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Thinking images

**Filmic thought and the viewer's perception in the films of
Apichahtpong Weerasethakul**

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the concept of the 'filmind', film as a thinking entity, through Daniel Frampton's book *Filmosophy* and the film phenomenological work of Vivian Sobchack. Highlighting the embodied viewer in the film experience of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's films the aim asks: In what way can Apichatpong Weerasethakul's films be understood as independent 'thinking' entities, and how does this affect the viewer experience? A dialogue emerges by bringing Frampton's notion of the filmic thought and Sobchack's theory of the film into conversation. The combination of these two theories allows us to push the traditional phenomenology further by addressing the film's thinking and the viewer as the receiving subject. The analysis focuses on Weerasethakul's films: *Tropical Malady*, *Hotel Mekong*, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* and *Cemetery of Splendour*, in a phenomenological close reading to explore filmic action and viewer immersion. The analysis finds that Weerasethakul's films demonstrate a form of thinking in the non-linear temporality and uncertainty of the film's own 'being'. The filmind and the viewer meet in the mood of the film, which mediates a suspension where the filmind and viewer both participate in the same shared space of being unknowing. The viewer is drawn to the film in a search for meaning, rather than the actions of the narrative.

Keywords: filmind, embodied viewer, Daniel Frampton, Vivian Sobchack, viewer immersion

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Introduction

When we watch a film, we don't just see and hear it, we feel it. The sensory impact of a film is not an accidental result of its form. It rather reflects on an autonomous mode of thought, what Daniel Frampton calls the 'filmind' – a film's independent thinking that presents its own logic. All the movements, sounds, colours and characters create some kind of vibration inside us, they stir us and resonate within us. This is not because of our interpretation of them, it's the films themselves that radiate perceptions, that through our bodies, express a thought. Although this might sound elusive, it forms the phenomenological groundwork of film scholar Vivian Sobchack's theory, where she elaborates upon the embodied experience of the viewer. Though, film theory has often prioritised interpretation over perception.

Frampton means that a filmind's *thinking* is seen through the images. But this thinking is not to be equalised with human thinking, the filmind thinks in its own way. If we as viewers can understand this thinking of the filmind it can offer a deeper understanding of the film's philosophical means (Frampton, 2006, pp. 19, 29). For us to understand and interpret films we first need to make sense of them through our senses. Traditional film theories that focus on language and psychoanalysis have often overlooked the role of the viewer's sensorial experience. It is, however, important to highlight the bodily experience as the body and its senses are the first thing that we encounter a film with, before a thought is formed (Sobchack, 2004, p. 59). Research in the field of phenomenology demonstrates that a combination of different phenomenological perspectives leads to a more nuanced understanding, instead of relying on a single philosophical view. These varied approaches bring valuable attention to the sensory aspects of the film experience (Quaranta, 2024, p. 43).

The problem with today's understanding of, and writing about film is, according to Frampton (2006, p. 169), the lack in verbalisation of how film form can convey a feeling. Form in film is often used to validate the interpretation of the film, while at the same time being separate from the narrative. He states that interpretation should always be based on the whole film. Frampton stresses that both form and narrative together form the unity of what he calls the 'filmind'. Similarly, Sobchack (1992) criticise the scholarly interest for its lack of description, or rather, ignorance of the bodily response of the cinematic experience. Films can physically move us. There is too much weight put on the objective aspects of film experiences. Instead

of seeing film as a static object that we simply observe, she emphasises the perceptual film experience in the viewer's body (Sobchack 1992, pp. 15 – 16). So, both Frampton and Sobchack address an absence in the understanding of film as a whole and its bodily impact on us. Further, Frampton (2006, p. 7) explains how shifting focus away from the filmmaker, to the drama of the cinematic experience, allows the viewer to understand the drama as something emerging from the film itself. In this way, the *filmind* offers a conceptual framework for understanding the origins of a film's actions and events: They emerge from its own thoughts and feelings.

The problems that Frampton point to center on the film's expression and the viewer's experience of the film, highlighting a relationship between film and viewer. For Sobchack (1992, pp. 5-7; 2004, p. 2) meaning in the film can only emerge through the viewers embodied experience. The film-phenomenological approach is therefore important as it successfully brings attention to the sensational range in the film experience.

The approach of the 'filmind' shifts the focus from what films mean to what they do, both to us and in themselves. It can reveal something new in the communication and relationship between film and viewer. The combination of Frampton's concept of the filmind and Sobchack's phenomenological approach therefore offers a unique framework for understanding film not merely as a representation, but as a thinking, feeling body that engages the viewer on a sensory level. However, little attention has been paid to these two perspectives: films as autonomous thought and the embodied viewer experience, and how these interact in specific cinematic experiences – especially in films where mood and temporality dominate over the linear narrative. How do we understand what the film is thinking and how do we *feel* that thought?

Apichatpong Weerasethakul is a director from Thailand who makes films known for their meditative pacing and dreamlike structures. He is blurring boundaries between the real and surreal, creating a sensory affective film experience. For this thesis I choose to work with Weerasethakul's films because their immersive expression and narrative form offer a rich ground for understanding a *filmind*. Hence, this thesis explores how a film can function as thought, and how viewers perceive this thought through an embodied experience. Drawing on the theories of Daniel Frampton and Vivian Sobchack, while using films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul as case studies, I ask:

- How can Apichatpong Weerasethakul's films be understood as independent "thinking" entities, and how does the viewer experience this?
- Framing question: What aspects of the filmind contribute to the viewer's embodied experience and positioning?

This thesis engages with two intertwined bodies: the film body and the viewer's body, both central in understanding how thought emerges through cinematic experience.

Aim and framing

Aim: In what way can Apichatpong Weerasethakul's films be understood as independent "thinking" entities, and how does the viewer experience this?

Framing question: What aspects of the filmind contribute to the viewer's embodied experience and positioning?

Delimitations

This thesis focuses on four films by Apichatpong Weerasethakul: *Tropical Malady* (2004), *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010), *Hotel Mekong* (2012) and *Cemetery of Splendour* (2015). The films have been selected as they were all produced in Thailand and their coherence as feature-length narrative or hybrid-fiction films. *Memoria* (2021), by Weerasethakul, is excluded from the analysis as it was produced outside of Thailand. His first feature, *Mysterious Object at Noon* (2000) was also excluded due to its hybrid documentary style. Furthermore, while Weerasethakul has made eight feature films in total and several short films and installation projects, this study is limited to a smaller section of feature films to allow for a more in-depth analysis. Practical concerns such as a films availability also played a role in the selections process.

Further, Weerasethakul's films are complex with many layers, often exploring themes such as ethnography, religion and politics. To understand the 'filmind' of the films it's necessary to use examples from several works to establish a conceptual framework. However, this comes with the limitation of not being able to delve into each film and the many themes they present. While many of these themes are compelling and worthy a further study, this thesis focuses on mapping out the filmind and therefore sets aside themes that fall out of the primary focus.

Disposition

In the theoretical frame of reference I map out the phenomenological work in film studies focusing on Vivian Sobchack and her work on the embodied film experience through the lived body. Then I move on to explain Daniel Frampton and his theory and concept of the autonomous *filmind*. After that, I briefly describe a problematisation of his theory and finally, I argue why a mixture of these two theories is suitable for this study.

In 'Method and Material' I present the films and describe how the analysis of the films is done. This is followed by the analysis which is divided into three 'themes', focusing on different ways of understanding Weerasethakul's films as thinking entities and their effects on the viewer experience. The films and their themes are analysed continuously throughout the analysis with scene examples and stills. The first theme 'Observation and self-reflection', focuses on the inward gaze of the filmind and how the self-reflective thinking can be understood by the viewer. Second, 'Mood as Thought' focuses on how mood functions not just as atmosphere, but as a form of thinking thorough which the filmind shapes meaning, bridging a relationship between filmind and viewer. Third, 'Reflections upon time and memory', explores how the films reflect upon time, memory and liminality, revealing a sense of *being* that challenges linear narratives and fixed identities. Lastly, a concluding discussion summarises the central findings of the analysis and places them in a broader, deeper context.

Theoretical frame of reference

Phenomenological perception and the lived body

Film introduces us to an experience that's fundamentally different from the photograph, one that reconstructs time, space and perception, making both motion and the movement of the camera visible. Film can fragment time and space in a way that photography cannot. The different images can embody an intentional and fluid subjectivity, creating a cinematic subject that can engage with the world emotionally, all while being tied to the material contents of its own narrative (Sobchack, 2004, p. 147). Film therefore holds the functions of something more than a static object, it functions as an embodied perceptual experience.

The core concept of the phenomenological approach is to gain knowledge of the world and ourselves. The first step is to explore the experience itself and how consciousness is engaged in a given phenomenon. The objective phenomenon and the subjective consciousness are

always tied together in an irreducible correlation which together creates meaning, a correlation of ‘intentionality’ which is describing how our consciousness is always directed towards an existing object. The relationship between phenomenology and film lies in their shared emphasis on how we focus our attention on an experience. As cinema involves both the film and the viewer, assuming an active, rather than passive spectator, the intersection of perceptual effects and film’s expression requires an analysis that accounts for both the film’s form and the viewer’s engagement (Sobchack, 2008, p. 436). Phenomenology offers both a rich vocabulary for exploring the relationship between image and viewer, and a framework for understanding the film experience as lived, instead of just theorised (Sobchack, 2008, p. 444). From a phenomenological perspective, the shot is more than just storytelling. It can be understood as a philosophical moment of consciousness and experience where sensations function as the primary data (Bezerra, 2014, p. 84; Frampton, 2006, p. 39).

The philosophical text *Eye and Mind* written by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in 1964 explores the functions of the eye and its connection to the body. He argues that our vision is not a mechanical passive function for us to see, but a selected bodily movement. We do not simply receive images, we rather interact with the world through sight. Perception is therefore not just something happening in our brain but an experience that’s involving the whole body. This argues against the traditional idea of vision only being a process of receiving images where the mind ‘interprets’ the light hitting the eye. It is our body that makes sense of what we see. The complex relationship between the body, vision and art is not simply a mental process but an embodied one. Our movement and vision guide us as an active process in the act of seeing. The body then makes sense of what we are experiencing by becoming both the subject and object. The body both touches and is touched (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, pp. 162 – 164). From this perspective Merleau-Ponty furthered with the concept of the ‘lived body’ which includes how the body is simply not something we have but something we perceive and explore the world through.

In the description of the ‘lived body’ Merleau-Ponty distinguishes it from the objective physical body which has its place in our physical world. This physical body can be divided, and each part has its own function and can be observed scientifically. In contrast, the ‘lived body’ can not be divided. It is always one.

The ‘lived body’ is what everyone perceives their world with, it’s the experience of having a physical body. In the act of seeing and existing it’s the lived body that we’re using – through our physical body. In that sense we cannot separate these two bodies as they are the same,

only with a perceptual distinction. Merleau-Ponty articulates that the experience of our lived body is the primary experience of our physical one. Though, the lived body do have a physiological ground since it is the functions, our senses, that mediates between the world and our awareness of it (Gallagher, 1986, pp. 139 – 140). So, the lived body is needed for us to make sense of the world, it's the connection in the body between the subjective feeling and the objective knowledge. We cannot isolate a single sensorial feeling in the experience of the world because all the senses are working together to create access to it, in the same way that we cannot localise this feeling to one definite organ. The lived body-experience is a complete experience of the brain function which takes place throughout the lived body. There is a conscious experience of the body, but not of all bodily experiences all the time.

The lived body is our indication of being alive. It's our point of view. It's what communicates and holds our intentionality towards the world. An object as a physical body among other bodies, but also a subject that can perceive and create a perspective of the world, making it possible for us to experience and engage with reality. It's the lived body that makes us understand the world (Sobchack, 2004, pp. 71 – 72). Further, Merleau-Ponty articulates how we experience art by highlighting the 'flesh' in the reversibility of experiencing paintings, meaning that the painter can both perceive the materiality of themselves and the painting itself. Reversibility in vision is never a one-way process, just like touch isn't. When the painter looks at a painting, the painting is also looking back, pointing to a deeper reflectional perception. Just like when two hands touch it is an alternation of perception, where touching and being touched happens simultaneously. Here, the 'flesh' is the *being* that enables perception, holding all embodiment of sensing and being sensed. Although Merleau-Ponty originally addressed this to the painter, the filmmaker can be understood as engaging the with same phenomenological understanding. Grounded in the same embodied forms as human perception where film returns to the viewer through the senses (Walton 2016, pp. 13, 15). In the act of experiencing, perception is what navigates and immerses us in the world. It presents objects and events that we, as embodied observers, interpret and give meaning to. While film cannot create a direct multisensory physical interaction in the same way that everyday experience can, it still engages the body and mind (Ivakhiv, 2013, p. 50). The viewer responds to the film with sensation, memory, and emotion, which creates an experience where film can be felt, even without touch.

