STYLISH POLITICS: LONG TAKES IN POST-1945 CINEMA

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is a politically conscious, comparative-historical formal analysis of long takes at the intersection of art and mass-market cinemas in the post-WWII era. Given the contemporary fascination with long takes in the critical discourse of film along with its fairly rampant employment in contemporary mainstream cinema, the discipline has lacked scholarship carefully examining formal techniques as such while remaining alert to the non-reductive possibilities for their political significance. Enlisting and building on the analytical approach of a cinematic poetics, the project outlines numerous contingencies in the practice of very long takes and their function in producing meaning before attending to the technique at the levels of cinematography, editing, and mise-en-scène in separate chapters. Objects of analysis are roughly divided in each chapter between progenitors of contemporary long-take practice—Italian neorealist films, *Rope* (1948), the 1960s and 1980s films of Jean-Luc Godard, and *Jeanne Dielman* (1975)—and more recent examples—*Timecode* (2000), *Children of Men* (2006), *Birdman* (2014), *A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night* (2014), and *Too Late* (2015).

The dissertation invests in the inseparability of form and content, as well as the political stakes of long take practice at both levels by parsing out the historical, technological, cultural, and diegetic contexts of long takes. In so doing, the approach

exemplifies previously unrecognized possibilities for employing a historical poetics in a

manner acknowledging a formal technique's commitments to and participation in social

power dynamics. These dynamics are legible within a film, in its production, and in its

participation in the historical tradition of authorship as constructed in European art

cinema.

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for Steve and Janet Jack—Dad and Mom—the two people whose support, faith, and love made this goal attainable. To the extent it can ever be said of mere humans, it is true, sans hyperbole: I owe you everything I have.

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INTRODUCTION

Preliminary Thoughts

In one of a series of interviews by novelist Michael Ondaatje, celebrated film

editor Walter Murch discusses the intricacies of when and how to edit raw shot material

in the construction of a film, a process he finds utterly intuitive. Explaining the need in

Hollywood-style filmmaking "to superimpose the rhythmic signature of the film on shots

that have no internal dynamic at all, which are simply held for length," Murch gives an

example from his experience editing a scene in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (dir. Anthony

Minghella, 1999). The scene follows a climactic sequence in which the protagonist has

killed another character and now stands on a beach watching the boat holding the body as

it slowly sinks. A medium over-the-shoulder shot keeps Ripley as well as the distant boat

in focus. In the interview, Murch poses and answers a question: "Ripley is sitting on the

beach and looks out to sea. There's a shot of the sea. How long do you hold it? You hold

it for as long as the thoughts you imagine Ripley is thinking can be held while you are

looking at that shot."[1]

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[1] Walter Murch in Michael Ondaatje, *The Conversations: Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 272.
 I am indebted to Professor Kenneth S. Calhoon for alerting me to Ondaatje's conversations with Murch and his own thoughts on the broad ramifications of this particular shot of Matt Damon's Ripley seen from behind.

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Figure 1: *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

Murch's approach to editing foregrounds a spectator's cognitive engagement with an on-screen character, an audience member's empathy as the guiding influence of how long to extend the duration of a shot before cutting—whether on set or in the editing room—to a new one. His philosophy also assumes a "rhythmic signature" "of" a "film" that, properly speaking, only exists as a process, idea, or goal while being edited. It also assumes that shots "simply held for length" have no such rhythmic signature as of yet, but the process of editing superimposes that rhythm. As such, Murch seems to believe that the process of cutting down otherwise simply "lengthy" shots is an intrinsic component of filmmaking, one that gives a film its rhythm or, perhaps, its heartbeat. This rule of thumb by a practitioner of filmmaking—one that Roger Ebert called "the most respected film editor and sound designer in the modern cinema"[2]—hints at the almost primal impulse to cut lest a film flatline. This image rather naturally raises the question of films composed in part or entirely of shots "held for length." Following the biological analogy, director of the single-shot feature film *Russian Ark* (2002) Alexander Sokurov stated his goal "to make a film in one breath," a nay-impossible feat until the advent of

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[2] Roger Ebert, "Why 3D Doesn't Work and Never Will: Case Closed," *Roger Ebert's Journal*, January 23, 2011, http://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/why-3d-doesnt-work-and-never-will-case-closed.

digital technology around the turn of the new millennium.[3] These counterpoints of editing styles—one standard practice in Hollywood and the other a feature of international art cinema—create a divide between a steady, even-tempered filmic pulse and a spectacular, Houdini-esque cinematic feat.

The comments by these filmmakers strike at a series of questions I address in this project, questions including craft practices, the intersection of aesthetics and subject matter, and the basic problem of what constitutes a "complete" shot. These issues give further rise to a glut of discursive, formal, theoretical, and political considerations borne out of long-take practices that must begin with clear vocabulary. Definitions only materialize after historical survey and close analysis determine how various discourse communities confer (somewhat) stable and (perpetually) nuanced meanings upon words.[4] As a discipline, film and media studies participates in this tradition like any other, with problems surfacing when scholars attempt to establish accurate, consistent terms with stable significations. Simply put, drawing boundaries is hard. Such is the central challenge my project hopes to address, one that studies the quantifiable, real-world elements comprising otherwise elusive works of cinematic expression and building a limited but robust taxonomy of this technique most often called "the long take."

Terms, Subject, & Stakes

To begin to address this issue more concretely, I offer what is arguably the most basic and primal technical term in cinema's vocabulary: the "shot." When we speak of a

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[3] Alexander Sokurov, "In One Breath," *Russian Ark* supplemental Blu-ray material, directed by Knut Elsterman (2002; New York: Kino Lorber, 2013), Blu-ray.

[4] I borrow the term "discourse community" from Prof. John Gage, whose text *The Shape of Reason* helped train me and my cohort of incoming Ph.D. students to teach composition courses to first-year university students. Gage's system of teaching writing is predicated on shared language in a diverse community interested in answering the same questions.

"shot," what do we mean? Described in the *Oxford Dictionary of Film Studies* as "the basic building block of all films," the entry goes on to list four primary but distinct definitions for the term. The first, "the apparent **distance** between camera and subject," revolves around the dimensions, size, and depth of the framed image.[5] This umbrella definition encompasses terms such as "long shot," "close-up," and "*plain américain*" (a type of shot named for its affinity by American camera operators during the classical period), among others (Fig. 2).[6] Second, a shot may also be "the **angle** of the camera in viewing the subject," another conception of the shot as static and spatial but this time having to do with the camera's angular perspective or position in relation to its subject. Consider here the examples of canted, low-angle, and point-of-view shots (Fig. 3). The third definition shares with the first two a fundamentally spatial aspect but attends to motion: "the **movement** of the camera during the shot," e.g., tracking, crane, and even static shots (Fig. 4).[7] Fourth and finally, we have "the number of **characters** within the frame," whether a two-shot or a three-shot (Fig. 5).[8] While there is a limited number of shot types within this category, the fourth definition of "shot" maintains a spatial and physical disposition, in this case focusing on the figures represented in a static image or still. Note that each of the following examples is labeled only according to one category of shot type while also illustrated three others. For example, Fig. 2 is labeled a "close-up

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[5] Kuhn, Annette, and Guy Westwell. "shot." <u>A Dictionary of Film Studies</u>. : Oxford University Press, 2012. <u>Oxford Reference</u>. 2012. Date Accessed 13 Jun. 2016 <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199587261.001.0001/acref-9780199587261-e-0635&gt>;. Emphasis added here and in subsequent three definitions.

[6] Stephen Teo, "Film and Globalization: From Hollywood to Bollywood," *The Routledge International Handbook of Globalization Studies*, ed. Bryan S. Turner (New York: Routledge, 2009), 415.

[7] I would point out that this definition's use of the term "shot" actually reflects the fourth definition, as it implies duration and even mutation.

[8] Kuhn & Westwell, ibid.

shot" (category 1) but also illustrates low-angle (category 2), static (category 3), and one-shot (category 4).

Figure 2: Close-up shot in *The Double Life of Veronique* (dir. Krzysztof Kieslowski, 1991)

Figure 3: High-angle shot in *North By Northwest* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1959)

Figure 4: Static shot in *Caché* (dir. Michael Haneke, 2005)

Figure 5: Two-shot in *They Live* (dir. John Carpenter, 1988)

"Shot"			
Camera-subject distance (scale)	**Camera angle (perspective)**	**Camera movement**	**Number of characters**
extreme close-up close-up medium close-up medium shot medium long shot long shot extreme long shot	canted low-angle high-angle low-level high-level point-of-view	tracking panning crane handheld/Steadicam tilt static	one-shot two-shot etc.

Table 1

Despite their differences, each one of these classifications of the "shot" shares

conceptual and linguistic commonality with the others. There exist numerous shot types

belonging to each definition, but "the shot" as a term so far retains a consistently spatial

character denoting the camera's proxemics with the image at a fixed point in time.

Admittedly, the movement inherent in the third definition assumes temporality, but space

remains primary. I appeal to Deleuze's "movement-image" to support this claim, that

camera movement—at least of the classical variety—is fundamentally spatial, using

temporal duration in service of spatial relations. Deleuze appeals to tracking shots in

Renoir and Welles films in which "the set of movements is distributed in depth in such a

way as to establish liaisons, actions and reactions" that produce a "unity of the shot."[9]

But at an even more primal level, camera movement presupposes duration no more than

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[9] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 26.

any other shot of cinema, which is intrinsically a medium of images of time unfolding in time. Even a freeze-frame, halting a recorded moment, isolates a point of time precisely by stretching out a spectator's experience of it. Within this understanding of the term "shot," then, *a shot cannot shift within a given category without then becoming a different shot*. That is to say, if an image corresponding to a label within the first category—say, a medium shot—shifts in movement and time to something else within that first category—say, a long shot—then we have two separate shots rather than one shot. Stated once more, a cinematic image is always simultaneously at least four shots. According to these definitions, temporal passage of a cinematic image *may* change the type of shot, though not necessarily.

Curiously, *Oxford* expounds upon these distinct definitional categories with an extended rumination on the term, immediately pivoting to the phenomenological nature of "the shot," in both spatial and temporal terms. The shot's temporality gets described as "a significant expressive feature" without ever defining the term's definitive relationship with time as such. Instead, the description that follows the four definitions appeals to three specific films in its attempt to explain the shot's temporal dimension. Significantly for present purposes, these three films are all products of auteurs and span the gamut from the relatively commercial mainstream (Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope*, 1948) to art cinema (Alexander Sokurov's *Russian Ark*, 2002) to the avant-garde (Stan Brakhage's *Window Water Baby Moving*, 1962). *Oxford*'s first four spatially-oriented definitions consistently range from 10-12 words each in their full entries, efficiently and decisively denoting the "shot" in its various configurations. The description that follows, focused on movement, runs more than 10 times longer (155 words) than any of the first four

definitions, struggling to express succinctly what this temporalized version of the "shot" precisely is and consisting almost entirely of a temporal aspect. Based on the explanation offered in the *Oxford Dictionary*'s entry, I offer a more succinct fifth denotation of the shot, defined as *the experience of an unbroken or successive duration of a stream of moving images initiated and terminated by edits*. As offering a definition is apt to raise more questions than offer answers, the ensuing chapters set out to do both.[10]

This definition remains deliberately ambiguous where the boundaries of the shot are now under discussion as well as subjective to accommodate the diverse perceptions of those boundaries. Since the shot, in this ultimate sense, hinges on temporal and spatial passage marked by distinct edits, do we defer to "edits" as understood by filmmakers (namely, film editors) or by audiences (which themselves are far from homogeneous)? As Chapter Three will explore, "edit" stands as another term demanding, if often refusing, clear definition. From earliest cinema to the most recent, numerous examples of "edits" complicate the working understanding embraced by scholars of film form. While it is safe to say that the most historically-common types of editing are identifiable as cuts, fades, dissolves, and wipes, digital technologies now offer filmmakers the option of rendering edits all but invisible. Are invisible edits still "edits"? How do we characterize shots in the context of this technique? In the actualities at the dawn of cinema, minor technical blips in the shooting of film created what in retrospect could be termed "unintentional jump cuts." Are *these* "edits"? Historically variable technologies, then, become one way in which traditional film definitions break down, in this case forcing analysts to identify

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[10] Note—the *Oxford Dictionary* goes on to acknowledge that the term "shot" still connotes "several additional meanings." Interestingly, all of these additional meanings are based in the experience of on-set production, the craft or technique of filmmaking by the practitioners themselves rather than the analysts who study it.

from whose perspective a term gets defined and where an exception to the rule might warrant revising that rule. An "edit" according to an editor does not necessarily equal an "edit" according to spectatorial experience, as the possibility of disguised edits illustrates. And if this is true of edits, it in turn becomes true of shots, whose boundaries depend on a stable notion of editing. I will attend to the symbiotic relationships between these filmic tools and elucidate other crucial interconnections across methodological boundaries, using the long take—another term demanding clear definition—as the touchstone.

In light of the above temporally inflected definition of a "shot," what is a "long take"? I submit that a long take, as understood in various discourses of film communities, is a moving image—wherein "moving image" is understood as a constant stream of filmic or digital frames correlating more or less to the experience of real time (as opposed to slow motion, for example)—persisting for a longer period than its discursive context has deemed normal, usually lasting longer than a minute. The inherently capricious nature of this technique is part of its allure as well as its elusiveness, an elusiveness reflected in the soft boundaries built into this definition. Elsewhere, the relativity of a long take's length has been compared with the relative depth or closeness of other shot types.[11] Importantly, a long take is entirely distinct from a "long shot," the latter fitting into *Oxford*'s first category with its notion of "length" applying to depth of space rather than duration of time. But because one of the definitions of "shot" so closely relates to the definition of "long take," discussions of the long take often lapse into a mislabeling of the technique with the recognizably different "long shot." Parsing out the difference between "shot" and "take" might provide some clarity. *Oxford*'s entry for "shot" goes on

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[11] Jeff Scheible, "Long Take," in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Film Theory*, ed. Edward Branigan and Warren Buckland (New York: Routledge, 2015), 273.

to distinguish between two sub-categories used on set and in the editing room: setups and takes. A "setup" occurs each "time the camera is positioned and framed for a specific shot," whereas a "take" is each time a reshoot takes place from the same setup.[12] "Long take," then, denotes a shot's lengthy running time while incorporating the connotation of a singular attempt to achieve a completed shot. The term's etymological significance, with reference to the production and post-production stages of filmmaking, imbue it with meaning extending beyond the criticism that analyzes it or the cinephilia that celebrates it. This reality demands a critical methodology accounting for the multifaceted nature of long takes, a technique irreducible to a construction of fandom, a critical trope, or marketing tagline. Long takes convey all of these and more. As a subset of the "shot" potentially manifest in virtually every moment, movement, and genre of cinema, it constitutes a discrete but supremely adaptable technique that tethers an eclectic sampling of films together while highlighting their distinctiveness. In the following chapters, I will use the term "long take" synonymously with the more hyperbolic "unbroken," "extended," or "prolonged shot" for purposes of readability and flow, despite the literalist contradiction in the term "unbroken shot." (Every shot, by definition, is "broken" by edits.)

