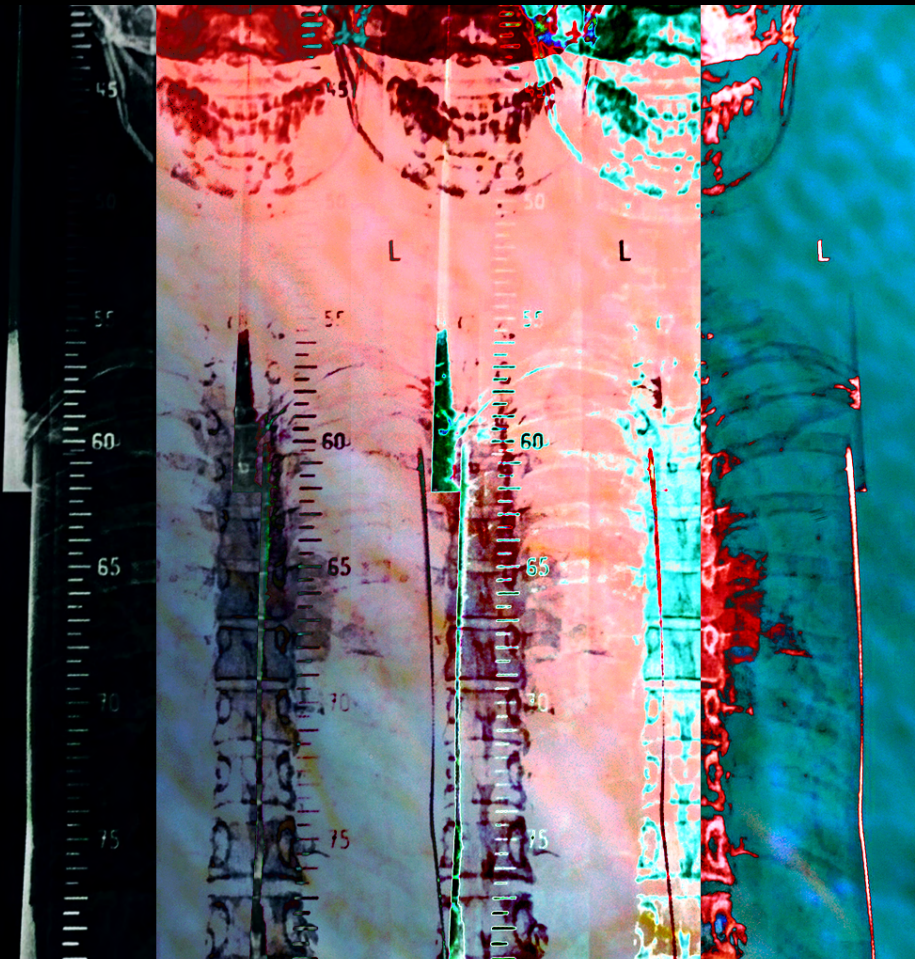


Our Body on Film:  
Affect and Viscera



Yenchi Nguyen

## Our Body on Film: Affect and Viscera

Research Question:

What makes us have visceral bodily responses while watching a film?

AKI ArtEZ Academy of Art and Design Enschede

ArtEZ University of the Arts Arnhem

## Our body on film: Affect and Viscera

A bachelor thesis for the programme of Moving Image

By YENCHI NGUYEN

Born on 27-12-1997

Student number 1535280

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the BA degree of Design

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## Introduction

We go to the cinema and we walk into a dark room. The door through which we enter is in the very back of the room and in front of us, there are rows of velvet seats that extend across the whole space. The seats are directed towards the silk screen which takes up the size of a good part of the wall. As we take a seat on our designated spots, the enthusiasm for what is going to be shown to us rises. The movie has not started yet and just a few movie-goers have gathered up until now, more people will check in soon. Strangers are chit-chatting and the ceiling as well as the wall lights are still turned on. We can feel the soft texture carpet beneath our feet through our shoes and the comfort of the seat, the mood is getting cosier. Some people already feel the need to start eating the snacks they have acquired especially for the experience. But then, the lights start to dim until they are slowly turned off and simultaneously the silk screen starts to brighten up. The speakers start emitting sounds which announces the screening of the first commercial. Some people feel obliged to set their mobile phones on mute or even on airplane mode and so we decide to turn off ours as well. At the third commercial or the first movie trailer soon-to-be-in-cinema everyone is finally fully engaged. The lights are off, the carpet and the whole environment blend in with the darkness. We feel like the sense of smell and touch have been dimmed as the sound emitted from speakers heighten and occupy and direct our sense of hearing. All we see is the big projection: tunnel vision. Looking left and right, we can recognise the profiles of people that are already fixated on the screen, visible through the light of the projection. By the time the movie starts, we as well commit ourselves fully to the movie. Even though the activity of going to a movie is a collective experience shared with the audience in the room, the experience itself is much more directed in one way: towards you.

Slowly but surely we are guided to enter a state of dissociation and thus, we are physically present but mentally, we are temporally engaged inside of another dimension, that is the reality on-screen. Deploying the same mechanisms of dream, we follow the narrative (or non-narrative) and we react to what is given. Our bodies are not occupied in any active movement and we are not the participants in the action but yet, we feel and we think. We are tormented, we are relieved, full of laughter or on the edge of breaking into tears. Our unconscious mind is

liberated from any inhibitions and is curious, hungry; it is open to the new. The way a movie can affect us has a very wide range and shows itself in many different forms. That does not exclude the fact that a movie can also not affect us at all. Interesting to me is the ability of audio-visual stimuli to influence us so strongly that it can literally ‘crawl’ beneath our skin. The mere existence of trigger warnings that impose, that what is being shown might have harmful consequences to certain audiences is proof for the imminent influence of exposure to the medium.

In this thesis, I want to research the interaction between our body and the moving image. It has become apparent to me, that movies have the ability to trigger reactions within ourselves such as a visceral reaction, a certain emotion or other bodily sensations. As we perceive, we feel. Even though our body is usually laid in a resting position as we slowly but surely delve into the movie and start disassociating from our own reality, our subconscious mind gets activated. We are conscious, that we are watching a movie and this is not what represents reality. But we still perceive what is depicted in the movie as if these feelings and sensations were our own and we react as if it was reality. My thesis is that we watch the movies with our mind but first and foremost we watch it with our body. Everybody has probably heard one of these statements before:

“This scared the crap out of me.”,

“This has given me shivers running down my spine.”,

“This gave me the chills”,

“This is hard to stomach”,

“This is hard to digest”,

“This touched me”,

“This is heart-breaking”,

“This is heart-warming”,

“This is nerve-wrecking”

And the list goes on. What is interesting about this is, that these reactions are all rooted in our bodily sensations. It proves, that emotions are in fact physical. “The body and the brain communicate in two different languages, one is the language of thoughts that speaks with

words and the other is the language of emotional experience that communicates through physical sensations”<sup>1</sup>. The language of film however, is complex and it deploys a number systems and intelligences: the logical (plot), the linguistic (dialogs), the visual-spatial (pictures, colors, symbols), the musical (sounds and music), the interpersonal (storytelling), the kinaesthetic (moving), and the intra-psychic (inner guidance), and the more we access, the faster we learn hence the different methods of information processing<sup>2</sup> according to PhD Psychologist Birgit Wolz.

