viewer spends in front of it. This purposefully extended viewing may raise suspicion that Snow intended to subject the viewer to certain sensual factors for a specific length of time to evoke psycho-physical reactions. The flat, almost static image is one of the most persistent. Yet the "fake" closing-up movement (which differentiates this image from the static one) gradually and arbitrarily directs the attention of the viewer to one point – the photograph of waves.[135] The whole process resembles meditation, in which the duration of an image introduces a meditative mode of perception, while the zoom "guides" the meditation through the image of the loft, gradually narrowing and directing attention to the chosen point of focus of meditation. This process is accompanied and co-related with the rising sine wave sound, which is also known for its ability to influence the brainwork.[136] Legge (2009) mentions the experience of the "intensifying sine wave to the advancing zoom" (p. 11) in *Wavelength,* in relation to the fact that at the time "Artists were experimenting with sound and light environments in New York . . . to various 'psychoacoustical' effects" (ibid. pp. 11-12).

By the time the zoom reaches its final destination, the sound reaches the highest pitch and then, simultaneously with the image turning white, it goes beyond the audible registers (ibid. p. 11). Both the sound and image cross the threshold of perceptibility while the whole passage through the room turns out to be a gradual preparation for this moment.

Walking Woman

When the zoom reaches the opposite wall, just before if concentrates on the image of the waves, we get a glimpse of two other images hanging in the nearest proximity. These are a

[135] Testa (1995, pp. 36, 37) says about the zoom that at first "it is barely discernible", but after the third human event, "its majestic indifference to the collapsed man pulls the eyes back to the facts that space has been constricting, and that the image is irretrievably flatter than before". Soon it becomes the main and most important experience in this film.

[136] The extent of time the viewer is subjected to these two factors together may suggest that Snow tried to use the sine wave and flashes of light to alter viewers' state of consciousness. Legge (2009, p. 11) notices that the sine wave vibrations make us feel levitating when the image of waves passes the border of physical closeness. She also analyses trance-like effect of light and sound in *Wavelength* (ibid. p. 25).

Walking Woman[137] cut-out and a photograph of a woman. These two versions of the coming and going woman seen in the last few shots of the film not only point to two separate realities: the material and immaterial one (be it the 3D reality vs. higher dimensions or the material vs. filmic reality) reflected upon throughout the film through the juxtaposition of illusionistic and flat images. They also in a more straightforward way draw our attention to *Walking Woman* as a meaningful clue for *Wavelength*.

The text below consisting of a fragment of *The Waves*, followed by a short paragraph referring to my work *Kitchen Wall* and a quote from Regina Cornwell concerning *Walking Woman* image draws attention to the motif of a woman in motion, which occurs in all three works. Interestingly, in all these works this figure is not only directly related to the phenomenon of light and shadow, but also appears cropped. In my work the female torso and the arm dissolves into an abstract shadow, while in the quoted fragment of *The Waves* the woman is hidden behind the horizon, while the only visible fragment of her body is the arm raising a lamp. In Woolf, the figure of a woman relates to flashes of colourful light and links closely with the motifs of abstract light and a cropped figure of *Walking Woman* image in *Wavelength,* divulging, yet again, the underlying and so far unobserved confluence of these two works. The second, short paragraph refers to my work *Kitchen Wall*, and bridges *The Waves* and *Wavelength*. (I would recommend to watch it with particular attention to the phenomena described in this fragment.)

"The sky cleared as if the white sediment there had sunk, or as if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp and flat bars of white, green and yellow spread across the sky like the blades of a fan" (Woolf, 1931, p. 1).

Kitchen Wall (00:05 - 00:59)

A body casts a shadow. A dark, abstract, unrecognizable mould covered light for a while like a veil covers a lamp. The body of a woman in movement – stretched, dark shadow of

[137] *Walking Woman* series, in which he explores the profile of a walking woman, was executed by Snow between 1961 and 1967 and embraces works in various media.

an arm and a fragment of torso brings disturbance into the motionless screen filled with pure light. Cropped by the frame, headless, dispersed into abstract dots of phthalo blue...

Walking Woman

"It is a silhouette of a woman in stride, the feet, hands and crown of her head cropped. The cropping accentuates framing. . . the extremities and frame apparently cut off by an actual, external frame[138]

Fig. 14 M. Snow, *Walking Woman*[139] (1964), left and J. Rojkowska, *Kitchen Wall,* right.

Walking Woman – a flat, two-dimensional figure, simplified to the point when it can express abstract ideas while preserving a visible link with figuration. A silhouette – which, although seemingly in action, is frozen in time. An artwork, an idea, an intellectual struggle which preoccupied Snow's mind for many years. It existed in numerous versions: as a negative and positive,[140] covered with layers of colour, exhibited outdoors as well as in gallery space, it always stayed first and foremost a confrontation between

[138] Regina Cornwell (1980, p. 5) about *Walking Woman* by Snow.

[139] Still from M. Snow, *New York Eye and Ear Control* (1964). Source: Bordercrossingsmag (2015).

