Immersing Into the Eye of the Camera  
Jae Woo Kang

Film is similar to the way people perceive the world in the sense that it has visual, audio, performative and temporal elements that evoke a multi-sensory, temporal experience. This causes audiences to believe the diegesis of the camera to be real. Hence, film gives the impression that the camera takes on the filmmaker’s, character’s or omniscient perspective and then projects it to the spectator. Vivian Sobchack claims that film world is perceived as lived body, which allows spectators to identify with the camera’s embodied experience in the diegetic world. At the same time, audiences are aware that film’s body is not their own. According to Sobchack, it is this double vision (through the eye of camera and spectator’s self-awareness) that allows the film experience to be visceral and subjective. Gilles Deleuze criticizes the way most film images are structured around a sensory-motor scheme. It is as if the camera perceives and the characters act accordingly. However, through his concept of time-image, Deleuze points out film images that are purely visual and aural, detached from cause and effect or reactions. Both double vision and time-image are unique features of film that extend human perception towards a more cinematic experience. Vera Chytilová’s Daises (1966) is a good example of a film whose image are at once and body conscious and purely visual. Therefore, film’s mechanical body, such as the camera or projector, allows viewers to immerse into film both phenomenologically and self-consciously, opening up opportunities to experience the film’s message from a sensual, embodied point of view.

Film is a technology that enhances human perception, just as devises such as glasses, lights, binoculars, microscopes, headphones, earplugs or speakers improve the way people see the world. It is as if tools and technology are extensions of the perceiving
body, enriching what people see, hear and feel. Sobchack explains how eyeglasses can be incorporated “into one’s being, [even though]... there is still the objective feeling of them there in the bridge of one’s nose.”¹ However, film differs from other perception-enhancing technologies in that it mimics human perception. In fact, Sobchack goes so far as to call film’s body the lived body, since “like the human body, the film’s body is animated and lived with existential prospects and purpose.”² For example, in Daisies, on top of the two female characters’ endless nonsensical behaviour, in various points there are flashing images of red roses, cut out faces and letters from magazines, green leaves, butterflies and brown dried leaves. These fast moving, colourful images are what might not have been visible in normal perception, just as a short-sighted person is unable to read without the aid of reading glasses. It is cinema that makes such associations of images possible. At the same time, those images have their own film’s body, namely the camera eye, the filmstrips that have been cut and taped, and the projector that go on behind the scenes and are invisible to the spectator, yet nonetheless, perceptible to the audience. The spectator’s consciousness of film’s body gives the impression that the film is embodied in the world. This embodiment is often related to the point-of-view from which the film is being presented.

Although film comes across as its own lived body, it is still pieced together through human perception and activities. Therefore, from watching a film, spectators understand the camera’s embodying experience as a representation of someone else, whether it is the director, the characters or an omniscient point of view. Sobchack explains this phenomenon as “a material disguise that is made explicit within the film’s immediate perception of itself,”³ so that film’s body can be represented as another kind
of material body. In Daisies, the camera takes a voyeuristic approach to perceiving the girls. When the girls are using older gentlemen for their luxurious meals, the camera is positioned as if it is sitting at the table, participating silently in the meal. When the girls are tricking men to taking the train without them, the camera is situated at a distance, as if it is watching them. At the same time, film’s body becomes affected by the girls’ behaviour. When the girls are starting to cut each other’s body with scissors, the film itself is shattered into pieces, as if the filmstrips are cut into pieces and taped back together. In the part where the girls are drunk in the restaurant, the film seems as if it is drunk with them, with its constant changes of colour and special effects. Films are at times voyeuristic and sometimes shot from an engaging perspective, which can give the viewers the impression that they themselves are experiencing these sensations. Sobchack quotes from Mitry that even though film “impressions are felt keenly as mine, they aren’t seen by me. I am not able, therefore, in any case, to believe myself ‘in him.’” ⁴ Hence, through watching a film, spectators are drawn into the filmic embodied experiences, but at the same time, self-conscious that those experiences are not theirs but rather the film’s. It is as though audiences get to borrow someone else’s body to have visceral experiences. This double vision works on two levels: to create an intense perceptual experience and to summon a detached response to the film.

