

# Phenomenology of Film Experience in Relation to Corporeal Involvement in the World<sup>1</sup>

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KATARZYNA WEICHERT

**Abstract:** How does a film affect the sensuality and corporeality of the viewer? This question is raised by modern researchers concerned with phenomenological theory of film and the embodied viewer. They mostly rely on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's findings, according to which we – corporeally embedded in the world – project the field of potential gaze and motion, we grasp the expression of a gesture. Such conceptions, as Daniel Yacavone states, do not consider the film as a work of art; they focus on basic visuality (and aurality) of film. In this vein, Vivian Sobchack limits her theory. She describes film in the categories of embodied perception: she treats it as a vision of the world offered from within, with a specific point of view, directing the attention, grasp of a gesture. In order to broaden this perspective I refer to Hermann Schmitz's new phenomenology. His concept of the embodied subject, the sensitivity open for the world, and also the concept of the world experienced through atmospheric drives or ambiguous sensations, allows the conceptual apprehension of many elusive phenomena, which cinematography has learned to skilfully exploit.

*Keywords:* Embodied viewer, new phenomenology, being affected, film experience

In phenomenological film theory, there is growing interest in the category of embodiment, the embodied viewer, and one of the major issues are the question of corporeal, sensory experience of the film, and the question – raised by Daniel Yacavone – about how the viewers are connected to their own corporeality through the film. There are plenty of publications and books concerning this topic – such as *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* by Laura U. Marks, Dana Polan (2000), *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* by Jennifer M. Barker (2009), *Carnal Thoughts Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* by Vivian Sobchack (2016), among which Sobchack's work *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (1990) is particularly influential.

However, these authors point out that the topic requires further attention (especially in Anglo-Saxon literature). Such things as the status of sensory experiences related to film experience, or how to explain the effect of an audio-visual work on the living, multisensory corporeality of the viewer, and yet open this issue for the question of influence of film as a work of art, remain unclear. Perhaps it does not require creating a specific theory of embodied film, but thinking about living corporeality in its passive openness and sensory involvement, and visual and aural qualities in their effective capacity. In this article I shall present Sobchack's concept of embodied film in reference to Merleau-Ponty together with doubts raised by Daniel Yacavone, and then I shall propose Hermann Schmitz's concept of living corporeality – the affected (touched) being – as yet unexplored tool for description of the film experience.

## Embodied Perception

Phenomenological film theories focusing on corporeality are mainly based on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of embodied perception. According to him, the access to the world is mostly

sensory and corporeal. The body is the background for all actions and activities. It determines the ability to focus, to turn to objects and persons that surround me. Thus it is the environment that defines and designs the area for potential actions. It utilises basic intentionality. By turning to an object, it distinguishes it in its field of observation and motion, it projects itself on it in order for the intentionality to occur: “The gesture of reaching one’s hand out toward an object contains a reference to the object, not as a representation, but as this highly determinate thing toward which we are thrown, next to which we are through anticipation, and which we haunt”<sup>2</sup>. In other words, it incorporates it into the scope of its motion. It can be described as functional recognition of one’s environment in one’s body. This also applies to reception of any phenomena and qualities. They are never neutrally granted, they are always available through a certain approach. Therefore they are shaped motorically, primarily received through corporeal assimilation. Body gets attuned to the received stimulus. Sensations, caused by e.g. the sight of a certain colour, are not simply acts of registration of qualities, but – according to the philosopher – a particular way of being. He indicates that the body, with particular muscles, reacts differently to reception of the colours red and yellow, versus blue and green. He interpretes adduction and abduction as the body pulling towards a stimulus or turning away from it, withdrawing. Thus the impressions do not create a mental state, but they affect motor activity: they are perceived together with the corporeal reaction to them. Corporeal reception of stimuli, ie. concurrence of perception and corporeal reaction can be described as the beginning of its understanding.

Therefore, according to Merleau-Ponty, the body is a tool for understanding – at least – of the perceived world. Assuming a certain attitude – in the moment of turning towards an object – determines its surroundings and ability to act and experience. Thus it defines a preliminary sphere of meanings. Movements of the body appear to be a membrane, vibrating and translating impressions into appropriate meanings: “is this strange object that uses its own parts as a general system of symbols for the world and through which we can thus ‘frequent’ this world, ‘understand’ it, and find a signification for it”<sup>3</sup>. The meaning behind gestures and therefore intentions of another person is recognised in the same way. Such gestures and other acts are treated as forms of expression, expressed through the body. The meanings they carry create the world between the gesturing persons, upon which realm the speech is also based.