[140] The figure-ground relationship is one of crucial issues present in Snow's works throughout his career. It appears in *Lac Clair* – a painting preceding directly *Walking Woman,* as well as in his later works (e.g. *Solar Breath,* 2002). See 'Glossary': figure – ground relationship.

three- and two-dimensional reality.[141] *Walking Woman* – a "negation of haptic space" (Testa, 1995, p. 29) by coincidence brought from the unchangeable duration of her world into the temporality of ours. A ghost, a "myth and immortality" or the myth about immortality.[142] Being a shadow without a body within the spatial world opens the door to the realm of spirits and apparitions and to the mental constructs of higher dimensions. The woman, equally an inhabitant of Shadowland and Flatland,[143] and – belonging to the same order of things – the only possible visitor in the two-dimensional version of the loft.

Walking Woman preoccupying Snow's mind for six years shows how his thinking evolved during this time span. It started as a painterly cut-out, which transformed into a spatial, two-dimensional steel construction confronted with the three-dimensional reality. Its being on the border of a static and moving image is manifested by the frozen movement of the figure. The further exploration of this issue involved displaying it outdoors, so that in a busy street it mingled with rushing commuters and looked like one of them. In 1962 Snow executed a 16-piece photographic series of *Walking Woman* entitled *Four to Five,* intended as a documentation of the work, yet it was also another step in bridging the static and moving image, which anticipated Snow's soon undertaken filmic practice (Testa, 1995, p. 29). This work developed later into *New York Eye and Ear Control* (1964) – a filmic documentation of the *Walking Woman* series. *Wavelength* – his next film shot directly after *New York Eye and Ear Control* elaborates further the ideas already present in *Walking Woman*. Snow used a variety of techniques to produce numerous versions of *Walking Woman.* Painterly cut-outs and the steel, smooth-surfaced figure created a volatile phenomenon: "the figures flared in the sun, turned dark against sparkling water, were clothed in an ever-changing range of colours and patterns from the trees, sky, river, rocks and passing people" (Reid, 1994, pp. 21-22). This description corresponds to intense changes of colour of the flat images of the loft. Its still, abstract-coloured version juxtaposed

[141] The presence of the *Walking Woman* image in *Wavelength* as one of the concluding shots indicates the importance and the relationship of this work to *Wavelength.*
[142] See 'Glossary': myth of the beginning of arts. The meaning of shadows in the mythology and languages of many cultures, indicating the closeness of the shadow and the world of spirits, is discussed in more detail in Chapter 1.
[143] See fn. 133b.

with the illusionistic, dynamic one, can be seen as further examination of the above ideas, initiated by the flat cut-out of *Walking Woman* placed in the urban reality of New York City.

She, a ghost, is accompanied in *Wavelength* by her bodily version –a photograph of a woman walking in the street. The subject of both is identical. A double vision of a woman going back and forth. One is almost abstract and symbolic, while the other one maintains unique, individual features. These two, placed next to each other, invite a question about their relationship. In Regina Cornwell's belief, they constitute a meaningful duo: "The pair of walking images is a metaphor for a reading of a film, suggesting in their contrast between flat, cut-out, partial abstraction and full photographic representation the dialectics of the film, and indeed of all films" (Cornwell, 1980, p. 79)[144]. But if we look at *Walking Woman* from a wider perspective, taking onto account the previous context of this work (outdoor space), the reflection on the relation between it and the filmic medium, although justified, yields to a different reading: in the last sequences of *New York Eye and Ear Control,* the cut-out of *Walking Woman* is taken away by Snow, only to reveal a real woman hidden behind it, and another woman behind the first one, facing the opposite direction – an anticipation of the two images on the wall in *Wavelength* and a reflection on the relation of *Walking Woman* to real life.

Hyperspace

On one hand, the relationship between the snapshot of a woman and the illusionistic cinematic images related to human events is stressed by the fact that three out of four of human evens involve women undertaking the action seen in the photograph: walking to and from, or in and out of the loft, sometimes even without saying a word. On the other hand, *Walking Woman* creates an analogy to the flat, half-abstract images of the loft, resonating particularly strongly with the shot of the ghostly, superimposed, negative image of a woman leaving the loft. Moreover, as there is a visual and physical proximity between these two still

[144] She continues about the third image: "The waves carry a double suggestion: they are expansive and endless, but also frozen and bear no trace of horizon no other visual clue to depth. Finally, the photograph is taken out of focus and into whiteness and complete flatness" (Cornwell, 1980, p. 79). But in this reading the third image does not relate to the other two. In my proposal, these three pictures coming to focus as the last images in the film stress the importance and validity of the idea of the three groups of cinematic images *Wavelength* is built on, with each of the still images creating an analogy to one of the three groups mentioned above.

images of women, so, throughout the film, there is a similar proximity between the illusionistic three-dimensional image of the loft and the two-dimensional one. Sudden jumps between them can be seen as pointing out their physical closeness, however, Snow doesn't stop at mixing various shots to show two versions of the same place using a different space-time paradigm. He goes one step further, superimposing the flat image over the illusionistic one, creating some sort of "hyperspace",[145] in which these two realities, although separate and different, co-exist. Legge mentions increasingly frequent episodes of this "double vision", as she calls it, and notices that it also happens with the double images of women on the wall. She comments the spatial consequences of this resulting in a kind of "stereometry":