My goal with this thesis is to inform about these processes and raise awareness about our body as a perceiving thing/object in itself. Furthermore, that will lead also to a discussion about what the (spectating) body actually is. As an artist, I always found it exciting how our mind and how our body are engaging in life, in dream and at the encounter with art or with itself. They are the foundation for what makes us live and feel the way we do. That is, how we perceive the world. Perception is inherently unique to each individual, meaning our experiences, our background and our decisions all contribute to the formation of our perception. That perhaps, makes the act of watching a movie into an interaction between ourselves and the image, rather than a one-way communication. The more it is interesting, that we can adopt certain emotions and sensation from merely witnessing an image or a sound. It might not affect everybody the same way in every case, but in some, we do find ourselves agreeing with one another. Is what we feel in these situations inherently virtual or is the exchange between the image and ourselves actually a direct confrontation to something hidden inside of us, such as our emotional plane? How deep can perception affect us as sentient beings?

In order to answer these questions, I will firstly display my research about the language system that Cinema deploys by cinematic apparatus. I will draw the relation between image and our perceiving body and explore in that way the interaction and the role that affect plays by the notions after Massumi, Deleuze and Latour. As I believe that these embodied experiences are psychosomatic I will lay out scientific research about how emotions are

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<sup>1</sup> Hilary Jacobs Hendel, “Emotions are physical” January 21, 2016, <https://psychcentral.com/blog/emotions-are-physical#1>

<sup>2</sup>Birgit Wolz, “‘Reel’ Reality Is Essence of Cinema Therapy.”, Accessed 25 Jan. 2022 [www.cinematherapy.com/pressclippings/advocate.pdf](http://www.cinematherapy.com/pressclippings/advocate.pdf).



physical perceptions. By investigating haptic visuality and sound, I hope to find the level on which perception becomes physical. As I believe that planned and carefully composed and executed audio-visual mixture is the key to why we feel towards film the way we do, I am keen to analyse on what kind of foundation such nerve-wrecking moments of intensity are based on. At the end I also want to put my personal work into context and hopefully will come to an enticing conclusion.

## 1. How a “reality” is built

“Because it’s true that talking about dreams is like talking about movies, since the cinema uses the language of dreams: Years can pass in a second, and you can hop from one place to another. It’s a language made of image. And in the real cinema, every object and every light means something, as in a dream.”<sup>3</sup> With this statement, Federico Fellini has recognised the oneiric qualities that film and cinema inherit. As dreaming is a state in which experiences come to us in form of flashing imagery, its uncontrollable nature brings to us an encounter with memory and knowledge transmitted through metaphors, symbolism and meaning. Non-judgementally we are put through a series of action after action which goes by its own logic, where we forcefully are put to recognise certain motifs which affect us in a certain way. And once we have woken up from the slumber, we are left with a lasting impression - after some time the dreams essentials seem to fade away just like how it is to recall a movie: what is left are faint memories of actions, people, settings and places. But while we are in the dream, the corporeality, the vividness and the experience tells us so much about ourselves and what we put meaning into. That is the common language that dream and film speak. Cinemas hypnotising calibre is quite undeniable and its resemblance to dream has been acknowledged by philosophers, surrealists such as André Breton and film theorist Barbara Creed:

Dreaming and viewing both take place in the dark; the subject is not in control of the flow of images which in both contexts seem to originate from a point outside the conscious control of the individual. Goudal argued that the physical conditions of film viewing enhanced the dream-state. The darkness of the auditorium closed out

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Cott, “Fellini’s Language of Dreams.” 1984 *Rolling Stones* <https://scrapfromtheloft.com/movies/fellinis-language-of-dreams-rolling-stone-interview-1984/>

distracting images from the real world while the music shut out any sounds. The dream-state was further intensified by the way that the images unfolded, not in accordance with rules of logic but in terms of their own logic.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, we are in a sphere which invites us to enter a different state of mind or rather, lets us peek into a different “reality”. It also guides us, just like in a hypnosis where we let go of our conscious control over our environment, thoughts and reactions, but open ourselves to suggestion and fascination. We let ourselves immerse with images, sounds but also words, and all entails meaning and thought. The similarity to a state of trance is settled - we temporarily blend out issues of our regular life, we take a break from our worries and things that occupy our thought and action. Our mind is captivated by what the screen presents to us. By entering this hypnotic state we have to surrender our own logic to the films logic while the screen gives us access to our emotional plane. We become part of the “Ocular-centric arrangement of screen, projector, and audience that goes by the name of ‘cinematic apparatus’ ”.<sup>5</sup>

Also referred to as the cinematic dispositif or apparatus theory, it has evoked many notions about the (power) relations and sociological as well as psychic mechanisms that are formed through the spectator, projection and the screen: how images are viewed, received, retained and forgotten.<sup>6</sup> The focus is hereby on how Cinema is experienced and what it does to our imagination; how the apparatus came to existence and how it can also be referred to as an ideological machine. Jean-Louis Baudry was the first one to draw a connection between Cinema and Plato’s allegory of the cave in *Republic*<sup>7</sup>. Plato’s thesis with the example of the cave was encouragement of distinguishing between reality and illusion. The fascinating interrelation is the set-up where the subject is positioned, that being a dark, isolated place in which the wall projects and mistakenly represents “reality”. The way shadows are projected onto the wall remind of the mechanisms that were deployed with the early magic lantern, a pioneer to the cinematic apparatus and hence, the dispositif of similar nature. In Baudry’s

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<sup>4</sup> Barbara Creed, "The untamed eye and the dark side of surrealism: Hitchcock, Lynch and Cronenberg." in *The Unsilvered Screen: surrealism on film* Cronenberg. Harper, G (Ed.). Stone, R (Ed.) (Wallflower Press, 2007), 119

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, "The Cinematic Dispositif (Between Apparatus Theory and Artists’ Cinema)." *Film History as Media Archaeology*. (Amsterdam University Press, 2016) 101-136.

<sup>6</sup> Tom Conley, “APPARATUS THEORY, PLAIN AND SIMPLE” in *The Anthem Handbook of Screen Theory* ed. Vaughan, Hunter (Anthem Press, 2018)

<sup>7</sup> Plato, G. M. A. Grube and C. D. C. Reeve, *Republic*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 1992.)

essay, *Ideological effects of the basic cinematographic apparatus*<sup>8</sup> he establishes his understanding of the subject-screen relationship, draws its connections to Renaissance perspective and the cave and breaks down why the apparatus itself is more meaningful for transcendentalism than the actual narrative of the film itself. What distinguishes cinema from other art forms is the 'transformation' of the work:

Between "objective reality" and the camera, site of the inscription, and between the inscription and projection are situated certain operations, a work which has as its result a finished product. To the extent that it is cut off from the raw material ("objective reality") this product does not allow us to see the transformation which has taken place. [...] The question becomes, is the work made evident, does consumption of the product bring about a "knowledge effect" or is the work concealed? [...] concealment of the technical base will also bring about a specific ideological effect. Its inscription, its manifestation as such on the other hand, would produce a knowledge effect, as actualisation of the work process, as denunciation of ideology, and as critique of idealism.<sup>9</sup>