Body is observing and observed both as immersed in the world and operating within it. It does not perceive itself as transparent – it cannot see itself as a whole. It rather remains unseen as a condition and background for its actions. It is also entitled among other bodies and in relation to them (in a determined structure of direction, like top-down), which is particularly apparent in experiencing depth. Mutual interruption of objects is a proof of irreducibility of perspective and determines the place of embodied gaze.

This corporeal immersion in the world is explained and exposed through human expression, particularly in works of art. Painting allows to reveal a web of relations between things, and primarily the relationship between them and the human as a corporeal being, observing and observed. The painter’s capable eyes see what is visible in the world, and also its spaciousness, connections between things, depth, and balance (or lack thereof). The painter transforms the visible and invisible aspects of the world, in other words – perceives what the world is missing for it to become a two-dimensional work of art through the use of paint<sup>4</sup>. Visibility appears under the painter’s brush through touch, through a gesture stemming from observing and transforming the visibility through the painter’s body, through cooperation of the eye and the hand.

### **Embodied Film Perception**

In this spirit Sobchack presents the sensory nature of film and links it to the viewer’s corporeality. In her book *The Address of the Eye* she presents film as an immanent vision of a consciousness

immersed in the presented world. In other words, what we view is a perception of the film, which – limited to a fragment of the given world, shown from a certain perspective – reveals visible things, their relation to other things, the depth, and it indicates their meaning by drawing attention to them in its field of perception. Thus the elements become a part of this world, and through it – a story. A film shows us the world from within and – according to Sobchack – in this lies the power of the cinematic medium and its capacity of offering a direct, embodied experience: “what I am suggesting here is that the power of the medium and its ability to communicate the experience of embodied and enworlded vision resides in the experience common to both film and spectator”<sup>5</sup>.

Film perception – the activity of exposing a gesture and focusing on objects – is offered for viewing. Sobchack treats the relationship between the audience and the film as a dialogous meeting of the viewing and viewed bodies. The offered vision does not belong to the viewer – it is separate from them, it can also be more or less confrontational and unpleasant. This independence and internal – with regard to the presented world – perception grants the film its subjectivity (or quasi-subjectivity) and makes it more than just an observed object. Moreover, Sobchack attributes a consciousness to film with a consciousness, as long as it is an embodied consciousness – perceiving and expressing its perception:

In this process of description, the existence of that “other seeing being” that is the film has been posited as constituting embodied subjectivity: “the sense of perception a semiology of meaning from within”. This “sense of perception” has also been revealed as expressive, capable of signifying in the world and to others its own and the world’s significance<sup>6</sup>.

Film creates perception and expression of experiencing the world and becoming, which transcends the direct perceptual experience of the author. It exposes the space “there where we view” or “there where the eye [of the camera] is” as a sensory, intentional space, an area of potential actions. It is observed by the viewer as corporeally inhabited and experienced, but by someone else. The viewer peeps on it, because it is not their own experience of being in the world; they are aware of exposing the experienced expression of perception. We could say that living perception becomes transformed. Like in the case of painting the tool for this transformation was the painter’s sensitive body, their eye and hand, in cinematic art the world is transformed in the eye of the camera and the whole technology associated with film. We cannot forget about the bodies of film creators, who – according to Sobchack – play a lesser part. Transformation would therefore rely mainly on exposing and broadcasting the experienced existence – untamed perception which now allows us to view it from within.

Film experience is based on perceiving the body as a carrier of expression, which appears through a series of sensory symptoms – a film is an analogon of human experience as significant and embodied<sup>7</sup>. The viewer, however, not only observes the embodied perception of the film, but their whole body participates in this experience. They receive it with their whole sensory reserve, relying on full physical access to the world (and cultural resources, or memory, as Laura Marks points out<sup>8</sup>) along with smell, touch, and grasping such properties as weight, size, texture, or sense of gravity<sup>9</sup>. As an example of such potential involvement, the author recalls her own film experience while watching *The Piano* (1993). She found the first scene particularly intense, where the gaze was inscribed in the body, shown from a subjective, intimate perspective.

As I watched *The Piano*’s opening moments in that first shot, before I even knew there was an Ada and before I saw her from my side of her vision [...] something seemingly extraordinary happened [...] What I was seeing was, in fact, from the beginning, not an unrecognizable image, however blurred and indeterminate in my vision, however much my eyes could not “make it out”. [...] my fingers comprehended that image, grasped it with a nearly imperceptible tingle of attention and anticipation and, offscreen, “felt themselves” as a potentiality in the subjective and fleshy situation figured onscreen<sup>10</sup>.