> *At the top is a double magazine photograph of a woman seen walking toward the camera in one image and away in another, but the photograph never really comes into focus. Beneath are two overlapping white silhouettes of the 'walking woman'. . . which only come into focus in the last fifteen minutes. The doubling of these images of women echoes increasingly frequent episodes of double vision on the part of the lens, like an unresolved stereometric image. In those last fifteen minutes, this double vision gradually takes hold, and for a minute the third, bottom image – which remains unresolved long after we can make out the 'walking woman' silhouettes – hovers within another, larger, ghostly superimposed image of itself, as if existing at two different focal distances at the same time* (Legge, 2009, pp. 10-11).[146]

The "double vision" through the superimposition happened not only with the images on the wall and the immobile images of the loft but also with moving images. A ghostly image of a woman superimposed on the image of the loft repeats the episode of the last "human event". Thus, the existence of a different space–time continuum, within which the present, past, and the future merge, and in which all events, deeds, and thoughts exist as an energetic trace, is brought to the fore. The ghostly woman entering and leaving the loft foretells also the flat, double *Walking Woman* image on the wall. *Walking Woman* and the ghost of a woman both belong to the same world of shadows, both are the subjects of

[145] See fn. 133b.

[146] The attempt to achieve something like "stereometry" adding an extra dimension to the existing ones shows again that Snow experimented with the space-time dimensions.

myths, the dwellers of other dimensions, which although inaccessible, are separated from us only by a thin film of our sensual limitations. Lisa Randall explains the multi-dimensional reality:

> *there could be other universes, perhaps separated from ours by just a microscopic distance. However, that distance is measured in some fourth spatial dimension of which we are not aware. Because we are imprisoned in our three dimensions we can't directly detect these other universes. It's rather like a whole lot of bugs crawling around on a big, two-dimensional sheet of paper, who would be unaware of another set of bugs that might be crawling around on another sheet of paper that could be only a short distance away in the third dimension* (Randall, 2003).[147]

The thin membrane between these two universes in *Wavelength* sometimes gets illuminated from behind with a strong beam of light, allowing the shadows of the other world to be seen in this one, and letting them mingle for a while. Legge (2009, p. 57), reflecting on the timelessness of *Walking Woman,* brings about Levi-Strauss's metaphor of myth and music:

> *Both music and myth operate as stresses between an external cultural grid and our internal perceptual grid, hollowing out "momentary lacuna"' in the grid of history and elapsed time, suspending the ordinary temporality in which they take place to admit us into "a kind of immortality". Levi-Strauss's metaphor for the temporal effect of music is apposite: "because of the internal organisation of the musical work, the act of listening to it immobilises passing time; it catches and enfolds it as one catches and enfolds a cloth flapping in the wind". Through this metaphor the dun curtain of Solar Breath becomes the fabric of music and mythology. The curtain looks back to the folds of stretched canvas in Snow's "walking woman" sculptures of 1963 . . .*

[147] Lisa Randall is a professor of physics at Harvard University. She earned recognition in 1999, after publishing papers written in collaboration with Raman Sundrum (a postdoctoral student at the time, now a professor at Johns Hopkins University) which offered a revolutionary approach to gravity, the theory of membranes and extra dimensions (Holloway, 2005, Randall, 2003).

The mystical idea of light as the creator of matter, and of shadow as having the power to reveal hidden realities, have been present in our culture for millennia. In the last century however, they have been re-introduced, revealing their scientific facet and reinforcing their presence in the reflection on our world. Adopting these ideas into thinking on *Wavelength* allows me to see it in a different light and results in a new reading. In this perspective *Wavelength* can be seen as a metaphysical and philosophical statement not only on the nature of filmic medium but also on the whole reality: the visible and the invisible, material and immaterial. It touches upon scientific concepts like the existence of higher dimensions, endowing them with mystical and mythical character and introducing the realm of ghosts. It shows light as the beginning and the end of all being, linking it with the Medieval metaphysics of light, and at the same time points to the scientific concept of the wave function as a means of describing the whole of reality. Thus, in *Wavelength* myth and scientific speculation, materialism and mysticism, ontology and epistemology mingle. As Snow claimed, it is the summation of aesthetical ideas and religious inklings, a time–space monument. It is a work about everything, yet about nothing in particular. As the artist himself believed, *Wavelength* is "metaphysics" (Monk, 1994, p. 326).To repeat Legge's words, "in all, *Wavelength* reaches beyond its own vanishing point; and its ambitions and effects – philosophical or pop-cultural, acerbic or nostalgic – seem endless" (Legge, 2009, p. 77).

Review of Practice

In this part I reflect on my studio work in the context of *Wavelength* by Snow. The similarity of some figures occurring in my and Snow's works inspired me to delve deeper into it to provide a sustained analysis of a possible relationship between these works.