So the progress in which the work emerges - that means film as a finished and finalised product - is of invisible nature, it is hidden. Idealism hereby refers to the philosophical school of thought in which mental processes are the foundation of reality, all reality that we know of can only be based on something mental which is the mind, spirit, reason and/or will.<sup>10</sup> Hence, the reality on screen can only exist due to our mental conditions. To increase its ideological value, there must be some sort of illusion made believed. This illusion of reality is made believed, already through the apparatus of the camera that takes up the intermediate task in the progression of the work: we believe, that what we are looking at is continuous movement, a "slice" of time (also: the past) even though if broken apart, we have separate images which need to be stitched together and put in context in order to create an artificial illusion of movement. Yet, while being aware of the structures on which the experience is built upon, we need to put "Trust" and "Belief" into the image<sup>11</sup>, putting believe into a plane (screen/image) that is full of intensities and forces which puts the subject (us) into an active centre of

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<sup>8</sup> Jean-Louis Baudry and Alan Williams. "Ideological effects of the basic cinematographic apparatus." *Film Quarterly* 28.2 (1974): 39-47.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Paul Guyer and Rolf-Peter Horstmann, "Idealism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ed. Edward N. Zalta, (Spring 2022 Edition) <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/idealism/>

<sup>11</sup> Elsaesser, 101-136.

meaning. We need to cooperate in the power structures between the machine, its location and the spectator or listener. The filmic experience thus becomes an “Embodied spatio-temporal event”<sup>12</sup> and by submitting ourselves to it, we reach a state of transcendentalism:

Breton developed the concept of ‘deracination’ to describe the way film could express powerful emotions. In deracination the spectator begins to identify so strongly with what is taking place on the screen that she or he is transported into another realm; thus the viewer experiences the events and emotions in an act of transcendence<sup>13</sup>

And it is here where we can draw back into the comparison to the dreaming experience and somehow also to a regression back inside of the mothers womb:

Going to the cinema is like returning to the womb. You sit there still and meditative in the darkness, waiting for life to appear on the screen. One should go to the cinema with the innocence of a fetus. [...] an audience should see a picture without any kind of bombardment of advice or interpretation [...] he just looks -and here we are again -like a dreamer. <sup>14</sup> - *Federico Fellini*

The resemblance between dreaming and the mother’s womb has also been drawn by Sigmund Freud in his *A*

*Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams*<sup>15</sup>

where he describes the apparatus of the dream in which the libido regresses to a state of primitive narcissism where the

dream appears through the ego as a form of hallucinated psychosis of desire<sup>16</sup>, it is a

“Reminiscence of one’s stay in the body of the mother, certain conditions of which it recreates: the rest position, warmth and isolation, which protects him from excitement.”<sup>17</sup> As psychosis can be described as a sort of loss of contact with reality that it is hard to distinguish



<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Creed, 119

<sup>14</sup> Cott, “FELLINI’S LANGUAGE OF DREAMS.”

<sup>15</sup> Freud, Sigmund. “A metapsychological supplement to the theory of dreams.” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, (Harvard 1957) 217-235

<sup>16</sup> Bertram D. Lewin “Sleep, Narcissistic Neurosis, and the Analytic Situation”, *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 23:4, (1954) 487-510 DOI: [10.1080/21674086.1954.11925962](https://doi.org/10.1080/21674086.1954.11925962)

<sup>17</sup> Freud, 217-235.

between what is real and what is not, the dream becomes this hallucination that is being taken for the reality. “After all, a person seen in a dream or on television may be as vivid as a person seen across the room, and works of art may be as concrete as clumps of earth. Representations of experience immediately create new experiences in their own right.”<sup>18</sup>

The similarity of dream to the cinematic apparatus is apparent, we are in a position of omnipotence, rest and isolation and we are egoistically located in the central point of meaning and desire. We deploy cinema as an instrument of ideology hence “the person who plays the main part in dream scenes is always the dreamer himself”.<sup>19</sup> Baudry takes up Freud’s notion to underline that cinema itself offers an “Artificial psychosis” and therefore the experience of the real or the dreamlike reality is established.

## 2. What a scene can do

### 2.1 Affect: Spectatorship and the Body

We find ourselves now in the encounter with the image and sound, our body stands in conversation with the cinematic moment. This moment can be compared to an exchange as what is represented *speaks* to us and in return, it demands a reaction. To reject the formation of a reaction within ourselves deems itself as inevitable, as a response to what is observed, the nature of affect, truly is unavoidable. The word affect is derived from the Latin word *Affectus* which means to “Produce an effect on”, “Exert an influence on” or refers to the mental state, capacity of emotion, desire or passion<sup>20</sup>. Since the mid 1990s, affect theory has been a popular topic in discussion within cultural and social studies but also in the arts and media theory<sup>21</sup>. With its wide scope of interest, there is a multitude of theorists that try to get a hunch about the true nature of affect; how it influences our thoughts and actions and how it is incorporated

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<sup>18</sup> David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses* (Princeton University Press, 2006) , 16

<sup>19</sup> Emily Pothast, “Ideology and the Cinematographic Apparatus.” *Medium, Form and Resonance*, (1 Apr. 2021), <https://medium.com/form-and-resonance/ideology-and-the-cinematographic-apparatus-495dec8890a8>.

<sup>20</sup> “Affect.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, Accessed 17 Jan. 2022. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/affect>.

<sup>21</sup> Mette Thobo-Carlsen, "The Affects of the Artwork: On the Material Art Object and the Affective Encounter in the Art Exhibition." *Arken Bulletin* 7 (2017), 96-114.

in the human experience. According to Spinozist-Deleuzean idea of affect, affects represent non-linguistic bodily intensities<sup>22</sup>: a visceral force which is similar emotion that embodies change and transformation<sup>23</sup>. Brian Massumi, a fellow Deleuzean theorist, sees affect as a small shock, an imperceptible energetic intensity or force which is one that can be found populating every moment of our lives, as it is in the air and expresses itself in a physical, bodily change<sup>24</sup>. Hereby he makes a clear distinction between affect and emotion or personal feeling:

AFFECT/AFFECTION. Neither word denotes a personal feeling (sentiment in Deleuze and Guattari). *L'affect* (Spinoza's *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. *L'affection* (Spinoza's *affectio*) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include »mental« or ideal bodies).<sup>25</sup>

It is a physical experience that precede our conscious mind and ontological cognition as it prepares our body to move to action.<sup>26</sup> "Affect is thus best defined as a biological or physical change in the body, a vague or indefinable bodily shift that can feel like trembling excitement for one person and uneasiness for someone else."<sup>27</sup> A moment, that is filled with potential and which cannot be realised into our language, it is independent from signification and meaning. And thus, it is a moment of intensity, it is embodied, over which we have no control.<sup>28</sup> It arises at encounter, within interaction between subjects but also between subject and external objects, such as art, a literary text or an environment. An affecting body therefore is always necessary in order to be affected. According to Tompkins, who bases his theory of affect on Darwin, there are three different classes of affect: affect for the preservation of life,

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<sup>22</sup> Kasper Kristensen, "What can an affect do? Notes on the Spinozist-Deleuzean account." *LIR. journal* 7 (2016): p.23.