But just as the sheer variety of long takes in practice reveals a far-from-monolithic technique, there exists a host of other synonyms for the term. At least some of these technical euphemisms can be credited to cinephiles, one significant discourse community known for celebrating and ranking many examples of long takes. "One-

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[12] Kuhn & Westwell, ibid.

shots," "oners," and "continuous shots/takes," are just a few of these alternate names.[13]

Some cinephiles do well to nuance these terms, such as Tony Zhou's admission in his

video essay on "The Spielberg Oner" that Spielberg's long takes "aren't even that long,"

usually "less than three minutes." Zhou highlights not the length alone of Spielberg's

oners but their length relative to their respective scenes, usually within "that one-minute-

to-two-minute zone."[14] Recognizing a pattern in Spielberg films not of "long takes" per

se, but of short scenes devoid of edits but marked by camera movement, Zhou chooses

the colloquial technical term "oner" over the less accurate "long take." Incidentally, the

formal term for "oner" is "sequence shot," which *Oxford* defines as "[w]here an entire

sequence is rendered in a single shot" and a "sequence" is defined as a "series of related

shots and scenes in a film, analogous to a book chapter, which constitutes a significant

phase of action or a move in the plot."[15] I find the chapter-book analogy an acceptable

one worth tracing to the sentence level. If a film is a book, a sequence is a chapter, a

scene is a paragraph, and a shot is a sentence, a "sequence shot" suggests a long sentence

spanning the entirety of a chapter. By extension, an ultra long-take feature-length film

devoid of cuts might be comparable to a book consisting of a single sentence. While the

meaning of "sequence shot" derives from the temporal length of the shot in relation to the

film's narrative structure, long takes are closely, sometimes intimately associated with

other camera techniques. Since long takes are always also definable by other aesthetic

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[13] Emilio Santoni, "The 15 Greatest Long Takes in Cinema History," *Taste of Cinema*, http://www.tasteofcinema.com/2014/the-15-greatest-long-takes-in-cinema-history/, last accessed 6/13/2016.

[14] Tony Zhou, "The Spielberg Oner – One Scene, One Shot," https://vimeo.com/94628727, last accessed 6/13/2016.

[15] Kuhn, Annette, and Guy Westwell. "sequence." A Dictionary of Film Studies. : Oxford University Press, 2012. Oxford Reference. 2012. Date Accessed 13 Jun. 2016; http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199587261.001.0001/acref-9780199587261-e-0619>.

elements (see above definitional categories), a critic may choose to characterize a long take by another primary camera technique, such as one in which movement takes precedence over duration. A "tracking shot" has a certain durational quality, requiring a sufficient period of time for camera movement "along tracks, or mounted on a mobile dolly or moving vehicle" to happen, but its definition relies primarily on this movement.[16] On account of this, many prolific tracking shots are also long takes; indeed, in some cases, they may feature no "tracking" at all. Numerous critics have designated the opening scene to the 2016 James Bond film *Spectre* (dir. Sam Mendes) a "tracking shot," but it's unclear if the camera ever "tracks" in the technical sense. In this scene, the camera—rather unusually for a studio film in the present era, a 35mm camera and thus more cumbersome than a digital equivalent—covers remarkably uneven ground completely adverse to dolly tracks. Cinematographer Hoyte van Hoytema explains that the shot worked through a combination of Steadicam work in league with a Technocrane, a few "shrewdly placed wipes and a smattering of CG."[17]

Zhou's video essay is only one of many choices available to web-surfers when it comes to long-take subculture, a fertile branch of cinephilia. As one of the most easily identifiable and virtuosic of camera techniques, the long take—particularly in the Internet age—is the gift that keeps on giving, a visual strategy appropriated by cinephiles in building almost innumerable blog posts, listicles, video essays, and critical articles. In a Google search for "long take" (quotation marks included, English-language only), the

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[16] Kuhn, Annette, and Guy Westwell. "camera movement." <u>A Dictionary of Film Studies</u>. : Oxford University Press, 2012. <u>Oxford Reference</u>. 2012. Date Accessed 13 Jun. 2016; http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199587261.001.0001/acref-9780199587261-e-0087>.

[17] "How 'Spectre's' Opening Scene Pulled off the 'Birdman' Effect." *The Hollywood Reporter*. The Hollywood Reporter. 6 November 2015. Web. 15 June 2016.

first 18 out of 20 results center entirely on the technique; another happens to be the name

of an Italian cinema dictionary, with only one result having nothing to do with film. Of

the 18 pieces about the long take, 3 are reference sites providing definitions (*Wikipedia*,

Columbia Film Language Glossary, and *Film Reference*), 7 are websites provide

rankings of "important" or otherwise impressive examples of long takes (e.g., *Indiewire*,

YouTube, and *The Telegraph*) and the remaining 8 offer some sort of analysis or technical

investigation of the long take (e.g., *The Guardian*, *Observations on Film Art*, and

Esquire). The sheer commercial breadth of these online publications testifies to the

popularity of the long take, a shift that seems most recently to have evoked the contempt

of cinephiles. As Oscar Wilde once contended to an audience of art students (perhaps the

cinephiles of his day), "Popularity is the crown of laurel which the world puts on bad art.

Whatever is popular is wrong."[18] Whatever validity may lie in cinephilic arguments

against the omnipresence of long takes, it is difficult not to see in this outcry a Hegelian

antithesis to match the long-take thesis. Such has been the reactionary disdain for the

long take's broad appeal that in recent years cinephiles from certain quarters have begun

parodying its trendiness. In addition to mockeries of the long-take obsession unique to

social media such as Twitter (see stills below[19]), a somewhat popular series of YouTube

videos spoofing the video-essay format lampoons the long take at the levels of

filmmaking practice—"From a technical standpoint, long takes are almost always

impressive because they elevate a scene to a metaphorical tightrope!"—film theory—

"It's important, because it's real cinema!"—film history—"The first film was actually

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[18] Oscar Wilde, *The Wit and Humor of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Alvin Redman (New York: Dover, 1959), 58.
[19] Matt Zoller Seitz, Twitter post, July 27, 2015, 1:50 p.m., http://twitter.com/mattzollerseitz; Booze,
Twitter post, July 6, 2015, 10:17 a.m., http://twitter.com/boozewallet; Peter Labuza, Twitter post, July 24,
2015, 10:35 a.m., http://twitter.com/labuzamovies.

one long take!"—and fandom—"At the end of the day, if you haven't shot a full 47

seconds of unbroken footage, there is a good chance your film will not be discussed by

the Internet blogs!"[20]

Figure 6: Long take cinema as butt of jokes on Twitter

Regardless of their contempt or enthusiasm, these cinephilic content-makers

accept the long take as a filmmaking tool relevant to the present moment and assume an

audience that shares familiarity with the trend. Acknowledging those relatively recent

films whose foregrounded long takes veritably ignited the conversation—from

filmmakers like Alexander Sokurov, Alfonso Cuarón, Emmanuel Lubezki, and Alejandro

González Iñárritu—many of these critics choose to highlight the "best" examples of the

technique over time. An especially popular video counting down the "12 Best Long

Takes in Film History"—with well over a million YouTube views—includes examples of

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[20] "WHY IS CINEMA: The Long Take (Cinema's Most Important Shot)," YouTube video, 2:41, posted by Cameron Carpenter, April 18, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=an0BWlItSHo.

long takes as far back as Orson Welles's 1958 *Touch of Evil*.[21] The top 5 exemplars

chosen, however, only stretch back to the 1990s: (5) *Boogie Nights* (dir. Paul Thomas

Anderson, 1997), (4) *Gravity* (dir. Alfonso Cuarón, 2013), (3) *Goodfellas* (dir. Martin

Scorsese, 1990), (2) *Snake Eyes* (dir. Brian DePalma, 1998), and (1) *Children of Men*

(dir. Alfonso Cuarón, 2006). In something of an afterword, the voiceover encourages

viewers to list more films in the comments section, even giving a nod to *Russian Ark*,

perhaps a curious omission from the list given its far more extensive length than the

others. But this testifies to the overlapping interests of long takes with thrilling spectacle.

If *Russian Ark* can be neatly (if unfairly) summarized as a long walk through a museum,

then the first five films on this list (and most of the others) are characterized as action

and/or plot-driven vehicles by directors popular in the American film market.

Thesis Statement

      This last point, regarding authorship, demands focused attention. I contend that

long takes and the figure of the auteur operate in a tight-knit, symbiotically generational

relationship. As subsequent chapters will argue, some directors employ impressive(ly)

long takes in order to assert themselves as auteurs; on the other hand, sometimes it

appears that a director flaunts their authorial freedom by employing lengthy—and

therefore expensive—shots that would be impossible for a less-esteemed director to

engineer (and find someone to pay to produce them). Thus, the possibility of a long take

is intimately connected with questions of authorship and industry: what faith does the

studio or production company have in the director's artistry—and box-office draw—to

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[21] "12 Best Long Takes in Film History," YouTube video, 8:36, posted by CineFix, April 14, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLFHdagIw6o.

allow the potentially-costly risk of a long take? Does the schedule permit enough time to carry out a long take, the planning for which can exponentially extend the shooting of a scene? Can the production afford the technology (Steadicam, rigging, and "a smattering of CG") to carry out the long take as conceived by the director and cinematographer? If the attempt fails in the available window of time, what ancillary resources exist to complete the scene for the film? Would the use of long takes assist in the film's promotion or chances of showing at a festival, ultimately benefitting its reception and financial return? All these and more questions realistically face those who would execute a technique that is—notwithstanding cinephilic ardor—quite unnecessary. Like any secondary strategy in filmmaking (there really is only one primary strategy, the shot), the long take is, in the language of philosophy, a contingency: it is true (or real), but not necessarily so. Whether inspired by artistic impulse, financial pragmatics, or authorial aspiration, every long take since the development of basic editing techniques could have been shot as a series of shorter takes. This is not to detract from the technique's validity or relevance, only to acknowledge the (rather obvious) premise that any artistic technique might have been otherwise, and the long take is no exception.

Having established some of this project's central definitions, its overall thesis can find a footing. Cinema history reveals multifarious examples of long takes, no two of which are quite alike though often akin. Sometimes associated with art cinema and an accompanying slowness, long takes also reflect a tradition in more commercially-driven cinemas, wherein they frequently flaunt virtuosic spectacle or skill related to the camera. Each subsequent chapter traces a microcosmic development of post-WWII long-take practice across historical moments finding a point of contact at the contemporary

crossroads of art and mass-market cinemas. In each case, I link the contemporary film(s) with one or more earlier forebers of long-take form in order to detect the legacy of long takes with similar features, effects, or politics in the hybridized space of today's American cinema. The project does not constitute an exhaustive history of the long take or even, strickly speaking, a history. Each chapter performs comparative historical analyses of film style, filmmaking practice, and contextual matters with the long take as the focal tool and point of entry. Thereby each demonstrates the heterogeneity of a single technique, the technique's relationship with authorship, and its contribution to a film's political investments. I also aim to show how the analytical principles of cinematic poetics—heir to Russian Formalism and its more recent descendent in neoformalism— can unveil these political investments by way of form and its constituting elements. If, as I have already argued, every filmic technique is a contingency, then every choice leading to every technique can be excavated for its political implications. For example, thanks to Laura Mulvey it is a commonplace that choices related to central characters, camera angles, and costuming encourage a male gaze contributing to the politically regressive act of objectifying on-screen women.[22] I maintain that the same principles and their ethical ramifications are more or less expressed by the language of film in every other context, but our vocabulary of how film form *does* politics requires expansion and the attendant critical enterprise demands more practice. Performing this work at the junction of mass-market and art cinemas, further, obligates that vocabulary to speak to diverse but linked modes of film practice.

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[22] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009): 14-30.

<u>Art Cinema & Its Peripheries</u>

        The following chapters will expand a fuller description of art cinema at the level of style, taking Bordwell's "mode of film practice" as a point of departure.[23] *Oxford*'s definition of art cinema removes the language of "mode" and refers to it as a "film practice and associated critical category defined by certain formal or aesthetic properties," contrasting it with "mainstream commercial film" and acknowledging the "fuzzy boundary" it shares with the European avant-garde.[24] Here *Oxford* aligns art cinema with significance at the levels of craft practices, criticism, aesthetics, and its relationships with peripheral industrial or institutional modes of cinema. Since terms such as "industry" and "institution"—which may bear self-evident meanings—will appear throughout the project, I want to ensure maximal clarity by establishing boundaries for them now. For purposes of consistency, I appeal again to *Oxford* regarding film industry, understood as the "ensemble of film companies, studios, creative and technical personnel, producers, and others that initiate and organize the process of film production, distribution, and exhibition."[25] The standard of for-profit commercial cinema in the United States (and many other nations) finds alternative models in countries with state-supported or state-subsidized cinemas. For my purposes, a film's industrial significance in the pages that follow will typically be contained in the subcategory of film companies along with creative and technical personnel. Art cinema itself does not constitute an industry, but rather it operates across industrial divisions and may thrive or suffer

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[23] David Bordwell, "The Art Film as a Mode of Film Practice," in *Poetics of Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

[24] Kuhn, Annette, and Guy Westwell. "art cinema." In *A Dictionary of Film Studies*. : Oxford University Press, 2012. http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199587261.001.0001/acref-9780199587261-e-0032.

[25] Kuhn, Annette, and Guy Westwell. "film industry." In *A Dictionary of Film Studies*. : Oxford University Press, 2012. http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199587261.001.0001/acref-9780199587261-e-0281.

depending on the industrial model of a given context. As for the language of "institution,"

Oxford provides no entry and scholars as a whole assume meaning, very often slipping it

into adjectival lists along with terms like "industrial," "national," and "generic." Steve

Neale has tried to understand art cinema itself as an institution by virtue of bearing its

own "film industry and film culture."[26] Others, such as David Andrew, agree but take the

extra step of reconsidering the term itself. Deriving its uses from Neale and others,

Andrew argues that an institution denotes "a social construct collectively created and

maintained over time."[27] While also acknowledging that art cinema encompasses myriad

other institutions (related to film festivals, arthouse theaters, and the film studies

discipline), Andrew and others conceive of art cinema as an umbrella institution that has

evolved significantly over time and manifests itself in its innumerable geographical

contexts. Consistent with Andrews, Bordwell, and other scholars of art cinema, I refer to

art cinema in part as a cultural (and somewhat meta-cultural) institution in this sense,

even as I trace how some of these scholars offer accented or competing characterizations

of art cinema. I also extend some of the same language to mass-market cinema, that

commercial tradition of so-called "mainstream" movies from which art cinema has

historically distinguished itself, since the two have always bore a host of similarities

distinguishing them from cinematic modes such as experimental, documentary, home

video, and exploitation. As I will elaborate further in the following chapter, the

distinction between art and mass-market cinemas has been increasingly complicated.

    Art cinema, typically conceived as a European movement, nonetheless escaped

European borders both during its heyday in the 1950s-1960s and especially in its post-

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[26] Steve Neale, "Art Cinema as Institution," *Screen* Vol. 22, No. 1 (1981), 11.

[27] David Andrew, "Art Cinema as Institution, Redux: Art Houses, Film Festivals, and Film Studies,"
Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies, Issue 18 (Oct 2010), 3.

1990 wave of global circulation. And although art cinema has often self-identified as inherently legitimate in contradistinction to mainstream cinema, its survival as "art" has always required the foil of the "vulgar" mainstream (often, but not always Hollywood). The figure of the auteur, coined and developed by critic-filmmakers associated with the French *nouvelle vague*, is one instance of art cinema's effort to distinguish itself from mainstream cinema. That being said, these French critics initially applied the term as much to Hollywood directors such as Hawks and Hitchcock as to Europeans like Bresson and Murnau. Indeed, the *nouvelle vague*'s importance to the development of "art cinema" as a mode can hardly be exaggerated, and the figure of the auteur to the *nouvelle vague* likewise. Notwithstanding art cinema's dependence on mainstream cinema, many auteurs have seen the former as autonomous. Mid-century Soviet director Andrei Tarkovsky in a way embodies the autonomy of the art-cinema auteur, with scholars often—perhaps usually—situating his films within European art cinema "rather than a Russian or Soviet film tradition."[28] In his autobiography *Sculpting in Time*, Andrei Tarkovsky writes, "I am only interested in the views of two people. One is called Bresson and one is called Bergman," going on to add, "What is Bresson's genre? He doesn't have one. Bresson is Bresson. He is a genre in himself."[29] Tarkovsky goes on to list Antonioni, Bergman, Kurosawa, and Fellini as other directors who *are* their own genres and thus transcend the generic constraints of cinema in general.

