

Not Lines but Points

Zbigniew Rybczyński believes that his first 1972 film pioneered in transforming a figure into a set of pixels which today, in the era of a digital record, is an everyday procedure, while then it was a project looking forward to the future. Rybczyński stressed that in the same period George E. Smith and Willard Boyle, two American scientists, had been working on the first charge-coupled device (CCD), composed of separate pixels. Truly, Rybczyński has been an exceptional artist, an artist and scientist, who has exceeded the current limits of knowledge, practice, culture and technique.

text: **Jerzy truszkowski**

Jerzy Truszkowski
B. in 1961. Visual artist and curator of exhibitions by the 70's and 80's new vanguard artists. As of 1992 he has cooperated with the Art Exhibitions Bureau Bielska Gallery in Bielsko-Biala, as an artist and curator. He has published six books on contemporary art.

IN AN INTERVIEW GRANTED IN 1983 for an American magazine Rybczyński stressed that the future of an image did not involve the so far systems related to a playback of television or computer images, based on a light beam running along a line, rather on beams that direct separate signals to each and every point an image has been composed of.

On the eve of the opening of the "Treatise on the Visual Image" exhibition at the Art Exhibitions Bureau Bielska Gallery in Bielsko-Biala, the artist granted me, and Krzysztof Kozakiewicz – my colleague and art historian – four hours long interview. It was for the first time in my life that I met Rybczyński in person, even though his debut film,

(A Square, 1972) was my favorite ever since I had seen it, most likely in 1984, during the show organized by Andrzej Mroczek, who was then the director of the Art Exhibitions Bureau Gallery in Lublin. If not for Mroczek, probably I would not have seen any films by Rybczyński, since these were neither presented on special shows in Warsaw, nor proceeded feature-length films offered by cinemas in other Polish cities. The Film Form Workshops – organized earlier, for example during the *Offer* symposium in 1978 – always lacked films by Rybczyński, as recollected by

Jolanta Męderowicz, an art historian who cooperated with Mroczek.

Apparently, the reason for this was a red star appearing for a moment in the film by Rybczyński *Oh! I Cannot Stop*, just before a final scene that showed a red spot on the wall.

Thus, the ever faster running subject hit the wall, his "eye" being a film camera that registered the image one sees on the screen. MA thesis by Agnieszka Kozakiewicz – entitled *The Œuvre by Zbigniew Rybczyński as a Completed Modernism Project in View of the Theory by Jürgen Habermas* (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań 2002, Prof. Piotr Piotrowski, Thesis Supervisor) – note the fact of totally unexpected, preventive censorship applied to "formalist" films.

In 1972 Zbigniew Rybczyński made his first 35 mm celluloid film, entitled *Square*. A white square was divided into subsequent, smaller squares that formed a shape resembling a human silhouette. At a certain moment the figure composed of squares changed into a white human form in various arrangements. The author of the film placed a camera under the ceiling, while his colleague from a ballet school, lying on the floor against a black background,



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changed positions of his body illuminated with a strong, contrasting light. Next, a human figure transformed into sets of ever larger squares. In a second part of the film an originally white square was divided into four squares: red, green, yellow and blue.

The squares were again divided into smaller squares, these in turn developed into four color human forms, and adopted shapes of four human silhouettes that were filmed in an identical manner as the one white figure. First they were separated from one another, next they got superimposed, transformed into sets of small squares, then into larger and larger squares.

The motive of female and male relation turned to be particularly distinctive in the works by Rybczyński made in High Definition technique. According to Agnieszka Kozakiewicz the artist expressed a certain approach to a uniform, as an element of repression of men who wear it. Krzysztof Kozakiewicz suggested an analysis of a different aspect of the work by Rybczyński: the fact that most videos by this artist present women in black corsets and black stockings; in case of the *Band* - in white ones.

Most likely for the first time I heard about films by Rybczyński in September 1983 during the first private meeting of artists representing the Airdrop Culture alternative movement, organized in Łódź, by Marek Janiak. For him, as for other Łódź artists, it was an important event that their older colleague won Oscar (1983) for the film *Tango*, the first ever granted

knowledge on photographic and movie lenses had reached the level of ideal models long time ago, due to Ernst Mach, an Austrian physicist.

In my opinion Rybczyński forgets that Mach the physicist, in the role of Mach the philosopher, was one of the founders of empirical criticism that provided bases for later criticism of physical experiments by means of making them dependent upon the subject that was conducting an experiment; both an observer and a designer of the experiment, entangled in various types of limitations: theoretical, conceptual, instrumental and institutional - at the moments when theories clash with the *praxis* of politics. Lenin hated empirical critics, who stressed a subjective nature of knowledge. Rybczyński does not like a multitude of lenses that must be produced in a number of variants since corporations wish to make money on a whole range of products offered to consumers, who are today encouraged to multiply images of the world. Rybczyński mentions an opinion that he heard from the head of the company manufacturing lenses; namely that practically every fifteen years they introduced into the market a subsequent version of the same lens - the theoretical model of which had been perfectly rendered by Mach. Nevertheless, consumers are inclined to buy new models.

In her thesis Agnieszka Kozakiewicz calls a "monster" the running subject from the film by Rybczyński. In my opinion, the *Oh! I Cannot Stop* film has become a prophetic vision of the running ahead positive feedback between surplus production and



„Schody”, 1987, kadry z eksperymentalnego filmu wideo, 35 mm, 26 min

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even more turns oneself into a kind of stage to perform his existence on, frequently through mediation of science and art. Rybczyński has been fascinated with the ideal *virtual reality*, and in his conversation with Kozakiewicz and myself he considered technological limitations still to be overcome in order to develop further this field of science and art. He has been not merely a practitioner, but a philosopher of the contemporary image world. It makes one think, and it is quite symptomatic how he has spared no effort to build – successfully – an ideal film studio – the *Studio Ideale* – in Wrocław, equipped with the camera provided with the latest lens model. First projects of the studio go back a quarter of a century. According to Rybczyński the greatest asset of the studio is an opportunity of life edit, thus eliminating what is called the postproduction process.

A single actor on an empty *blue screen* stage can play any part, he is digitally multiplied, and placed against any chosen digital background. A viewer, following a reflex developed in the latest century, identifies with the actor, and he has an impression that he is playing various parts simultaneously against various backgrounds of the image world.

The exhibition has been meant to make one warm to the new electronic medium and to the *Studio Ideale*. The presentation ended with multi screen projection of the *Tango*, the best known, and the most effort consuming film by Rybczyński. Many months – many hours a day – of strenuous work to project individual frames onto tarnished pane, and to draw masks that cover individual characters and their background brought about the result, the artist has never repeated in any of his later electronic pieces. ■



„Czwarty wymiar”, 1988, kadry z eksperymentalnego filmu wideo, 35 mm, 27 min



„Traktat o obrazie”, ekspozycja, Galeria Bielska BWA