Vivian Sobchack's film phenomenology

Merleau-Ponty conceptualised the body as the studied object, the way our body, through our senses, make sense of what we perceive. Perception of art is deeply connected with our body, emphasising a dynamic process of seeing. Our body is a body among other bodies, existing and experiencing at the same time. Therefore, our perception is embodied. We are engaging with it. Many film scholars have drawn upon this work when writing about phenomenology in film, and how we perceive and experience the images in front of us. Vivian Sobchack (2000) expanded the idea of the lived body to cinema by suggesting that film is a body expressing on its own. She furthered the concept of the lived body and applied it to film experience. She theorised film as a material being, stating that film viewing is the creation of a relationship between two material beings, since experiencing the world through the lived body and the physical body is to experience the material self. It's a shared experience between two living bodies: the film and the viewer (Sobchack, 2004 p. 66 – 67).

Sobchack argues that since our perception is always situated in a particular time and place, we are not experiencing from a neutral position, but from our own perspective, and this perspective is shaped by our surroundings. Here, Sobchack stresses that our intentionality is always directed towards *something* because we are always perceiving or thinking of something. Therefore, intentionality is always shaped by our physical world and not just the mental world. Clearly, we cannot experience everything going on around us. We are limited by our bodies as we cannot be in several places at the same time or see an object from all angles. We create meaning based on what we choose to direct our intentionality towards, this is what we then react to. In this reversibility, meaning emerges for us and it's constantly alternating. 'The lived-body not only situates intentionality as and at a permanent existential address but it also has the capacity to send this address forth as expression and to call it back as perception.' (Sobchack, 1992, 67). Meaning does not pre-exist, it appears in the interaction between subject and object, perception and expression and is an ever-going performance. The lived body is more than a container only receiving experience, it can also project something outwards in expression and take in meaning as perception. In the film experience it's the film body that grasps our attention and shapes our perception. From this perspective of reversibility Sobchack continues to explain the relationship between the spectator and the film and how they interact as two different bodies. The film experience includes both the viewer and a viewing subject (the film).

What Sobchack addresses is how the film experience can be communicated via the body and its senses. The viewer understands the film through the lived body. Even if the viewer cannot fully identify with the images, it's still possible to identify with the *being* of the film by taking part of its world. If the film experience was entirely unilateral, where the viewer simply projected own interpretations on the images, then there would be no real need for understanding the film and the search for meaning would be bypassed. Instead, the film experience is dynamic, occurring between two bodies: the film body and the lived body of the viewer. Both share the same experience of the film, through the sensory engagement. In this way, the film and the viewer are united by a common investment in the experience, even though they remain two separate bodies (Sobchack 1992, pp. 285– 286). Sobchack then asks: How can a film that exists for our perception be said to exist expressively and perceptively for itself? And how do we speak of it when this body is so metaphorically invisible? As the eye of the film doesn't belong to either the filmmaker, the camera or the spectator, the film exists as 'the visible visual relation between an embodied eye and a sensible world' (Sobchack 1992, p. 203).

The film expresses itself and its own form of perception and embodiment through the aesthetics, movement and framing. It is these expressions that the viewer directs intentionality towards and what's shaping meaning of what's perceived. Therefore the film becomes a body that can be perceived through the interaction with the viewer. The mechanisms and the technical tools of the film can be recognised as the film's body, just as the senses and organs of our bodies provides us with the tools of perception (Sobchack, 1992, pp. 203 – 205). This film body comes to life in the relationship with the viewer. Without the exchange of viewing and being viewed, the film only exists as a static object. The meaning of the film exists in the experience and perception of the film, it does not have it by itself. So, to understand the film's body is to see how it functions in the world, much like we do (Sobchack 1992, p. 219). The film holds the same properties as the *lived body* as it is both expressing itself (shows) and being perceived (seen).

In sum, when drawing from Merleau-Ponty, Sobchack states that we do not just have a body – we are our bodies, experiencing the world through them. The lived body holds the function of making sense of what we perceive, and we can respond to what our intentionality is directed towards. In doing so, we also express ourselves in response to the perceived. This reversibility of both being touched and touching, forms the basis of the relationship between the film and the viewer.

Daniel Frampton and the filmind

Daniel Frampton introduces the concept of the 'filmind' in his 2006 work *Filmosophy*, where he explores how film can function as a tool for philosophy and how it can change our understanding of film and reality. He highlights a feeling many filmgoers can recognise: the feeling of losing touch with the outside world and becoming immersed in the film-world.

After leaving the cinema, this feeling lingers and stays in the mind and the real world feels changed. Reality can feel re-discovered through the film's changed version of reality. As if something inside of us has been changed by the film itself (Frampton 2006, pp. 3–4).

Frampton explains this transformation through the film's use of reality. The film uses the real world, moulds it, and returns it to the viewer as its own unique interpretation of it. In this process, the film changes reality through the aesthetics, and the objects in the film no longer belong to the real world, instead they become a part of the film-world. Therefore, the film creates a world that's emerging from reality. With this premise Frampton argues that philosophy can learn from the nature of these film-worlds. Once we start seeing films as self-contained worlds, we can better understand how they create meaning. Within this framework Frampton formulated the concept of the *filmind*, a term to describe the conceptual origin of a film's events and actions. Frampton makes it clear, though, that the concept of the filmind does not intend to replace or ignore the creator of the film, rather its purpose is to highlight the limitations of the narrational theory. Limitations regarding the narrator's incapacity to explain the film-worlds' creation. A film doesn't just tell a story, it creates a whole world and the narrator can't fully explain how film-worlds are built, emotionally or visually. Therefore, the filmind is not just an external narrator but the film itself that is shaping its own meaning (Frampton 2006, p. 6–7). Frampton's theory therefore emphasises the link between cinematic thinking and philosophical analysis.

Since its invention, film has been related to the mind and to thinking. The early critics became philosophical when they described the aesthetics of cinema, they weren't philosophers but the film as an artform made them think like ones by positioning films as a creation of the imagination (Frampton 2006, p. 15). But many film theorists have ignored the exploration cinema's nature and put more focus on the narrative discourse, seeing the film as a fictional story where the film-world is understood through the visual style. Daniel Yacavone (2008) means that a deeper philosophical exploration of films can reveal that these film-worlds can function as an experience of objects with complex dimensions. He suggests that a theory of

the film-worlds can involve both the creation of the worlds and also the viewers subjective experience of these worlds (Yacavone 2008, pp. 84 – 85).

With the filmind as a starting point, Frampton continues to describe the function of the filmind and how it expresses thoughts. He makes a connection with memories and film as they are both created by a series of images. In the same way that we are reassembling memories to think, the filmind's using images to 'think'. If we use the film's 'thinking' as a way of understanding the film, it can help us to understand a film's intention (Frampton 2006, p. 19). Though, he makes it clear that the thinking of a film does not simply mirror our emotions, perceptions and experiences. Stating that a film is the result of our thinking would be to limit and compare it with our own thinking. Frampton means that film is more than that, a film can generate knowledge independently, and to understand this is to accept that film can think in its own unique way (Frampton 2006, p. 26). Ultimately, his *filmosophy* is about film-worlds and how they work.

When discussing film as something that generates its own thought needs an understanding of the relationship between the viewer and the film, as well as the origin of the film's narrational voice. Frampton explains that we must resituate films from being only the product of someone creating a film or wanting to send a message, towards the understanding of a film that's creating its film-world from its own point-of-view. Talking about the 'film-being' involves recognising that the images and sounds originate from something which is the film itself. Frampton problematises the idea of the images and sounds belonging to an external provider, like the director narrating the film or a character in the film. He challenges the idea of images only 'thinking' when the director or a character is thinking, instead he highlights the film's own autonomous action. Talking about a film based on who the director is, is a handy writing according to Frampton, a convenient way of writing about film. Stating that a shot is the 'language' of the director reflects a familiar structure of interpretation. However, if the viewer is unaware of the director, then the film appears as something that's simply existing on its own. Therefore, the recognition of a creator can limit the film's existence in the discussion of the film experience. Though, Frampton does not ignore the importance of the filmmaker's role in the creation of the film (Frampton 2006, pp. 29 – 30). These arguments of Frampton highlight how narratology tries to approach the concept of a 'film-being', and the idea of film being able to communicate with a sender and a receiver. While the receiver is the obvious viewer, the sender is more difficult to point out. Frampton agrees with David Bordwell, who means that giving an implied author to a film forces a guiding voice upon it, some kind of

human projection. But to experience film we don't need to conceptualise the sender, we only need the film itself. There are theorists stating the opposite, that there is always someone responsible for the narration of images and sounds. Frampton responds to this by answering that, in the end, it's the images and sounds themselves that present film's story (Frampton 2006, pp. 33 – 34). For to conceptualise an outside force as the source of the narrative is to situate the source of the film's events outside of the film itself. But that is unnecessary. If we allow the film to originate from itself, then we allow for a kind of personality that can share its thinking with the viewer (Frampton 2006, p. 38). But of course, the viewers are on some level aware that the images they see are produced by someone and what they see is a result of a built environment. Still, this information has little effect on the emotional response of the viewers. As we perceive the film, the brain creates an emotional response while simultaneously filtering out the fact that everything is constructed. In this way, we perceive and respond to the film-world in a similar way that we respond to the real world (Weik von Mossner 2017, p. 60).

In sum, Frampton argues that the sounds and images in film are intended, but not from an external author but from the film itself, the filmind. When a viewer finds a connection with the film it is the expressions of that film that's creating the relationship. This leads on to a broader discussion about the relationship between the film and the viewer, particularly through the view phenomenology, which emphasises lived experience, perception and the embodied viewer experience.

In phenomenology and film studies the central question is often: How do we as viewers experience film? But Daniel Frampton shifts this question and asks instead: How does the film itself experience? As humans we always carry our own perceptions and experiences with us, they happen as our lives pass by and we cannot decide when. The filmind, however, can move between characters, moods and moments. It can rewind, fast-forward and shift perspectives in ways humans can't. While phenomenology is grounded in our embodied experience, Frampton sees the filmind as a body that's thinking on its own and one that also experiences. He refers to Merleau-Ponty and argues that film is suitable for philosophy as it can express its own way of thinking and seeing. Whereas we can only understand objects in relation to ourselves, film can both have the object and be it (Frampton, 2006, pp. 39 – 40). It should be highlighted that a film's expressions are not the same as human expressions. The filmind does not speak human language, but instead uses its own images and sounds. Drawing from Sobchack's theory on a film's subjectivity, Frampton agrees that the film's subjectivity is

different than the one belonging to human beings. The film expresses a subjectivity of its own and for itself, but it's made accessible for us (Frampton 2006, p. 42). This leads on to Frampton's notion of the film body, not to be mixed up with the lived-body of humans that Merleau-Ponty addresses in his phenomenology. The film body is the subject from which the images come, but this also points out the difficulty of applying phenomenology into film theory. When we say that the film is a 'body' we're risking inscribing it as something living and therefore, we separate it from the constructed film-world. What we as viewers are experiencing is not the film's body by definition, but rather the movement of the camera that's showing images to us.

The filmind is its own entity and we cannot separate the images from the film body as they are the same. Since we don't see the filmmakers behind the film, we can only engage with the films as if it exists on its own. The film's images are not realty, but the film-world it presents can feel real. While a film, by all means, is created by filmmakers with their own intentions and perspectives, the viewer experience is of a different kind. When I am in love, my vision does not become soft and glowing, but a film can make its vision so. Therefore, the film-subject is not a human mind, but a *filmind*.

Frampton's turn from classical film theory

Frampton's concept of the filmind comes as a philosophical response to the classical theories that treat film as an object shaped by a director and expects the viewer to be passive. The 'classical problems' that are related to the ontology of film and authorship were reconstructed by new philosophies of film (Sinnerbrink 2011, p. 65). Most classical film theories frame cinema in the structures of semiotics, realism or psychoanalysis. Realist theorist André Bazin saw film as a mechanical reproduction of reality, where minimal artistic interference allowed for reality to truly emerge in the film, which reduced the need for heavy interpretation by the viewer (Braudy and Cohen, 2016, p. 110). Here, the viewer becomes a passive observer of reality. In contrast, psychoanalytic film theory, drawing ideas from Lacan and Freud, understands the viewer as a subject whose thinking is being structured by its unconscious. Christian Metz meant that the viewer identifies not with characters or narrative but with the act of looking itself, which involves both desire and lack of something. Laura Mulvey furthered the discussion by giving the viewer male and female perspectives, highlighting how the classical narrative cinema offers a male-oriented gaze in the images, creating pleasure and

‘unpleasure’ produced through gendered viewing positions (Braudy and Cohen, 2016, p. 590 – 591). Both Metz and Mulvey focus on the semiotic and symbolic structures of film. The auteur theory, meanwhile, saw the director as the primary creative force of a film, giving the viewer the job to interpret the creativity of the director (Braudy and Cohen, 2016, p. 396). These models frame the viewer as someone who interprets meaning created by others. Philosopher Gilles Deleuze marked a philosophical shift by moving away from the idea of film as representation or language, to instead understand film as something creating thought. His writings about the time-image and the movement-image opened the possibility of film being capable of creating a philosophical reflection (Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 91). Deleuze opened for a dynamic understanding of cinema which Frampton came to build his theory on. Philosophy scholar Robert Sinnerbrink distinguishes between two approaches to ‘film-philosophy’: *philosophy of film*, which examines film through traditional theories, and *film-philosophy*, a philosophical exploration which argues that film itself can engage philosophical reflection, a unique kind of thinking. It challenges the common trend to rank the conceptual theorisation over the aesthetic qualities of film (Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 7). It is the second perspective that Frampton aligns with, and which this thesis follows.