<sup>23</sup> Thobo-Carlsen, 96-114.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* p. 102

<sup>25</sup> Brian Massumi, "Notes on the Translation and Acknowledgements." in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987)

<sup>26</sup> Eric Shouse, "Feeling, Emotion, Affect". *M/C Journal*, vol. 8, no. 6, (Dec. 2005) doi:10.5204/mcj.2443.

<sup>27</sup> Thobo-Carlsen, 96-114.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

affect for people and affect for novelty.<sup>29</sup> It is much more of a biological attribute and we humans are able to have an affective experience even before it comes into cognition:

“Affects are comprised of correlated sets of responses involving the facial muscles, the viscera, the respiratory system, the skeleton, autonomic blood flow changes, and vocalisations that act together to produce an analogue of the particular gradient or intensity of stimulation impinging on the organism”<sup>30</sup> The face represents according to him the centre of emotion, it informs ourselves and others and actually is the experience of affect: “We learn the language of the face through correspondence between what a face looks like and what it feels like”.<sup>31</sup> Due to its speed, visibility and precision it has priority over other visceral forces in the body.<sup>32</sup> The face is an indicator for feeling and emotion, it is both window and mirror. “In viewing a person, or a face, we apply both our own prior experiences and the cultural associations prevalent in our society”.<sup>33</sup>

Early on as children we learn to identify emotions through the expressions of the face. We all have seen cartoons, animated films and fantasy movies where it appeared that there were these scenes in which collectively, as adults many people can recall an experience of a heart-breaking moment. I will take as an example scenes such as in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1*<sup>34</sup> where Dobby passes away in effort to save his friends, or in *The Lion King*<sup>35</sup> where Scar has schemed to kill Mufasa and Simba finds the dead body of his father or in *Pokémon: The First Movie*<sup>36</sup> where Ash gets petrified and Pikachu tries to revive him while all the other Pokémon around him are breaking into tears, one thing that they have in common is that we can see that a depiction of a fictional reality and a face can transmit affect and emotion better than words can do, even if it is not a real face or a representation of a real

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<sup>29</sup> Virginia Demos, *Exploring Affect: The Selected Writings of Silvan S Tomkins* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 21

<sup>30</sup> Demos, 19

<sup>31</sup> Demos, 210

<sup>32</sup> Demos, 210

<sup>33</sup> David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses* (Princeton University Press, 2006), 20

<sup>34</sup> *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. Part 1*, directed by David Yates, (2016, Burbank, CA : Warner Home Video), DVD

<sup>35</sup> *The Lion King*, directed by Rob Minkoff and Roger Allers (1994, Buena Vista Pictures), DVD

<sup>36</sup> *Pokémon: The First Movie* directed by Kunihiko Yuyama, (1998, OLM, Inc.)

person. Especially as children, we get attached to our favourite fictional characters and mostly do not comprehend the full meaning of death or what it means to cease to live, and yet we are feeling the loss of these characters as our own loss. We know that the character will not continue to live in the realm of the imaginary fictional world, their face will not elicit life again. The faces of the mourning characters are acting as strong indicators of the felt emotion and the shock and as children we are compelled to being empathetic towards the situation as we see our favourite heroes suffer tragic experiences and trauma. We already understand the detrimental event through the affect and the way others feel around them and the social implications without having made experiences like this ourselves. We learn in that way cultural and social expectations and to adapt to them.

Emotion therefore is the display of a feeling<sup>37</sup> which arises through affect, it is not affect itself. When we have gotten affected by something, it instantaneously has materialised in our body in a spontaneous, non-linguistic, non-conscious way. Emotion on the other hand, is the movement that our body executes, the action as a response to a feeling which comes to shape after the affect has been translated in some way, there is need of it to come into concept based on our personal perception; A feeling has our identity that means our previous experiences as its foundation and is therefore personal and biographical.<sup>38</sup> It is astounding to see the different displays of emotions that our body governs through sensation and identity formation, hence we speak of the language of our face or the language of our body.

In 2014, Lauri Nummenmaa conducted a study about emotions and their associations to bodily sensations that she presents in the article “Bodily Maps of Emotion”.<sup>39</sup> With the help of a computer program she had participants execute five different experiments with a unique topographical self-report method (emBODY) where they had to colour two silhouettes of bodies according to their increasing or decreasing stimulus towards emotional words, stories, movies or facial expressions.<sup>40</sup> Its relevance lays in the fact that emotions often navigate us through life and effect our behaviour and physiological states and on the other way around,

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<sup>37</sup> Shouse, “Feeling, Emotion, Affect”

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

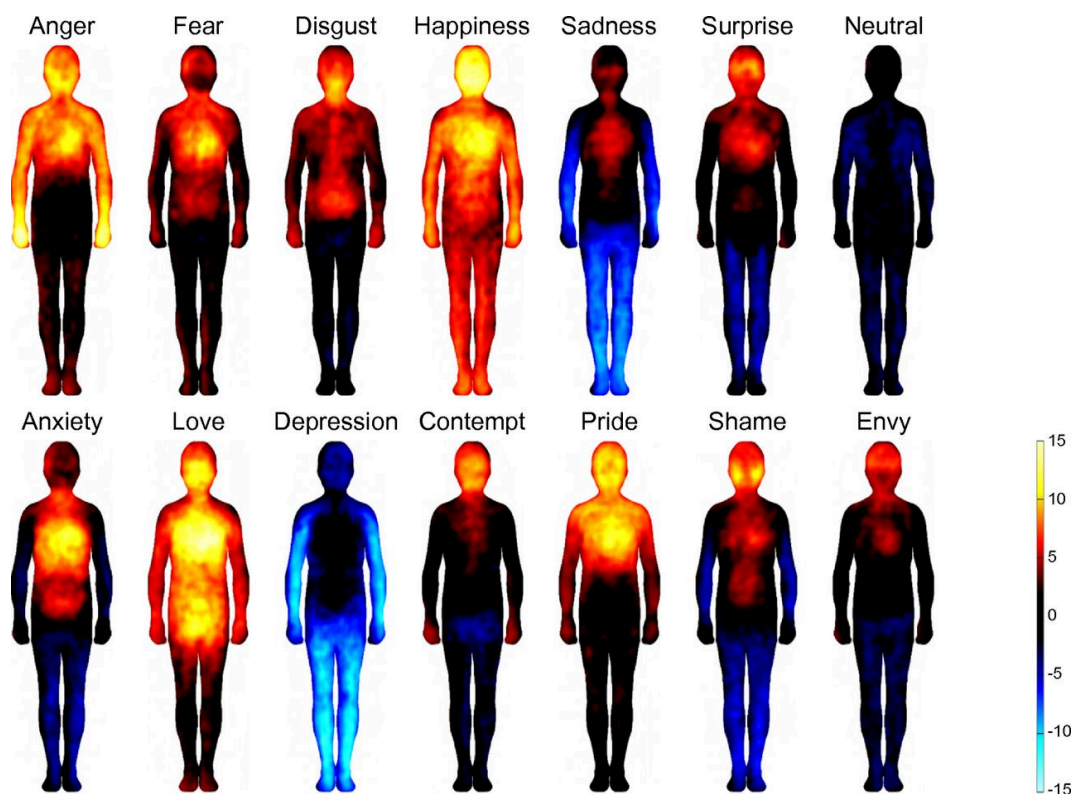
<sup>39</sup> Lauri Nummenmaa, et al. "Bodily maps of emotions." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111.2 (2014): 646-651.