Tarkovsky's tribute thinly veils a self-congratulatory assumption about the lineage of auteurs in which he situates himself, a lineage that stands out chiefly against the backdrop of mainstream cinemas, and only from certain social, cultural, and political

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[28] Jeremy Mark Robinson, *The Sacred Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky* (Maidstone, UK: Crescent Moon Publishing, 2008), 45.
[29] Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003), 150.

contexts. As for technique, some but not all of these auteurs embraced the long take as a practice foundational to their stylistic signatures. During the exhibition of Antonioni's *L'Avventura* at the Cannes Film Festival in 1960, spectators shouted out, "Cut!" repeatedly, finding the takes too long (read: "slow") for their liking.[30] Bresson wrote, "Against the tactics of speed, of noise, set tactics of slowness, of silence."[31] In his book, Tarkovsky takes pride when describing the penultimate scene in *The Sacrifice* as "the longest scene [sic] in the history of cinema."[32]

To round out the cinematic landscape as discussed in this project, I draw again on *Oxford* for a definition of "avant-garde film" consistent with the above terms and thereby situating it within a discourse of established (though fluctuating) meanings in relationship with one another. *Oxford* refers to avant-garde cinema as "[a]n international film practice that explores cinema's capacity to manipulate light, motion, space, and time, and/or expresses the filmmaker's personal artistic vision," "linked to broader trends and practices in fine art" and "particularly closely associated with modernism." Apropos of my purposes, the entry goes on to note that avant-garde cinema's influence traces back to 1920s European artists who were "motivated by a desire to add a temporal dimension to painting and sculpture."[33] Chapter Four attends in part to a film that rides this line and performs this "temporal dimension" to a painterly visual style. Finally, independent cinema constitutes another locus of study for the coming chapters, where it will receive

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[30] Mark Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 5.

[31] Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer* (London: Quartet Encounters, 1986), 52.

[32] Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 227. Almost certainly, Tarkovsky means to say "shot." Incidentally, Tarkovsky also describes it a lasting "a full six minutes." While true, the remark is odd because a much longer shot exists earlier in the same film (about 10 minutes).

[33] Kuhn, Annette, and Guy Westwell. "avant-garde film." In *A Dictionary of Film Studies*. : Oxford University Press, 2012. http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199587261.001.0001/acref-9780199587261-e-0047.

fuller attention. For now I call again on *Oxford*, which defines it simply as "[a]ny type of filmmaking that takes place outside the mainstream film commercial industry," a broad understanding upon which I will expand in Chapter Four.[34] It merits mention, however, that the "mainstream" or "commercial" film industry from which most of the aforementioned practices are distinguished does not receive a dedicated entry in *Oxford*. While this might be a case of comparing apples and oranges—an ostensible "industry" as opposed to a (mode of) practice—the omission likely serves to illustrate the hegemony of the mainstream, or what Bordwell calls "mass-market cinema," an industrial approach to film production comprising the mode of film practice her terms "classical cinema."[35]

Methodology

The approach taken in the following chapters has flowed naturally out of my background as a lover of movies who came to film studies as a discipline after working in two other fields of the humanities. Turning to elementary textbooks simultaneously with works applying high theory to films, I appreciated the level of analysis written for an undergraduate audience as best suited to the objects of study while theoretical and ideological works tended to take me farther away from the films, lacking a closer understanding of their function *as* films. Pam Cook, Kristin Thompson, and David Bordwell have produced rigorous and detailed accounts of film history and developments of style across movements, modes, and national contexts. The work of teaching that has

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[34] Kuhn, Annette, and Guy Westwell. "independent cinema." In *A Dictionary of Film Studies*. : Oxford University Press, 2012.
http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199587261.001.0001/acref-9780199587261-e-0370.
[35] David Bordwell, "Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in Contemporary American Film," *Film Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (Spring 2002): 22.

supported this project has kept me tethered to this overarching approach, one balancing

film history intrinsically—relations of French poetic realism to the French New Wave—

and extrinsically—how U.S.-occupied Japan led to subversive subtexts in a late 1940s

Akira Kurosawa film—and addressing cinematic expression, broadly speaking, as a

unique one with conventions all its own. Convinced of the inherent value of promoting

this understanding to students, and inspired by the continued work of Thompson and

Bordwell (now emeriti professors) in their scholarly books and popular blog, I am

committed to perpetuating this approach within and beyond the classroom, where

Thompson and Bordwell's textbooks *Film History: An Introduction* and *Film Art: An*

Introduction are reigning standards. And as Bordwell stands as one of the most often-

cited cinema scholars in non-academic film criticism, the analytical tools of this project

have the potential benefit of bridging not only style and subject matter, politics and form,

but also academics and critics, teachers and students.

Parsing a film's production background and reception culture—in concert with its

formal tools and audio-visual fabric—alerts us to the technical and artistic choices as well

as industrial and technological limitations that together produce that film's form. The

information gathered in this process helps fashion an understanding of the film not as

mere inspiration for scholarly contemplation or cinephilic desire but toward a stronger

and more durable assimilation of diverse tools for cross-disciplinary inquiry and dialogue

within and outside academic borders. Rather than a stereotypically "formalist" approach

to the objects under analysis—subjugating all choices, elements, effects of the film to

questions of style alone—I borrow from Bordwell an approach of "poetics," an analysis

of "how films work, and why under certain circumstances they came to look the way they

do." This exploration involves "a wide range of factors: artistic intentions, craft guidelines, institutional constraints, peer norms, social influences, and cross-cultural regularities and disparities of human conflict."[36] If auteurist approaches are invested in locating points of similarities and evolution of a distinctive style across the oeuvre of a particular director, and if historically-based studies of films depend on pinpointing formal motifs and cultural artifacts of films embedded in their respective moments, then poetics works to take into account the myriad irreducible and (oftentimes) contradictory forces giving rise to a film.

Under this rubric, any film both is and is not a discrete object of analysis. Every object bearing the name of "film" possesses an intrinsically closed form (sometimes more than one), sequels and remakes notwithstanding. But a film is always embedded in a host of contexts leaving direct and indirect marks on the film's production, distribution, exhibition, and reception, and vice versa. In this sense, poetics can gesture toward a film's political significance, insofar as politics entails "the acquisition or exercise of power, status, or authority."[37] But poetics can also ignore such considerations when they do not constitute the proximate coordinates of analysis, such as when politics seems to flow out of an interpretive act rather than a merely analytical one. So I borrow also from Jacques Rancière, who maintains, "Artistic practices are 'ways of doing and making' that intervene…in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility." Just as the stage "is simultaneously a locus of public activity and the exhibition-space for

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[36] Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*, 1.
[37] "politics, n.". OED Online. March 2017. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.libproxy.uoregon.edu/view/Entry/237575?redirectedFrom=politics (accessed May 13, 2017).

'fantasies'," so also does cinema possess diegetic and extra-diegetic levels.[38] These levels may stand as competing, parallel, or (most often) complex strata of social power dynamics demanding both an analyst and an interpreter to parse out textual interplay and political significance. Scouring the agencies and confluences exerting roles in the production of a given film obligates one to account for social power forces precisely as forces, interrogating biases of authorship legible within a film and in the discourses surrounding it. Debates on authorship within the discipline and in communities of critics and cinephiles too often assume an ultimate arbiter of a film's art (and meaning) as well as the reducibility of that arbiter to the director, the producer, the studio, or a multiplicity of spectators. Poetics can be applied to deconstruct this assumption by dissecting a film as the heart of a centripetal and centrifugal series of conditions, a text within contexts. So while poetics as a rule attends primarily to the film, this democratizing methodology cooperates with other critical approaches—including theoretical lenses—customizing itself to perspectives that would seek to expand the critical discourse of a film without subjugating it to a monolithic compartmentalization. To be fair, few if any methodologies necessarily does such violence to an object of analysis by deliberately ignoring its complicating factors. Their practitioners, on the other hand, sometimes do. But it may be said that poetics simply has as its central premise the potential validity of any number of approaches and seeks to provide the tools and language to put these strategies in dialogue.

In this project, I exploit the democratic capacities of poetics by deploying its tools toward films employing long takes while remaining politically alert to power dynamics

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[38] Jacques Rancière, "The Distribution of the Sensible: Politics and Aesthetics," in *The Politics of Aesthetics* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004), 8.

performed in, by, and around the films under analysis. Amounting to a syntactical element of film style, an examination of long takes might easily slip into bare formalism, but it is here where I believe this politically conscious approach can prove most fruitful. Although my approach might productively be employed toward any number of formal techniques, long takes' association with filmmaking virtuosity and audience spectacle suggest an immediately apparent power dynamic with questions relating to the film (sometimes reduced to the "auteur") and the audience. Expanding each of these simplistic figures will tease out the irreducible but perceptible tensions existing across all the levels that poetics purports to account for. And so, avoiding formalism's sometimes-apolitical tendencies, this methodology nonetheless takes style seriously. While attending to a film's political elements—in subject matter as well as form—I will engage poetics toward a relatively scientific or objective examination of how a politics is produced by and reflected in this aspect of cinema called long takes. Far from imposing an external methodology upon the films, poetics strives to do history while doing analysis, yielding results that the artist-practitioner as well as the critic-analyst might find useful, results nevertheless accessible to and potentially valuable to film theorists. The versatility of a poetics does not pretend to transcend methodologies but works to provide the indispensable voice of a methodological ambassador, rigorously parleying the building blocks of cinematic construction, from the hard-and-fast to the slippery.

Bordwell stands as the most prolific exemplar of poetics as a methodology. In his 1989 book *Making Meaning*, Bordwell sets forth poetics in contradistinction to the interpretive enterprise in its myriad forms. In a word, if interpretation tends to overlay texts, artworks, and objects with schemata in order to draw predetermined readings out of

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them, then poetics seeks to begin with the texts, artworks, and objects with full attention to their contradictions, nuances, and contingencies. If interpretation tends to discard formal analysis except when a given stylistic technique lends further support to an ideological critique, poetics works to understand that camera movement in light of industrial conventions, historical context, directorial practices, and innumerable other variables. Perhaps most importantly, if interpretation eschews textual contradictions and any elements conflicting with an internally coherent hermeneutic, then poetics foregrounds those contradictions by celebrating the multiple meanings a film produces by way of the many factors contributing toward its composition. As such, poetics does not reject interpretive or theoretically based analyses of films but rather holds them accountable by attending closely to questions of style and history. Within poetics, the fabric of a film intends toward certain effects within its audience and functions toward various significations. It may participate overtly or unconsciously in a generic discourse. But poetics does not see films as "inviting" certain readings above others so much as films themselves as the productions, already producing meanings within the complex continua of the film's goals and effects. This being said, historical poetics aims not to discard interpretation per se but to reposition "its protocols within a broader historical inquiry."[39] Analytical poetics complementarily resituates a film's properties within their domestic context, not extracted from the film and reorganized but laid alongside other techniques and filmmaking tools to recognize patterns, practices, problems, and the like. As Bordwell notes, poetics does offer a kind of epistemological framework for the critic, but he insists that "some frameworks are more complex, precise, and nuanced than

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[39] Bordwell, *Making Meaning*, 265.

others; some reveal anomalies and counterexamples rather than mask them off."[40] By

way of thorough and close examination of a film's elements and its variables, poetics

borrows a more empirical model of scientific investigation and allows results to surface *a

posteriori*, results shedding light on filmmaking, film industries, authorship,

spectatorship, and criticism.

Literature Review

André Bazin's writings on a few central and interrelated topics—among them the

long take—form a major basis for the long take's historiographic significance. Film

scholarship and criticism today still reflect an almost universal but mostly unspoken

obligation to acknowledge Bazin's contribution to long-take analysis. Chapter Two will

review and apply Bazin's approach to long takes in terms of temporal duration, cinematic

realism, and the Italian neorealist movement. For now, it suffices to state that Bazin

placed enormous import on the long take and its employment by a select number of

auteurs. He argued that extended shots embody the essence of the cinematic image in

contradistinction with Sergei Eisenstein, whose Soviet-montage approach prioritized the

politically meaningful clash of images produced by disjunctive editing. In this sense,

Bazin's stance was polemical, a policy rhetorically anticipating that of *les politiques des

auteurs* developed by his *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics in the years to follow. While Bazin

thoroughly reasoned his position with plenty of evidence, his position stands in such

opposition to Eisenstein that subsequent generations of critics and scholars have largely

rejected the dichotomy between the two. But whereas Eisenstein's theory is typically

equated with the political—with a dialectical approach associated with Marxism—

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[40] Bordwell, 266.

Bazin's can be potentially understood as endorsing "a kind of democracy of perception" in which the spectator is "free to pick and choose what to look at within the frame, rather than have the filmmaker pick out what he or she considers important by cutting and foregrounding specific faces of objects."[41] Here I also note that although Bazin's Western, religious, and classical approach to criticism—to say nothing of his ties with the French New Wave—has contributed to his reputation as an auteurist, Eisenstein assumed a similar model of upper directorial echelons. This as well as his basic position regarding shots and editing are contained in the statement, "The minimum 'distortable' fragment of nature is the shot; ingenuity in its combinations is montage."[42] Crucial to this project is the relationship of cinematic authorship to the question of a shot and its borders, as well as the historical tendency among these thinkers to locate a politics among these relations.

Decades following the (early) deaths of Eisenstein (1948) and Bazin (1958), once film studies itself was well established, Brian Henderson's essay "The Long Take" (1976) brought the technique under critical discussion at a moment when film theory had begun its lengthy reign over the burgeoning discipline. As such, Henderson is at pains to prove the theoretical stakes of his subject. Today Henderson's essay is most valuable for its insistence that both Bazin and Eisenstein went to unnecessary extremes by positing an antithetical relationship between the long take and editing, rather than one of codependence. Henderson asserts that the relationship between these two elements— "elements" in the full sense of foundational, atomic-level components of cinematic construction—is both crucial and symbiotic. A long take—even a short one, for that matter—depends on how its beginning and ending cuts inflect it. Henderson goes so far

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[41] Robert P. Kolker, "Studying the Film Text," in *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, ed. John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 16.
[42] Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Sense*, trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 5.

as to say that a "cut which ends a long take—how it ends as well as where—determines or affects the nature of the shot itself."[43] Bill Nichols disagrees with Henderson on this point, insisting that the boundaries of a shot "are of a different logical type from the material they punctuate."[44] I choose to defer this debate with the observation—also to be explored in Chapter Three—that edits *matter* in relation to their respective shots. Henderson helpfully notes that the relationship between long takes (or shots in general) with edits has historically been one and the same with that of mise-en-scène and montage. For if mise-en-scène is, as Henderson puts it, "the art of the image itself," then mise-en-scène plays out in the visual space and elapsed time—in a word, the shots— between edits. This visual space may be best understood as "of a different logical type" from montage—the art of joining images together—but this dispute only highlights the incontestability of montage's acutely intimate relationship with mise-en-scène, of edits with shots.