In the section 'Waves' I write about the differences in rendering space in *Wavelength* and in two of my works: *Air* and *Kitchen Wall*. The deep expanse of the loft in *Wavelength*, which undergoes gradual flattening through the employment of the zoom and thanks to the introduction of a flat, shadow-based image, is juxtaposed with an unchangeably shallow

visual plane in my works, accompanied by various layers of depth created by sound. Merleau-Ponty's reflection on the visible as a thin fragment of a much bigger being, concludes my reflection on space in both Snow's and my works.

The use of coloured light "redirects attention to the film's material nature" (Elder, 1989, p. 190) and flattens the image even further. Elizabeth Legge's comment on the "immaterialisation" of the image happening through the use of light, brings to mind its wave-particle duality and equally well describes *Wavelength* and my abovementioned works.

In the section 'Shadow-Presence' I reflect on the representational character of filmic and photographic image. I scrutinize a particular example of the presence-absence interplay in *Wavelength* through the image of the ghost and compare it with the shadow-play in *Kitchen Wall.* As the ghost stresses the absence of a model, the occasionally abstract shadow in my work balances on the edge of the representation of a body and presentation of a shadow -- and opens up a field of reflection on the question of presence and absence in Snow's and in my works.

In my films sound builds a deeper space than the visual image does. I compare the use of mechanical sound, the sound of activities undertaken off-screen and the sound of the radio playing in *Wavelength* and in my works to find out that it creates a complex, multilayered plane co-mingling with the everyday reality.

The slow, inevitable, mechanical movement of the zoom constitutes a crucial element of *Wavelength* not only in the sense of the construction of the film but also as a metaphor-building factor. The image of waves and the final white light to which it resolves, which in *Wavelength* constitute part of the metaphor, in my work are substituted with two images alternately replacing each other and sometimes mingling: the image of the texture of the wall, which stresses shallow depth and materiality, and the mobile image of the shadow play. Section 'Zoom " is devoted to the above issues.

As in the previous chapters, the poetic description of the images from the discussed works interwoven into the text constitutes a kind of formal analysis and serves the purpose of drawing reader's attention to their shared aspects, which will be analysed in detail later in

the chapter. It is advisable to watch the mentioned work while reading passages that relate to it.

Waves

The space of the loft in *Wavelength* – although very deep at first, gradually gets flattened. In comparison, in my film *Air* the image is compressed and flat and does not suggest any depth. Only when the camera moves away to show a wider picture, can the vertical plane of the "screen" be recognized as a wall, while the horizontal plane at the bottom of the image, which only now becomes visible, introduces three-dimensionality. It also changes the perception and understanding of light: at first seen as an abstract entity, now it shows itself as a physical, everyday phenomenon created by diurnal light wandering along the walls. This double nature allows it to be seen as a natural, yet at the same time it maintains the power of an abstract image introducing symbolic meaning.

Air (00 -00:04, 00:24 – 00:28)
Shadows of waves, dark and sharp-outlined, follow one another like strings touched by invisible fingers. They alternately sharpen and get blurred, come forward and recede in a strange optical dance mingling the texture of the wall and the image. The waves blur gradually, losing their shape, revealing their existence only by pulsating movement – life throbbing under the skin of some unidentified living organism. Although shadows are usually linked with the world of objects, to find the source of the waves performing the shadow-play, one has to look into the invisible things, into the secret activities of air or clandestine life of light.

In the interview with Simon Hartog, Snow defined the image of waves in *Wavelength* as "visible registers of invisible forces" (Hartog, 1994, p. 51). The volatile image of waves reveals the existence of the energy, yet if it were not for the shadow, the energy itself would

elude our awareness. Scott MacDonald noticed that "The ocean waves in the image are a metaphor for both the periodic motions of the zoom lens and for the oscillations of the sine wave; they may also suggest the 'ocean' of visual possibilities the conventional cinema refuses to traverse" (MacDonald, 1993, p. 36). Intrinsic movement of light causes waves to penetrate everything, even solids. The visible universe is an ocean of invisible waves.

Coloured Light

Air (00:10 - 00:25)

The image of the wall with the rectangle of rippling waves seen from a broader perspective assumes brownish and amber tones accompanied by a faint prismatic glow on the edges of the rectangle. They soon change into subtle blueish light illuminating the whole image. Changes keep coming in turns, bringing pinkish and grey tones. The camera lens starts closing up on the top of the bright rectangle, at the same time registering the changes of colour happening in the whole interior.

Elder claims that in *Wavelength* the "intense changes in the qualities of the colour and light . . . cause the audience to redirect its attention . . . to the film's material nature" (Elder, 1989, p. 190) or to the "filmic technical processes itself" (Testa, 1995, p. 37). The technical interventions mentioned by Bart Testa: flashes and flares, changes of focus, light and film stock, introduction of coloured filters, a passage of negative footage, create a "play of depth and flatness" (Testa, 1995, p. 37).