<sup>40</sup> Nummenmaa, 646-651



we also experience subjective conscious emotional feelings due to our bodily sensations. Thus, this research could help us to understand mood disorders or emotional disorders better.

Most basic emotions were associated with sensations of elevated activity in the upper chest area, likely corresponding to changes in breathing and heart rate. Similarly, sensations in the head area were shared across all emotions, reflecting probably both physiological changes in the facial area (i.e., facial musculature activation, skin temperature, lacrimation) as well as the felt changes in the contents of mind triggered by the emotional events. Sensations in the upper limbs were most prominent in approach-oriented emotions, anger and happiness, whereas sensations of decreased limb activity were a defining feature of sadness. Sensations in the digestive system and around the throat region were mainly found in disgust. In contrast with all of the other emotions, happiness was associated with enhanced sensations all over the body. The nonbasic emotions showed a much smaller degree of bodily sensations and spatial independence, with the exception of a high degree of similarity across the emotional states of fear and sadness, and their respective prolonged, clinical variants of anxiety and depression.<sup>41</sup>



Bodily topography of basic (Upper) and nonbasic (Lower) emotions associated with words<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Nummenmaa, "Bodily maps of emotions"

<sup>42</sup> Nummenmaa, "Bodily maps of emotions."

## 2.2 Participation

As the cinematic moment is a moment in which affect is being transmitted, the apparatus itself acts as another affective body. Gadamer saw this sort of interaction between the work of art and the audience as a form of play in which we, the audience are engaging as active participants<sup>43</sup>. The significance of the word play is hereby fundamental to his claim: that describes a self-movement which is generated by the living being, a non-purposed activity to which reasoning is applied, which is what sets the rules.<sup>44</sup> In *The Relevance of the Beautiful and other Essays*<sup>45</sup> he writes extensively about how the work of art actually reveals itself as a play of art. The artwork expresses itself in form of its performance: no matter whether it is a painting, a drama, theatre play, poetry, a song, a book or what can be seen in the television, it is of communal, communicative character and its existence is incomplete without an audience that partakes. It cannot truly function without us engaging with intention, ambition, effort and commitment, that is to “Play along”.<sup>46</sup> Its hermeneutic identity is what moves us to act upon it; we must seek to understand in order to identify its meaning and to create our own judgement upon it.<sup>47</sup> If we are immersed in the work of art, it will open a leeway for us, a space of free impulses in which we can grasp its true form and attentively construct our own impressions.<sup>48</sup>

In that way, how we perceive and “Play along” with these movements is inherently subjective to ourselves. Each of these movements are filled with potential of symbolising a dramatic turning point, a shift; that is to corrupt ones perception of thyself, space and time. They can represent a crucial factor and indicator for how we will feel next in our body, about ourselves and perhaps about the world: we will leave the moment differently if we have had a real experience of it. Thereby when we speak of being *moved* by a scene I believe that it is that we were truly affected, we have had a true conversation, a real exchange with that external object.

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<sup>43</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 1988). pp.24-26

<sup>44</sup> Gadamer, 23

<sup>45</sup> Gadamer, 23

<sup>46</sup> Gadamer, 23-25

<sup>47</sup> Gadamer, 25-26

<sup>48</sup> Gadamer, 22-27

A movie can act on us in many different ways just as we can take many different modes of perception upon it. Our body participates with its wholeness, we are addressed as corporeal-material beings, that includes our nerves, our senses and the entire physiological substance. Therefore vision and sound engage all our other bodily processes. Laura Marks has given this notion the name “Haptic visuality”<sup>49</sup>: a mode of perception in which we contemplate our relation to the image with the memory, sense experience and imagination rather than being immersed in the narrative.<sup>50</sup> Hereby she differentiates between haptic and optical images. According to her, optical perception prioritises the representational power of the image, it gives the viewer all the resources to be understood. Haptic visuality in contrast “Refuses visual plenitude [...] and encourages a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image”.

<sup>51</sup> The way this mode is established is through the material layer of the image, the textual quality of the film itself and its incompleteness:

[...] grainy, unclear images; sensuous imagery that evokes memory of the senses (i.e. water, nature); the depiction of characters in acute states of sensory activity (smelling, sniffing, tasting, etc.); close-to-the-body camera positions and panning across the surface of objects; changes in focus, under- and overexposure, decaying film and video imagery; optical printing; scratching on the emulsion; densely textured images, effects and formats such as Pixelvision (Fisher-Price toy camera, used to interesting effect by Michael Almereyda); and alternating between film/video.<sup>52</sup>

In that way, film becomes a tactile medium and we are able to “Touch” it with our eyes.<sup>53</sup> This form of filmmaking has been richly explored by experimental filmmakers who ought to bring forth playful connections that are drawn from within the viewer through rich textures and closeness, where the viewer feels the film rather than seeing it. “It is in the meeting of the film's skin and the viewer's skin that film becomes meaningful.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Laura U. Marks and Dana Polan. *The skin of the film*. (Duke University Press, 2000)

<sup>50</sup> Marks, 163

<sup>51</sup> Marks, 164-77

<sup>52</sup> Donato Totaro, “Deleuzian film analysis: The skin of the film” *Offscreen*. (Retrieved February 23, 2022) [https://offscreen.com/view/skin\\_of\\_film?%2Fnew\\_offscreen%2Fskin.html](https://offscreen.com/view/skin_of_film?%2Fnew_offscreen%2Fskin.html)

<sup>53</sup> Marks, 173

<sup>54</sup> Jennifer M. Barker, *The tactile eye: Touch and the cinematic experience* (Univ of California Press, 2009)

Stan Brakhage's *Dog Star Man*<sup>55</sup> serves as a wonderful example that illustrates the essence of haptic visuality: It is like a cosmological phantasmagoria of spontaneous imagery and abstract textures and visual effects which tell the story of a bearded man (filmmaker Stan Brakhage) who ascends together with his dog on a snowy mountain to chop down a tree. Shot on 16mm and comprised of a prelude and four short films, Brakhage achieved to create a compelling experience by manipulating and even destroying the physical surface of the film in terms of scratching and painting on it and utilising various exposure times. It is here where the viewer is asked to examine one's own thoughts and feelings as the piece inspires introspection. Because it is silent, it is demanded of us to contemplate on how the image itself affects us, how we relate to the dust particles, the blurred vision, the animated cracks that appear on the film, scratches, the hyper proximity to a body, the scalp and the feeling of curly hair; to remember the heaviness of carrying our own body and the fear of heights. It asks us how we relate to the magnetism of the moon, to the stars, how the rocky ground feels beneath our soles and the feeling of wild waters touching our skin; we are put to think birth and nature and our own memory of the experience of it. Like that, the film lets us breathe the cool thin and fresh air on the mountain too. It is like a dream sequence, the film becomes our experience and it is no longer us who experience the film from a distant voyeuristic position.