Mark Le Fanu's "metaphysics" and "post-Bazinian reflections" on the long take trace the French theorist's bold claims to its contemporary moment in 1997, a moment just predating cinema's digital shift that would introduce new possibilities for the long take, as Le Fanu recognizes. Acknowledging Bazin's critical legacy "at the end of a tradition," Le Fanu writes that Bazin somewhat contradictorily argued for the long take as a kind of primal return to cinema's origins while also maintaining a teleological element in his historiography of film. Le Fanu rightly wonders whether Bazin truly believed cinema would have been "better off without the innovations of Griffith or Eisenstein" but goes on to survey film history's examples of long takes to support his claim that "the

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[43] Brian Henderson, "The Long Take." *Movies and Methods Vol. 1*. Ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976), 319.
[44] Bill Nichols, editorial preface to Henderson, 314.

Bazinian tradition of the long take, with its finely realistic and psychologically nuanced *mise-en-scène*, is still observably vibrant and living." Le Fanu makes this case in part by teasing out the differences between a more static and contemplative long take style versus a flashier moving one "that signals the director's virtuosity; the challenge here being to show what he or she can do" in a "one-off set piece, often opening or closing the film."[45] The author does well to acknowledge that this distinction in long take style has existed for decades, tracing a shift toward mobile camerawork from a more stationary approach to the pre-sound era. For the purposes of this project, Le Fanu's distinction between stationary and virtuosic camera styles helpfully breaks down long takes into two categories, although I find unhelpful Le Fanu's language of "metaphysics," as his division does not delve into a philosophical or theoretical analysis of these broadly reducible styles as much as it simply differentiates them with aims associated with authorship. In the coming pages, I will address these concerns—authorship, mobile versus static camera styles, and the legacy of Bazin—using Le Fanu's distinction as a starting point.

Unbroken shots have long been intimately linked with art cinema, as virtually every scholarly text attending to art cinema's formal attributes acknowledges. Most of these works break down art cinema's overarching stylistic goals into particular sub-modes such as a long-take aesthetic, along with transcendentalism and serialism (according to Mark Betz) or soft lighting and deep focus styles (according to András Bálint Kovács).[46] In this study I do not attend to long takes restricted to art cinema per se,

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[45] Mark Le Fanu, "Metaphysics of the 'Long Take': Some Post-Bazinian Reflections," *P.O.V.* No. 4 (Dec 1997), http://pov.imv.au.dk/Issue_04/section_1/artc1A.html.
[46] Mark Betz, "Beyond Europe: On Parametric Transcendence," in *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*," ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 31; and

or in its ancillary movement "slow cinema," in which long takes form one of the central

phonemes of stylistic grammar. A work of scholarship such as Ira Jaffe's *Slow Movies:*

Countering the Cinema of Action occupies a liminal space encompassing both slow

cinema and the more standard art cinema with which it overlaps, regarding long takes as

an omnipresent technique producing a spectatorial effect of slowness.[47] Art cinema's

claim to long takes possesses historical basis, despite the technique's mongrel

manifestations in contemporary cinema. Whether F.W. Murnau's post-immigration

assertion of European authorship in *Sunrise* (1927); Orson Welles' use of long takes in

Citizen Kane (1941) and *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), contributing to the

exasperation of RKO Studios; Carl Theodor Dreyer's continuous movement during a

climactic long take in *Ordet* (1955); Michelangelo Antonioni's nay-impossible long-take

zoom in *The Passenger* (1970); Chantal Akerman's incredibly lengthy, static shots of the

titular character in *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles* (1975); or

choose-your-long-take in the films of Tarkovsky, from *Andrei Rublev* (1966) to *The*

Sacrifice (1986), art cinema's consistent employment of long takes has long acted as a

marker of a contemplative, oftentimes spiritual viewing strategy and evidence of an

auteur behind the camera. In the context of Hollywood, this auteur's use of long takes has

often caused an abrasive relationship with the studio. For a more thorough (but non-

exhaustive) taxonomy of long takes and associated effects and styles, see Appendix A.

András Bálint Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema 1950-1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 51.

[47] Ira Jaffe, *Slow Movies: Countering the Cinema of Action* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2014).

<u>Chapter Summaries</u>

Following this chapter, Chapter Two explores contemporary manifestations of the long take in divergent political schemas related to camera technique and drawing on diverse moments in the history of art cinema. Entitled "Camera Politics in *Children of Men* and *Birdman*: Neorealism Realized and Auteurist Autocracy," these films are two fairly recent examples of virtuosic long takes, directed by peers Alfonso Cuarón and Alejandro González Iñárritu and both featuring director of photography Emmanuel Lubezki, a name now strongly associated with long takes largely through repeated work with these directors. The chapter traces *Children of Men*'s cinematographic style and political goals back to what stands as one of the first exemplars of art cinema, Italian neorealism, using Roberto Rosselini's *Paisan* as a point of contact. I interrogate how the more recent film acts as the ultimate realization of goals that the earlier movement was incapable of carrying out, based on industrial and economic limitations. *Birdman*, on the other hand, displays reverberations of films directed by Jean-Luc Godard such as *Pierrot le fou* (1965) and *Passion* (1982). I demonstrate that *Birdman*'s goals self-consciously and problematically work to highlight the importance of the auteur as central to a work of art cinema.

Chapter Three is called "Editing Politics: Ultra-Long Takes, Filmophilia, and Going Digital." It expands on the relationship between the long take and editing, as broached at the beginning of this chapter, at the loci of celluloid and digital cinematic media. Drawing on Hitchcock's infamous long take-driven *Rope*, I show how the ostensible "failure" of Hitchcock's film has nevertheless inspired other filmmakers in recent generations to experiment with ultra-long takes in films such as *Timecode* (dir.

Mike Figgis, 2000) and *Too Late* (dir. Dennis Hauck, 2015). Committed to long takes but bound by their respective formats of image capture, these films rather paradoxically reveal both the indispensability of editing to long takes as well as new conceptions of and alternatives to the traditional "cut." The two recent films in this study address the extent to which digital technology possesses the potential for democratizing the art of cinema, as has been asserted by its advocates.

Finally, Chapter Four is "Politics of the Image: Stasis, Spaces, and 'Vengeful Bitches'." Tracing Patricia White's conception of art cinema as associated with a "feminized taste culture" that has experienced a shift from a more traditional "foreign" character to diasporan filmmakers worker in independent film, I examine the unique style of long takes employed by Chantal Akerman in her film *Jeanne Dielman 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) and exposit how long takes help perform a critique of the patriarchal status quo. By using a static camera and planimetric compositions, the film enacts a painterly style that I couch in an art history context before illustrating part of the film's legacy in a more recent woman-directed film with strikingly similar visual style and political concerns, *A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night* (dir. Ana Lily Amirpour, 2014). As a whole, the chapter shows how this particular approach to framing, camera stasis, and duration emphasize mise-en-scène in ways unique from the films of previous chapters. Further, these films share narrative similarities of women who perform violence against microcosms of patriarchy, a parallel rendered especially significant in light of the political function of their respective mise-en-scène. In addition to White, I also appeal to Claire Johnston's 1973 polemic regarding women's cinema as politically engaged entertainment.

CHAPTER II

CAMERA POLITICS IN *CHILDREN OF MEN* AND *BIRDMAN*:

NEOREALISM REALIZED AND AUTEURIST AUTOCRACY

Introduction

We presently find ourselves in The Moment of the Long Take. The technique has

arguably never been more conspicuous in popular cinema's history. Across media

platforms, the long take has come to embody an overt stylistic bravura some audiences

expect from cinema and TV, with the technique functioning as a yardstick of aesthetic

validation for filmmakers and cinephile communities ranging from the orthodox to the

informal. Whether binge-watching Netflix's entry into the Marvel universe in *Daredevil*,

taking in the latest formally-audacious European art film in *Victoria* (Schipper, 2014), or

eschewing primary texts and skipping straight to online "supercuts," there exists a long-

take outlet for everyone. But perhaps no contemporary name is more synonymous with

the long take than director of photography Emmanuel "Chivo" Lubezki, a Mexican-born

cinematographer who tends to work with a handful of auteurs[48] and is the recipient of the

Academy Award in his field for an unprecedented three years running.[49] Some of

Lubezki's closest directorial collaborators, and those who have helped gain him Oscars,

are fellow Mexicans Alfonso Cuarón and Alejandro González Iñárritu. In their films

Children of Men (2006) and *Birdman* (2014), we see time-honored but neoteric

incarnations of the long take. Compared to one another, these films use the technique in

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[48] In addition to the directors central to this chapter, Lubezki has worked multiple times with Terrence Malick and at least once each with Tim Burton, Michael Mann, and the Coen brothers.
[49] Without detracting from Lubezki's photographic expertise, his Oscar streak reflects the Academy's complicity in the broader cultural predilection for the long take.

ways strikingly opposed on a political level but share a divergent interconnection with historic art cinema.

David Bordwell's seminal essay on art cinema articulates the two principles motivating its narratives: realism and authorial expressivity.[50] Respectively, *Children of Men* and *Birdman* exemplify these potentially contradictory poles defining art films. The two films, produced at the intersection of art and mass-market cinemas, exhibit a divide between a liberating camera politics engaged with ground-level concerns in synch with formal realism and a regressive camera politics corresponding to an authoritarian director detached from populist concerns. *Birdman* showcases its use of the long take through tropes of art cinema associated with the *nouvelle vague* but divorced from the latter's historical and political investments. Instead, the film laces its single-take conceit with high irony accented by a misogynist conservatism. While these characteristics crescendo in *Birdman*'s treatment of a woman film critic, the long take acts as the engine—and the camera a phallic apparatus—amplifying a problematic treatment of women generally and its own audience specifically with unmistakable ambitions toward art-cinema authorship. In *Children of Men*, long takes depicting terrorism and warfare bring fruition to Italian neorealism's historical and industrial limitations. Certain sequences use unbroken shots with the goal of mobilizing the film's audience toward political activity, imagining a future of gender, class, and race emancipation.

By attending to a historically-inflected analysis of style, we can recognize the bifurcated legacy of art cinema in both films and how they hybridize the tradition of art cinema with its counterpoint in mass-market fare. To be clear, this project does not

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[50] David Bordwell, "The Art Film as a Mode of Film Practice," in *Poetics of Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 153.

necessarily make a broad claim about a general trend in art cinema's appropriation by popular movies, as if the meeting between art and mass-market cinemas always consists in realist films on the one hand and authorial expression on the other. Rather, the two films I examine here conveniently and somewhat discretely embody these twin (but non-identical) tendencies in a context tethered to but not restricted by the arthouse. By attending to these high-profile contemporary descendants of art cinema, we situate ourselves better to probe other instances of today's markedly heterogeneous art films. Drawing on different lineages within historic art cinema and employing the long take toward disparate but historically-linked ends, I show how *Children of Men* uses its long-take aesthetic toward a progressive social politics akin to Italian neorealism and invested in cinematic realism, whereas *Birdman* enlists the technique toward a socially regressive politics strongly promoting the figure of the auteur. At stake in this argument is the stability of art cinema as a formal mode, an industrial market, and a cinephilic discourse notwithstanding its manifold historical, national, and cultural manifestations.

Despite the differences of these two films, what sets *Children of Men* and *Birdman* apart as noteworthy contemporary instances of the long take? At a base level, both films were critically lauded and financially successful enough for the subsequent projects of their directors to receive significantly more funding.[51] Both of these follow-up films—*Gravity* (Cuarón, 2013) and *The Revenant* (Iñárritu, 2015)—were also shot by Lubezki and received extensive media hype for innovations in camerawork and lighting.

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[51] In Iñárritu's case, *Birdman*'s production budget was $16.5 million while *The Revenant* was initially given about $60 million to work with. (Reports indicate that the latter's budget ballooned well above $100 million.) In Cuarón's case, *Children of Men*'s production budget was $76 million whereas *Gravity* was budgeted at $100 million. For the numbers, see: http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=birdman.htm, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/how-leonardo-dicaprios-revenant-shoot-810290, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=childrenofmen.htm, and http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=gravity.htm.

Moreover, the formal craftsmanship of *Children of Men* and *Birdman* stands out for its almost unabating camera mobility, using cinematography dynamically to navigate spaces and cross thresholds. While these films do not cut in a way typical of traditional Hollywood practice, camera techniques such as pans and staging through mise-en-abîme gesture toward the goals of continuity editing. Specifically, the cameras frequently move in order to capture various sides of a conversation or use mirrors to achieve a shot-reverse-shot effect. Consequently, every frame within the long takes revises the previous image through camera motion, emphasizing the instability of the camera and thus also the frame's spatial boundaries. The films' resistance to cut often removes (and indirectly reappraises) the 180-degree rule, creating diverse possibilities for representations of cinematic space and (dis)orienting effects. Although the films employ long takes in single settings, the filmmakers tend to make the technique most visible during scenes of spatial transition. Herein lies a major point of departure from traditional art cinema and marks the films' crossroads with mass-market film: rather than confining long takes to a single setting of relatively static cinematography producing effects of abstraction (*Vivre sa vie*, Godard, 1962), contemplation (e.g. *Stalker*, Tarkovsky, 1979), slowness *sui generis* (e.g. *Damnation*, Tarr, 1988), or surveillance (e.g. *Caché*, Haneke, 2005), *Children of Men* and *Birdman* spotlight their long takes during moments of pronounced motion. In a word, when art film meets mass-market film, the long take shifts from its emphasis on time to lay stress on space in service of narrative.

Further, *Children of Men* and *Birdman* use digital technologies to extend takes beyond what traditional, less portable celluloid cameras allowed. Historically, the maximum length of a film reel limited the duration of a given take and unwieldy cameras

restricted a shot's mobility. With the advent of digital filmmaking, director Alexander

Sokurov could achieve a true single-shot feature-length film in 2002, *Russian Ark*. But

unlike that film, *Children of Men* and *Birdman* stand out for their use of carefully

disguised editing, deploying CGI to suture different shots together and create the

appearance of longer takes.[52] This chapter will examine the respective functions of the

long take in these hybrid mass-market/art films through an analysis of their aesthetic

approaches and historical reference points. I hope to illustrate how the current attention

the long take is garnering from cinephile communities is a moment of cinematic déjà vu,

a recurrence of a technique visible across numerous contexts in film history now

distinguishable chiefly through its hybridity and popularity. Both of these recent films

purpose the long take toward goals most typically associated with European art cinema.

Children of Men does so by mobilizing its audience through camera and characters

toward political activity. *Birdman* does so by foregrounding tropes of art cinema:

ambiguity, the auteur, and art itself.