Problematising Frampton’s concept

Frampton argues that the ‘filmind’ exists independently of the viewer, decentralising both the film industry and the role of the filmmaker. According to this view, a film doesn’t need a viewer to create meaning as it thinks in its own ways. However, this creates a paradox of the ‘filmind’, for if a film truly thinks independently, why is our interpretation of that thinking relevant at all? While Frampton claims that the filmind has an autonomous consciousness, we are still the ones trying to understand that thinking. This highlights a tension of the filmind concept: the filmind’s own thoughts might exist, but they only become meaningful through the viewer’s engagement. As researchers and viewers, we study films because we are interested in their stories, expressions, meanings and emotional effects. Without this interaction of film and viewer, the film’s expressions would be left static. Meaning emerges in the relationship between the film and the spectator. From this perspective, the filmind is best understood in relation to the spectator. To position the filmind by itself might undervalue the role of the perception and interpretation. This is where perceptual film theory becomes important. If the film body is a body that thinks, then it also requires another body (ours), to be perceived and felt. Here, Vivian Sobchack comes with a useful contrast. While Frampton

states that a film ‘thinks’ on its own, Sobchack argues that films only become a body through the interaction with an embodied viewer. The films’ expressions only become meaningful once viewed. This poses a question: If an embodied viewer is needed for a film to come to life, does that make the ‘filmind’ concept irrelevant?

Encounter between film and viewer

The answer to the asked question, when blending the theories of Frampton and Sobchack, would be no, but not without complexity. Merleau-Ponty stated in 1964 that: ‘We see only what we look at. What would vision be without eye movement?’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 162). We do not simply encounter the world by looking, we can explore it through movement and without movement our vision wouldn’t be complete. This movement shapes how we perceive our surroundings, Merleau-Ponty here refers to human perception and how we engage with the world. In *Filmosophy* Frampton extends this idea to the film itself as a subject that thinks and perceives. According to him, the camera is not just a passive recording device, but a vehicle for exploring and expressing an own interpretation of reality. Films don’t simply present the world, they create unique film-worlds with their own alternative realities. The viewer experiences these worlds through the sounds and images that are the expressions of the filmind’s thinking. Film-thinking therefore becomes the shaping of the narrative – through framing, movement and aesthetics. A kind of thinking that happens even before a viewer sees the film (Frampton, 2006, pp. 5– 6). While Frampton’s theory has received critique for exaggerating the autonomy of the filmind and decentralising the filmmaker. He states that his theoretical writing should be positioned as a starting point instead of a definitive framework, an openness that can invite to further questions in the discourse of phenomenology in film studies. But while it offers a powerful way to understand films as autonomous thinking entities it also comes with limitations. Some critics argue that treating film as something organic with intelligence might risk anthropomorphising a technical process and undermining the industry and its filmmakers. However, Frampton answers this concern by stating that the filmind is not a mystical entity but a way to conceptualise how film itself creates meaning. Therefore, the concept of the filmind can offer a deeper engagement with the film’s unique agency without becoming only a metaphor (Frampton, 2008, pp. 366 – 369). In response to these arguments by Frampton, Daniel Yacavone proposes two ways of understanding the film-worlds. First, as perceptual objects created by a filmmaker’s creative choices and second, as immersive experiences perceived by viewers (Yacavone, 2008, p. 86).

It is by his second suggestion that I combine the theory of Sobchak's phenomenology, with Frampton's theory of the filmind to highlight the film's action. To give this subject, the filmind, a viewer or receiver is essential for this analysis. Without perception the film may still 'think', but it would remain silent, existing on its own. This would make both film analysis and phenomenological research irrelevant. Since experiencing is the basis of film studies the embodied viewer is needed. Frampton and Sobchack both describe films as a kind of being that's expressing subjectivity, not as passive objects but as 'bodies' responding to their environments. While Frampton speaks of the *filmind* in terms of autonomous thought, Sobchack speaks of the *film body* in relation to the viewer's lived body. Even though these perspectives differ from each other, they do not contradict one another. Frampton rather pushes his argument a step further, outside of traditional phenomenology, by giving film its own thinking subjectivity that's separate from both the director and the viewer. Still, a conceptual tension arises between the film's autonomy and the viewer's embodied perception. While Frampton argues that a filmind can exist independently of a viewer, Sobchack states that the film body is something that becomes meaningful in the relationship between film and viewer. Instead of resolving this tension, I will use it to guide my analysis, proposing a middle ground which focuses on both the film's expressions and the viewers perceptual experience.

This thesis is therefore framed by the central questions: Can Apichatpong Weerasethakul's films can be understood as independently "thinking" entities? How does these expressions affect the viewer's experience of the filmind?

Frampton's theory makes it possible to view Weerasethakul's films as autonomous beings that can express meaning through aesthetic choices, independently of both the filmmaker and viewer. Meanwhile, Sobchack's theory of the 'film body' gives this autonomy meaning in the act of viewer perception. Together, these theories allow for an exploration of how narrative and aesthetic choices can contribute to a film experience that both thinks and feels. Therefore, the subjects to be examined in this thesis are two interrelated bodies: the film body as a 'thinking' being and the 'lived body' of the viewer, and how these interact in the intersubjective experience of film. With the phenomenological ground of this study, my own perceptions can't be ignored. Building on Sobchack's (2004) concept of the lived body as a 'third term', where the 'thirdness' refers to the mediation between perception and expression between the bodies of the viewer and film. I will extend this third term to myself since I am both the researcher and viewer at the same time, and my own body becomes a part of the analytical process, a third body that the films will go through (Sobchack 2004, pp. 60 – 61).

Few studies have applied Frampton's filmind theory in-depth or used it to analyse specific filmmakers or films, particularly in phenomenological contexts. This thesis therefore addresses a gap in the field and in engagement with the concept of the *filmind*, testing it through close readings of Weerasethakul's films.

Method and materials

For the analysis, the films *Tropical Malady*, *Hotel Mekong*, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* and *Cemetery of Splendour* will be examined in depth with the theoretical frameworks of Frampton and Sobchack as a base to answer the aim of the thesis. Selected scenes will be used to illustrate key points and to support the arguments.

While watching the films, I noted recurring events and themes, these themes form the different sections of the analysis. I am looking for expressions in the films that can be understood as the film's own thoughts, through the concept of 'filmind'. To examine how viewers might understand these scenes as emerging from the film itself, I will describe how they are experienced and what takes place within them. This will be based on my own experience of them. Although I describe the scenes from a 'we-perspective', I want to emphasise that these interpretations are my own.

Even if the concept of the filmind and the phenomenological approach to film viewing can be applied to any films, this thesis focuses on the films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul to maintain coherence in the analysis. This choice is not based on auteur theory or thoughts of directorial intent, but rather for clarity. Using films from one filmmaker creates a consistent ground to explore how films can think and feel. Introducing multiple filmmakers might make the analysis fragmented. Thus, Weerasethakul's films provide a focus which allows for a deeper exploration of the *filmind* and the embodied experience of a cinematic world.

Research reflexivity

Since this research includes an analysis of both the film as an 'thinking' entity and the 'lived body' of the viewer, my own subjective perceptions cannot be ignored in the analysis.

Watching and analysing the films with the theory also includes an engagement with my own emotional framework. Therefore, my own lived body becomes a part of the research as I am becoming into both the researcher and the viewer. Phenomenology does value the first-person

perspective and highlights that knowledge always comes from a specific, embodied perspective (Sobchack 2008, p. 438). By including Frampton's theory of the autonomous 'thinking' film and the viewer's embodied perception, my interpretation of that thinking will go through my own interpretations. This embodied film experience will also be included in the analysis of Weerasethakul's films. This highlights an issue with Frampton's theory since he's addressing autonomous film thinking, but analysing films requires my engagement. That's where Sobchack's theory picks up by addressing the importance of viewer engagement.

Who is Apichatpong Weerasethakul?

Apichatpong Weerasethakul is a filmmaker and visual artist from Thailand whose work often explores the relationship between oral history, media heritage and cinema as a spiritual medium, together with a subtle engagement with queer themes. His films have received international recognition, which has situated him as a key figure in contemporary Thai cinema. Yet, his films have not been widely embraced by a larger Thai audience (O'Hara, 2012, p. 188). He's known for blurring the lines of past, present and future, merging humans and non-humans together (Bezerra, 2014, p. 88). Much of the written works about Weerasethakul's films has focused on environmental perspectives, posthumanism and ecocinema (Chulphongsathorn, 2022, p. 541). Born in Khon Kaen in northeastern Thailand he studied architecture before moving to Chicago to study filmmaking. While much of his work has received more recognition abroad, he has regularly returned to Thai society to find creative inspiration in the oral traditions and local engagement, which is seen in both his films and art installations (Teh, 2011).

Selected films for this thesis

Tropical Malady (2004) is divided into two parts telling two stories that are vaguely connected. The first half is a romance story of two young soldiers as they get to know each other and their moments together. The second half called 'A spirit's path', is a mythical story where the narrative is explained with intertitles. It's set in the jungle where an unnamed soldier tries to hunt down a spirit-tiger that can transform its body. In the jungle, the soldier face fears and desires under mystical circumstances.

Uncle Boonmee Who Wants To Recall His Past Lives (2010) follows a family living in a forest. The narrative mainly focuses on the last in the life of days of the middle-aged man named Boonmee, who's suffering from kidney failure. He's living on his farm with his sister-in-law Jen and his nephew Tong. Boonmee has been a widower since his wife passed away a decade ago. He also has a son that, without explanation, has been lost since many years. One evening during family dinner his wife suddenly appears as a ghost, and they are also joined by a red-eyed black-haired figure stating that he's Boonmee's long-lost son. Even though Boonmee is the main character the narrative perspective changes, and follows different characters in different times, tells stories that end as abruptly as they begin.

In *Hotel Mekong* (2012) the narrative is a one hour long hybrid of fiction and documentary. Set in a hotel along the Mekong River it contains of conversations between a man and a woman and her mother. The mother and daughter are possessed by a ghost making them eating human intestines and the film contains several scenes of them eating bloody intestines. In the beginning a man gently playing acoustic guitar is seen, his guitar playing is then heard almost entirely over the rest of the film. It's difficult to distil what scenes are fictive and what scenes are 'real'.

The story of *Cemetery of Splendour* (2015) revolves around the middle-aged woman Jenjira who starts volunteering in a temporary hospital. It's built in an old school classroom where military soldiers are hospitalised for a strange sleeping condition which is making them suddenly fall asleep. Jenjira befriends one of the soldiers and she helps him make sense of his dreams and she takes help from a female medium. Together, they explore the mystic surroundings that seem to have a connection with the soldiers. It's a dreamy film-world and spirits appear, looking like humans.

Analysis

This analysis is based on the question: In what way can Apichatpong Weerasethakul's films be understood as independent "thinking" entities, and how does this affect the viewer's experience? This main question is paired with a framing question: What aspect of the film contribute to the viewer's embodied experience and positioning?

The analysis examines recurring themes in Weerasethakul's films that suggest a form of autonomous film thinking, mainly through the films' non-linear storytelling and dreamlike

scenes. The themes will be examined for their relevance to film-thinking and through close readings of scenes where this thinking becomes most clear. The analysis also examines how the viewer's embodied response plays a role in making that thinking meaningful, which shapes the relationship between film and viewer.

Observation and self-reflection

This first section of the analysis begins with one of the final scenes in *Cemetery of Splendour* as it captures the filmind's way of thinking and its self-reflective thoughts. The scene's introspective tone highlights a perceptual consciousness that invites the viewer to understand the images as expressions of a thinking that's emerging from the filmind itself. This gives an introduction to understanding Apichatpong Weerasethakul's films as thinking entities and to explore the filmind's relationship with the viewer.