Here, the author describes a particularly perceptual impression, which incorporated the experience of her own body into the process of watching. She shows that sight is not isolated from other senses, but that it (together with hearing) grants the multisensory, experiencing body an access to the world of the film. This is why Sobchack describes the viewer as the synaesthetic subject, i.e. one in which certain sensory experiences are translated into other senses. It is also coenaesthetic, which means that different senses in their corporeal unity heighten certain experiences (or diminish them)<sup>11</sup>.

Status of sensory experiences such as touch or smell is ambiguous – no matter how suggestively the smell of magnolia or taste of a dish is described, the viewer’s memory or sensation is not the literal experience of smelling. Thus it would constitute an imagination, or a quasi-impression. Still, it is an experience that cannot be reduced to two senses: sight and hearing. In my opinion, senses should not be treated as separate, but inseparable from the experiencing body; as such that engage the body, but also as such that originate in the body, depend on it. Another problem, but also a characteristic feature of film experience, is immersion, drawing the viewer’s attention towards the film events and its sensory world. Thus the viewer’s sensations, their experiencing of their own body, are dispersed. Even if sensual experiences can be enhanced, they are localised “there”, or in some contrast to “here”. The author describes this paradox on the example of strong haptics of the woolen fabric shown, and her own sensations of touching a silk shirt. Her own body becomes the background for appearing film figures, it is an invisible side of haptic perception. The author states that “the cinesthetic subject feels his or her literal body as only one side of an irreducible and dynamic relational structure of reversibility and reciprocity that has as its other side the figural objects of bodily provocation on the screen”<sup>12</sup>. This exchange and reversibility is not always harmonious, it can also be disrupted, especially in intense, unpleasant, or even violent scenes.

### Film as a Work of Art

Describing a film as an analogon of human perception and defining the relationship between the viewer and the film as a dialogue between two observing and observed perceptions is controversial. According to Yacavone, identifying the eye of the camera with living perception is linked to “all encompassing ‘functional analogy’ between the suggested material and prereflectively experienced presence of a film – its ‘body’ – and the human body”<sup>13</sup> and the possibility of communication is based on similarity between the activity of the eye of the camera and human perception towards their surroundings. Giving the film subjectivity, focusing on technological potential to create film perception, is supposed to dismiss the questions concerning the author, their style, and the film’s effect as a creative unity – a work of art.

I think that recognising subjectivity of the film shows the immanence of cinematic vision, where all revelations expose the meaning, show the significance of a given element in the world of the film or the depicted story, anticipate actions and events, and which always occur from a certain perspective and because of it<sup>14</sup>. It allows to treat a film as establishing its own worldliness. Some doubts may arise from the question about how the embodied perception of a film is supposed to be an extension of human perception – as Laura Marks interpretes this concept<sup>15</sup> – and to what extent it can be creatively transformed. Does showing the separate (quasi) subjectivity of film not signify separation from the limited human perception? Sobchack replies that film confronts the viewer with a nonhuman perspective:

Nonetheless, insofar as the film’s material conditions for providing access to the world, accomplishing the commutation of perception and expression, and constituting or signifying a significant coherence are different from our own, they provide us actual and possible modes of becoming other than we are. Thus, even as human bodies engage the film’s body in an always correlated activity (whether of filmmaking or spectating), the film’s material body also always engages us in its possibilities as a nonhuman lived-body<sup>16</sup>.

Yet the author sees this separation mostly in the concrete materiality of the cinematic apparatus, less so in the intention and creative work of the authors.

Film is not so much an extension of perception, but it rather appeals “to our power tacitly to decipher the world or men and to coexist with them. [...] A movie is not thought; it is perceived”<sup>17</sup>, as Merleau-Ponty states. Yet Yacavone points out that film, or rather technology and physical aspects of the medium, is not automatically capable of embodiment or representation of the processes of experienced perception. Neither does it simply refer to natural objects of perception or sensory experiences, but it is an audiovisual work. It offers the viewers a vision, grants specific access to the world and story it shows – in the framework of certain camera work, editing, configuration, and defined time. It appeals to perception understood as a silent ability to grasp meanings of gestures, yet it does not mean that it reproduces it directly. Recreating a bodily experience, approaching the intimate perception engaged in the world of life is the same film construct as distancing from it. It is more important to skillfully manipulate the viewers’ attention, to manage perception in order to efficiently lead the viewer – by engaging them emotionally, corporeally and intellectually – through a given story.