Bordwell on "Art Cinema"

      In "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice," David Bordwell acknowledges

the limitations as well as the usefulness of establishing boundaries distinguishing art

cinema apart from other cinematic modes. Art films, almost by definition, call attention

to themselves through unique stylistic approaches. Such approaches contribute

significantly toward the figure of the auteur and art cinema's intimate relationship with

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[52] *Birdman* was shot on digital cameras, the Arri Alexa Mini and Arri Alexa XT Plus
(http://www.arri.com/news/news/emmanuel-lubezki-asc-amc-on-birdman/). *Children of Men* was shot on
lightweight film cameras, the Arricam Lite and Arri 235: Benjamin B., "Humanity's Last Hope" in
American Cinematographer, Vol. 87 Issue 12 (Dec 2006), 75.

that figure. By definition, auteur films are marked by their diversity and arguably resist an all-inclusive classification. Nevertheless, Bordwell insists that there is "a set of formal conventions" to which practitioners of art cinema subscribe, whether consciously or not. Intimately related to the success of this overarching style are the "implicit viewing procedures" to which audiences must be committed.[53] For present purposes, the formal conventions of art cinema Bordwell outlines consist primarily of two categories of narrative motivations: realism and authorial expressivity. Regarding the latter, one can easily point to the vastly different systems of production in European cinemas, systems permitting filmmakers more artistic freedom than Hollywood's well-oiled machine. Less efficiency in Europe often meant increased independence for directors. Art cinema's realism stemmed from historical and industrial catalysts, such as the impetus to create films with a distinct visual aesthetic, marking themselves as more believable than standard Hollywood fare and appealing to more grounded human experiences rather than escapist entertainment. Postwar-era Hollywood films, on the other hand, became perceived as unfaithful to "reality" as audiences were coming to understand and experience it. From its censored eroticism to chronological narratives, the studio-driven gloss and coded politics of Hollywood films effectively invited a cinematic counterpoint. Art cinema's realism coincides with the traumatic impact of mass warfare on the European continent in the first half of the 20th century. Unlike North Americans, war on their own soil created distinct experiences for Europeans and raised questions that postwar cinema began to explore. Although Bordwell does not account for this historical component of art cinema's postwar emergence in his essay, Gilles Deleuze formulated a philosophy of cinema hinging on precisely this transition, noting the shift in postwar

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[53] Bordwell, 151.

visual perception that spurred a breakdown in the spatiotemporal linearity of classical Hollywood films.[54] This historical and potentially politically-loaded aspect of art cinema's postwar blossoming, I argue, bears importantly in developing a useful model for understanding contemporary art cinema. It so happens that Bordwell locates in Italian neorealist films—films explicitly grappling with quotidian struggles of humans rebuilding their lives in the late 1940s—"the first postwar instances of the international art cinema."[55] Further, in his "Afterword" section of the essay, composed nearly 30 years after the initial publishing in 1979, Bordwell identifies "the very long take" as a significant technical and stylistic innovation in recent decades. Realism, authorial expressivity, Italian neorealism, and the long take are all central to the following analysis of *Children of Men* and *Birdman*.

Bazin and Italian Neorealism

The foregoing elucidates an established critical discourse for art cinema as a mode of film practice. My argument here hinges on a divergence in narrative tendencies of historical art cinema—never itself a completely stable film practice—into more broadly palatable mass-market cinema. But just as the present moment constitutes a delta at the mouth of art cinema's perpetually serpentine river, art cinema has always exhibited confluences where previously distinct tributaries—other genres, practices, modes, and institutions—merged with it. Following the analogy, art cinema was also born out of eclectic cinematic headwaters. Among other movements at its source rests Italian neorealism. Along with established voices like Bordwell and André Bazin, contemporary

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[54] See Deleuze, *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
[55] Bordwell, 152.

analysts of art cinema such as András Bálint Kovács and Mark Betz recognize in Italian

neorealism one of the first pronounced manifestations of art cinema.[56] But the long take

is relatively absent from scholarly accounts of Italian neorealism, surely on account of its

absence from the movement itself. I maintain that this dearth is itself significant, a

stylistic deficiency that reveals its own invisible presence. In time, the long take would

become a central formal technique of art cinema. In Europe's postwar period, however,

industrial, economic, and technological conditions precluded its effective use. This

effectiveness depended on filmmakers getting enough elements of a shot "right" to make

it worth including in a completed film. In neorealism, everything was in place at the

levels of style, subject, and politics for the long take to be employed. Yet, we tend not to

see it.

André Bazin's extensive defenses of neorealism and the long take offer ample

evidence that these two easily could have been bedfellows. According to Bazin, both the

technique and the genre (or, to use Bazin's term for neorealism, "a kind of humanism")

reveal at their center a predisposition for the type of realism Bazin believed was inherent

to cinema as an art.[57] In his essay, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," Bazin

praises documentarian Robert Flaherty and director F.W. Murnau for their non-montage

filmmaking. He first writes that "the cinema has at its disposal a whole arsenal of means

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[56] Mark Betz includes Italian neorealism with the French avant-garde and German Expressionism as three key movement contributing toward the institutionalization of early European art cinema. Drawing from Deleuze, Betz maintains that Italian neorealism's settings of urban decay "are sites of physical and psychological crises that produce a radically new approach to storytelling and filming…" See Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 13, 37.
      Kovács uses the term "late modern cinema" as essentially synonymous with "art cinema," listing early modern cinema of the 1920s, Italian neorealism, and American film noir as the primary forbears of the burgeoning new film mode. See Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 204 (← double-check).
[57] André Bazin, *What Is Cinema? Vol. 1* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 29.

whereby to impose its interpretation of an event on a spectator,"[58] criticizing the Soviets for having "carried to its ultimate consequences the theory and practice of montage" and the Germans for having committed "every kind of violence to the plastics of the image by way of sets and lighting."[59] Flaherty, however, shows "the very substance of the image" by allowing time to elapse between a cause and its effect. Here, Bazin praises the long take for its visualization of temporality and the way the image retains measured tension between moments. Conversely, Bazin praises Murnau for performing the spatial equivalent of Flaherty's temporalized long take. In both cases, Bazin's basis for adulation is "uncompromising realism."[60]

The above comes in the context of Bazin's argument that silent cinema evinced a practice that not fully realized until the advent of synchronized sound, the practice of cinema revealing reality rather than adding to it. Whereas Bazin associates Soviet and German approaches with the latter, he finds that synch-sound cinema finally permits cinematic realism, seen in Flaherty and Murnau's unbroken shots, to blossom. The following section of Bazin's essay presents examples of post-silent cinema that embody this realist approach. Bazin limits these examples to French and American films before spending a sizable paragraph explaining why he omits "the dazzling display of Italian [neorealist] cinema." Lauding neorealism's "hitherto unexplored themes," Bazin nevertheless insists, "the real revolution took place more on the level of subject matter than of style."[61] Taken as a whole, this portion of Bazin's essay finds the theorist endorsing a stylistic technique (the long take) for its relationship to a broader cinematic

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[58] Bazin, 26.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid. 29

approach (realism) while noting that an otherwise significant national movement (Italian neorealism) lacks the stylistic innovation to act as an exemplar of the realist technique.

The question, then, isn't why Bazin doesn't include neorealism in his formalist hall of fame, but rather why he mentions neorealism in this section at all. I submit that, although he doesn't say so, Bazin intimates how close neorealism comes to the formal realism he celebrates in the same breath. Citing the "-realism" of "neorealism" in the latter's subject matter rather than its style, Bazin reveals his view of a deficiency in the Italian movement that industrial and economic conditions prohibited. These conditions prevented the Italians from exercising the stylistic freedom that might have elicited Bazin's unreserved commendation and also unnaturally dichotomized form and content. Postwar neorealist films were shot in poor conditions and known for using whatever film stock was available, usually of subpar quality and not conducive to long takes. Even when long enough strips of celluloid were available to shoot a long take, the technique represented too dangerous a gamble to succeed in one attempt, such would be the expense or inability of reshooting the scene. Roberto Rossellini explained in an interview that his shots in *Rome, Open City* averaged much shorter than in his earlier and later films for precisely this reason, his inability to acquire long enough strips of film.[62] Cesare Zavattini, outspoken neorealist proponent and famed screenwriter of *Rome, Open City* and *Bicycle Thieves*, even verbalized his own dream for an ultra-long take, longing for a 90-minute shot in the life of a single man in which nothing at all happens.[63] (Zavattini's vision looks downright prophetic when one considers some of Andy Warhol's experimental long-take films of the 1960s.) These documented wishes of neorealist

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[62] Peter Brunette, *Roberto Rossellini* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 45.
[63] Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*, 42; Roy Armes, *Patterns of Realism* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1971), 171.

filmmakers to use unbroken shots toward real-world concerns demonstrate the prohibitive historical conditions that impacted Bazin's appraisal of the movement.

Children of Men

When viewed through the lens of neorealism, *Children of Men*'s use of the long take looks something like the realization of a former impossibility. Despite Zavattini's desire to chronicle quotidian events as opposed to extraordinary ones, action scenes in *Children of Men* are stylized through long takes ostensibly to lend them a more realistic quality. Indeed, such has been the fulfillment of Zavattini's dream that Cuarón and Lubezki have been compelled to abbreviate the long take's duration so as to retain a documentary feel and supress excessive stylization. According to Cuarón, Lubezki made a persuasive case for ending the opening shot of *Gravity*—their 2013 follow-up to *Children of Men*—at about 13 minutes, despite Cuarón's wish to extend the take further. Lubezki argued cutting was necessary in order to avoid "calling attention to the long take and creating an expectation that that's what the film was about. But that's not what it's about."[64] In the interview, Cuarón goes on to wrestle with the goal of cinematography, concluding that it exists not for its own sake or the story's but, rather, for "cinema" itself. And despite obvious narrative and formal differences between *Children of Men* and *Gravity*, the long take unifies the films' shared investment in realism. According to Lubezki, *Gravity*'s long takes are meant to resemble the unbroken shots that have become a formal feature of film footage actually shot in space.[65] The stated documentary approach to cinematography in *Gravity* links it aesthetically with the visual style of *Children of Men.* On other occasions, Cuarón and Lubezki have concealed edits in order

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[64] Sic. Cuarón's words: https://www.theasc.com/ac_magazine/November2013/Gravity/page2.php.
[65] [Cite.]

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to achieve the facade of longer takes. So despite stressing their restraint toward the technique, they have also extended their unbroken shots through editing rendered invisible through CGI, a technology quite unavailable to Rossellini.[66] A biographer offers an account of Rossellini's similar, but more technologically primitive, editing strategy in *Rome, Open City*. In lieu of limited film stock, Rossellini was said to employ a classical or "illusionist" editing style akin to that of Hollywood to ensure operating "primarily in the service of the narrative line and increased emotional involvement."[67] This pairing of story with audience affect anticipates Cuarón's aforementioned use of the term "cinema," the straightforward but somewhat ineffable goal of narrative, formal, and affective elements. Both Rossellini and Cuarón/Lubezki, then, employ ostensibly "invisible" editing styles in order to achieve long takes—inflected by both technological conditions and aesthetic demands—in the service of a fundamentally cinematic effect.

The cinematic effect of these long takes, as the following analysis will illustrate, is bound up with a formal politics of documentary realism and an investment in a hopeful future. These two goals intersect with the long take's spatio-temporal alignment as well as the use of children as subject matter.[68] The neorealist films *Rome, Open City* (dir. Roberto Rossellini, 1945), *Shoeshine* (dir. Vittorio de Sica, 1946), and *Paisán* (dir. Roberto Rossellini, 1946) illustrate a continuity of style, subject, and goals that uncover a fruitful correlation between neorealism and *Children of Men*. In a word, the films exude

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[66] *Gravity*, for example, featured backgrounds that were almost entirely animated through CGI. So when the camera pans away from George Clooney's face and toward Earth before returning to Clooney in the film's opening shot, animation creates what the filmmakers call "virtual camerawork." This creates the impression that our views of Clooney and the images bridging the gap of those views all constitute a single, unbroken stream of images. In reality, animation conceals a cut. See: https://www.theasc.com/ac_magazine/November2013/Gravity/page2.php.

[67] Brunette, 45.

[68] By "spatio-temporal alignment," I mean the efficiency of capturing the sense of recorded time as well as spatial bearings. The effect of the long take in these examples offers spectators the perception of lived temporality (freer of temporal ellipses through edits, for example) and locational orientation.

"real time" and, as such, distinguish themselves from the long take as manifest in the counterpoint film *Birdman*. Although at odds, the two respective film pairings I propose evince two sides of the same art-cinema coin. David Bordwell's influential essay on art cinema breaks this "mode of film practice" down to two principles for narrative motivation: "realism and authorial expressivity."[69] Insofar as Rossellini's neorealist films and *Children of Men* stand out for their representations of realism, authorial expressivity trumps realism in *Birdman* and its reference point in Godard's New Wave films.

Although the criteria for what constitutes a long take fluctuate based on a variety of contextual factors, there are two shots in *Children of Men* to which I will refer as "long takes." This choice is based on (1) the fact that the film showcases these as the longest takes; (2) the attention these takes draw to themselves formally; and (3) the response from audiences, itself encouraged by the filmmakers' emphasis on these shots in interviews. The first of these two shots appears fairly early in the film, clocking in at about four minutes long. The second, longer take comes near the end of the film and lasts for nearly six-and-a-half minutes. For our purposes I will attend primarily to the second shot, but first some framing. *Children of Men*, based on the novel by P.D. James, takes place in dystopic England in the year 2027. In this moment, Britain is the last remaining nation amidst a global crisis stemming from massive infertility, leading to the collapse of every other government on earth. The narrative revolves around a disenchanted man named Theo who is compelled by his former partner, an alleged political activist/terrorist, to help accompany an illegal "fugee" woman called "Kee" across dangerous territory to an enigmatic, possibly non-existent organization called "The Human Project." En route, Kee reveals to Theo that she is pregnant. The film follows the two characters as they

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[69] Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*, 153.

encounter a variety of threats as well as good Samaritans before achieving their mission with a newborn girl.

Just prior to the aforementioned long take, the film offers a thematically pregnant image accenting the lengthy following shot. The previous shot closes with Theo pushing Kee in a wheelchair up the street of a refugee-camp-turned-warzone while Marichka, a helpful innkeeper, follows. Devastation and gunfire surrounds them. The characters pass by what is (by all appearances) a wailing mother sitting at the roadside cradling a dead young man, presumably her son.[70] Marichka briefly turns toward the screaming woman before hurrying off-screen-right toward Theo and Kee. The camera, meanwhile, pans-left and tilts toward the mother and son, as if compelled to pause and absorb the image before catching up with the main characters.[71] The mother and son act as (1) a site removed from the main characters and action, (2) a sight primarily for the camera (i.e., for the audience as opposed to the film's characters), and (3) a citation of an earlier reference in the film. Regarding (3), this image hearkens back to an intratextual source via Theo's cousin Nigel. Nigel oversees the "Ark of the Arts" program, a state-sponsored effort to recover important works of (Western) art in the face of worldwide destruction. As Theo looks upon the damaged but salvaged *David* sculpture by Michelangelo, Nigel laments, "Couldn't save *La Pietà*. Smashed up before we got there." Seemingly a passing comment, the remark recalls the image of a canonical Western artwork central to Renaissance humanism, of a mother cradling her dead adult son, in this case the Virgin

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[70] While there is no narrative information provided about these characters, I believe that it evokes a mother-son relationship, as the following analysis reveals.

71 This notion of the camera exuding some sort of agency through exercising the will to look away from the central characters or to be distracted by another scene has a precedent in *Children of Men*, perhaps the most significant instance of which concludes the film's other virtuoso long take. There, after escaping from a disastrous ambush, police pull over the car that transports Theo, Julian, Kee, and Kee's midwife. Luke shoots and kills both officers, then forcing Theo back into the car and driving away. As the car departs, the camera (which exited the vehicle) remains at the roadside and tilts down at the two lifeless bodies on the street. In an interview, Lubezki celebrates this instance of the camera lingering on a scene removed from the main characters. He offers his take on the gesture's significance, which boils down to the didactic presence of the filmmaker's guiding hand.

Mary and Jesus. The reference suggests that the artwork's annihilation corresponds to the impending extinction of the Western tradition.

Children of Men's first reference to *La Pietà*, simultaneous with a representation of the *David*, finds a striking point of contact in *Paisan*. Perhaps as if to consolidate themes, narratives, and production finances, Rossellini's film is composed of six discrete narrative episodes all set in wartime Italy but in a variety of contexts. *Paisan* uses long shots (NB: not "long takes"!) in a way spatially comparable to the temporality of long takes. That is, perhaps in light of Rossellini's aforementioned inability to acquire long strips of celluloid, the film appears to compensate for its relatively short takes (and lack of continuous action at the level of unbroken takes) by using shots that encompass as much space as possible. While this is not to equivocate the important distinctions between long takes and long shots, it would seem that long shots in *Paisan* function at least in part to capture a realistic sense of urban environs overwhelmed with combat fire. Indeed, the film uses clips of documentary footage intercut with Rossellini's own scenes.