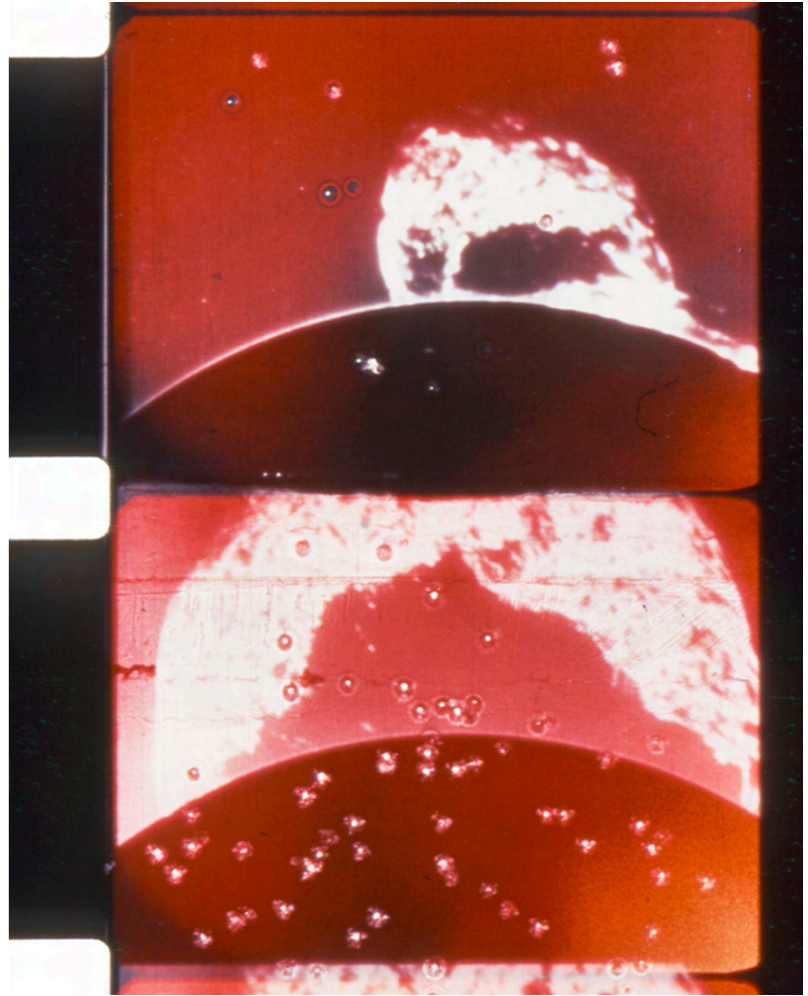
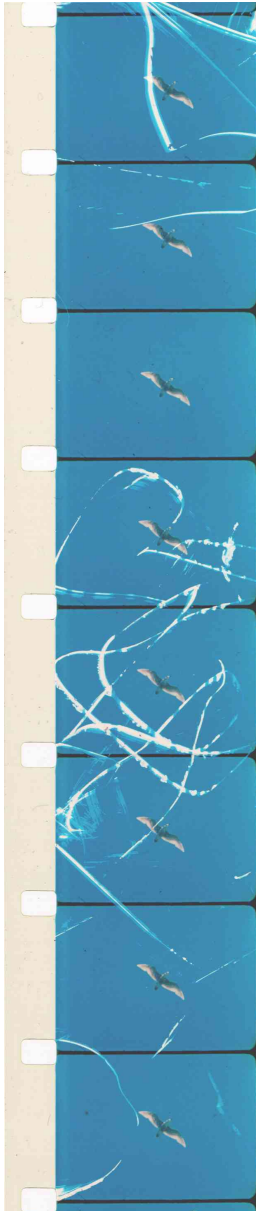
The silence in this film creates a certain mystery around it, it signifies an otherworldly place.<sup>56</sup> Since the end of the silent film era, audiences have become so adjusted to aural accompaniment guiding us and giving cues, often accentuate what we are seeing. Due to that, even if we don't need to look at the image constantly we understand what is happening, the sound can serve as another pair of eyes. In this particular work, the absence of sound heightens the sense of disorientation as Brakhage lets go of our hand and leaves us alone to image. Each and every frame becomes more difficult to decode which is what makes it also more mysterious and unclear. Having no sound emphasises the material level of the film, the haptic visuality as that is all that we have. Every frame seems to entail aesthetic meaning, and every frame demands careful inspection and observation. While we know that silence and

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<sup>55</sup> *Dog Star Man*, Stan Brakhage, (1961-64)

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Goerne, "The Emotional Impact of Sound: A Short Theory of Film Sound Design" (2019) 10.29007/jk8h.

non-silence both affects our overall perception, I would like to talk a bit more about the role of sound in cinema in the next section.



Stan Brakhage, Dog Star Man Filmstrip<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Brakhage, Fred Camper, *Brakhage's Contradictions* *Chicago Review* (No. 47:4 & 48:1, Spring 2002) <https://fredcamper.com/Film/BrakhageS.html>

### 2.3 The Power of Sound

“Films are 50 percent visual and 50 percent sound. Sometimes sound even overplays the visual” - David Lynch

Since the arrival of sound in film, cinema has transformed into a new medium. During the last century the art of the moving picture has made immense technical progress with its unique mixture of sound and imagery. As the quote by David Lynch suggests, the audio-visual medium focuses on two types of perceptions, our visual perception and our auditory perception. But still, the power of sound is heavily underrated in film. It is its own movement, capable of transmitting intensities and affect just as much as visual imagery does but yet it is often overshadowed element to the projection on the screen. Often perceived in terms of a hierarchy, sight is generally assumed to be on the top while sound is just merely an accompanying element, there to aid and enhance the visual experience. But what needs to be understood is the immense power that sound inherits. It changes the way we see the image but it also changes the way we get affected over all. It is sound that gives rhythm and unity to a scene. Maybe the reason why its appreciation is pushed so much in the background is because of the unconscious processes that are involved in hearing: sounds are actually perceived, analysed, processed and synthesised faster than what we can process visually,<sup>58</sup> it often affects us before the scene has laid out to what is going to happen as Michel Chion notes “in a first contact with an audiovisual message, the eye is more spatially adept, and the ear more temporally adept”. In a synthesis of image and sound, the audiovisual illusion comes into shape, which Chion calls *added value*:

By added value I mean the expressive and informative value with which a sound enriches a given image so as to create the definite impression, in the immediate or remembered experience one has of it, that this information or expression "naturally" comes from what is seen, and is already contained in the image itself. Added value is what gives the (eminently incorrect) impression that sound is unnecessary, that sound merely duplicates a meaning which in reality it brings about, either all on its own or by discrepancies between it and the image.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Michel Chion, *Audio-vision: sound on screen*, (Columbia University Press, 2019), 10

<sup>59</sup> Chion, 5

Our everyday lives are occupied with dozens of different sounds coming from our immediate environment. Hearing is one of the most important elements for survival,<sup>60</sup> without the sense of hearing, it would be much more difficult to navigate through life. According to Chion, there are three different modes of hearing which addresses different objects : 1. Causal listening, in which our perception tries to identify through the sound the the source, 2. Semantic listening, which refers language and other codes in order to interpret a message and 3. Reduced listening, in which we only focus on the traits of the sound itself.<sup>61</sup> Causal listening is hereby one of the most commonly deployed modes and in film, one of the most influenced deceptive forms of hearing.<sup>62</sup> Heidegger once said: “Much closer to us than all sensations are the things themselves. We hear the door shut in the house and never hear acoustical sensations or even mere sounds”<sup>63</sup> When we deploy this mode of hearing, we believe that what we hear is the object itself and not the invisible wave that is transmitted through space. And that is exactly one of the many roles that sound play in film: it gives the film dimension, it creates space and time, plenitude and turns objects into real entities. “Sound [is] superimposed onto the image [and] is capable of directing our attention to a particular visual trajectory”.<sup>64</sup>

The way sound appears in movies is in form of spoken dialogue, diegesis, sound effects and music.