In the final scene of *Cemetery of Splendour* Jenjira sits on a bench watching children playing football on a field in front of her (Figure 1). The field has been excavated with piles of dirt disrupting its surface. The camera is placed in a high-up window in a nearby building and captures Janira from a distance. A sense of quiet observation is created by the camera, which remains completely static throughout the scene. The window shutters are visible on each side of the image and act as borders to the scene, and they are also creating a feeling of observation, as if someone was looking out the window. The dirt from the children playing rises into the air as they move across the field and the scene slowly fills with brown dust.

Throughout different scenes in the film we've seen an excavator slowly digging up the field. The field was once intact but has now been transformed, and the children continue to play on the uneven ground. This can be understood as a shift in Jenjira's own perception since her world has also changed, but her life continues on. The events have created new perspectives, making her reflect in a new way. The filmind, through its camera placement and framing, does not just document this change – just like Jenjira it also reflects upon it. The stillness of the shot and the view from above looking through a window functions not only as an observation of the filmind's own world but also as a contemplation of it. The filmind doesn't just show us what happens in the scene, it turns its gaze inwards and thinks of its own story and transformations. Jenjira, the film-world and the image are all part of the expression of the filmind, and those expressions are the film thinking and reflecting over itself. Here, the filmind is not only creating a narrative but also reflecting on its own thinking. The window

can be seen as a physical barrier and a symbolic door between the filmind and the world it observes, the filmind therefore both presents and thinks at the same time. Just like Janjira observing her world change, the filmind watches itself unfold by observing the emotional and existential effect of its own narrative. Here, the stillness, the high-up perspective and the glancing through a window shows a kind of self-awareness that aligns with Frampton's notion of the filmind as something 'thinking'.



Figure 1. Janjira watching the children play football. Still from *Cemetery Of Splendour* (2015).

This is, as Frampton puts it, a conceptual understanding of a film rather than a practical description, where the concept of the filmind helps us understand the film and the creation of its own thinking. This is not a human mind, but something else, and this 'mind' is a metaphor for the film's expressions (Frampton 2006, p. 73). Frampton continues to explain that everything in the film is intended by the filmind, the thinking starts as soon as the film begins. So, everything seen in the images on screen – the characters, landscapes and movements – are all part of the filmind. And instead of understanding the filmind's images as if they're presenting an experience of things, rather, the filmind directs its intention toward things like characters, objects and events. As 'experiencing' is something connected to human knowledge, and the filmind is not a human mind, it cannot present us with experiences but only intentional thoughts. Therefore, both movement, objects and sounds are the filmind approaching a thought (Frampton 2006, pp. 77 – 78). Everything on screen is the film thinking and the film itself is the filmind. This means that everything seen in the last scene of

Cemetery of Splendour is the film's thoughts, it's the film-word created by the filmind and also the filmind's thoughts of this very world. In contrast, from the realist view of André Bazin ([1967] 2016, p. 130), the stillness and long shot of the last scene might be interpreted as a natural observation of reality, rather than an expressive act of thought from the film itself. Viewers would then objectively interpret this as an approach to show reality, instead of the phenomenological address where the viewer instead gets immersed in the image.

Viewer approach to filmind

As viewers we get to experience both the storytelling of the filmind and its understanding of itself. When the filmind looks through the window and observes the movement of the scene, it also observes the inner life of itself, as the film-world is the core of the filmind. The filmind then engages in a self-reflective contemplation of the events and their consequences. What we see is therefore the filmind telling a story whilst also thinking. This is where Frampton (2006) argues that the filmind and the film-world are inseparable as they are the same, they do not co-exist independently (Frampton, 2006, p. 75). So, as viewers we get to experience both the film's own self-reflection and the story it tells, intertwined in the image. The film's introspection therefore invites the viewer towards an open-ended reflection instead of directing us towards an emotional response. The viewers have throughout the film created an understanding for Janira's world and, in turn, a relationship with her so they can understand the presented thinking of the filmind.

At this point, the film's introspected way of thinking almost appears as if the film is lost in thought, not aware that the images it shows are its own thoughts. This self-reflexivity appears as something the film is not aware of. The film-thinking observed here seems to be an unconscious reflexivity of the film, but as mentioned above: what we see is something intended by the filmind, a directed intentional thought, and therefore the self-reflexivity is also conscious. The filmind has engaged in a self-reflexive perception, and while it's reflecting, it also brings its experiences into consciousness via the images. However, Sobchack (1992) warns that a film that's too self-aware can risk alienating the audience, a critique of when the self-reflection becomes too explicit. When it does, it risks distancing perception from experience where the awareness of the body leads to alienation (Sobchack, 1992, p. 218). However, *Cemetery of Splendour* does not fall for this as the self-reflexivity is woven into the filmind itself. It doesn't draw attention to its own process of perceiving and

reflecting. Instead, it naturally integrates its self-awareness into the film-thinking, mirroring Jenjira's shift in understanding. So, here the filmind's perception should function as an expression of its own world rather than an external commentary on itself.

From a traditional theoretical perspective, the narration in this scene might be read as functioning through the language of cinema that affects the viewer unconsciously. In psychoanalytic film theory, Christian Metz originally argued in 1975 that meaning is created through signs and symbols which are embedded in the film, and therefore positions the viewer in a passive, observing role, perceiving rather than participating (Metz, 2016, pp. 608 – 609). From a phenomenological perspective, however, Sobchack (1992) shifts the view by saying that the viewer actively experiences the film bodily and emotionally. Film becomes something we participate in, not just something we interpret. Sobchack is not ignoring the filmmaker, but stating that the film is more than the creator's explorations as the film is a secondary reflection of events. The events presented on the screen, to the viewer, seem to narrate themselves. So, for the audience the film's perception seems to be its own articulation of its engagement with a world. This is possible because the film has a bodily presence in it. The film has an active presence, engaging in both perceptual and expressional activity, unlike the filmmaker who is absent (Sobchack, 1992, pp. 216 – 218).

This aligns with how *Cemetery of Splendour* presents its final scene (explained above), which does not just present a moment of a narrative ending, but also a reflection on the film's own perceptual awareness. The film does not explicitly state its self-reflection but rather perceives and expresses it at the same time and therefore embodies the cinematic consciousness that Sobchack describes. If a film presents its thinking throughout the film, the viewer is more likely to engage with it in an open-ended way, allowing for interpretation rather than passive observation. For if the film wouldn't be thinking and only to be presenting the story from a beginning to an end, it risks becoming a closed narrative which could be limiting the viewer's ability to create an embodied understanding of the film.

Sobchack's notion of film perception as an embodied and autonomous articulation makes *Cemetery of Splendour* a film that doesn't just create a narrative but also actively thinks of its own existence. The film doesn't ask for a special emotional response but instead invites a contemplation which allows its perceptual and expressive thinking to happen naturally. Another example of this self-reflexive filmind appears in a scene in *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*. This scene appears as a short story, independent from the rest of the film. A princess sits at night by a pond, the blue tones of the image capture her in a quiet

reflection. As she gazes at her reflection in the water, she sees not her present self, but a younger version of herself smiling back at her. The film cuts between her two versions, showing us their different point of views as they are looking at each other. This creates a dialogue between the past and the present, illusion and reality. The present-day princess says that what she sees in the pond is a deception. When the film interrupts its own storyline like this, it highlights a thought that has emerged from the film's consciousness, not necessarily tied to the plot but important on its own. The cutting between the perspectives can be the film that's reflecting upon itself, much like the princess contemplating her own transformation. Again, the film does not just tell a story, it turns its thinking to an inward gaze that embodies its own process of reflection. This moment captures the self-reflexivity of the film, where the act of storytelling and thinking becomes inseparable. In sum, looking at the exemplified scenes, the film does express itself as some kind of being that's having its own thoughts and reflecting upon a world of its own. The stillness and framing of the shots enables a thinking that's both conscious and unconscious but without drawing too much attention to its nature of an objective film. The viewer can then understand the images as something reflecting, in the absence of a filmmaker, presenting reflexive thoughts that the viewer can find themselves in. Though, this situation depends on if the film is presenting a reality of its own and if the viewer accepts the images as a film-world. I will further examine how different elements in the films function as expressions of thought and bridge the autonomy of the film with the spectator's lived experience, while also considering how such thinking might disrupt the viewer immersion.

Documentary-style

I want to return to Sobchak's warning that when a film becomes too self-conscious, it risks damaging the viewer's process of perception and expression by drawing too much attention to itself. This exaggerated self-awareness can alienate the audience, as the film becomes overly absorbed in its own actions (Sobchack, 1992, p. 218). And since every scene constitutes the film's 'thinking', every decision shapes our perception and should be understood as an expression of the film's thought (Frampton 2006, p. 116). Here I want to argue that some scenes in Weerasethakul's films does articulate the film-thinking strongly, which can break the immersion with the viewer when the film is 'thinking' through common documentary aesthetics. Instead of deepening the film's thought process, the overly evident self-awareness disrupts the immersion and distances the viewer.

Documentary techniques in cinema often evoke a sense of realism, shaping the audience's expectations of objectivity and truth. Adrian J. Ivakhiv addresses documentary film and its differences from the narrative film, emphasizing that the documentary draws attention to its own production. The audience has learned how to recognise documentary aesthetics, so when those characteristics appear in a fictional film it leads the audience to associate the film with documentary and realism. These documentary techniques can therefore disrupt the traditional narrative immersion and blur the lines between a constructed storytelling and the documentary observation. This can make the viewer conscious of the film's construction (Ivakhiv, 2013, p. 180). In Weerasethakul's films, these documentary aesthetics do not simply situate the narrative in realism, they create tension between the film's introspection and its engagement with the viewer. Frampton (2006) understands realism as something the film cannot represent, the film only presents its own subjectivity and objectivity, and, as opposed to André Bazin's statement, Frampton underlines that an objective view of the real world is not possible (Frampton 2006, p. 5). So, if a film turns out to have the property of representing the real world, it might lose its reliability as an entity. This raises the question of a film's reliability – does the documentary aesthetic break the immersion between the film and the viewer? Here I want to explore how these documentary elements can be found in some of the aesthetics of Weerasethakul's films, where they draw attention to themselves by breaking the fourth wall or using documentary aesthetics. This raises uncertainty whether the film acknowledges the viewer or if it's just drawing the viewer into its film-world and, once again, being self-reflective. Earlier mentioned scene examples highlight both the conscious and unconscious film-thinking, the film's way of observing its surroundings. Something all Weerasethakul's films have in common is their quiet way of being in, and reflecting upon, their surroundings. This observational gaze is a rule rather than exception, but when examining the way the camera is placed and the way it interacts with the characters, the film reveals its relationship with the characters. Sometimes, it acts as if it doesn't want to be discovered by the characters, as if it's hiding, maybe from itself, asking the question whether the film wants to observe or be observed.

This tension is particularly evident in *Mekong Hotel*, where the camera's observational gaze alternates between being invisible and self-conscious. In one scene, the camera captures the man and the woman in a full shot, standing side by side on a terrace, looking beyond the river below them, positioning the viewer as an unnoticed observer (Figure 2). The camera frames them statically as they chat with each other, until suddenly they both turn towards the camera

and smilingly stare into it, prompting the camera to turn 180 degrees. The filmind acts as if its hiding from their stare, turning its gaze to another direction to avoid eye contact, as if it got caught observing them talking after trying not to get discovered. Once it turns away, it draws attention to its own existence. This also, as in earlier examples, offer an insight into the filmind's reflexive thoughts where both the characters and the movement of the camera are the thoughts of the film. But this movement indicates an internal conflict: Does the filmind want to acknowledge its viewer, or does it want to remain unnoticed? We experience a moment of hesitation that mirrors an uncertainty of the filmind's identity. It's not fully stable in its own existence.



Figure 2. The man and woman has turned around, looking into the camera. Still from *Hotel Mekong* (2012).

Similar moments of uncertainty occur several times in Weerasethakul's films. In the beginning of *Tropical Malady* a young military man rests on a roofless terrace (Figure 3). He looks mysterious as he's smiling for himself, but also wavering with his gaze into the camera as the intro credits appear. In *Hotel Mekong* a man sits on a sofa, playing an acoustic guitar. The camera is placed still right in front of him, and as he calmly plays the guitar he briefly glances into it the camera. The family in *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* sit by their dinner table and hear the sound of something coming up the stairs. The camera is placed in between the stairs and the table. As the characters stare at the direction of the stairs, they look into the camera, searching for the origin of the sound. Again, the camera does a 180 degree turn to show what they are looking at. A red-eyes hairy figure, revealed to be Boonmee's son.

A later scene in the film shows the figure captured in the jungle, staring into the camera for 15 seconds, breaking the fourth wall just like the family did earlier.