Paisan's fourth installment is entitled "Florence," also the city where the *David* is housed. The overall style and specific imagery of "Florence" bear rather astonishing similarities with *Children of Men*. In the episode, Harriet (an American nurse) and Massimo (an Italian man) team up to traverse dangerous territory in Florence, where Allied troops are fighting the Germans across the Ponte Vecchio, the last surviving bridge separating the northern and southern sectors of the city. Harriet seeks her Italian lover and Massimo his family. Like Kee and Theo in *Children of Men*, the storyline of the episode centers on the clear goal of a man and woman evading combat on streets under siege in order to reach a shared destination safely. On the way, Harriet and Massimo pass

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through a storage center housing old sculptures. The facility puts the two characters well

above ground, safely overlooking the streets below in a shot anticipating the Ark of the

Arts scene in *Children of Men* (see images below). The films' respective placement of

artworks above and outside the realm of ground-level conflict separates art from politics,

creative expression from the people's struggle. The well-documented practice of saving

art from the devastation of war, represented in *Paisan*, becomes critiqued and corrected

in *Children of Men* by citing the marble sculpture of *La Pietà* later in the film at the street

level with actual human bodies.[72] By way of a politicized documentary realism, the new

image revives and revises *La Pietà* with non-Western, immigrant bodies, imbuing the

sculpture with new significance. In so doing, the film suggests that art and politics have

conjoined and global hope springs from a non-Western source.[73] Rather than through a

magnificent and enduring sculpture, the film uses a subjective, even personified handheld

camera on war-torn streets to express the imminence of a non-Western emendation to

Michelangelo's Mary-and-Jesus. *La Pietà*'s silence is replaced with indecipherable

screams, the smooth and light marble with bloodied bodies of color, and the historically

stable identities with anonymous persons. Prior to the film's most pivotal long take, this

scene reminds the audience of *La Pietà*, updates it, and suggests the ongoing political

significance of the film's Christ imagery through the perspective of historical realism.[74]

As if further to compound the similitude of these films' interests and imagery, the

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[72] I would note that the documentation of this historical practice has made it into more than a few films. See, e.g., *The Train* (1964, dir. John Frankenheimer), which revolves around French Resistance fighters attempting to save a host of masterpiece artworks from Nazi theft.

[73] As it has already done through the character of the pregnant Kee. It should be noted that this was an important change that deviated from P.D. James's novel *The Children of Men*. In the book, the pregnant woman was a British woman of unspecified ethnicity, presumably white.

[74] Incidentally, Cuarón acknowledged in an interview that the inclusion of this scene was meant to evoke "a real photograph of a woman holding the body of her son in the Balkans," a photo that Cuarón believed was "very obvious[ly]…referencing *La Pietà*." http://news.moviefone.com/2006/12/25/interview-children-ofmen-director-alfonso-cuaron/.

"Florence" episode of *Paisan* ends with Massimo's death, with the final shot capturing Harriet cradling Massimo in a pose effectively identical to *La Pietà*, itself duplicated in *Children of Men* (see images below).
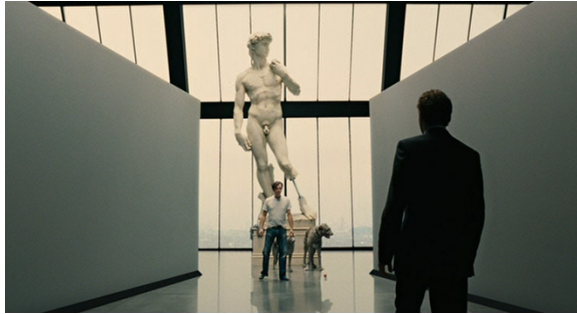
        In the single-shot take that follows, Theo, Kee, and Marichka continue on foot

through the camp toward the coast. Consistent with the film's overall style, a handheld

camera[75] follows the characters in a way visually reminiscent of documentary as well as

Italian neorealism. While the shaky camera might be seen as citing *cinéma vérité*,

notorious for the handheld effect, documentary scholar Bill Nichols distinguishes *cinéma*

vérité—which he identifies as a participatory mode of documentary—from an

observational approach that seeks to capture historical reality as it unfolds without

intervening in the process. As a fiction film, *Children of Men* is unlikely to use a

participatory camera mode, despite how embedded the camera is in the action. Even in a

fiction-film context, the cinematography in this long-take sequence recalls wartime

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[75] Most likely an Arricam Lite or Arri 235 (both digital), according to the film's technical specs. See Benjamin B., "Humanity's Last Hope" in *American Cinematographer*, Vol. 87 Issue 12 (Dec 2006): 75.

documentary footage, passively recording events, rather than the active intervention of a

filmmaker confronting an individual (e.g., Michael Moore interrogating NRA figurehead

Charlton Heston in *Bowling for Columbine*).[76] Drawing on an example from Jon Silver's

Watsonville on Strike (1989), Nichols notes that the opening scene of that film uses a

long take that is crucial toward the film's investment in realism. Here, the long take

"bears witness to an existential necessity… Everything is at risk at a precise instant of

historical time that anything other than a long take could represent not authenticate in so

direct a manner."[77] Nichols' description testifies to an alternate but more ambiguous

name for *cinéma vérité*, "direct cinema." While direct cinema can connote a participatory

mode of documentary that records "the truth of a form of interaction that would not exist

were it not for the camera," in a fiction-film context it may also imply a less mediated

formal style, one that presents events taking place as if they happened historically and

might have been recorded by a documentarian's camera.[78] *Children of Men*'s dystopic

setting in the near future establishes it as potentially historical, distinguishable from

fantasy and science fiction. Its use of a handheld camera recording a long take in an

urban-industrial war-torn setting further functions as the realization of a historical

impossibility in Italian neorealism. So similar in action and environment are this shot

with the "Florence" installment of *Paisan* that one wonders whether the latter might have

served as inspiration for the former. Whereas Rossellini's film uses long shots to convey

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[76] A fiction-film counterexample might be *Cloverfield* (2008, dir. Matt Reeves), a film "shot" diegetically by a character using a camcorder, documenting destruction in New York City. In this case (as also in a film such as *The Blair Witch Project*), the camera operator exists within the diegesis and disrupts the fourth wall's traditional stability between the camera and the audience.
[77] Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 44.
[78] Nichols, 118.

a sense of spatial reality, however, Cuarón and Lubezki alternately use long and medium

shots to shift spatial bearings as "real time" flows unbroken by edits.

At about 6.5 minutes, the film's (ostensibly) longest take begins with the three

characters together, follows Theo during his separation from the others, and concludes

when he and Kee reunite. All the while, almost constant gunfire and firebombing threaten

the characters' survival, with numerous bodies falling throughout. The shot begins with a

hard cut from the previous scene, a cut consonant with a shift from non-diegetic silence

to a foregrounded musical soundtrack announcing a climactic scene at the levels of style

and story. Interrupting the screams of the grieving mother are the dissonant screeches of

strings and horns, along with the single strike of a bass drum, commencing the new shot

with sound akin to horror. Visually, we see down a dark tunnel devoid of characters

toward a dead-end vanishing point in the hazy daylight. Garbage litters both sides of the

tunnel from foreground to background. The camera shakes noticeably before the

characters enter the frame from behind, running ahead as the camera catches up and

follows them. Reaching an intersection with heavy gunfire, the characters duck against

the wall. The camera's POV is at head-level of the cowering characters. As if cautiously

peeking around the corner, the camera tracks ahead slightly while Theo and company

wait for the gunfire to subside. They eventually race across the street with the camera

shadowing them. The absence of Steadicam technology is increasingly apparent as the

camera movement takes on the characteristics of a crouched, running camera operator.

The overall aesthetic, from cinematography to the physical setting and its structures,

epitomizes the disrepair so prevalent in neorealist films, particularly those of Rossellini.[79]

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[79] See especially the bombed-out and ruined buildings throughout *Rome, Open City* (1945); *Paisan* (1946); and *Germany, Year Zero* (1948).

The camera's ability to navigate these streets with such agility stands out all the more for the impossibility of such camera movement in neorealism.

The apex of *Children of Men*'s cinematographic realism materializes around this long take's halfway point. When Theo takes cover from gunfire with other people in a ramshackle bus, bullets penetrate the outside and strike some of its occupants. Consequently, blood splatters onto the camera lens and remains there. As a diegetic substance makes sustained contact with the (invisible) filmmaking apparatus, fictional and non-fictional elements collide. Such a collision violates the traditional rules of narrative cinema and should, if accidental, compel the director to call for a cut. Instead, the shot lasts several more minutes. The camera not only produces shaky effects in this shot but also bears the effects of being embedded in combat at ground level. Replicating documentary footage of warfare, the literal, material camera—as opposed to the way film analysis often refers to its invisible or figurative presence—testifies to the perils its characters endure while under siege. Paradoxically, the blood splatter on the camera lens also removes or mediates the on-screen danger by revealing the invisible lens, reminding the audience that this is indeed "a movie," even as it operates in a mode that says this is "real."

Not insignificantly, the film's earlier long take features blood splatter on the camera that, according to Cuarón, *was* accidental and he *did* call for a cut. However, so involved was the action of the shot that no one heard the director's order and the shot continued. Here is Cuarón's account once he saw that the lens had been impacted:

> Stupidly, I started yelling, 'Cut!' But there was an explosion, so nobody heard. And Chivo Lubezki, the cinematographer, he just kept on going like this [Cuarón makes a 'keep-on-rolling' gesture with his hand]. And so we kept on going. And there was this amazing adrenaline at the end, everybody congratulating

everybody, and I said, 'Yes, but there was a splash on the lens.' And Chivo turns to me and says, 'You idiot, that's the miracle.'[80]

The interviewer jokingly responds that after two miracles—the explosion and the blood splatter—Cuarón should be sainted. Cuarón gives a telling response: "No, no, I'm the sinner. Chivo is the saint!" The anecdote holds significance to this chapter in a few ways. First, the story as well as Cuarón's self-deprecating account of it testify to the pervasive problem of chalking up every filmmaking success to the genius of the director. Even the interviewer, despite Cuarón's initial narration, ascribes credit for the "miracles" to Cuarón. However, Cuarón's embedded, war-story mode of recounting the event highlights the collaborative nature of filmmaking as well as the serendipity of accidents to produce "brilliant" cinematic elements. Both aspects undermine any reductive auteurism conceiving of the director as solitary and monolithic. On display here is Cuarón and Lubezki's professional rapport, also evident in the earlier citation of Lubezki disputing Cuarón's plan for an even-longer take in *Gravity*. Not insignificantly, the *Children of Men* anecdote relates the cinematographer overruling the director's "cut!" order mid-take. (So widely known is the director's responsibility for calling "action!" and "cut!"—even by the cinematically disinclined—that Lubezki's boldness can be seen as almost mutinous.) Scheduling restrictions on the scene's location rendered this the final available attempt to execute the shot in a single take. Whether location restrictions or the unpredictability of materials making contact with the camera, the moment reminds us that filmmaking in the 21st century, despite increased technological capacities from the days of neorealism, remains susceptible to variables in the production process. Lastly, this story provides a point of contact regarding both the practice of allowing/adding blood

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[80] "The Visionaries (Edgar Wright, Marc Webb, Alfonso Cuaron [sic]) | Comic Con 2013 [Full Panel]," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lr71cGX7KeY.

splatter to the camera lens as well as the filmmakers' pronouncement concerning it: a "miracle." It would seem that they held to this position regarding the spiritualized realism of this lens-splatter practice; in the final and highly dramatic shot of *Gravity*, water droplets splash onto the camera lens.

Birdman: Summary

Set in present-day New York and revolving around a has-been Hollywood actor's staging of a Broadway play, *Birdman* would seem to have decidedly lower stakes than *Children of Men* in terms of its narrative. From the first post-prologue scene, even the film's tone is markedly distinguished from Cuarón's dystopia. Iñárritu's film is ostensibly a comedy, albeit one laced with thematic seriousness, peppered with explicit discussions about grandiose ideas like truth, love, and identity. The film uses metatextual satire to skewer big-budget Hollywood filmmaking, particularly of the superhero variety, by starkly differentiating the Broadway scene from its cinematic West-Coast counterpart. The film's protagonist, Riggan Thompson (Michael Keaton), plays a washed-up actor famous chiefly for his former glory days playing the titular "Birdman." The casting of Keaton is itself ripe with irony, recalling the actor's stint as Batman in Tim Burton's 1989 and 1992 films. Keaton as well as Riggan are characterized by having turned down offers to continue playing a superhero following more than one successful stint in the role. *Birdman* also references other Hollywood stars associated with comic book movies. At an early point in the film Riggan is unable to recast a key part in his play, so he starts listing actors. Two of them have figured prominently in superhero franchise films (Michael Fassbender in Marvel's *X-Men* and Jeremy Renner in Marvel's *The Avengers*),

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with the other presently busy starring in a film series adaptation of popular young adult

fiction (Woody Harrelson in *The Hunger Games* films). Later, a poster for the Superman

film *Man of Steel* is prominently figured in the background of a shot. In one of the film's

other ironies, Riggan eventually casts the part to a character played by Edward Norton,

who played Bruce Banner and the title character in Marvel's 2008 *The Incredible Hulk*.

Norton, like his character in *Birdman*, is also renowned for his difficulty as an actor on

set.[81] *Birdman* goes on to depict the various internal and external hurdles to Riggan's

eventually-successful staging of Raymond Carver's play "What We Talk About When

We Talk About Love." Throughout the film, Riggan's struggle to self-identify

(consistently hearing the antagonistic voice of Birdman inside his head) corresponds with

the public's resistance to accept him as anything other than this rather absurd fictional

character.

Important for present purposes, *Birdman* is presented almost entirely as an

unbroken shot. Save for short sequences devoid of characters and dialogue at the

beginning and the end of the film, all cuts are disguised. Consistent with the film's avian

subject matter, the camera's movements mimic those of a bird, freely floating and gliding

through the use of Steadicam. Although Riggan is the main character, the camera does

not restrict itself to Riggan's point of view. On a number of occasions, Riggan is entirely

absent from scenes.[82]

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[81] Peter Sciretta, "The Incredible Hulk: The Truth About Edward Norton vs. Marvel," */Film*, Published June 14, 2008, http://www.slashfilm.com/the-truth-about-edward-norton-vs-marvel/.
[82] This is relatively unusual in single-shot films. See, for example, how the camera maintains close contact with its main character in films such as *Russian Ark* (Alexander Sokurov, 2002), *Victoria* (Sebastian Schipper, 2015), and *Hardcore Henry* (Ilya Naishuller, 2016).

<u>*Birdman* on Art & Authorship</u>

       Birdman immediately announces itself as a self-conscious art film through an

allusion to one of the most quintessential "auteurs" of film history in its opening credits.

As *New Yorker* critic Richard Brody notes, the letters composing the on-screen titles

appear in a manner nearly identical to those in Jean-Luc Godard's 1965 *Pierrot le fou*.[83]

After displaying the production and distribution company names,[84] *Birdman* has red

letters gradually appear against a black background in alphabetical order, starkly (each

letter "cuts" in, rather than fades or dissolves), and in synch with an irregular solo

drumbeat that will act as the film's primary soundtrack.[85] These letters eventually form a

short extract from Carver, a poem to which I will attend in greater detail shortly. After a

brief moment of stasis (with continued drumming), the letters disappear intermittently

and alphabetically as the film's title appears horizontally across the center in grey.

