

Why Celluloid is Essential to Cinema

Chinese and the Koreans named cinema greatly, articulating cinema's most poetic and Essential characteristic. In Chinese, cinema is called 电影 (电 electric, 影 shadow); in Korean, cinema is called 영화 (영=映 = to shine, 화 = 画 = painting). In both languages cinema is an art that emerges out of something. Terms arose because of cinema's use of celluloid film in the past.

Movie were contained in rolls of celluloid film. People who wanted to watch a movie, however, did not go to a movie theater in order to stare at the rolls of celluloid. What they saw were the shadows of the celluloid rolls projected onto a screen. Cinema was "electric shadow"/"light painting".

When watching a celluloid film projection, viewers obtain the privilege to witness two things: 1) *past that is contained* in the film objectified by the camera's gaze and 2) *present in its process of becoming*. Because the gaze of the camera is not attributed to any subject but only to its self, which is a mechanical thing, the frame is sterile and viewers are invite to *objectively* observe the images on screen. In a rudimentary sense, cinema viewers can only see what and how the camera sees.

What is truly special in viewing a film that is being projected through celluloid is that the viewers witness the aging of the medium through grains and scratches on the celluloid that are magnified on screen. Thus, viewers witness two phenomena at the same time, as mentioned above. *A movie on a screen displays the captured past and the grains and scratches display the present state of the celluloid becoming old*. Further, because the camera frame renders any image within it to be viewed objectively, *the viewers of a movie get to objectively investigate the temporality of cinema, which is the Essential Being of cinema in the sense of phenomenological understanding of the essential universality of things*.

To sum it all up, celluloid film projection has the ability to objectify time, which is then given to the viewers to be observed objectively – "aiming exclusively at establishing 'knowledge of essences' and *absolutely no 'facts'*"¹. Cinema when projected through celluloid film is phenomenology – *the science of Essential Being* – made possible to be experienced as well as to be understood. Viewing cinema through rolls of celluloid film is not only for sake of experiencing the "filmic look". It really is for the sake of experiencing the Essence of cinema.

On the other hand, digital projection has no phenomenological quality, for celluloid is not present to display the present in the process of becoming old. With digital projection, cinema is no longer "electric shadow"/"light painting". It is rather a "digital slideshow" (literally twenty four JP2 files flashing each second) and it marks the end of cinema with and of Essence. If only filmmakers and film viewers had critically approached cinema before impulsively abandoning the use of celluloid film cinema would still have its Essence.

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2016/02/25
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¹ Edmund Husserl (the founder of phenomenology) does an extraordinary job in his book *Ideas* (1931) investigating the Essence of phenomena of psychology, of chemistry, of Nature, etc.