Kitchen Wall (00:00 – 00:13, 00:46 – 00:56)

The stillness of the image gets interrupted by the shadow of an outstretched arm. The dark spot of the body, which comes next, covers the radiant spot. A dark blue shadow cropped by the frame to the point of abstraction divides the image into three parts: the pool of an amber glow on the left, the grey spot on the right and the dark nebula in between.

The blue nebula of shadow in *Kitchen Wall* covers an amber spot, creating a monochrome image of busy, pulsating, blueish tones. The movement of the large shape occasionally

reveals a spot of golden light on the left. With the motion of the dark shape, the spot changes its outline, shrinks and grows. Its move reveals a radiant blot of light on the wall again, and the image takes on the spectrum of colours from dark greys to violets to pinkish whites.

Changes of light, although surprising with the intensity of colours, originate in white light – the same white light which during its daily journey wanders through the spectrum of colours, and the same which can be seen in the last sequences of *Wavelength.* Legge's words, referring to *Wavelength*, also fit my works: "The passages of intense colour and flashing light make us feel that the worId is being transmuted into new substances – with light itself giving up its ordinary role of making other things visible while being invisible, and instead shaking apart into its component spectral colours, taking on mote-like textures, turning into a particle accelerator and prism" (Legge, 2009, pp. 49-50). The white light in *Wavelength* contains within itself the image of waves, the changes of colours and all the images seen earlier.

Shadow-Presence

In *Air* a gradual close-up reveals a dense dark shadow on the right edge and details of the texture of the wall. The shadow, although inscrutable, shows some movement, which indicates the presence of a person hiding in the darkness. The movement seen within the frame is, however, too ambiguous to divulge any information. In *Air,* the movement of the camera, the instability of the hand and moving shadows evidently cast by a human being introduce an invisible presence. Elder (1989, p. 211) mentions a ghostly image of a woman in *Wavelength*: "A ghost is someone who, though departed still possesses some measure of presence. This presence however, is not that of a real person or entity, but that of one who returns to haunt us as an Absent One. Hence, in the figure of a ghost, presence and absence commingle" (ibid. p. 211). A woman in *Kitchen Wall*, similarly as in *Air*, is never seen, therefore the shadow in both films at the same time tells of presence and absence, but this absence differs from that one introduced by the ghostly figure in *Wavelength*. The shadow in my works points out to the off-screen presence of the model during filming. The movement of the shadow indicates the movement of the body at the time of filming.

Through this specific link maintained with the living person, which can be sensed but cannot be seen, the shadow, through its mystical character, can be associated with the representation of the human soul rather than with the sphere of the deceased. Elders says: "It is clear that Snow uses the death and haunting of the scene by a ghost to point towards an inevitable consequence of the making of photographic images and of representations of all sorts – the fact that representations 'kill-off' their live models and return in their stead ghostly 'semi-real' representations which, while presenting their models (in the sense of offering a likeness or at least representative of them), still render them absent" (Elder, 1989, p. 211). The likeness between the model and its filmic rendering does not occur in my works; the shadow of the model is ambiguous, though the degree of ambiguity changes (from a figurative shape to an abstract spot). Being related directly to the body and its actions, the shadow represents it, pointing out to the absence of the model, and at the same time, balancing on the edge of abstraction, maintains realism.

Sound

A gentle hum of the camera in *Air* accompanying the image directs our attention to a mechanical presence. The hum, however, gets disrupted by some other noise resembling the sound of steps. The trembling movement of the gear, the noise and movement of the dark spot make us aware that someone is holding the camera. Flat, abstract display of colours framed by the edge of the table at the bottom is accompanied by three different plans of sound: the clear and recognizable sound of everyday activity can be heard against the background of the mechanical sound of the working camera and indistinct chatter of a TV programme. The two latter ones are not unlike the sounds in *Wavelength*: the sinewave and the radio sound in the second "human event".[148] Here however, the sound of the camera indicates a mechanical presence and marks the "first plane" – the shallow depth closest to the screen. The "second plane" introduced by the sound of human activity happens behind the camera, demarcating the space shared with the first one, so that their proximity can be recognized as confined to the same interior. The TV sound introduces yet

[148] Snow's *Wavelength* as well as two other films executed directly after this one (*Back and Forth* and *La Region Central*) were accompanied by mechanical sound, which was post-synced. In Snow's opinion the electronic soundtrack in *La Region Central* functions as a "'kind of nervous system' in the experience of the projected film" (Legge, 2009, p. 71).

another plane; it broadens the very flat visual space of the image and suggests a much larger physical area spreading beyond the frame, the "third plane" of another room adjacent to the kitchen. It also introduces a different space-time continuum of the broadcast programme, and yet another, invisible, off-screen presence of a speaker, mediated through the technology. When the light-and-shadow play turns abstract, it is the sound which anchors the image within the reality.