Pierrot le fou begins in much the same way, with mostly red (and a few blue) letters

juxtaposing against a black background, appearing on screen in the same visual manner

as *Birdman* except slower and without a soundtrack synchronized with the emerging

letters. (See examples below.) Instead of *Birdman*'s drums, classical music plays at the

start of Godard's film. In each, all letters are capitalized with the exception of the letter

i/I, rendered oddly as a dotted capital letter.[86] In concert with the other elements, the

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[83] Richard Brody, "'Birdman' Never Achieves Flight," *The New Yorker*, Published October 23, 2014, http://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/birdman-never-achieves-flight.

[84] Fox Searchlight Pictures, New Regency Enterprises, M Productions, and Le Grisbi.

[85] Although a moment arrives later in the film that reveals a diegetic source of the drum soundtrack, this essentially acts as a deviation, a cinematic sight/sound gag not unusual in art cinema. Consider, e.g., in [Godard film] when Jean-Paul Belmondo turns off his bicycle radio, revealing that the non-diegetic soundtrack in fact originated from within the diegesis.

[86] This idiosyncratic typography is visible in most of Godard's mainstream films from 1963-1980, beginning with *Contempt* (1963), and concluding with *Every Man for Himself* (1980). Some stills here are taken from: http://annyas.com/screenshots/updates/the-typography-of-jean-luc-godard/.

consistency of this seemingly small detail evinces *Birdman*'s rather obsessive urge to cite an art-film forebear to a meticulous degree.
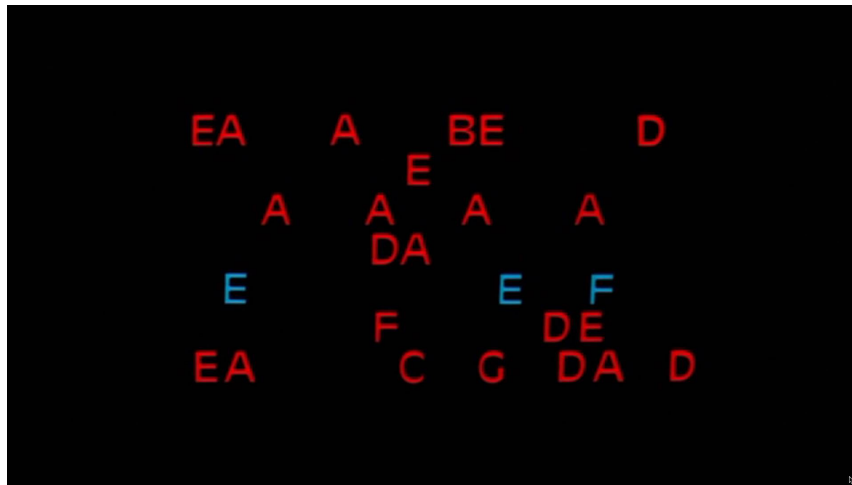
Figure 10: In-progress opening credits to *Pierrot le fou* (1965)
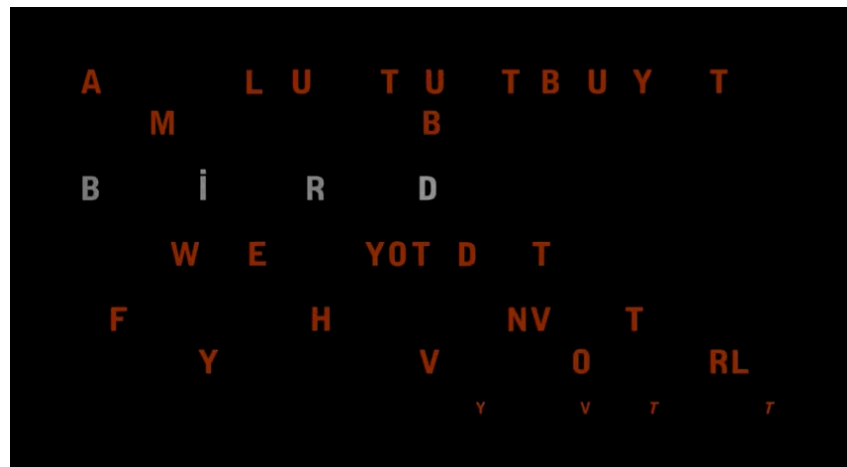
Figure 11: In progress opening credits to *Birdman* (2014)

The significance of these formal and literal citations is multifold. First, the reference to Godard in a general sense stands as a bold textual allusion at the film's outset to the director arguably most associated with the *politiques des auteurs*, save the auteur's auteur himself, Francois Truffaut. But even against Truffaut, there is little doubt that film culture has embraced Godard as representing the auteur-driven *nouvelle vague* in a

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I would also add that this choice of typeface is used not only in the opening credits but in the film's promotion, including the posters and home video casing.

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particularly unadulterated way. Following the New Wave's peak in the early 1960s, Godard's films became increasingly radical, culminating with his well-documented, decade-long departure from the French film establishment. Truffaut, on the other hand, directed noticeably non-radical films that, while not generally received as conventional, reflected a stylistic and institutional divergence with Godard. This parting of ways would be followed by a schismatic exchange of letters between the two former friends. Godard roundly criticized Truffaut's film *Day for Night* (1973), implying that Truffaut had sold out and embraced a dishonest form of institutional filmmaking.[87]

From this perspective, *Pierrot le fou* marks a turning point of sorts for Godard, one that sheds light on the director's own evolution as well as *Birdman*'s position on the conventional-to-avant-garde filmmaking spectrum. Godard's tenth feature-length film, *Pierrot le fou* can easily be read as a revision of his first feature film, *Breathless*. Centering on a couple on the lam—and each starring Jean-Paul Belmondo as protagonist, arguably playing the same character—both films toy with established film conventions, explicitly cite classical Hollywood cinema, and end in tragic betrayal and death.[88] Shortly following the 1965 *Pierrot le fou*, Godard's films shift toward a more politically didactic and stylistically experimental approach. Prior to this change, *Pierrot le fou* can be read as chiastic in relation to *Breathless*, marking the end of Godard's early period and shifting into the liminal years of a more avant-garde style while still operating within established institutional filmmaking. With this in mind, *Birdman*'s opening allusion to the Godard of 1965 suggests a film(maker) at the border of institutional practice. These opening credits plainly point to a canonical and formally revolutionary practitioner of art cinema

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[87] Antoine de Baecque and Serge Toubiana, *Truffaut* (trans. Catherine Temerson) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 300.
[88] As I will argue, each of these becomes significant in relation to *Birdman*.

inseparable from the proverbial *auteur*, marking *Birdman* as a film-text of haute authorship and willing to imitate that filmmaker for the film's preliminary artistic statement and aesthetic look. As previously noted, *Birdman*'s periodic references to Hollywood blockbuster films function as ongoing points of contrast that distinguish *Birdman* from conventional, character-driven movies from innovative, auteur-driven art cinema.

But this art-oriented, authorship-focused setup displays literary proclivities in both films. *Pierrot le fou* and *Birdman* frequently reference literary authors in order to question the notion of authenticity. Godard's cinematic predisposition toward literary and theatrical artists has been aligned with the *Film d'art* movement of 1900s France, an approach invested in elevating the new medium to a "seventh art,"[89] distancing cinema from its initially diversionary aims and considering it an extension of "legitimate" art forms such as the novel and theater.[90] Ironically, mainstream French filmmaking by the 1950s had so absorbed *Film d'art* that it became emblematic of the industry's innovative languor. Having moved into high-budget costume dramas that often imported stars of the French stage, *Film d'art* came to embody *la tradition de qualité* so loathed by the *Cahiers du cinema* critics and denounced in Truffaut's scathing manifesto, "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema."[91] With the *nouvelle vague*, the original goals of *Film d'art* made a return of sorts in the form of a more unorthodox and ludic approach to commercial filmmaking that distanced it from contemporary mass-market fare while still

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[89] See Ricciotto Canudo, "Reflections on the Seventh Art." *French Film Theory and Criticism* (1923): 291-303.

[90] Dayna Oscherwitz and MaryEllen Higgins, *The A to Z of French Cinema* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 170.

[91] See Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema," in *Movies and Methods, Volume I*, ed. Bill Nichols: University of California Press, 1976: [insert page numbers]

regularly citing mainstream film, especially Hollywood.[92] Despite this new approach, Godard's cinema in particular retains an interest in all things literary, to say nothing of its frequent references to the stage. The New Wave's overhaul of *Film d'art* may be seen as restoring the early historical aims of the movement in a new attempt to disassociate cinema as art from mainstream entertainment. Intrinsic to this distinction, and indisputably evident in Truffaut's pronouncement, is legitimate art's roots in singular authorship in contradistinction with the broadly mechanistic production of mainstream films. Godard's interest in texts—which borders on obsession, evident in unremitting intertitles and dialogue quoting various artists and authors—roots his own art not only in auto-authorship but also the broader tradition of literary and artistic authorship. Moreover, in the same way that Godard's citations bear formal markers of a unique visual style, *Birdman*'s opening titles bear the imprint of Alejandro González Iñárritu. As the quotation from Raymond Carver vacates the screen, four letters remain, haphazardly spelling out "AMOR," diagonally across the film's title. This Spanish word for "love" accents the Carver poem and connects the film's theme with Iñárritu's Spanish-speaking homeland of Mexico. In the case of *Pierrot le fou,* the opening titles desert the screen and leave two disconnected Os across the middle. In addition to whatever these two letters suggest (if anything), for our purposes it stands as the (partial) inspiration for the "AMOR," the trace at the end of *Birdman*'s titles.[93]

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[92] Ibid. 171.
[93] I would suggest that the double presence of the letter "O" at the end of Godard's credits is a clear example of art cinema's recurrent propensity toward opacity, the sort of element that could mean any number of things. In the case of these two Os, one might argue that their resemblance to zeros aligns with the ultimate existential crisis and fate of the two main characters. Alternately, the two Os, separated by a sizeable space, could be interpreted as two eyes from the screen, staring back at the audience. Enough other elements in *Pierrot le fou* could easily be cited to support the notion of the film itself returning the spectator's gaze. Regardless of how we might ultimately explain this brief moment, its enigmatic character can be comfortably understood in relation to authorship.

The opening titles of *Pierrot le fou* conclude with voiceover narration by Belmondo's character, who quotes from a biography about composer Diego Velásquez. A particularly text-heavy film of Godard's, with intertitles of literary extracts often interrupting narrative action, *Pierrot le fou* exudes a rampant but playful poststructuralism, overtly borrowing from an assemblage of authors and artists, deconstructing quotations and reappropriating them at will. *Birdman*, on the other hand, foregrounds its bibliography in the opening minutes. In the image from *Birdman* described above, we are given an animated epigraph by Raymond Carver, whose short story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" is central to the film's narrative. It appears thus:

AND DID YOU GET WHAT YOU WANTED
FROM THIS LIFE, EVEN SO?

                                    I DID.

AND WHAT DID YOU WANT?

TO CALL MYSELF BELOVED, TO FEEL
MYSELF BELOVED ON THE EARTH.

                        (RAYMOND CARVER, *LATE FRAGMENT*)

The short poem is among the last Carver composed, included as the final entry in *All of Us: The Collected Poems of Raymond Carver* prior to the appendices.[94] About to die, Carver contentedly acknowledges the fulfillment of his life's central wish, to know the affection of others. Taking the form of a dialogue, or perhaps soliloquy, the poem forms a retrospective on personal relations in the face of imminent death, a pattern that finds easy parallels in *Birdman*. Also true to the film, Carver's poem does not address any interest of the author in returning the love of others. Instead, the words doubly insist on the need to *be*-loved, rather than *to* love. *Birdman* revolves around a main character whose self-loathing spurs a desperate desire for affirmation from family, fans, critics, and co-workers. Riggan's thirst for admiration stunts any ability to greet the needs of others adequately. Examples abound, ranging from forgetting the name of a stagehand to more significant examples. First, Riggan's daughter Sam (Emma Stone) has a history of drug addiction and is defined by her cynical outlook on life. In an ostensibly loving gesture toward her, Riggan employs her as his personal assistant. Within the architecture of

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[94] Raymond Carver, *All of Us: The Collected Poems of Raymond Carver* (New York: Knopf, 1998).

character dynamics, however, this confuses Sam's role as Riggan's daughter/laborer, and Riggan himself as father/employer. Sam is regularly exasperated with the responsibilities of working for her dad, and Riggan consistently blurs his two roles with Sam when they interact. In relation with Mike (Edward Norton), Sam is most often reduced to an object for compliments ("That ass is great") and interlocutor during games of Truth-or-Dare, which are characterized by Sam ogling over the enigmatic Mike. As a rule, the film positions Sam as an abused, passive character who, far from passing the Bechdel Test, functions as a foil for exclusively male characters. Sylvia (Amy Ryan), Sam's mother and Riggan's ex-wife, acts in a similar way. In Riggan's dressing room during the premiere's intermission, Riggan recalls to Sylvia the evening of a blowout argument they had years before. Pensively, Riggan asks, "Why did we break up?" Sylvia quickly and sternly responds, "You threw a kitchen knife at me. And an hour later you were telling me how much you loved me." Riggan's domestic abuse is recounted in the same breath as his failure to "love" his wife consistently. The scene, which offers the most honest moment acknowledging the extent of Riggan's treatment of women, avoids making light of spousal abuse but shuts the door on the issue as quickly as it opens it.

Brody's review of *Birdman* goes on to observe that the opening image appears to cite Godard's later film *Every Man for Himself* (1980). And though similarities link the two, a stronger connection can be found between *Birdman* and *Passion* (1982), a Godard film released two years after *Every Man for Himself*. *Birdman*'s first post-credits shot is part of a brief montage (bookending a similar one at the film's finale) of abstract images. The very first of these images is a canted shot of the sky at dusk (see Figure 4). A shooting or falling star occupies much of the frame as the camera follows it. The concept

of a falling star offers metaphorical significance in relation to *Birdman*'s main character,

a former movie star running out of money and desperate to stage a successful Broadway

play. Much in the same way as *Children of Men* punctuates its longest take with the

preceding shot updating *La Pietà*, *Birdman* presents a penultimate image prior to its

super-long take that acts as an abstract metaphor. The first shot of *Passion* positions the

camera in a manner similar to that of *Birdman*, except here it is daytime and, rather than a

falling star, a jet expels contrail across the cloudy blue sky (see Figure 3). In the case of

each, a cut transitions from an abstract atmospheric shot to an indoor long shot of a

person involved in the production of a performance requiring the collaboration of many

people but governed by a single director (read: *auteur*).

Figure 18: *Passion* opening shot

Figure 9: *Birdman* opening shot

While any metaphorical significance in the opening shot of *Passion* is more opaque, *Passion*'s narrative revolves around a somewhat manic film director attempting to overcome numerous obstacles in the making of a film. As with *Birdman*, much of *Passion* takes place behind the scenes, highlighting the difficult production process of these performative art forms. *Passion* operates more self-reflexively, with a film director working in Switzerland to record somewhat abstract, formalist compositions while battling with the producer over the film's lack of a central narrative. And although not comprised of long takes, the film within *Passion* consists of numerous *tableaux vivants*, still life shots of models posed to resemble famous paintings. Similar to a long take, this technique highlights and extends the duration of a scene in a way that draws attention to itself and taxes the performers, in this case through silence and immobility. That Godard employs *tableaux vivants* in the context of classical art further aligns with Iñárritu's stake in aesthetic integrity and art citation.