Yacavone also emphasises that Merleau-Ponty was concerned with film as a work of art which not only uses mechanisms of perception, but relies on its own rules of construction<sup>18</sup>. It is a purposefully organised unity which changes in time, so that the presented world and its meaning are successively revealed through particular relations between the parts of the whole. Subsequent images determine their meaning, a previous scene can foreshadow the following scene – the meaning develops in time (a film is a temporal Gestalt). We should add that montage and camera movement allows for creative configuration of the content through manipulation of the order of images, length of takes, sound, or just colour (white balance), which are synthesised in specific rhythm.

A film has its own rhythm, which is perceived and palpable, and which constitutes the distinction of cinematic aesthetics and expression. However, this does not mean that a film (even one distanced from the conditions of human perception) cannot be experienced by a living body, that it does not stimulate the body in its multisensorics, and that the process of embodiment does not occur. At the end of his considerations Yacavone states that the question of sensory-affective film experience and connecting the viewers with their own corporeality is open<sup>19</sup>. A helpful lead could be New Phenomenology by Herman Schmitz, which offers a particular expression of affective, emotional and corporeal involvement in the world, in which sight (together with other senses) triggers corporeal communication. It does not offer a particular film theory, but rather it describes anew the relationship between an embodied human and their world.

### Corporeality as Sensitivity and Openness for Sensory Phenomena

The New Phenomenology project, expanded into ten-volume *System der Philosophie* (1964–1980) offers a systematic phenomenology of the feeling body and embodied experience as well as sensuality of the world. The system is based on rich and detailed historical exposition, studying and reinterpretation of classical philosophy and references to various research, analyses of experiences and art. New Phenomenology is developed within Die Gesellschaft für Neue Phänomenologie and applied in different fields, such as medicine, psychiatry, art history or architecture. I shall briefly present the way of understanding the body and being in the world together with possible film references; unfortunately this is no place for presenting broad argumentation and system foundations.

#### *Feeling body*

Corporeality is a way of being in the world that realises the feeling nature of involvement in the world. It is not a separate place with a closed structure, but a feeling expanse – exposure to the world. The feeling body (*Leib*) is understood as an area with no set boundaries, a surfaceless

space, felt as own. It is not defined by sensory control, e.g. it is not the boundary of skin determined by sight, but through senses this feeling may intensify, broaden, weaken, etc. Body is not limited by geometric requirements of objectively determined space, but it anchors within it in the absolute place<sup>20</sup>. It can be described as a nonrational, nonmeasurable place of feeling oneself, which is not limited by reversible relations of remoteness and distance. It is determined on the basis of feeling of one's own body and spontaneous motion. Body is a felt sphere, self-finding, an expanse with various points of intensity. It has its own dynamics, its vital drive, which occurs between contraction (*Engung*) and expansion (*Weitung*)<sup>21</sup>. Feeling and recognition of the "here" happens mostly through contraction inhibiting the expansion, so characteristic of experiences of pain and anxiety. Contractions and expansions constitute the peculiar corporeal dialogue and are understood as opposing, overlapping or exclusive forces. They react to what is encountered in the environment, and are stimulated by it. In case of sitting at the table, e.g. a rectangular one, corporeal involvement with the table does not only mean observing its size or shape, but also sensing the potential to expand, sort of sliding across the counter. Top of the table is the field for potential expansion. Schmitz defines this phenomenon as corporeal direction (*Richtung*), which – through expansion – progresses from contraction to expansion.

By sticking to the example of an affected being sat at the table, we can notice further overlapping tendencies. The inhibiting contraction determined by the solid mass of the table can be a force competing with distancing. Schmitz calls this antagonism (contraction versus expansion) tension (*Spannung*), while an opposite situation, when expansion competes with contraction, is welling (*Schwellung*)<sup>22</sup>.

The contrast of this experience can be also observed in the film *The Piano*: in the beach scene, when Ada puts her hand through a small hole in the box, places it on piano keys and starts to play. Solid mass of the box introduces blocking tendency, yet touch of the keys, gentleness of her hand and spatiality of sound introduce vastness. The heroine's hand and face are presented separately, outside of the inhibiting pressure of the weight and inaccessibility of the box. Because of this contrast, along with visual isolation of the heroine's body from her hand and its exposition, the scene has a strong haptic effect. The effect of shutting off the external conditions and the feeling of intimacy and safety was further enhanced audially: in the moment of inserting the hand, the sounds of the sea and the rest of the environment fell silent. The scene was violently interrupted (corporeal communication being interrupted as well) by the intrusion of the sea with its visual, aural and haptic vehemence, drowning the piano and Ada playing it.