Wavelength was shot in the broad illusionistic space of a loft, which gradually got flattened by the zoom, use of filters and negative film stock. The radio sound in it is directly related to the human action – it gets switched on and off by the woman entering the loft. *Kitchen Wall*, conversely, earned depth thanks to the sound. Flatness and three-dimensionality, or rather various depths, interact in *Kitchen Wall* with visual and aural elements, creating a manifold space. It can be seen as corresponding to the "hyperspace" of *Wavelength*, though built in a different way, neither by superimpositions, nor by the introduction of a two-dimensional, timeless plane. Two-dimensionality, time and the "television space" in *Kitchen Wall* and *Air* are strongly related to the physical space of the interiors in which they are set, and lack the metaphysical or scientific sense of hyperspace in *Wavelength*. They co-exist, creating one uniform space of existence.

The Zoom

Probably there is not any single text of *Wavelength* which would not analyse its last few sequences. In fact, the whole film is designed as a process of taking the viewer gradually from the first shots to the last image of white light[149] – and this is achieved due to one tracking shot. The closing up movement of the zoom, it has been noticed, accentuates inevitability, is arbitrary and predictable.[150] The "prophecy" (Wees, 1981, pp. 78-83) of the ultimate end achieved this way gains here existential character – it is the end of no return. *Air,* on the other hand, ends very differently – with a blueish, "empty screen" – the wall, whose materiality is clearly noticeable. The hesitant movement of the camera gives the

[149] A. Michelson (1971, p. 174): "we sense the fact that . . . its movement will terminate inexorably in a focusing upon a particular area not yet known to us".
[150] See Wees, 1992, p. 157.

impression of waiting for the phenomenon to happen again and asserts to the viewer that the last shots were not scripted or planned but shot spontaneously. As much as the first part of the film concentrates on the shadow play, the second part attracts attention to the action of filming itself. The zoom, from a shallow depth brings us very close to the wall so that we can examine its structure and materiality. At the same time, as if accidentally, it reveals the presence of a person hiding in the dark shadow, although the close-up of the hand and the camera are so enlarged that they are almost impossible to identify. The movement of the camera in *Air* changes the vantage point, drawing attention to various elements of the interior, displaying hesitation and evidently looking for the best shot. Testa claims that

> *It is paradoxical but transparently true that many filmmakers value the mobile hand-held camera . . . because it does intrude within the real, as an index of subjective realism. But its intrusiveness takes on aesthetic value because it is the singularly most powerful rhetorical strategy in filmmaking for asserting the co-presence of camera and the world or, shifting emphasis, the co-presence of the camera and the self of the filmmaker. The aesthetic value of this co-presence is a realist one, the value that accrues to an index of authenticity* (Testa, 1995, pp. 58-59).

The hand-held camera and the sound of steps in *Air* bring realism and, in a way constitute an equivalent of the illusionistic image in *Wavelength*. This, together with the shadow performance on the wall, makes different images and realities alternating in *Wavelength* (illusionistic image, two-dimensional reality, *Walking Woman*, abstract light and *Atlantic*) merge into one.

Testa mentions that Peter Gidal and Malcolm Le Grice tried to "recast Snow interpretatively, moulding his films to their theory of avant-garde film" (Testa, 1995, p. 44). He also notes that soon their:

> *account of Snow was rapidly inserted into a wider Structuralist debate. . . Gidal . . . proposes a full 'semiotic reduction' dedicated to the elimination of symbol, allegory, metaphor, as well as story-telling, arguing that these poetic forms tip the balance against the perception of film's materiality and more toward 'transparent representation'. That is, we read through the image to a meaning behind it and no longer grapple with its material operations. . . [In their view]*

> *the task of the avant-garde is to be the reductive isolation and exposure of cinematic techniques as 'material practices'* (ibid.).

Regardless of the purely materialist reading of the critics mentioned above, in many comments the zoom and the last sequences in *Wavelength* are perceived as harbouring metaphorical sense. Thus, Legge claims that:

> *Like Zeno's arrow, Wavelength's zoom can work as a metaphor for any number of things: perceptual processes, chronological measurement, directional movement, line of sight, teleological history or narrative of any kind. At the time of its making and ever since, Wavelength has functioned as an allegorical structure par excellence, situated within any number of scientific, philosophical, sociological and popular cultural narratives* (Legge, 2009, pp. 21-22).

And in another place: "The waves, 'vanishing and reappearing', beat out the 'measure of *infinite* time' as the ironic and inevitable metaphor of that climax" (ibid. p. 71). The scholar quotes other opinions: "Annette Michelson also responded to the putatively phallic thrust of the zoom, converting it into a metaphor of experience itself" (ibid. p. 61), whereas Testa notes that "in Snow's film time generally carries metaphoric significance" (Testa, 1995, p. 45). P. Adams Sitney adds to these voices, claiming that "the zoom continues . . . into the final image of the static sea pinned to the wall, a cumulative metaphor for the whole experience of the dimensional illusion in open space" (Sitney, 2002, p. 354). He also mentions Michelson, who finds this film "a metaphor for consciousness itself" (ibid. p. 355). Thus, *Wavelength*, operating within metaphors and allegories – as many critics noticed, contrary to the strict materialist reading proposed by Gidal and Le Grice, still holds semiotic connections. For that reason, it's worthwhile to try to look at *Wavelength* from the broader perspective. Ryszard Kluszczyński proposes a division of audio-visual temporal media, including artists' films, into several groups, depending on their strategy of breaking with the narrative structure of traditional cinema. The ones which would be of interest to us here are poetic and structural films. The former:

> *arranges the images in poetic structures, linking them together either with metaphoric relationships based on associations and antitheses (semantic links), or references to symbolic, mythical and archetypal meanings. The poetic film has*

> *been developing since the twenties (e.g., Dadaist and Surrealist oneiric cinema), assuming always newer forms* (Kluszczyński, 1997, p. 2).