The characters' gazing into the camera can function as a reinforcement of the filmind when occurring occasionally in the films. It puts focus on the filmind's self-reflexivity as they have the function of being an inward gaze. According to Frampton (2006), when characters look into the camera, it is not just a direct address but an instance of the filmind 'thinking about itself' (Frampton 2006, p. 29). However, what happens in *Hotel Mekong*, is that this self-reflection becomes excessive with its mixture of narrative styles – characters breaking the fourth wall frequently in combination with the slow observational pacing creates a sense of detachment. The filmind draws attention to itself and its existence as an object presenting a story. As a result, the filmind appears trapped in its own introspection, instead of drawing the viewer deeper into the film's consciousness. This makes it difficult for the audience to engage with its way of thinking.



Figure 3. Soldier looking into the camera. Still from *Tropical Malady* (2004).

Cemetery of Splendour, *Tropical Malady* and *Uncle Boonmee* only contain either one or no scenes with fourth wall breaks. For a viewer to have an authentic experience, the filmind needs a well-balanced presentation of itself as a film and how the film-thinking is presented in relation with itself. Too much attention on its own thinking reminds the viewer of the films objective construction of 'only' telling a story, breaking the immersion with the film's being and reminds the viewer of a creator's involvement in the film. For the filmind to be affective,

it must have a balance between self-awareness and immersive storytelling. While self-reflexivity is an important part of the filmind's thinking, too much of it risks distancing the viewer from the film. Here Sobchack's concern about an overly self-conscious film becomes relevant. A film that's too occupied with its own construction loses the ability to create a meaningful and embodied relationship with the viewer. The balance between the viewer and the filmind becomes disrupted, a struggle that's aligning with Ivakhiv's (2013, p. 45) discussion of self-referential loops in perception:

'When I think about something, I am the subject and the thought-about is the object. But when I think about myself, "I" become the object of my own thought, which creates a circular or recursive, self-referential loop in my experience.' (Ivakhiv, 2013, p. 45)

The filmind, in its attempt to observe itself, becomes lost in this loop, unable to fully reach out to the viewer. The viewer is then reminded of the film's construction instead of being immersed with its world, and the viewer experience becomes fragmented. The embodied response that Sobchack seeks is lost. A filmind being too self-reflexive might not have the desire to present a story, the film-thinking is only the result of the film trying to figure things out and being uncertain of its identity. But the viewer experiences this as fragmented storytelling. Ivakhiv (2013) further explains three categories of experience in phenomenology, (1) the firstness, which is the perception of a phenomenon which in this case is the direct viewer immersion with the image, the event itself; (2) the secondness is all the senses perceiving and responding to the image, it's the viewer processing what they are seeing; (3) the thirdness then becomes the meaning itself being created – the meaningful action the viewers use to make sense of the film. It's the dynamic relationship between these three that create meaning in the film experience, but most importantly, it's in the thirdness that the meaning emerges for the viewer (Ivakhiv, 2013, p. 53). Thus, in order to be immersed in the film-world, there must be a balance between these aspects for the viewer to connect with the images. A filmind that's overly self-conscious disrupts this process and the viewer is left unsure of the film's identity.

This tension between immersion and self-reflexivity challenges Frampton's idea of a fully autonomous filmind and aligns with Sobchack's concern of alienation. The balance between self-reflection and narrative viewer engagement depends on whether the filmind is accessible to the viewer or if it remains trapped in its own introspection. A film must be self-aware in order to think, but excessive self-reflection or uncertainty in its identity can risk losing the audience's engagement. Frampton's (2006, p. 106) notion of a viewer believing that the

characters in the film are intended by the film's thinking and therefore feel the meanings of the filmind, can be questioned when the filmind presents a thinking that's difficult to engage with. While the documentary style gives the viewer a feeling of realism, it's actually through the ambient soundscape and presentation of time that the filmind develops its perceptual engagement with the world it presents.

Ambient soundscape and time

A filmind can be perceived as autonomous in its conscious and unconscious self-reflexivity. It's way of thinking in images shows its ability to perceive its surroundings. In this part of the analysis I will be addressing how the filmind's direct attention to its surroundings creates a meaningful and embodied response in the viewer. A strong element in all films in this thesis is the filmind's attention to ambient background sound, as if the sounds have such an impact on the filmind that it places them in the foreground. This creates a rich soundscape that's shaping the viewer experience with its presence. Throughout most of the films' duration only diegetic sound can be heard, the loud noises of the jungle is regularly present. For the filmind, sound becomes an important aspect when focusing on the surroundings of the film-world. Frampton (2006) marks sound as the way the film feels its thought-process, how it thinks about feelings. He's aiming critique at classical film analysis for its argument of sound being used for characters and action, letting the sound represent only them (Frampton 2006, p. 120 – 122). The ambient sounds in Weerasethakul film's become a representation of the filmind's own world. Alexa Weik von Mossner (2017, p. 54) explains how the continuity editing of a film guides the viewers' attention toward the desired narrative, telling them where to look and what to notice, similarly to a literary narrator directing its readers. Except here, the filmind itself is the narrator, thinking and feeling through image and sound, and therefore making the narrative action less important in terms of meaning-making.

Hotel Mekong, *Uncle Boonmee* and *Cemetery of Splendour* all start with a black screen, the opening titles and the sound from the surroundings of the upcoming scene. We hear the birds chirping in a jungle, the wind blowing, the noise from a working excavator, and when the image appears, it picks up where the sound is and merges with it. As the films goes on, the background sound is almost always present. In *Tropical Malady*, the film begins with a scene of some military men taking pictures. We can hear the voices of the men, the beeping sounds of a digital camera and the rustle from a tarpaulin. Here, the filmind directly presents how it's affected by the surroundings and how they shape the filmind's view of the film-world. The

on-going sound of nature plays a big part in the filmind's world, notably in the way it puts them in the foreground. Distant voices, insects and wind, all ambient sounds that are always present in our lives. But our mind filters them away as something unimportant – unless they become important. For the filmind, these sounds are important and they are therefore brought to the foreground of the film-thinking, making the viewer aware of their presence, instead of just letting the sound remain subordinated to the image they belong to. As the ambient sounds are the first thing to awake our senses when the film starts, appearing before any image, their presence fills the entire scene in anticipation of what's to come. The fact that these ambient sounds are always present highlight their importance for the film – a relation where nature is a part of the filmind by shaping its thinking, and the thinking shapes the film-world. Furthermore, as most of the sounds origin from a natural source, this indicates a filmind that is closely connected to nature and its own world, and this diegetic space is an active force that becomes a part of the action, instead of being a passive setting.

Connection between sound and time

The two-way process of reversibility that Merleau-Ponty highlights is created by the filmind in its perceptive experience (Walton, 2016, p. 13). The filmind holds both agencies of perceiving and being perceived. This is a deeper reflectional perception enabled by the filmind's thinking. In *Uncle Boonmee*, the jungle sounds remain throughout the film, almost overflowing the narrative. Thus, sound is playing an important role in both the narrative and the experience as a whole (de Cock de Rameyen, 2021, p. 173). By staying present through the sound, the filmind can help the viewer stay in the narrative even though the order of the events appears to be non-linear. Even if the filmind doesn't have the intention to present its thinking to an imaginary spectator, the viewer can still establish a relationship with the image. And even though the spectator doesn't think of the viewer-experience in terms of image and sound originating from a 'thinking' body, these two bodies – film and viewer – can create a bond without being aware of each other's existence. Weik von Mossner (2017) states that the viewer can rarely get a direct insight to a character's mind (unless it's voice-over), they must use the embodied experience to assume what the characters might think of (Weik von Mossner, 2017, p. 55). The embodied experience becomes a key for the viewer to see the film as a filmind, to get an understanding of the film, and its characters. So, among other things, it's through the clear presence of sound that the viewer experiences the very structure of movement and meaning in the films, and become able to create an embodied response. Sobchack (2004) argues that our experience of relating and connecting to a film goes beyond

finding a recognition. Instead, she highlights the bodily connection in what is seen and heard, how the viewer relates physically to the images that blur the boundaries between subject and object, the self and the film. The act of watching becomes a shared exchange between two bodies (Sobchack 2004, pp. 65– 67). From this perspective, I find it meaningful to reflect on my own experience. When I hear the wind blowing or birds chirping, sounds we've all experienced, I can use the memories that the senses of my body hold to make sense of what I experience – in this case a film. My own relationship with my world can be used when creating an understanding of the filmind's relationship with its own world, making it easier for me to engage with the film. Therefore, a relationship with the filmind has formed along with an understanding of its film-world, making it possible for me to delve into the narrative even further.

What the filmind further communicates is a reflection about nature, being in the present and what exists in its world. Its thinking highlights the presence of nature and how the nature affects itself. Now, I will argue how the sounds are connected to the filmind's attitude towards time. Thomas Elsaesser & Malte Hagener (2015) explains how sound, unlike image, cannot be reduced to a single moment. Sound can not be fixated and therefore reminds us of its nature of always being ongoing, representing the living itself (Elsaesser & Hagener 2015, pp. 155 – 156). In *Cemetery of Splendour* the filmind presents nothing but diegetic sounds for the whole film, except for one of the ending scenes where a thai-pop song is played. Though, after the song, the film ends with credits accompanied with the buzzing sounds of nature once more. The film begins and ends with the sound of its world, as if it suddenly starts to present its narrative action, thinking, directly without further explanation. Similarly, when the film ends, it's a reminder of the fickle nature of time. The non-fixable sound that is the first to appear represents something living here and now. The film is aware of time, and also perceives time, which means it also becomes a being. Even though the timelines in these films are unclear (we don't always know when and in what order the events happen), time is constantly present in nature. And as sound has both tactile and haptic qualities, the viewer can gain an understanding of the film by the presence of nature, which in this case is connected to both vegetation and time. The lived-body of the viewer makes it possible to embody the filmind's thinking, as it is in the expressions of the filmind that the viewer can find an embodied relationship. The direct presentation of the sound puts the viewer straight in an event and therefore marks the reversibility of perception. Ultimately, there are two bodies experiencing this reversibility. The filmind, experiencing its own reversibility by thinking

about and presenting its film-world, and the viewer who is experiencing this thinking, letting it shape the viewing experience.

The filmind's use of ambient sound is not just a background element but an important part of its thinking and being. The sounds shape its perception of the world which makes nature an active force in the filmind's existence instead of just being a passive setting. By foregrounding the ambient sounds – always letting them be heard in the scene – the filmind highlights its own consciousness and emphasises the experience of existing in time instead of being in a fixed chronology. This presence creates an embodied connection between the viewer and the film, as Sobchack (2004, p. 65) suggests, where perception is felt physically and not just bodily. Here the reversibility of perception is central as the filmind both perceives and, at the same time, is shaped by what it perceives, just like the viewer's embodied experience of the film can enable a deeper engagement with the film-world. Therefore, the filmind's engagement with time and sound suggests an ongoing process of looking for something, a searching quality that will be further explored. Sound is not just an aesthetic choice, it is a marker of presence, time and consciousness, which highlights the filmind's awareness of its own being. The ambient sounds also carry a feeling, creating an overall 'mood' in the films, a deepened understanding of the filmind that bridges the relationship between the filmind's thinking and the viewer.

Mood as thought

In this section, I will explore the function of 'mood' for the filmind, not as an explicit expression, but as something that emerges from all of its thinking. In the same way that the ambiance creates a reversibility of perception, the mood deepens this and becomes a key form of expression for the filmind. Mood is the first thing that the viewer perceives as an embodied response when experiencing the filmind. It becomes the mediator between the filmind and the viewer. The films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul tell stories that are all strange in some way. Their treatment of time, life and the physical body, offers an understanding that differs from our everyday human experience of existence. Nevertheless, they do so with a calmness by creating a profound sense of stillness in the present. The filmind observes its world, and so does the viewer. Carl Plantinga (2018) explains the experience of mood as something that can permeate a scene, or even an entire story. It's a way of experiencing the film-world where mood becomes the structure through which we meet the narration (Plantinga 2018, p.180).

This overarching mood manifests itself in both the individual scenes and the overall narrative of Weerasethakul's films.

Tropical Malady is divided into two stories, each told with slightly different moods, though they come together in the end. The first story, the love story between the soldier and the country boy, has an aesthetic that differs somewhat from Weerasethakul's other films, as well as from the second part of this film. The handheld camera is often moving through the scenes as it captures their modest romance and ordinary existence. Ambient sounds are clearly heard and much of the story is filmed in daylight. This first story presents a familiar storytelling style that doesn't differ much from the mainstream filmic style. Yet this humble romance, which never fully develops, gains meaning when the second story of the film begins. Set in the jungle, often during nighttime, the story slows down and shifts in both aesthetics and thinking. Told as a kind of legend, the film quietly follows the soldier's attempt to catch the tiger spirit almost looking like a dream.