Sobchack bases her theory on Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, which leads to the amplification of perception. From a phenomenological perspective, perception creates reciprocal, meaningful relationships between the perceiver and the object. Merleau-Ponty stresses the importance of perception, positing that “the spirit of the world is ourselves, as soon as we know how to move ourselves and look. These simple acts already enclose the
secret of expressive action.” By the intuitive act of perceiving, a special connection between the world and individuals can be established. Through its body, film presents its own way of how to move and look at the world. In the beginning of Daisies, spectators are not informed as to how to perceive the images of the cogwheel, bombing explosions and the sounds of percussion and trumpet. However, by the time the images of a demolished city accompanied by bombing sounds reappears at the end, the audience has experienced the journey that the girls went through. During the course of the film, spectators have been annoyed, intrigued, aroused or even identified with the actions of the girls. Therefore, when they see the last images, they can associate the image of the ruined city with the degeneration of the world, the girls’ praise for bohemia, or the luxurious banquet table. The spectator’s engagement in the film’s embodied perception of the girls triggers a refreshed perception of such images as the bombed city at the beginning at end of the film. By going into the perception of camera, and thus developing their own experience of the girls, audiences learn how to see the image. As Merleau-Ponty states, “[t]he joy of art lies in its showing how something takes on meaning – not by referring to already established and acquired ideas but by the temporal or spatial arrangement of elements.” Consequently, when the spectators identify with the film’s embodied perceptions, new spatiotemporal arrangements of elements are established, allowing audiences to have a more intense, engrossed experience. As Delueze defines, “cinematographic consciousness is not us, the spectator, nor the hero; it is the camera – sometimes human, sometimes inhuman or superhuman.” In other words, viewers’ perception merges with the camera’s perception, which transpires their perception beyond what they would normally see. Through this process, the meaning of the film and
its images reveal themselves. However, the film experience does not only revolve around meaning or theme.

Due to the fact that spectators are aware of film’s body being separate from their own, they are prevented from reacting to what they see in film. Deleuze is critical of film images motivated by sensory-motor schema. Often films fall into an almost cause and effect structure, in which a character perceives, is affected and acts upon his or her perception. In this way, it is easy for a film to fall into cliché. However, he entertains the idea of images that are removed from time and space, “[b]ut a purely optical or sound situation,” which he calls *any-space-whatever*. From the aspect of *any-space-whatever*, perception is not easily reduced to a few sentences or ideas, but rather turns into a bundle of experiences. Therefore, when the girls in *Daises* try to mend the mess they made out of the banquet table, it is not merely a statement about the girls’ inner psyche, political comment on anarchism or a repugnant criticism of violence in society. Rather, it is an experience of the film’s bluish tint, newspaper suits the girls are wearing, the musical whisperings of the girls, putting back the broken dishes and glasses, and the piling up of nauseating mashed food. Each is capable of triggering a corporeal response from the audience. Since by its nature film reminds audiences that they are watching a film instead of actually undergoing an experience, viewers can assume the point of view of “a cinema of seer and no longer the agent.” As seers, spectators can have the advantage of focusing on the optical and sound quality of the film, unlike the characters who have to act upon it. As a result, film leaves the audience with intense experiences that are subjective and unique.
From visceral, embodied filmic experience and detached spectator consciousness, film and spectator work together to develop new ways of perceiving. The fresh perceptions evoke purely optical, aural situations that are removed from reactions or cause and effect relationships. The images of *any-space-whatever* allow audiences to perceive a film without a quick, cognitive response. Moreover, the other fact that film has an embodied, immersive quality opens viewer’s perception to experience those images in intense, meaningful ways. Therefore, even though spectator consciousness has evolved by associating certain images to create clichés, film often leaves the audience with sensual bundles of experiences. Merleau-Ponty describes how a blind man perceives the world at the tip of his cane. Through the cane, he is not analyzing the world, but rather is viscerally experiencing the hardness of the pavement, the sharpness of corners, the softness of grass or the movement of a coming pedestrian. Spectators of film also perceive the film’s diegesis in corporeal, embodied ways with real sensations, and so receive cinematic experiences rather than messages.

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2 Ibid, p 219
3 Ibid, p 225
4 Ibid, p235
7 Gilles Deleuze, Cinema 1, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press), p 21
8 Gilles Deleuze, Cinema 2, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press), p 5
9 Ibid, p 2
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