The play between these forces (contraction versus expansion) can assume various intensity and proportions. There is a difference between breathing, when the dynamic is in balance, and the situation in which one of the drives is dominant, e.g. tension of pain or anxiety. In this situation contraction is the agony of inhibiting an expansive impulse. In order to illustrate welling, the philosopher presents a series of situations, mostly linked to feelings of pleasure, like during sexual arousal, but also when taking a deep breath outside or watching a horror film; or to emotions accompanying a carousel ride. The play between the two tendencies can progress in two modes: intense or rhythmic. However, usually one side is dominant – it determines the nature of the whole play. This is how the philosopher differentiates between feelings of anxiety and fear. Anxiety is played out between rhythmic tension and welling, while pulsating in fear is caused by pauses. The philosopher defines phenomena opposing the competing ones as privative contraction or privative expansion. They are characterised by mutual disengagement from each other and thus from the corporeal dynamics. In the case of contraction, the phenomenon is so powerful and sudden that it blocks the expansive impulse. Anxiety is painful because contraction inhibits the expansive impulse, tension competes against welling, but in sudden terror it is disengaged from expansion. It is worth noting that in horror films, the characters in climactic moments are often presented in extreme close-ups, only their faces are shown, and the space becomes eliminated, which creates the effect of e.g. suffocating (like in *The Blair Witch Project* from 1990). Privative

expansion, on the other hand, means release from contraction, which Schmitz describes as alleviation, feeling of gladness while watching a beautiful view, or relief.

The structure of corporeal dynamics is further differentiated by protopathic and epicritic tendencies<sup>23</sup>. The protopathic tendencies are characterised by the feeling of dispersal, blurring and dissolving, generally speaking: distancing. Observing the richness of impressions through providing appropriate terminology allows to differentiate sensations and, for example, describe the headache caused by previously drinking too much alcohol as protopathic (dull) contraction. The epicritic tendencies, however, are characterised by the feeling of tightening and insistence. The most obvious example is an intense, even in its verbal aspect described as sharp or acute, pain or sound (e.g. a whistle).

### *Being involved in the world*

Body, with its dynamics, is open and involved in the world, and at the same time – exposed to it. It is a place of feeling and sensitivity, an affected (touched) being (*Betroffensein*). Feeling means being open for richness of density of the environment, by which one is constantly approached, irritated or stimulated, but which can also act soothingly. This can be enhanced through sensitivity, a keenness towards the surroundings, which allows to establish oneself in the environment. Sensitivity allows to notice the inseparable yet sensational element of understanding the environment: sensitivity is the beginning of understanding. It happens through grasping meaningful impressions (*vielsagende Eindrücke*), which are described as striking and clear. It cannot be thoroughly explained and presented, it rather conveys vague, but comprehensive meaningfulness. It is a play of subtlety which still evades definition, but already allows to recognise the situation and situate oneself, ie. act in a given situation or towards a certain human being: “it is the first impression that gives them [...] directions for their behaviour towards that person”<sup>24</sup>. To sum it up, this initial sensational understanding can be called a corporeally motivated intuition.

This approach towards the body and its relationship with the world requires a specific conceptualisation of space.

The world shows up not as a neutral realm of already separate entities but as the atmospheric fields of significant situations, opportunities or quasi-corporeal forces or “opponents” that in the first instance become manifest to the conscious person in form of the “internally diffuse meaningfulness” of holistic corporeal impressions<sup>25</sup>.

Space is the realm of co-occurrence, overlapping, standing out and disappearing of various chaotic and dynamic unities which Schmitz defines as situations. By engaging in them, one can distinguish states of affairs, worries, or hardships, with which the affected being is struggling, ways of reacting, acting, and also desires. They appear as what the affected being undertakes, what can be asked about. The affected being enters the situation treating it as a meaningful unity and explicates it.

They analyse obtained sensations, which become further manipulated meanings, and other, more discreet, remain undistinguished and create a dense background. This is a good way to perceive many film scenes in which tension is built first, which is important for holding the viewer’s attention, raising their curiosity, or setting up an adequate emotional impact. It can be a dangerous situation, like in the restaurant scene (*Lovecraft Country*, 2020) in which tension is built through an exchange of glances, the contrast between white inhabitants of the town and black newcomers, a moment of silence and then leaving the premises. The danger begins to concretise in an overheard conversation which provokes the characters to act, to run, and eventually it realises in the form of a group of armed people.