Figure 4. Janjira sits by the soldier. Still from *Cemetery of Splendour* (2015).

Here the mood acts as the cognitive framework for the filmind, as the filmind's thinking and storytelling isn't logic, as in the logic of cause-effect. The filmind instead contemplates the now, where the mood highlights the thinking atmosphere of the filmind. The mood becomes the meaning-maker instead of the plot which, unconsciously of the filmind, invites the viewer to a way of 'feeling' its way through the film. The moments of stillness and silence in the films highlight a contemplative filmind. The eery mood in the jungle blurs the distinction between animal and human, as the filmind itself either isn't sure of the difference, or doesn't

care. Rather it tries to understand its own thinking, which is expressed in the unified mood. For the filmind, the mood is what weaves its thoughts together. It's the filmind's way of making sense of its own thinking. Mood is both the parts and the whole, an interrelated process of thinking. Stillness is found through all the films by gently persuading the, at times, complex narratives. It turns into something that gives the filmind a curious and observing gaze, rather than a sequence of events supposed to create a thrill. In *Cemetery of Splendour* the camera stays close to the characters and the rooms they are located in. As we watch Jenjira sitting by the bed of the sleeping soldier in the temporary hospital, the night falls and the only visible change in the room is the red, pink and blue hues from the light therapy lamps that is placed in between the beds (Figure 4).

The filmind patiently waits and remains in the scene to see what happens, the colours in the hospital room are expressions of the filmind's thought. The shared desire of the filmind and of the characters to understand the mysterious dreams of the sleeping soldiers is conveyed through the soft, changing light from the lamps. According to Frampton (2006) the filmind can feel the drama in colours and create its own references in those – a certain tone that can hold the experience of its world (Frampton 2006, pp. 118 – 119). In *Cemetery of Splendour*, where most of the scenes are set in daylight, the filmind has a welcoming attitude towards the thinking and its drama, emphasising a peaceful feeling instead of putting focus on the, otherwise, complex and strange narrative. This way of focusing on the stillness instead of the odd events is also found *Uncle Boonmee*, where the narrative could be expressed by featuring the action, but here the mood instead has the function of directing the viewer into the scene instead of creating a stressful scene.

The family sits by the dinner table at their outside terrace, the darkness surrounds them and the only light source is a ceiling lamp above them. The sudden appearance of the ghost wife and the black-haired figure with red eyes (their son) could surely create a stressful scene. But the filmind's way of creating acceptance in the scene, with its peaceful thinking, allows the scene to remain peaceful. The darkness surrounding the image hides what lurks in the jungle behind them, the table lamp illuminates the scene and lights up the characters sitting, almost motionless, as the two strange figures appear. Their welcoming reactions, instead of fear, carries the calm of the entire scene. Rick Warner (2024) likens the characters to barometers, attuned to the ambience of their surroundings. Rather than letting the narrative carry the complexity, it's the characters who do so. Their performances generate suspense, as the viewer is left to wonder about the strangeness of the situation (Warner 2024, p. 135). Thus,

the filmind creates suspense by not revealing its innermost thoughts, leaving the viewer in a state of quiet anticipation. However, these thoughts emerge through the characters, as the filmind seems to wonder about the lives of those who have left the family. Perhaps the filmind itself is unaware of the depth of the thoughts it expresses. This could explain why, in *Cemetery of Splendour*, we learn about the dreams through the female medium instead of seeing them visually. It's through the shifting colours of lamps and the words spoken by the characters that the filmind's desire to reach these mystical dreams is subtly indicated.

As viewers, we're not becoming immersed and interested in what we know, but in the mystery of what's hidden from the narrative, both from us and the filmind itself. This state of not-knowing of the filmind can be understood as a reflection of the filmind's own subconscious life. Just like dreams, it doesn't have full access to its inner life so the filmind's expressions – the dreams, moods and strange beings all become something half-thought. The filmind cannot resolve the dreams or happenings, but it still tries to do so through its thinking, which is what's creating the mood. The mood becomes something present but not seen. The medium in *Cemetery of Splendour* is not only talking about the dreams, but she is also talking about what the filmind itself is having trouble with formulating. The filmind exposes some kind of reflexive thought that reveals a desire to understand the meaning of its thinking.

Vivian Sobchack (1992) emphasises how we feel through the lived-body before we can articulate a thought. One could say that this is similar to the thought process of the filmind. The moods function as a validation of the filmind's subconscious thoughts: its way of feeling before formulating a thought. These subconscious thoughts then become available for the viewer as mood, in which the viewer encounters and engages through the lived body. This way, both the viewer and the filmind are engaged in the same phenomenological thinking. They feel before they know. Two bodies existing in the same mood of feeling and thought. Here, the viewers are invited to enter a relationship with the film through the mood instead of trying to decode the story. But, for this to happen the filmind cannot be misunderstood. For Chiara Quaranta (2024) the cinematic mood can position the viewers understanding of the film's essence. If the mood of the viewer differs from the one of the film, the viewer may struggle to connect with the feeling that the film seeks to evoke and consequently miss the opportunity to experience it in a meaningful way (Quaranta, 2024, p. 37). In Weerasethakul's films we can never fully know all the intentions or the innermost thoughts of the filmind, but the thoughts of the filmind that we actually get to experience are so convincing that we accept the immersion and enter a relationship with the film. Quaranta (2024, p. 42) deepens this

notion by suggesting that the cinematic world not only reveals something about the film itself, but also about the world in which it takes place (our own), which helps us understand something about ourselves. This statement is closely associated with Sobchack's (1992, p. 67) words about reversibility and meaning-making. Meaning is created on what the viewer chooses to direct their intentionality towards. If the mood of the film is compelling, we want to become more involved with it, meaning that it is something meaning-making for us. Quaranta (2024) describes this desire to direct the attention towards the film. The mood in the film directs attention towards the film's environment, making us further search for that mood in the film. If we for example watch a horror film, we expect to see certain things associated with the genre, and we start looking for them (Quaranta 2024, pp. 183 – 184). Therefore, the moods in film play an important role in the experience of engagement for the viewer: they make the viewer want to engage with the film. The films in this analysis present a mood that can be understood as the essence of the film's thoughts, creating an understanding of the film for the viewer. Mood acts as the mediator between the film and the viewer. The viewers don't just watch the film, they enter a shared relationship with the film's affective movement. Upcoming themes in this analysis also play a part in manifesting this kind of mood.

Reflections upon time and memory

This ongoing process of 'seeking', noticeable in the way the film thinks in reflexive ways, through inward gazes, the self-observations and the surrounding soundscape are all signs of an awareness of being. In the following sections I will explore how this being is in a search for a place to belong, in both time and body. A shared theme for the films is the reflection of time and memories that is found in the narrative. The timeline is often unclear and presented through non-linear storytelling that lets the viewer realise that some scenes represent earlier events. The film thinks of events and time in slowness, which directs the pace and impression of time, and for the viewer this is presented as thinking in a sense of ambiguity.

In the film's process of making sense, according to Sobchack (1992, pp. 209 – 211), the camera functions as the instrument of embodied perception, it's an eye that's always situated within the world it observes. She highlights the role of the film projector and the screen when defining the film's body, where the projector makes the camera's observations visible, and the screen functions as a space for both perception and expression. This cooperation lets time be

fragmented and reconstructed, shaped by the film's own being-in-the-world. As viewers we simultaneously perceive and experience time through our bodies, it's where we can access time and the world. Sobchack describes the film body in a similar way, an apparatus that both perceives (through the camera) and expresses (through projection). What we, as viewers, perceive is not reality itself but the film body's own experienced view of its world. When we watch a film in the cinema, we're engaging with the film's own experience of itself, its way of being-in-the-world. Through our lived bodies, we make sense of the film because we, too, understand what it means to exist in a world through our sensory observations. Ultimately, time is experienced by two different bodies. The film body and our own body, each shaped by its own perceptual world.

In Frampton's theory, the expressions and perceivings of the film are all the filmind's thinking, even if there is a viewer or not. The thought and experience of time on screen is similar to Sobchack's argument, stating that it's the body of the film's own perceiving we are watching, which is an ongoing process of thinking, feeling and observing. Thus, looking at the analysed films that's presenting an unclear timeline, this is the filmind's way of thinking about time.

From the perspective of classical auteur theory, which connects the film's aesthetics and narrative to the director's personal vision, the non-linear timeline could be interpreted as an intentional aesthetic choice by Weerasethakul. However, from Frampton's point of view, such structures are instead the expression of the filmind's own perceptual and conceptual process. Frampton (2006) clarified that the film's thinking is not equalised with our thinking, the filmind creates knowledge on its own by giving new meaning to reality and constructing a re-perception of it. Therefore, the timelines in Weerasethakul's films might not function or express time in the same way that we perceive it (Frampton, 2006, p. 26). The first half of *Topical Malady* is told in a modern narrative style, telling the story of the romance between two young men. The second half, called "A Spirits Path", is narrated with intertitles and paintings explaining the story, followed by scenes. It's the story about a soldier on a mission to try to kill a spirit shaman, who has taken the form of a tiger. The two narratives do not have any explicit connection to each other, it's up to the viewer to interpret the two stories. In this case, the filmind simply thinks of the two narratives, not caring too much about their continuity. This highlights its thinking, or rather, its perception of time. What's important to the filmind is not the chronological order of events, or their relation to each other. It's what they tell us, which in this case is a story of a romantic relationship and a story of a spirit

roaming in the jungle. Together they create a combined narrative, rather than a narrative spanning a period of time. In *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* the only event confirming a certain timestamp is the death of Boonmee at the end of the film, followed by his funeral. Otherwise, the previous scenes don't have a fixed place in time and space, they could have happened in any order. And like *Tropical Malady*, the film has short stories within the story, without any connection to the film's narrative. In *Cemetery of Splendour* the only thing indicating time passing in a straight timeline is the returning scenes of an excavator digging up a football field. Here, both Frampton and Sobchack are aligned with the idea of a film having its own understanding of time compared to ours. Here, the filmind is clearly focusing on other things than the narrative order. Or could it be that it simply doesn't care about time? That it doesn't fulfil any function in its film-world?

For film scholar Rick Warner (2024) suspension in time is a way of describing how an awkward presentation of time can draw attention to the situation, rather than leading to the next narrative event. Using continuity for advancing the story can be limiting to the narrative. When ignoring this and realising the powers of time, the attention is instead put to the suspension. This way a world that takes little for granted is presented, where the experience of time is thickened (Warner 2024, pp. 41 – 42). So, the way that Weerasethakul's films think of time, by putting attention to different events, directs the viewer towards the experience of the film instead of the suspense of characters and narrative. In this way, the perceptual experiences override the narrative structure by focusing on the way the filmind perceives its world and therefore highlights the phenomenon of experience.

The viewer, who is perceiving the suspense with the lived-body, can enter the film with an understanding of the film's concept of time instead of the narrative. For Merleau-Ponty, explained by Bezerra (2014), knowledge *is* the body and its direct engagement with in the world, not the reason of the mind (Bezerra 2014, p. 80). As a viewer, the first thing we encounter is therefore the filmind's thinking, a complete experience of the entire film as an entity. The relationship with the film is created in this understanding of time, but also in an overarching perception of the mood the filmind. There's not one, but several factors contributing to the creation of the films' mood. The filmind doesn't think of time in the same ways we do, it thinks of events in time by putting conscious attention to situations. This way of thinking about time gives the film the agency of being an entity, as the image is the expression of thought.

According to Frampton (2006), film presents a new kind of thought, a unique conception of time and thinking, different from our own. It allows us to perceive the world in ways we otherwise wouldn't be to. By accepting the film's own way of thinking, its temporal logic and experience of reality, and relating it to our own, we're confronted with the limits of our own perception (Frampton 2006, p. 70). In Weerasethakul's films the filmind's thinking is placed in direct contrast with ours, making us aware of the impossibility of thinking exactly like the film does. Even if this realisation comes from new ways of thinking or through the awareness of our mental limitations, it can be understood as a validation of the filmind.