The works belonging to the latter "break down and abandon the narrative structures, focusing the audience's reaction on ontological representation of the cinema, analysing film as a medium" (ibid. p. 3).

Considering this division, one could say that the discussion about *Wavelength* has been developing around the issue of its affiliation to one of these two groups. The film's structural character has usually been acknowledged, though, despite the presence of semantic links which have been noticed within it. But, as far as the genre of poetic film is concerned, *Wavelength* has not been officially linked to it in any of the analyses I have come across. In my reading, however, when light and shadow (which earned the film the opinion of materialist) are viewed in the context of mystical ideas, the whole work takes on a new complexion. From this position, not only some images or their sequences, but the film as a whole, its structure, arrangement of images and the title are seen as carrying a metaphorical meaning. This analysis, accompanied by the juxtaposition of the film and fragments of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, makes the film's poetic nature even more evident.

Conclusions

The three filmic works: *Pharmacy*, *Arabesque* and *Wavelength*, which are the subject of this thesis, have been regarded as belonging to the most significant examples of their genres. Since the very beginning, the second and third ones have kept researchers' continuous interest, which has resulted in numerous analyses. However, even contemporary studies are strongly coloured by past commentaries. What makes this research valuable is the attempt to break with the historical slant and to bring a fresh outlook. The use of art practice as a research method allowed me to see aspects of the abovementioned works that have eluded the attention of theoreticians. This is particularly true in the sphere of the symbolic understanding of images, which is typical of cultures influenced by the Orthodox icon. Thus, the figures of light and shadow, being at the heart of this philosophical and pictorial tradition, have shaped my studio work, which has evolved around these two motifs.

My preoccupation with shadow-play led me to the reflection on all the analyzed works from the perspective of the motifs of light and shadow. As a novelty came an introduction of the painterly viewpoint on the abovementioned motifs occurring in these films. While not neglecting the media-specific approach, I broadened it with the painterly outlook—a step which is justified by the fact that all these works are rooted in the painterly tradition of the image. The juxtaposition of these films with paintings revealed visual similarities between the images, which in turn led me to investigate their intellectual interrelations. This approach produced a profound change in the reading of the analyzed works.

Consequently, *Pharmacy* by the Themersons, when juxtaposed with Nowosielski's works: *Still Life* and *Portrait*, raised the question of animistic tendencies in modernist art and its relation to such ancient genres as shadow theatre and the Orthodox icon. As a consequence, the reflection on the animistic character of *Pharmacy* revealed pagan and magic influences in Nowosielski's work. At the same time, the method of using light, namely the "instability" of the light source, its placing "inside" the image and the resulting effect of "internal glow", which this study shows as a shared element in the examined works of Nowosielski and the Themersons, exposed another unexplored feature of Nowosielski's

practice – its links with the filmic medium. On the other hand, his paintings bring Neoplatonic ideas, the iconic paradigm and contemporary scientific understanding of the relation between matter and light to my reflection on *Pharmacy*. Thanks to this, the elements of *Pharmacy*, noticed and researched earlier, like the blend of mysticism and science, were emphasized, and the intellectual motifs through which the film had previously been looked at, were deepened by the idea of its relation to painting. The greatest value of this analysis, however, lies in the fact that *Pharmacy*, one of the most interesting yet very little commented Polish avant-garde films, earned another voice in the discourse. Whereas in reference to Nowosielski's works, my thesis encourages further study into very little researched pagan and magic influences in his practice.

Detailed observation of the similarities between *Arabesque* by Dulac and Suprematist painterly works by Malevich inspired an original study of the role of light in the process of abstracting figurative shots in Dulac's work. Due to questioning the generally accepted views on rhythm as a factor in this process and showing the evolution of the role of light in Dulac's pieces, from the earliest to *Arabesque*, a rarely examined, although significant element of the artist's work came to the fore.
Among many inspirations mentioned in Dulac's practice, light was the neglected one, since both contemporaneous and current discourse on her work revolves around such elements as rhythm, the ability of the images to express or evoke emotions, and feminist issues. My research, however, uncovered a very unexpected relationship between Malevich and Dulac, bringing to light mostly unexplored, shared creative impulses in the practice of these two artists. For Dulac it was her fascination with the mystical light of Medieval European sacred art, while for Malevich it was his inspiration with French Symbolism. This brought to light hitherto unnoticed relations of the images in *Arabesque* with the broader intellectual and artistic context of Dulac's era, including the discovery of the light-matter equation, adopted later in the philosophy of cinema by Bergson and Deleuze. These ideas, so far never associated with her work, put the psychological dimension, usually related with *Arabesque,* into perspective, adding a new layer of meaning.