### *Corporeal communication*

One of the methods to engage the body in the surrounding environment Schmidt calls the corporeal communication. It can be defined as a way of co-occurrence and permeance of the

body (with its dynamics) with the approaching and stimulating environment which reveals itself in the form of power. The affected being becomes noticeably touched and agitated, and it remains affected by the given phenomenon. However, its nature is occasional; through involvement one can become more sensitive and increase the intensity of communication, but also get pushed out of it. Corporeal communication, as a way of navigating through ambiguous impressions, occurs through embodiment (translated as “encorporation” by Rudolf Owen Müllan and Jan Slaby) (*Einleibung*) and disembodiment (*Ausleibung*)<sup>26</sup>. In the first case, an area subjectively felt as own becomes broadened, it incorporates previously distinct elements. In other words, there emerges a relationship based not solely on separate sensory qualities, but on the feeling of unity in corporeal dynamics. It could be even called a corporeal union with the perceived object, “a fusion of synchronising body or bodies, e.g. through a glance”<sup>27</sup>. Sight appears to be a particularly powerful trigger of corporeal communication. By confronting an object – for example, a stone flung towards us – we assess its size, location, flight trajectory, and we duck. Yet this is not based on intellectual evaluations and calculations, devising a strategy of avoiding an obstruction and making a decision to take action – but on unity of body and its surroundings and its cooperation with sight, and on perceiving the situation as a momentary unity. Because of such cooperation a daily walk down the street is not a catastrophic series of collisions. This power of embodiment, together with synaesthetic involvement of the body, was used in the scene from *The Piano*, in which Ada plays on the keys carved in the table and teaches her daughter to sing (to make a specific sound). The touch and visual location of the keys were enough to recall auditory experiences, to figure out the musical scale. Her husband Alistair could not understand this, but it was clear to the audience who knew the heroine’s musical passion. In this case embodiment introduced the synaesthetic character of haptic sensations. I shall present the category of synaesthetic characters below.

Embodiment allows to corporeally read and recognise the surrounding phenomena which appear as vital in the given moment. Incorporating them in the body allows for immediate motoric (in the sense of motion) and vital (in the context of the economy of contraction and expansion) interpretation. One can become incorporated, drawn into a network of corporeal influences, against one’s will. This is characteristic of another person’s glance which affects the whole sense of self. Such an uncanny feeling of being suddenly drawn in could be experienced by the viewers of *Funny Games* (1997) when Paul turns directly to the camera and looks straight at the audience<sup>28</sup>.

A special role in corporeal communication is played by so called bridges connecting the body with what is perceived. They are a medium which also triggers communication; they are the dynamics of encountered objects, which stimulate the affected being, the corporeal dynamics. Schmitz distinguishes suggestions of motion (*Bewegungssuggestion*) and synaesthetic characters (*synästhetische Charaktere*). Suggestions work by directing the corporeal dynamics: from contraction to distancing. They apply to sounds: a “welling” noise getting louder, or a “rising” bright tone among the “lower” ones. Every rhythm is such a suggestion, determined by relations of sequence.

This rhythmicity also applies to poetry, which, by releasing a suggestion of motion, more effectively opens the reader for the given poem, for sensationality of the situation merely hinted between the lines. Synaesthetic characters, on the other hand, are complex qualities which belong to certain phenomena, like e.g. warmth and coolness of colours. It is often used in films depicting events in Mexico; white balance is shifted in order to create the effect of heat. In *Seven* (1995); in most scenes cool colours dominate (and it rains all the time, too), but the climactic scene takes place in the desert, which is presented in yellows. Silence also has synaesthetic character: it can be vast and solemn, or pregnant, heavy like lead, confining and protopathically dead: “solemn or soft morning silence is vast, while onerous, heavy silence is confining and protopathically dull”<sup>29</sup>. The characters show the complex way of experiencing sensations and their common aspects. Subtlety of music, similar to gentleness of warmth or slight tiredness, opens the body for yet another synaesthetic character. A great example of the effect of synaesthetic characters is a loud and hissing “shhh”, which due to its specific character suggests a very sharply defined action.



Their suggestive power can absorb the affected being so much that it can allow certain situations with their meanings and nuances to be revealed, and feelings to appear. Referring to Gernot Böhme's elaborations, Schmitz recalls the case of a woman who would often experience inexplicable melancholy in the morning<sup>30</sup>. Only after much consideration she associated the smell of a clean towel with her family home. The smell evoked a sensation of a very emotional situation. Through the synaesthetic character one situation emerged, along with richness of meanings and feelings in the form of atmospheres, and revealed another situation from the past. (Such experience was beautifully depicted in *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*, 2006, when Giuseppe smells the perfume made by Jean-Baptiste). Schmitz describes feelings as spatially but vastly spilled atmospheres – comparable to spatiality of sound<sup>31</sup>. They reveal the nature of feelings, which do not immanently belong to the subject, but appear in the form of drives, encompassing or approaching, engaging the moved being. They can stimulate corporeal dynamics, or be felt as directed forces (of joy or sorrow, directed upwards or downwards), they can have their own density points (localised in the objects of these feelings); some of them, like grief, have strong radiance, which means that they dominate other feelings (one person's joy would be stifled in the presence of a group of grief-stricken people).