But the filmind's way of thinking about time also presents a filmind that ponders upon its existence, one that is unsure of where it is situated. In *Cemetery of Splendour* the soldiers have a mysterious disease where they fall into sudden sleep, they have vivid dreams, and the doctors are trying to figure out why what they're dreaming of. In one scene the soldier and Jenjira are sitting outside talking, a friend of the soldier has contacted a medium in an attempt to understand his dreams. As the medium places her hand on his body, the spirit that haunts his dreams enters the body of the medium, and through her body the spirit walks away and shows Jenjira an ancient temple nearby while the body of the soldier remains still. Neither Jenjira nor the viewer can see this temple, only some remaining stone structures. Both Jenjira and the viewer must trust the medium as she describes what she sees. As mentioned in the first section of this analysis, the filmind expresses self-reflection through the way the camera lens functions as an introspective gaze. The dreams experienced by the characters are further what the filmind experiences, in a continuous process where the filmind thinks of those dreams it also tries to comprehend them, while using the medium to fully reach to the inner meaning of the dreams. Here, I will refrain from discussing dream interpretation, as that would set the analysis in a different direction – but what the film does here is, nonetheless, trying to comprehend itself. The soldiers falling into an uncontrollable sleep is also the filmind losing control over something. Therefore the images, the thinking itself, is the filmind searching for an answer. Dreams or memory flashbacks take up large parts of the films and sometimes we don't know whether it's a dream, a flashback or a thought about future. In *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* the narrative is interrupted with stand-alone short stories which end as abruptly as they start. They can be interpreted as representations on Boonmee's earlier lives he's experienced, but that's not something we should take for granted as it's left unexplained (except by the film title). For Anders Bergström (2015) the flashbacks function as a language of the film, they act as a cinematic memory of the film itself, rather

than placing events in a unified timeline. The memories in *Uncle Boonmee* are motivated with the physical sensation instead of a narrational focus which directs the viewer attention towards the questioning and contemplation of the past (Bergström 2015, pp. 4– 5). This aligns with Frampton's notion of the filmind thinking about time differently than we do. However, the dreams in *Uncle Boonmee* and *Cemetery of Splendour* don't appear without a reason, they are still part of the films' thinking, even if time operates differently within them. Bergström (2015, p. 6) furthers the argument by stating that memory in cinema is what connects the characters' subjective reality and the film's exploration of subjective experience of the world, maintaining the link between time and the self. Therefore, the filmind acts as a form of memory, preserving the connection between itself and the passage of time.

Viewers can interpret these unclear time-moments as confusing or as interrupting to the narrative if no understanding or relation is created with the filmind. An engagement with the narrative and a will to understand the images is needed. Here, a question of active spectatorship emerges: Do the viewer need to actively want to understand the film to understand its ideas, or should it come naturally as a part of the viewing experience? In positioning theory, explained by Carl Plantinga (2018), viewers have little choice in the viewing experience. The textual operation of the film positions and subjects its audience, which makes them into objects for the cinematic expression (Plantinga 2018, p. 105). This is true in the sense of being absorbed and accepting the emotional role that the film presents, but this absorption is not entirely involuntary since viewers choose to engage. Being immersed does not equalise a passive spectatorship as viewers can actively allow themselves to be drawn into the film while maintaining agency. We engage with the thinking of the filmind when we allow ourselves to be engaged with it. Plantinga (2018) continues by stating that the immersive activity of the viewer is both the absorption of the fictional world and the viewing experience itself (Plantinga 2018, p. 110). So, the viewers' embodied response is what's making the film, the *thinking*, meaningful, and in that response the filmind can be accepted as a body that expresses thought. Therefore, the understanding of a filmind is an active choice once the viewer accepts the storytelling or thinking of the filmind, and once immersed, the viewing experience comes naturally. The viewer's relationship with the filmind isn't only about following a narrative but engaging with the filmind's unique perception of time and embracing the films reflective experience. Continuing with the viewer's embodied relationship with the film body, this analysis will examine how a perceived split between the filmind and its body emerges, revealed through the filmind's thinking and how this is

experienced by the viewer.

Disruption between the filmind and the film body

This section explores how the presence of non-human beings functions as an extension of the filmind's perception, blurring the boundaries between the real and imagined. This is experienced by the viewer as a disruption between the mind and body of the filmind.

Our lived body communicates between our subjective feeling and the objective knowledge. The dynamic film experience is a shared experience between the film body and the lived body of the viewer, where both have the same interest in the embodied experience (Sobchack, 1992, pp. 285 – 286). The viewer's embodied experience is attuned to the signals and emotions that the filmind expresses, which allows viewers to perceive when the filmind indicates a sense of disconnection from itself. This disconnection can be found in the filmind's expression in the analysed films, through the recurrent themes of animals and spirits, as if the filmind doesn't know where, or in what to situate itself.

Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives clearly approaches the subject of existing in lives before and after the one represented in the film with its title. In the beginning of the film the intertitle says, 'Facing the jungle, the hills and vales, my past lives as an animal and other beings rise up before me.', and in the end, lying in a cave Boonmee states 'I was born here...in a life I can't remember.' The first scene, after the intertitle, shows a buffalo in a dark forest tearing itself loose from a tree. In the scene with the princess by the pond, she's talking to a catfish and offering her jewellery to the water, later to have sex with the catfish. The sudden return of the lost son in the shape of a black-haired figure with red eyes (Figure 5), unquestioned by the characters, also tells the story of some kind of being that's put into the lifeform of an animal. In the end, 'ghosts' of the persons in a room appear, while the persons are sitting there still alive. Not to mention the appearance of the ghost which is Boonmee's deceased wife. Here, the filmind clearly presents its thinking about beings and how they are connected to a physical form. The different animals could be the earlier or upcoming lives of Boonmee. What we face in the images is the insecurity of the filmind, which questions what it's like having a body and how to tie itself to one. The filmind is unsure of where to situate its confused thoughts. In *Hotel Mekong*, cannibalistic ghosts called 'pobs' occupies two women, and there's a machine that's able to drive out spirits from bodies. Jenjira in *Cemetery of Splendour* contacts a medium who can talk to spirits in the soldiers' dreams. Two 'dead

spirits' appear in human form after Jenjira's been praying to some saints. One scene shows a microscopic organism floating across the image of a cloudy sky. In *Tropical Malady* the entire second half of the film tells the story of a soldier trying to hunt down a tiger that's committing killings at night. The tiger is a shaman that can turn himself into different beings. A ghost and a talking monkey also appear. The filmind is thinking about having physical bodies and existing in different lives. So far, it seems like it experiences and thinks of time in a different way from us. Similarly, the filmind seems to experience its body being diverse in some way, which blurs the boundary between being here and being absent, past and present. It seems to search for something subjective beyond having an objective body.



Figure 5.. Boonmee's son, in the shape of a hairy figure. Still from *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010).

From the perspective of Sobchack (1992) these concerns of the filmind suggest that there is a rupture between the viewer experience of the filmind's body and the filmind's experience of its own body, as if the viewer connects the human experience of having a physical lived body with what the filmind presents as a body (itself). As a consequence, the viewer may project its own experiences onto the film, and these experiences may not be what the filmind thinks. This aligns with Frampton's (2006) notion of the filmind having thinking structures that are different from ours – including its conception of its own body.

As mentioned earlier, the filmind presents non-human thinking about time, making the viewer aware of our incapacity of thinking and experiencing timelines like the filmind. Therefore, the viewer also becomes aware of the difference in thinking about, existing in, and having a body.

Once this limitation is accepted and integrated in the perception of the film, the viewer must make sense of it in some way, and the closest thing at hand is the lived body of the viewer. But since we cannot fully understand the structure of the filmind's thinking, we interpret it as a fraction in the filmind's experience of its own film body. Our perceptual limitations direct this sensation through our lived body, registers it as if the experienced sense of self doesn't match with the lived body: our way of making sense of the filmind's thoughts of a body. This thinking destabilises the experience of the body that we are used to and present a supernatural ability to separate the mind from the body. For Sobchack (2004) the bodily signs of change can disrupt the perceived unity of the self, as if the objective body doesn't belong with the subjective feeling of it. The human body therefore holds an uncontrollable and sometimes frightening ability to suddenly change without our involvement (Sobchack 2004, p. 232). In Weerasethakul's films it's not only the events and the portrayals of spirits and other beings that are making the story strange, the filmind also contributes to the strangeness by representing human existence without being human.

In an article, Dewey Musante (2016) presents how the site of horror in the film *Insidious* (2010) can shift from the house to the body of the spectator by developing the concept of the 'Bodily Diagram'. Musante suggests that the feeling of 'haunting' isn't limited to a specific body but to all bodies, including the audiences, the characters and the aesthetics. The Bodily Diagram is therefore a structure in the film that both contains and reveals the horror, it *is* the horror felt through the film (Musante 2016, pp. 79 – 80). Here, a comparison can be partly drawn to the concept of the filmind where everything presented is the filmind thinking of a subject. The filmind, unknowingly, uses the structure of the Bodily Diagram to communicate its non-human sense of being, but this structure is not fully understood by the viewer. The ghosts, animals and spirits appearing is seen as manifestations of the filmind's fragmented or unstable thinking, which leaks into the viewers affective disruption. What makes the Bodily Diagram not entirely applicable to the filmind concept is the filmind's way of not directing its thinking towards a spectator. For Frampton (2006), film-thinking is a conscious type of thinking that exists only 'here and now' that is not directed towards a subject. The Diagram is instead a structure that functions between different bodies, including the body of the viewer. It doesn't need to be aimed towards something, but it can only become functional in the relationship between the film and the viewer. Therefore, the Diagram can function as the bridge between the thinking of the filmind and the viewers' understanding of that thinking. Musante (2016) further states that the film itself constructs horror through its affective

structure, which creates a feeling at the viewer (Musante 2016, p. 81). In Weerasethakul's films the mood is created in the filmind's way of thinking about its existence in different life forms. The viewer then experiences the mood as being 'haunted' by the film's structure. This haunted feeling is the filmind's thinking that reaches the viewer's perception by the unsettling sense of unity, linking it back to the experience of the lived body that Sobchack emphasises. Those bodily deviations disrupt the security of the lived body, and the viewer becomes aware of the relationship between the subjective feeling of having a body and the body itself. Thereby the horror, or disruption, uses the body as a site of the feeling of disturbance. The filmind's different mode of thought, is thus perceived as a distinctive way of subjectively searching beyond the objective body.

Death, life and sickness

Lastly, I want to delve into the pervasive themes of life, death and sickness in the analysed films. By building on the idea of how the filmind creates disruptions in the viewer's perception of the lived body, this section will explore how those themes are revealed and can be understood.

The death of Boonmee in *Uncle Boonmee* happens at the end of the film. Boonmee is led to a cave by the ghost of his wife together with Jen and Tong. He states that this is where he in one of his lives once were born. They all stay in the cave and Boonmee dies during the night. This is the first event of a solid timeline in the film, the earlier scenes have no clear events that can confirm a straight narrational order of events. What ends his life is the dialysis tube that becomes disconnected by his ghost wife. Fluids leave his body from the tube, and he slowly dies. Boonmee's kidney failure and the life supporting treatment that he's tied to becomes a big part of the story. Long and still shots of his caregiver giving him treatments while he's lying in bed makes his bodily condition a part of the film. *Uncle Boonmee* is the only film analysed that visibly shows someone dying. Death plays, in one way or another, a role in all four films through the appearance of ghosts and spirits. In the second story of *Tropical Malady*, when the soldier is on a mission of killing the spirit tiger, he's confronted with a moment where he must kill the spirit, resembling a human. It's not just death that the characters encounter, diseases also affect them, although it doesn't seem to bother them that much. In *Cemetery of Splendour* Jenjira has been seen limping throughout the film as her one leg is shorter than the other. Towards the end of the film, when she's being showed the ancient temple by the medium, she pulls up her trousers and reveals a severely swollen and deformed

leg. It doesn't hurt her, and she's not bothered by it, even though she cannot afford an operation for it. This untroubled way regarding obstacles of the body and life is a recurring subject. The strange sleeping condition that struck the soldiers isn't something that's worrying the characters, instead of trying to find a cure they're focusing on understanding the dreams and inner life of the soldiers. The women in *Hotel Mekong* that are possessed by the cannibalistic ghosts exist in the film as if it was a normal thing happening. And the scenes containing the women eating bloody intestines are no more thrilling than the scenes of people talking with each other.

Just like the film's fluid thinking about time, death and life are also fluid in an ongoing process instead of being events with a clear beginning at birth and an end at death. Life and death seem to be something that the film reflects loosely upon, unknowing of the complex significance it can hold. Here, the observational gaze, discussed earlier, also appears in the film's reflection about a changeable life, which is found in the long takes, the stillness and the characters' way of dealing with the unusual situations, making it appear as if the film is observing and accepting the situations rather than getting upset or sad. Boonmee's life is clearly affected by the illness that's making him stay in bed. The film lingers in these scenes, observing the entire situation from a distance, not wanting to interfere with what's going on. By not cutting the scene, the film reveals how it accepts the thought and lets that thought take the time it needs, instead of rushing the scene by making it shorter. In *Uncle Boonmee*, when Boonmee receives his treatment in bed, we can see the entire procedure for the treatment being done in silence, except for some exchanged sentences regarding the treatment (Figure 6). The film doesn't know what happens or what will happen in the scene, it waits patiently for what is to come. Boonmee is noticeably affected by his condition, but despite that, the film doesn't know what will happen before, or after, life, it is not a question it allows itself to be stressed about.