This aspect of my thesis will be helpful for those who intend to deepen their understanding of Dulac's art, especially the evolution of light in her narrative and non-narrative films, and

their relationship with painting. The influence of Symbolist art in her narrative work is well known, but her non-narrative pieces show a kinship not only with Suprematist art but also with Giacomo Balla's work (see Chapter 2). Meanwhile, the presence of Malevich's work opens the door to further explorations of the link between Dulac's pure cinema and absolute cinema.

Looking at Snow's *Wavelength* from the viewpoint of my practice, I noticed a very clear trichotomous structure. I grouped these into (1) flashes of light; (2) static, shadow-based images of the loft; and (3) illusionistic images. I propose reading the flashes of light from the perspective of the Medieval metaphysics of light, through the scientific understanding of waves and through the idea of light as a source of matter. Static, flat images of the loft opened up a previously unexplored possibility of looking at them from the point of the visualization of invisible realms through the use of shadow, the theory of higher dimensions and the mythology of shadow. The third group, that is, illusionistic images, which are frequently regarded by commentators as a metaphor for the narrative cinematic style, were interpreted as being a straightforward reference to physical reality. The division of the images into three groups *itself* is novel, but the discovery of their analogy to the three pictures occurring in the film's last few minutes further enriches this proposal and significantly influences the understanding of *Wavelength*. It not only offers a more complete explanation of the role of still images in this work but also opens the door for a metaphoric and symbolic reading of the film. However, the proposed interpretation demands a prior acceptance of the idea that *Wavelength* can be seen not only as a structural, materialist work but also as a poetic one. The embracing of this possibility, apart from bringing justification to the metaphoric reading of the abovementioned construction, substantiates the comparison between *Wavelength* and Vermeer's painting, and resonates more thoroughly with Snow's words: "I wanted to make a summation of my nervous system, religious inklings, and aesthetic ideas".[151]

Since the reading of *Wavelength* through semantic links has been for decades consistently rejected or diminished, the change in perspective towards this film, proposed in this research, can be seen as an original contribution to knowledge.

[151] See Chapter 3, fn. 112.

This work points out to certain, so far neglected ideas in the commentary and, as such, invites further examination of the issues touched upon here. One of the possible paths for future scholars could be the examination of the relation between *Wavelength* and Vermeer's work, especially the analysis of surprisingly numerous shared motifs like the window,[152] female figure in the interior or image within image, not to mention light. This thesis encourages an in-depth examination of the poetic character of *Wavelength,* particularly its links with *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf, but also provokes the unwrapping of other possibilities of reading metaphors harboured by this film.

To conclude, it can be argued that the reason why my investigation into the issue of light and shadow in *Pharmacy*, *Arabesque* and *Wavelength* can be seen as contemporarily relevant is because it offers a new perspective on the motifs of light and shadow in these films, which makes it possible to break from the historical projection in which they have existed hitherto. It not only broadens the context and, what follows, also the interpretation of the works, but also, or rather above all, restores the due place to light and shadow in the artists' film, respecting the deep and centuries-long intellectual and artistic tradition of these motifs in European culture.

[152]It occurs in Snow's wider practice, e.g. *Speed of Light* (1992), *Solar Breath* (2002).

Annexe

The Annexe contains the images of my shadow-play objects, to which I occasionally refer to in the text.

Fig 18 J. Rojkowska, *Object I* (1996) https://vimeo.com/106394682

Fig 19 J. Rojkowska, *Object III* (1996) https://vimeo.com/ 106310560

Fig 20 J. Rojkowska,*Object II* (1996) https://vimeo.com/ 106495234

Fig 21 J. Rojkowska, *Wave* (2018), object, https://www.joannaroy.co/shows

Fig 22 J. Rojkowska, *Wave* (2018), film, https://vimeo.com/219875512

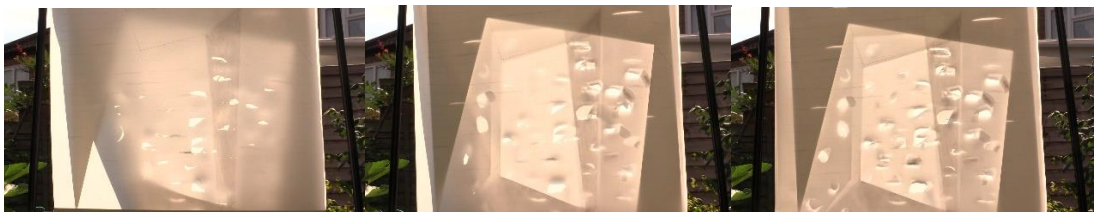

Fig 23 J. Rojkowska, *Window* (2016), object

Fig 24 J Rojkowska, stills from the film *Window* (2016)

More works on www. joannaroy.co

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