The term diegesis refers to the relation of image or sound to the virtual world of the film. A diegetic sound belongs to the world of the film, it exists as an acoustic signal in the virtual world. A non-diegetic sound can either be metadiegetic, i.e. subjective (e.g. an inner voice in the character’s head, or an “semantically overloaded” or by other means alienized sound mimicking a character’s perception), or it can be extradiegetic, i.e. completely outside the world of the film, audible only for the

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<sup>60</sup> Wallace. “Importance of Hearing” *Hearing Center of Excellence* Accessed February 26, 2022

<sup>61</sup> Chion, 25-29

<sup>62</sup> Chion, 26

<sup>63</sup> Martin Heidegger: *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks*, Reclam 1960

<sup>64</sup> Chion, 11

audience, not for the characters (e.g. typical film music or typical fancy “sound effects”)<sup>65</sup>

When speaking of non-diegetic sounds, one can say that they often add to a scene's atmosphere and convey emotion and affect, it gives us in that way an aural impression, a more coherent and immersive experience. We often associate sounds metaphorically as our auditory perception works in terms of the haptic properties and we use words that are actually associated with other sense perceptions such as “high, low, deep, warm, cold, bright, dark, rough, smooth, big, small, soft, edgy, round, flat, sharp, dull, transparent, translucent, shimmering, sweet, colourful”.<sup>66</sup> That makes the use of sound in film also into a haptic experience. Sound actually engages multiple of our senses and can make a specific action or scene felt more real. In *127 Hours*<sup>67</sup>, when Aron finally decides to cut the nerve in his arm in order to break it so to escape the boulder that had him trapped for several of days, we can really feel the painful sensation in our own body. The sound design brings out the haptic quality of sound and conveys the torment, as every time the knife comes in contact with the nerve, that is to touch it, there is an unbearable high pitched screeching and terrible, sharp noise. We can imagine the sharp qualities of the knife in the moment of contact with the extremely sensitive nerve. In combination with the image, seeing the nerve completely bare, open skin that reveals a thin string surrounded by blood and muscles and his suffering expression, it puts us into the crevasse with Aron and makes us feel our own nervous system.

Watching a scene with sound and then without sound can completely change the affect and sometimes even its context. If present, sound plays a big role in our reception of the film and is the key for many iconic moments. Not to forget the musical scores, which are sometimes even more iconic than specific scenes, sound design is a highly important and carefully curated element of filmmaking. As David Lynch says, the filmic experience is in its whole 50/50.

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<sup>65</sup> Goerne, 25

<sup>66</sup> Goerne, 18

<sup>67</sup> *127 Hours*, directed by Danny Boyle (Warner Bros. Entertainment UK) 2011



### 3. Can a Non-Body be affected?

“When you will have made him a body without organs, then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true freedom.” - *Antonin Artaud*

I want to use this section to talk about two selected body of works from my own artistic practice that I have conducted during my studies. Alienation stands in the centre of my creations and I treat my concepts like thought projects. My interests lay in exploring the correlations of conscious and unconscious thinking, theorising the (spectral) body, embodiment and generally the landscapes of body and mind. I often think in terms of existence and how exterior forces can affect our interior world. My efforts are to achieve oneiric qualities in my works, as I am fascinated by realities that are coming from within the perceiving self or outside the norm. The two artworks that I have chosen both deal with some sort of absence of the body. The spark of interest was hereby, how our thoughts would adapt to a bodiless experience of existence. How would affect work upon an essence-less body without its viscera and lively mechanisms?

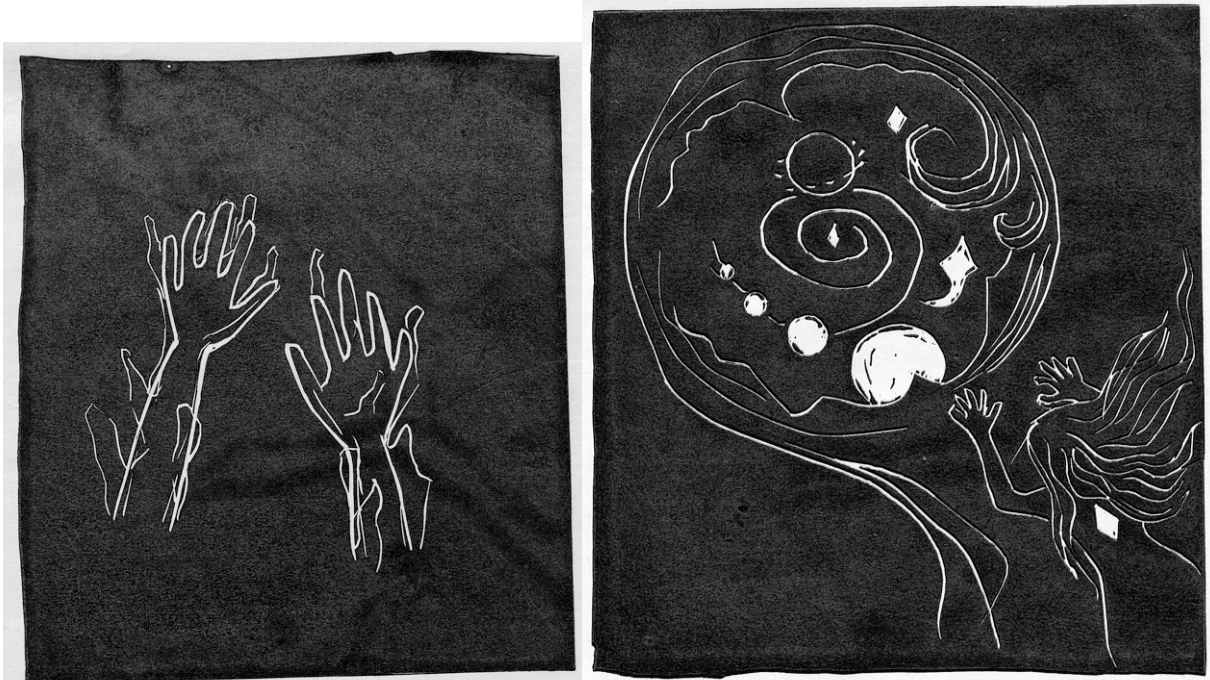
In 2021, I wrote a novel which goes by the name *0*<sup>68</sup>. It is a self-bounded book for which I chose a distinct, textured and glossy type of paper and made linocut prints. Because of the nature of linocut print, I wanted each of the three bounded books to have their own imprinted memory. With a total of 7 chapters and 35 pages it is comprised of separate poems that describe the story of a girl, who loses her body in a mysterious way and gets transferred into another realm. She becomes a No-body. Time flows different and it even seems not to exist, physics are beyond understanding and her surrounding environment are indeed quite strange. The parameters of this world are infinite and she tries to find an escape from this corrupt reality. She is lonelier than she has ever been before, with no living being wide around. All that she has are now her memories and her knowledge which start to fade away as all senses