Atmospheres emerge from a rich environment and have incidental nature. Different elements of sensory experience can remind about situations or atmospheres and evoke different sensations. To a great extent it is not only a matter of understandable references linking places with certain meanings, but also of details like proper lighting, smells, kind of materials used to finish e.g. furniture, and shapes. In films, appropriate aesthetics, colours, interiors or costumes are used to evoke certain memories, or rather – to build an atmosphere associated with generational experiences, like in the series *Stranger Things* (2016) referring to the climate of the 1980s.

Suggestions of motion also apply to objects with regard to their shape or massiveness, which become included – mostly through sight – in the play of corporeal communication. Sensing the line transcends the limit of a material figure with a suggestion of moving forwards, deeper. In other words, a line is an extended path of sight led by a shape. This dynamics of a line, subject to corporeal communication through suggestions of motion, Schmitz calls the course of shape (*Gestaltverläufe*). In other words, it consists of characteristic suggestions of motion for the given shape, resulting from understanding lines by the involved body.

The philosopher distinguishes two basic forms of shapes: rotund and angular, with different corporeal significance. Round, and mainly semi-round forms have a two-fold aspect: convex and concave. Although they make up a "single" shape, depending on the centre point they have different dynamics and course of shape. Convex motion suggests distancing and expansion, sliding from a semicircle. On the other hand, it can evoke a sensation of contraction, by centring on the most protruding point. However, combining this contraction with expanding arms of the bulge only increases the sensation of distancing. The concave side evokes a sensation of closing, drawing in and embracing.

In case of a spiral twisting around its own axis the dynamics becomes more complex. The spiralling itself can increase the dynamics through shape, but screwing and unscrewing drives it to the extreme. It almost pulls the affected being into its own centripetal swirl. Very intense competition occurs between alternating dominance of welling and tension, contraction and expansion. The opposites are too strong to talk about balance or any corporeal lightness, e.g. characteristic of a wave. Sight does not fix on one spot, but it becomes sucked in by a mercilessly twisting line; there can also be an effect of rising, when it leads upwards. The question is, whether it is a coincidence that often it is a spiral staircase, such as in *El Laberinto del Fauno* (2006), that becomes a portal – through a well – to another world.

Straight lines gain their fundamental corporeal significance by constructing angles, and their courses of shape depend on types of corners they create with other straight lines. Acute angles are associated with contraction, while obtuse angles – with expansion. Usually in the first case epicritic

tendency is dominant, and in the second case – protopathic, but it is not always so. Epicritic tendency is strongly observed in German expressionism, e.g. in *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920), in which the painted scenography with triangular, sharp and deformed shapes creates an atmosphere of unfamiliarity and unease. A similar effect of tension is achieved through oblique shots, particularly when they are taken exaggeratedly from below or from above of the perceived object of character.

Each shape belongs to one of the above types: the straight and angular, or the rotund. They appear in various configurations and compositions, and each description of them can reveal sensed nuances and differences. They differentiate and dynamise each other. Experiencing them can depend on the level of sensitivity of a given individual, and also on – culturally and historically shaped – corporeal disposition (*leibliche Disposition*), i.e. ease and openness for a certain type of sensations, which Schmitz examines with reference to the history of architectural forms<sup>32</sup>.

### Conclusions

Art explores human sensitivity, their corporeal, perceptual and emotional involvement in the world. A film, an audio-visual content presenting certain events and engaging the audience into a given story, affects the viewer on different levels and manages their attention. Even more so – it does not only affect them on various levels (corporeal, emotional, intellectual), but it also relies on corporeal dispositions and on emotional and meaningful nature of certain phenomena in order to create the given content. It presents the story in a framework and through specific rhythm, emotional impact, suggestion of motion, or synaesthetic characters of given situations.

Exploration of the question of corporeal, synaesthetic experience which is not separate from the feeling of meaningfulness of the world around us and various phenomena (such as heaviness of tense silence, a sense of danger in an exchange of glances, recognition of love and tenderness, or of desire through touch) will allow us to better understand the sensory impact of film. Apart from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Schmitz's conception provides us with appropriate tools. Schmitz's understanding of the body, openness and exposition for the world explains a lot of various phenomena and experiences linked to colour, shape or sound sensitivity, and also to excruciating and painful sensations which are connected to certain meanings. It is hard to apprehend them in the categories of objects, yet art – including cinematography – has learned to use them very well. Perhaps this is why Sobchack speaks about embodied perception of film also because film gives us access to familiar yet elusive daily life phenomena, or evokes strong and deeply felt sensations which we usually can generally describe with one word, such as grief, romantic love, etc.