Figure 6. Boonmee receives his medical treatment. Still from *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010).

If Frampton's statement is taken by its word, that a film only thinks in a now-time and doesn't have a subconscious, then having concerns about a possible after life shouldn't be possible. The film in Weerasethakul's films does ponder upon life before and after the one happening right now, proving that there is some kind of underlying thought of a curiosity or concern. Though, this thinking is rather unproblematic from the point of view of the filmind, the calm reflections of the characters, that are not revealing feelings such as being frightened or sad about death, highlight this. Instead, the filmind reflects upon life with a curious attitude, letting whatever happens, happen. The filmind likely perceives death differently than we do. For us, death is the one certainty, a boundary that marks an end and our thinking cannot comprehend anything beyond it, just as we cannot recall anything of existence before birth. For Sobchack (2004) death in fiction film can portray it without the bearing the full weight of death's reality, films are able to explore imagery without being questioned for their truthfulness. As viewers we can therefore look at death more boldly and with an interest without violating the seriousness it holds (Sobchack 2004, p. 242). So, when we see death in film it signifies a clear rupture between life and death. What happens in Weerasethakul's films, with their unbothered thinking, is that we as viewers are exposed to a thinking that can neither be confirmed nor denied. We can only consume it without confronting its reality and accepting it as a way of thinking, and once again exposing ourselves to the limitations of our own thoughts. Thus, the filmind doesn't know what happens in the liminal state of life and death, the thinking explores different possibilities and accept them as a reality, allowing

anything to happen. This indicates a reflection upon existence where the filmind by some means is aware of the fragility of being alive. Though, this aliveness is not bound to a static living body, the filmind sees the dying of a body as the possibility for the 'spirit' to pass on. Understanding the filmind as not having a subconscious, as Frampton understands it, isn't entirely convincing as the filmind presents thinking influenced by a desire to know beyond what's known.

The filmind, unlike the viewer, has no objective body. No birth, no death and no boundaries that define it as a living organism. And yet, it seems haunted by the body's fragility. Its recurring attention to disease suggests a kind of subconscious awareness that when certain conditions overcome the body it can cause harm. While it cannot represent what happens before birth or after death, it remains in thought with the in-between, the liminal space. For the viewer, with a life marked by the fixed events of birth and death, these thoughts may seem abstract or uncertain. But for the filmind, they may be the most logical form of thought it can have. What we interpret as subconscious thoughts could in fact be the filmind's primary consciousness with fluid thoughts without boundaries. But as embodied beings we are too limited to understand that thinking. The filmind's 'subconscious' might not be a failure in knowledge but a form of thought that exists beyond our comprehension.

This claim leads back to Frampton's (2006) notion of the filmind's capability of only being in a conscious state, not revealing an 'inner consciousness', as he addresses it (Frampton 2006, pp. 70, 203). This is something that Ben Tyrer (2020) argues against, or at least he states that it's an incomplete argument. Cognition and thinking by both film and human cannot be completely conscious. Film is also shaped by an unconscious dimension with hidden elements that emerge beyond the viewer experience. Tyrer means that Frampton is ignoring his own arguments of the possibilities of the filmind's thought itself, suggesting that film-thinking should be used with the subconscious in mind (Tyrer 2020, pp. 28– 29). This argument aligns with the findings of this analysis. Frampton argues that a filmind is unable to drift away in thought, however, this analysis reveals something more complex. The filmind reveals a reflective awareness about time, life and being in their own world, which implies that the filmind in a way, is aware of its own 'body', though not in the same way as humans are. Some kind of awareness of the fragility of the body is therefore present in the viewer experience. But Frampton also mentions how the filmind can articulate a way of thinking beyond our conceptual understanding. This argument, together with the findings of the analysis supports the idea that the filmind has some kind of subconscious activity, though this subconscious is

bound to the logic of the filmind's thinking. In Weerasethakul's films the filmind might not have a subconscious in the human sense, but its structure does behave like one when expressing an underlying meaning or thought. Its ponderings about life and time, which are found throughout all of the films, is a feeling that glues the different stories and characters together.

Concluding discussion

This discussion examines how Weerasethakul's films express thought, what Frampton calls 'filmind', through mood, embodiment and perception. It highlights the filmind's expression of thinking and the viewer's lived-body experience of that thinking. The analysis suggests that Weerasethakul's films function as independent embodied entities that can challenge our human ways of perception and thinking. The films do not simply tell a story, they *think* through cinematic processes which is expressing a logic that's often non-linear, free and affective. They think in their own way, differently from human thinking, which makes it possible to not just tell a story but to communicate through ideas and thoughts about life through the images and sounds in real time. This non-human thinking is embodied in a way that we as viewers experience as something 'uncanny' or deviant, since we cannot follow its logic. Instead of completely understanding the filmind's thoughts, we experience them emotionally and physically through our lived bodies. This reveals a sense of the filmind's body that is liminal or fragmented through its representation of spirits, animals and dreams, which makes themes such as life, death and time to not appear as something fixated for the filmind. It thinks of them as something fluid, without a beginning or an end, and the bodies of the humans and animals don't seem to have any boundaries to either diseases or death.

The viewer experiences all this through their own lived-body which creates a strange, immersive relationship between the filmind and the viewer. This relationship and will to delve into the filmind is created in a suspension of what we, and the filmind, don't know. All the thoughts by the filmind creates the overarching mood of the film, several parts that become a whole, and vice versa. Mood becomes the shared space where the filmind and the viewer meet, through the bodily engagement of the viewer's self-perception. The filmind's subconscious thoughts pervade the narrative as it also becomes the narrative. Here, mood becomes the most prominent sign of the filmind having subconscious thoughts, it's not just aesthetic but an access to the filmind. More than creating an expressive tone of the film, the mood is the expressive force where the filmind's perceptual logic becomes understandable to

the viewer. The filmind is thinking in a liminal space, expressed through sensory and affective structures, suggests some kind of unconscious thinking. This challenges Frampton's (2006, 203) claim that the filmind only exists in a fully conscious state, which opens the possibility for a more layered kind of film-thought.

Here, the filmind's thoughts are not subconscious in the human sense, but in its own way. Therefore the analysis partly aligns with Ben Tyrer (2020) who states that film meaning is shaped by an unconscious dimension and elements that emerge beyond the viewers direct viewing experience. He proposes a model where the subconscious is integrated in the interpretive process of film-thinking, understanding films more as dreams (Tyrer 2020, pp. 28– 30). This way his model emphasises psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and how the filmind can express something beyond the evident narrative. The filmind therefore becomes something of a split object, instead of the only-conscious film thinking that Frampton addresses. Which takes a step away from the phenomenological approach of understanding the filmind. This is of course a way to further the understanding of the filmind, by trying to comprehend its dreamlike thinking through psychoanalysis. But since the aim of the thesis also is to investigate the viewer experience of the filmind, the theory of Sobchack comes in handy and can explain the perceptual experience without leaving the phenomenological context, in which meaning can be understood through the embodied experience and not in the unknown. This brings the bodily experience of film back into the spotlight, which I want to address as one of the most important aspects of the film experience and one of the reasons why we care about films so much.

Returning to Sobchack's (2004, p. 59) assertion that meaning-making in the film experience happens in the body through a sensorial process and before a reflective thought is formed. The aim of this essay is not to identify the filmind but rather trying to understand its expressions in the embodied viewer experience. So, by accepting the filmind's fragmented thinking as felt experiences at the viewer, it shows that a 'not fully articulated thought' doesn't have to be something unconscious. The viewer understands the filmind as different felt experiences of being in the world.

I want to return to the function of the mood in film. The analysis highlighted that it acts as both a sign of some kind subconscious process and as the bridge between film and viewer. This raises a question of the necessity of the viewer's thoughts for the filmind to be validated as a thinking entity. Is the filmind's existence dependent on our interpretation, or does it exist on its own, with or without our engagement? This leads us to a discussion about the

relationship between the film as something autonomous and the viewer being the one confirming the autonomy, which might seem like a loop. For Merleau-Ponty (1964, p. 169) meaning is always created in the relationship between the subject that perceives and the object that's being perceived, meaning that the concept of the filmind only becomes meaningful when someone feels it. But Sobchack (1992) claims that films, as film-beings, also experience through their own film bodies. This means that they are not just passive objects waiting to be interpreted, but active beings that perceive and express even before we engage with them (Sobchack 1992, pp. 285–286). So, if we see the filmind as a *being* expressing perceptions, then the filmind might 'exist' without being perceived, but the filmind's thinking becomes 'alive' in the act of perceiving. Meaning that the filmind is not without value in the absence of the viewer. But it's acknowledged through the encounter with the lived-body of the viewer, which also is where the filmind's thoughts and mood take shape. Weerasethakul's films does express characteristics of an autonomous thinking in the expressions of time and life, but they are not entirely independent, without the viewer's body they remain unfelt. The filmind doesn't need validation but recognition of feelings, and to understand that is to feel the film instead of interpreting it.

The use of Weerasethakul's films was well suited for the analysis as there is an abundance of mood in them. The way they tell stories in a calm and pondering way is suitable for the filmind theory. But all films radiate a mood in their own way. The theories of Frampton and Sobchack makes it possible to see and identify what aspects of the films make us immersed in them, gaining knowledge about why the filmind's expressed feelings made us feel a certain way. This type of approach is not tied to a certain type of films or storytelling, as all films express thinking in their own way. Thus, we can learn something new with every film we encounter. Since every human is different in their life experiences, memories and perceptions in lived-bodies, every new interaction between film and viewer generates new knowledge about meaning-making. In the analysis it became clear that the filmind tells different stories, or rather, puts attention to different kinds of thinking. *Hotel Mekong* stood out among the four films with its documentary style that draws attention to itself as a material object. The filmind concept emphasised this film as the one that most explicitly questioned what a filmind could be. When *Hotel Mekong* draws too much attention to itself as a result of human creation, it disrupts the possibility of a viewer being immersed. From this perspective, the filmind becomes less convincing and its thinking seems fragmented or unsure. Though, as the analysis highlighted this thinking also presents a filmind with an uncertainty. Making the viewer doubt

the determination of the thinking is also a way of becoming immersed in the film-world, creating an atmosphere of uncertainty that can act as a narrative force, all felt through the lived-body of the viewer. But, when approaching *Hotel Mekong* only from the perspective of Frampton, the filmind seems less convincing as a thinking entity. It is with the theory of Sobchack that it becomes easier to encounter it from the viewer experience.

Does this uncertainty of meaning of the filmind mean that the concept is only applicable to films with a strong thinking force of their own? If so, these kinds of films – that differ from classical storytelling styles, such as the semi-documentary style – risk being excluded from the filmind’s usage and therefore excluded from philosophical discussions. This would be a missed opportunity to further the filmind’s potential. Instead, the disrupted or self-conscious filmind should be seen as a different kind of thinking and not a weaker one. What it expresses is not a lack of thought, but a different form of thought that questions itself as a being. So, if we accept this dubious expression as a valid form of thought, then we open up the concept of the filmind to a broader understanding – as not all thinking must be linear or immersive. Some filminds have different kinds of narrative modes, which doesn’t exclude them from philosophical engagement. Instead, it highlights the potential to explore different modes of thought beyond the limits of classical narrative and perception. The ambiguity between the documentary style and fiction in *Hotel Mekong* reflects some kind of meta-liminality where a filmind exists between presence and reflection, between documentary and fiction. This aligns with the idea of liminal thought discussed in the analysis where film-thinking cannot always be linear, it can be fragmented and self-doubting. Just like the human thought where reflection is needed in the search for answers. This view doesn’t disrupt the viewer experience – it just needs a different kind of viewer engagement. From Sobchack’s perspective, the relationship between the film and viewer is co-constructed. Instead of rejecting the immersion in the uncertain filmind the viewer is invited to be more active in the viewing experience. Those kinds of films require the viewer to participate more consciously in the meaning-making. The films’ uncertain voice then, isn’t a failure but a different kind of thinking that reflects on the complexity of thought itself.

Ultimately this thesis highlights how the overall mood of a film shapes the viewer’s experience and forms a relationship between viewers and the filmind. It’s not just what we see, but what stays and stirs within us, what keeps us seeing film as something meaningful. Films become bodies around us with embodied presences, just like other human beings, and they shape us through a shared experience. By experiencing the filmind’s thoughts through

our own lived-body we can stay in a phenomenological understanding of film, focusing on perception and sensation, without relying on models that tends to favour symbolic interpretations. This way, we can affirm film's capability to think and feel with us. A Film's subjectivity opens up a perspective that belongs to the film itself. For a short time, we can enter another body, another way of feeling and thinking. We feel before we interpret something, it's the first thing that happens, even before we form an opinion. This is where film becomes truly meaningful and human, in its ability to sense something inside of us.

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Filmography

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