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<sup>68</sup> Nguyen, Yenchi 0 2021

have been taken away from her. She has no form, no identity and all that she can do now is to think, to reminisce and to not lose hope for eternity. She imagines to have a body but the truth is that it is gone. Eventually she just becomes nothing. If we are deprived of all the senses and the needs that come with having a body, such as sleeping or eating, drinking, feeling, the ability to do things. I was wondering whether or not we could even call an experience as such a "life" as if that is actually living. To live means to be giving in to our bodily needs, to give attention to the signals that our bodies convey to us. That means to restore, replenish, to feel, to care, to learn and to move.

She felt how the hole in her chest became bigger. The more time she spent, the more she was losing. In confusion of what she was, she started to forget who she was. The girl was made of memories, and those memories did not cling onto her the way she clung onto them. And so she became fragments of another world shattering in this realm in which identity played no role.<sup>69</sup>



In *How to talk about the Body?*<sup>70</sup> Bruno Latour talks about affect as articulation (being affected by differences) and the bodies ability to get moved and affected by others.<sup>71</sup> One must always strive to become a more articulate subject and acquire oneself through that way a

<sup>69</sup> Nguyen, Yenchi "The past has long forgotten" in *0* 2021

<sup>70</sup> Bruno Latour, "How to talk about the body? The normative dimension of science studies." *Body & society* 10.2-3 (2004): 205-229.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*

proper “body”, differentiating oneself from the inarticulate mass. Here he also asks himself the question of being free from articulating oneself and be free from a body through the example of a short dialog:

‘Ah’, sighs the traditional subject, ‘if only I could extract myself from this narrow-minded body and roam through the cosmos, unfettered by any instrument, I would see the world as it is, without words, without models, without controversies, silent and contemplative’; ‘Really?’ replies the articulated body with some benign surprise, ‘why do you wish to be dead? For myself, I want to be alive and thus I want more words, more controversies, more artificial settings, more instruments, so as to become sensitive to even more differences. My kingdom for a more embodied body!’<sup>72</sup>

To see the world free from a body, means death. To be affected is not possible without a body and its physiology, we learn and interact with the world through our body and its limitations.

My black and white shortfilm of two minutes, *Imago*<sup>73</sup> is as the name gives away, inspired by the lifecycle and metamorphoses of a butterfly. I was fascinated by the transformational stages this insect has to go through until it reaches the stage of maturity. It is about attaining a body but then loosing it again, a process about re-learning, re-experiencing life and re-turning to the place of hibernation. I wrote a poem about this in German with English translation in the subtitles. This is hereby my only work which I have conducted in my “native” language, as I have grown in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual setting and found cultural identity hard to approach. The translation goes like this:

It is the beginning of your time  
The creation  
The heartbeat

One  
Two  
Three  
Four

You start to take shape  
slowly

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<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Nguyen, Yenchi *Imago* 2020

Your consciousness forms  
 The house that you are trapped in  
 is no longer sufficient  
 So, you break out

For the first time  
 You get to feel the light  
 The air  
 The life  
 The colour green  
 Enjoy how food tastes  
 And what it means to grow

Your body tries to withstand the  
 gluttony  
 So, your skin breaks  
 And you escape

The more you know  
 The less it frightens you  
 The recurring insight.

The retreat is coming.  
 It is enough.

Forget who you are  
 Forget your language  
 Loose your limbs  
 Unravel  
 Stay where you are  
 Stay in process

Wait.<sup>74</sup>



In the course of the poem, we can hear how more sounds are added and perceived as the being grows into life metaphorically: a heartbeat, a beeping, the sound of electricity. I used a second voice, which repeats what I say just like a baby or a child who learns how to speak. As it comes to consciousness, we hear the cracking of eggshells. Flickering lamps symbolise a faint awareness. The aural space is getting filled with random noises, just like acoustics in everyday life. Towards the end there are whispering voices in reverse, just as if the words that

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<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*

left their mouth get pulled back in time. The being is meanwhile in a state of stasis and fragmentation, just like a caterpillar whose body is mixed up like a soup. The whispering denotes a regression to a time before existence, an involuntary forgetting of life. By the end it is silent, and the last thing we hear is the second voice saying “wait” like a command that was understood, while looking at deep darkness.

As both works deal with an ultimate absence or loss of the physical body and its senses, I interpreted the resulting feelings as isolation and alienation. One without a body can no longer be a vessel for memory - one who cannot make new experiences will be doomed to forgetting. One who is not bound by bodily needs will lose all identity as identity is formed through memory, experience and touch. The non-body is incapable to interact, it is the setting free of all affect, emotion, feeling and identity. The opposite of becoming, not a not-becoming but more like a regression, a going backwards in time. It is a turning into nothingness how the air in a balloon ceases to be something when you pop it. Therefore to answer the question in the title while keeping regards to Latour, I believe that a non-body is a death, it does not have the ability to be affected due to the absence of autonomy, incapability to absorb intensities, impossibility to move and to be moved and independence to gravity and time.

## Conclusion

The experience of a film is multi-faceted and film-viewing can be done from many different perspectives and modes. Its power to move us and affect us is up to us, or to be more precise our subjective, physical and mental disposition. How much we are immersed in the reality on-screen depends on how much truth we invest in the audio-visual illusion. What has become apparent to me during this research is how closely related our senses are to one another and how perception is so closely affiliated with our experience of life and therefore to our whole nervous system, the body-memory in its whole and our autonomy. Just by witnessing something visually and acoustically, our body can relate to it in what first seems to be completely imaginative but which is truly a genuine reaction that comes from within us. It lays in our nature. Our bodies are incredibly intelligent self-autonomous affecting objects and that makes it beautiful that only through affect we can relate, we can feel and that is what makes us so sentient. It just shows what a force affect is and all its capabilities. It's fantastic that affect simply comes as a side effect of being alive and having a body, a body with organs.

By investigating the cinematic apparatus I was able to draw connections between the dreaming experience and the cinematic experience which enabled me to see why films sometimes come so close to us and feel so real (or surreal). The study about affect made me realise how affect is already actually in our body and how emotions are formed, how complex the nature of affect is overall and the possibilities that are entailed with this notion, it is astounding they are eliciting intensities. And these intensities, this electricity - it fills up the room, it is contained in the image and in the sound. Image and sound act together like a symbiosis. I most certainly see how physical emotions are at the core and that also helps me to understand myself better. Our capability to converse with a work of art can open new leeways for us in which we are free to discover new layers to what we want to and are able to experience. *A window as well as a mirror.*

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