A film, like a good art, reveals elusive phenomena, situations from multiplicity of life, and explicates (translates) them in audio-visual form and gives them its own rhythm which engages the embodied and sensitive viewer in a given story.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The paper was created as a result of the research project no. 2017/25 / N / HS1 / 01626, financed from the funds of the National Science Center, Poland.
- <sup>2</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald A. Landes. Routledge, 2012, p. 140
- <sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. 245.
- <sup>4</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Eye and Mind" *Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, Galen A. Johnson, Michael B. Smith edited. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993 (121-149), p. 128.
- <sup>5</sup> Sobchack, Vivian, *The Address of the Eye. A Phenomenology of Film Experience*. Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 135-136.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p. 142.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibidem, p. 143.
- <sup>8</sup> The role of memory, also body memory, is analysed by Laura U. Marks. Marks, Laura U. *The Skin of the Film Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Duke University Press, 2000.
- <sup>9</sup> Rudolf Arnheim showed exhaustively how sight alone can identify not only shapes and colours, but that the sense of weight and balance are inherent part of perception. Arnheim, Rudolf. *Art and Visual Perception. A Psychology of the Creative Eye*. 1954. University of California Press, 1974.
- <sup>10</sup> Sobchack, Vivian, *Carnal Thoughts. Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*. University of California Press, 2004, p. 63.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 69.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 79.
- <sup>13</sup> Yacovone, Daniel. "Film and the Phenomenology of Art: Reappraising Merleau-Ponty on Cinema as Form, Medium, and Expression." *New Literary History*, 47, Winter 2016 (pp. 159-185), p. 165.
- <sup>14</sup> This perceptive subjectivity of film can also be called the narrator – in literature the narrator is the telling entity, then in film it is the showing entity, more or less distanced from the given world and the character, or similar to it and limited.
- <sup>15</sup> Marks, Laura U. *The Skin of the Film Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Duke University Press, 2000, p. 149.
- <sup>16</sup> Sobchack, Vivian, *The Address of the Eye*, p. 162.
- <sup>17</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "The Film and New Psychology." *New Sense and Non-Sense*. John Wild edited. Translated by Hubert L. Dreyfus, Patricia Allen Dreyfus. Northwestern University Press 1964, p. 58 (48-59).
- <sup>18</sup> Yacovone, Daniel. "Film and the Phenomenology of Art.", p. 168.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibidem, 182-3.
- <sup>20</sup> Schmitz, Hermann. *Der unerschöpfliche Gegenstand*, Bouvier Verlag, 1990, p. 29.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibidem, p. 135.
- <sup>22</sup> Schmitz, Hermann. *Der Leib im Spiegel der Kunst*. Bouvier Verlag, 1987, p. 24
- <sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 34.
- <sup>24</sup> Schmitz, Hermann. "Rozumienie." Translated by Mariusz Moryn. *Swiat, jezyk, rozumienie. Szkice (nie tylko) hermeneutyczne*. Andrzej Przyłębski edited, Expol, 2007, p. 69.
- <sup>25</sup> Schmitz, Hermann, Müllan Rudolf Owen, Slaby Jan. "Emotions outside the box – the new phenomenology of feeling and corporeality." *Phenom Cogn Sci* 10, 8 Feb. 2011, (241-259), p. 244.
- <sup>26</sup> Schmitz, Hermann. *Der unerschöpfliche Gegenstand*, p.137-140. Disembodiment is linked to the feeling of separation, release from one's own body in favour of sensation of predimensional depth or density of a given centre, it is a way of surrendering oneself to distancing without any anchor.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p.137.
- <sup>28</sup> Not only sight triggers corporeal communication; hearing is another way of receiving and reacting to the density of surroundings.
- <sup>29</sup> Schmitz, Hermann, *Der Leib, der Raum und die Gefühle*. 1998. Aisthesis Verlag, 2007, p. 23.
- <sup>30</sup> Schmitz, Hermann, "Über das Machen von Atmosphären." *Zur Phänomenologie der ästhetischen Erfahrung*, Anna Blume edited. Verlag Karl Albert, 2005, p. 37.
- <sup>31</sup> Schmitz, Hermann *Der Leib, der Raum und die Gefühle*, p. 23.
- <sup>32</sup> Schmitz, Hermann. *Der Leib im Spiegel der Kunst*, p. 81.

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