But technical problems hamper artistic triumph within the films' respective diegeses. In *Passion*, incessant difficulties with the lighting force the director to halt

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production, as performers lounge around the sets awaiting solutions. In *Birdman*, the very first production mishap that we witness is precisely one of lighting, although rather different from those in *Passion*. In *Birdman*, a stage light falls onto the head of a difficult actor and allows Riggan to recast a key part. Not only does the moment elicit the "falling star" image from earlier, but it also strengthens the film's ties with *Passion*. Further still, whereas *Passion* highlights a challenging production element—lighting—within its diegesis, *Birdman* does so through its extra-diegetic conceit of the long take. As the ostensible mechanism through which nearly the entire film is presented (minus the montaged bookends), the long take mediates *Birdman*'s diegesis and works with the presence of a diegetic director to draw attention to the auteur overseeing production behind the camera.

But perhaps most tellingly, *Birdman*'s polemic on art and authorship is most clearly legible in the character of Tabitha Dickinson, the *New York Times* theater critic twice seen in a bar whose opinion, according to both Mike and the play's producer, is "the only thing that matters in theater." She promises Riggan, "I'm going to destroy your play." Referred to by male characters variously as an "old bat" (Jake, the producer) "a lazy fucker" (Riggan), and someone who "looks like she just licked a homeless guy's ass" (Mike, then Riggan). Tabitha is the ultimate foil to Riggan's success on Broadway and, thus, to his life. She provides an opportunity for Riggan and Mike to bond over their shared risk in performance (versus the easy life of a critic) and for Riggan to opine about risking everything in the face of her "crappy opinions backed up by crappy comparisons." Tabitha's haughtily belligerent attitude toward Riggan is encapsulated in a bitter diatribe in which she tells Riggan, "I hate you. And everyone you represent. Entitled. Spoiled.

Selfish. Children. Blissfully untrained, unversed and unprepared to even attempt real art. Handing each other awards for cartoons and pornography." Curiously, for all the antagonism between Riggan and Tabitha, they seem to share a hierarchical view of art. Riggan resents his own image as Birdman as much as Tabitha takes umbrage at a Hollywood actor staging a Broadway play. Their conflict lies in a disagreement not over art but artistry, notably whether Riggan can actually perform the role of a successful artist. One does not stage a pet project out of privilege and get away with it, Tabitha insists. In reaction to this injustice, she vows to write a negative review before having seen the play.

Here, the film deploys male performers to denigrate and feminize the figure of the critic. Only ever seen in the bar through the eyes of Riggan and Mike, Tabitha is defined by her gendered indignation, a sexually frustrated woman taking pleasure only in the downfall of impudent poseurs who mix low art with high art. Her contempt toward Hollywood parallels that of the film itself, as seen in the latter's aforementioned digs toward blockbuster movies. Riggan's self-proclaimed authenticity, a quality prized by all the main characters and inspired by a personal note from Raymond Carver that Riggan keeps in his pocket, connotes Riggan's ticket to theatrical triumph. His own truthful performance leads him to replace the blank in a stage gun with a real bullet and shoot himself during the play's premiere, the second of Riggan's (apparent) failed suicide attempts referenced in the film. In the film's final, even ultimate irony, the injury leads to a beak-like bandage being affixed to his face while hearing Tabitha's rapturous review read from the morning's *New York Times*. Once again resembling a bird-man, the visibly wounded yet vindicated Riggan is free to embrace both of his personae: the imagined,

internal Birdman voice and the real, external *vox populi* finally and harmoniously

validating him. The culmination of Riggan's personal and professional crises is pictured

in his ambiguous exit from an upper-story hospital window, a concluding embrace of his

Birdman identity permitted by the critical valuation of his play. Finally, Riggan receives

the stamp of artist as *Birdman* the film successfully ends its (series of) long take(s).

Riggan's victory comes from defying the critical odds and measuring up to the

authenticity of high art, while *Birdman* pulls off its long take through technological

trickery creating the impression of an impossible shot.

Conclusion

Whereas the documentary-derived and neorealist-influenced aesthetic of *Children*

of Men strategically employs long takes toward a progressive politics, *Birdman* uses the

technique more problematically, emphasizing a pecking order separating lowbrow mass

entertainment from art fastidiously birthed by a skillful auteur. With the future of the

human race at stake, *Children of Men* marshals its camera, story, and politics to ensure,

as Žižek puts it, "that film as art will really survive."[95] Although the film acts as a strong

critique of contemporary globalism—particularly the West's culpability for it—Lubezki's

camera work in *Children of Men* openly takes on documentary characteristics in order to

emphasize the pressing and real-world nature of the dystopically fictional narrative. In

Birdman, on the other hand, the plot centers on whether a depressed actor can

successfully stage a play and attain positive reviews. Here, Lubezki's camera draws

attention to the myopic desire for the success of the artistic elite. The relationship

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[95] Slavoj Žižek, *Children of Men* DVD extra, directed by Alfonso Cuarón (2006: Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2007).

between *Birdman*'s narrative and its camera style suggests the film's investment in a cinematics that foregrounds the technical prowess—even the wizardry—of its maker(s). As Riggan appears able to manipulate objects with his mind, blurring the distinction between the film's own dichotomy between truth and lie, so also do *Birdman*'s hidden edits knowingly extend the appearance of an impossibly long take and add a magical element to the film at diegetic and extra-diegetic levels. Aside from the few brief shots comprising the prologue and epilogue, these hidden cuts create *Birdman*'s impression of being a single-shot film.

Between the invisible joints of the shots, however, is a camera style that cannot reasonably be described as "documentary-like" or "realist." Rather, *Birdman*'s camera moves almost constantly, its motion suggesting a weightlessness far removed from the shoulder-bound, mobile-but-grounded shakiness of *Children of Men*. Lubezki's camera in *Birdman* seems to float through its New York environs, levitating in and around the theater where Riggan and company interact. Occasional fast pans and tilts disrupt the otherwise drifting character of the images, often in ways that simultaneously allow the frame to follow diegetic movement and, as aforementioned, camouflage an edit. Unlike the grounding of *Children of Men*'s camera and its revealing tendency to look away from Theo upon sites of crucial significance, *Birdman*'s camera possesses an avian freedom from beginning to end that aesthetically sutures the audience to Riggan's point of view.

Although Lubezki himself operated the camera throughout the film's handheld shots, many of the pirouetting shots in *Birdman* were achieved through the use of a Steadicam, operated by Chris Haarhoff. The Steadicam—initially developed in the 1970s

as "a device that could smooth out handheld action shots"[96]—acts as a major contributor

to the graceful movement of *Birdman*'s camera, most likely used in scenes that would

otherwise betray the quivers of the camera operator's steps. Some of the mythology of

the Steadicam's glassy effect finds its roots in the innovative use of the apparatus in *The*

Shining (1980). For that film, Garrett Brown worked with Stanley Kubrick to innovate an

adjustment to the original device that enabled the camera to operate extremely close to

ground level (around 3 inches, in the case of the "Big Wheel" scene). The resulting effect

in Kubrick's film eerily suggested a ghostly presence: smooth, quick camera movement

with diegetic sound limited entirely to the sound of the boy's trike on and off rugs and

hardwood floors. With increased use of Steadicam in the decades since *The Shining*,

perhaps the technique has lost some of its otherworldly effect. But like *The Shining*,

Birdman takes advantage of the Steadicam's fluidity to convey a mode distinguishable

from cinematic realism. Not that *Children of Men*'s camera work resists an authorial

signature, but *Birdman*'s rejection of realism in favor of dreamy transcendence and the

preeminence of its narrative ambiguity proselytize the figure of the auteur and the film's

own status as a creation of an authorial agent. Eschewing accessibility in exchange for

abstruseness, *Birdman* draws attention to its source in the all-knowing mind and all-

capable hands of the filmmaker. In the last pre-epilogue scene of the film, Riggan appears

to fly out of his hospital window in such a way that potentially confuses the fantasy of

what we see with a possible reality of suicide. When his daughter Sam wanders to the

window a moment later, the smiling expression on her face appears to confirm the film's

ultimate blurring of fantasy with reality, suggesting that Riggan actually has flown away.

This is the only moment in *Birdman* when a character other than Riggan acknowledges

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[96] http://tiffen.com/steadicam/history-of-steadicam/

that an utterly impossible event could have occurred outside of Riggan's mind. This ending concludes *Birdman's* narrative on a supremely ambiguous note, one that elicits from a mass-market audience the natural question, "What *really* happened to Riggan?" Aside from the film's considerable energies spent toward executing the appearance of an extremely long take and alternating real and non-real events blurred together in a dreamlike camera mode, *Birdman* has heretofore stuck fairly closely to a mass-market approach, albeit one accented with the influence of European art cinema. But the film's finale overtly rejects the former in favor of the latter, a reversal that draws all the more attention to an authority behind the film that might clarify the murkiness.

In a remarkably similar and yet distinct counter-example, the finale of *Children of Men* also leaves the ultimate fate of its main character, Theo, unclear. Perhaps mortally wounded, Theo directs Kee's attention toward her newborn baby and the arrival of the ship *Tomorrow*. But rather than spotlighting ambiguity as in *Birdman*, *Children of Men* concludes with the logical culmination of a narrative that has come to replace an emphasis on the character of Theo with the object of Theo's renewed outlook, a hopeful future as embodied in Kee and her baby Dylan. Pushing on Žižek's argument that *Children of Men* is a film about background rather than foreground, I observe that the film's background slowly overtakes its foreground. Fugees, pictured only peripherally to Theo in the film's beginning, transform and outlast him by the end. Theo's nearsighted focus on his own situation slowly gives way to a broader perspective that peaks with his erasure as the central character in the final scene. So rather than wallowing in its ambiguity, *Children of Men* uses ambiguity as a tool to redirect audience attention from a

possibly-dying protagonist toward a new foreground, one that finds a seamless

correlation in the real world of the film's audience.

CHAPTER III

EDITING POLITICS: ULTRA-LONG TAKES, FILMOPHILIA,

AND GOING DIGITAL

<u>Introduction</u>

Long takes can be very hard to execute. When asked why they commit to filming

in long takes, directors tend to list reasons falling into one or more of the following

categories: formal experiments, audience immersion, (assumed) economy of cost and/or

time, and sheer—often gendered—bravura. Whether their interviews reveal such

rationales or not, attention to the films and their contexts—production, historical,

technological, and institutional—reinforces these categories as rationales for long takes.

If the long take can be characterized as a cinematic technique-cum-fetish in recent years,

the practice of shooting (and projecting) on traditional celluloid stands as another historic

practice now metamorphosed into a fixation and phenomenon. Some directors in our

current, largely digital moment still opt to shoot on film proper for reasons generally

classifiable as aesthetic, nostalgic, and practical.[97] Long takes at the intersection of

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[97] An example of aesthetics: Regarding her 2016 film *Certain Women*, Kelly Reichardt recounts the process of planning to shoot digitally for practical reasons: the turnaround time to send the negative off for processing, have a print sent to the shoot's remote Montana location, and view the dailies in time to complete the "section of the film" they were shooting. But once Reichardt and her cinematographer Christopher Blauvelt saw the washed-out test footage, reducing a snowy landscape to "a solid block of white," she was compelled to make a last-minute shift to 16mm film. Paula Bernstein, "Kelly Reichardt on Shooting *Certain Women* on 16mm, the Ugliness of the Day, and Making the Space Tell the Story," *Filmmaker Magazine*, October 14, 2016: http://filmmakermagazine.com/100081-kelly-reichardt-on-shooting-certain-women-on-16mm/#.WEhzDTKZOHo, last accessed 12/7/2016.

An example of nostalgia: Sam Mendes, director of the 2016 James Bond film *Spectre*, confesses that after seeing the first dailies on 35mm film "It had a romance, a slight nostalgia, which was my own imposition, but I had that feeling…I definitely will shoot movies on film again, but I will also occasionally shoot a movie on digital for reasons that have to do with aesthetics and probably speed…" Benjamin B., "*Spectre*: Interview with Sam Mendes," *Blog: The Film Book* on *The American Society of Cinematographers*: http://www.theasc.com/site/blog/thefilmbook/spectre-interview-with-sam-mendes/, last accessed 12/7/2016.

Some practical examples: As director of photography Steven Fierberg insists, "[E]specially if you're shooting a lot of day scenes…you should consider shooting on film." Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-hsien admitted after shooting *The Assassin* (2015) that he may need to shift to digital for cost

celluloid and digital cinematic media invite examination of not only the director but also the editor and role of editing. Despite their inherent resistance to cutting, long takes in art cinema-influenced mass-market films are nevertheless thoroughly edited shots that, under the constraints produced by the long take, demand innovative techniques acting as placeholders for cuts. In a word, long takes within this institutionally hybrid class introduce numerous problems for filmmaking, the solutions to which can be productively brought under the heading of editing. This chapter focuses on three "ultra-long-take films," which I define as films with unbroken shots pressing at the limits of what their respective media allow: *Rope* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1948, 35mm Technicolor film), *Timecode* (Mike Figgis, 2000, digital video), and *Too Late* (Dennis Hauck, 2015, 35mm Techniscope film).[98] By virtue of the unorthodox nature of their form, paired with more typical characteristics ranging from narrative conventions to audience accessibility, I accent the broader goal of this project, which studies films at the crossroads of art and mass-market cinemas, by classifying these films as simultaneously "experimental" and "mainstream" (i.e., mass-market).

Directors and collaborators of these experimental mass-market films driven by ultra-long takes display creative editing solutions to the problem of not cutting, solutions yoked to the medium of each respective film, whether celluloid or digital. Historically

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reasons, but "I need to grasp the essence of this digital medium first—to find its limit." A host of other directors have, as of 2015, only ever shot on celluloid, certainly making it the natural and more familiar medium for them: Cameron Crowe, Francois Ozon, Steven Spielberg, Ken Loach and Xavier Dolan. Vadim Rizov, "~64 Films Released in 2015 Shot on 35mm," *Filmmaker Magazine*, February 16, 2016: http://filmmakermagazine.com/97320-64-films-released-in-2015-shot-on-35mm/#.WDldnjKZOHr, last accessed 12/7/2016.

[98] This list is certainly not exhaustive of ultra long-take films; and, further, it does not apply to films that *appear* to press at the limits of what their media allow but only with the help of disguised edits. Examples might include long takes from *Children of Men* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2006, 35mm film) and the apparently-unbroken shot comprising almost the entirety of *Birdman* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2014, ARRIRAW 2.8k digital), both of which are discussed in the previous chapter.

innovative and aesthetically significant solutions have included disguising cuts (*Rope*),

split screens (*Timecode*), and the starkest-possible cuts that incongruously and

retroactively emphasize the absence of traditional editing (*Too Late*). Each of these

films—all located across a spectrum between art cinema and mass-market film—enacts

feature-length experiments of long-take form, and each of their primary solutions to that

formal device appeals to editing rules and practices. This chapter operates under the

notion that a lack of cutting is not synonymous with a lack of editing; editing techniques

populate film style in ways ranging from rules of editing to whip-pans rendering cuts

ostensibly invisible to the naked eye. Also, I take as a point of departure the conceit of a

long take—commonly considered an elaborate, unconventional camera technique—in a

mass-market/art film involves creatively compensatory techniques that buttress

traditional principles of spatial and narrative continuity, rendering otherwise "art" films

more accessible to mass audiences. In line with this project's broader goals, the chapter

will also illustrate how long takes in this context continue to produce a strikingly classical

construction of the auteur in a contemporary setting. This particular incarnation—infused

with the longest-possible takes a given format can accommodate—not only amplifies the

inherent white-male privilege already endemic to the figure of the auteur, it also performs

it.

The focal problem of this chapter, then, is that of the resistance to cutting created

by very long takes. A staple of film language, cuts become either absent or (in some

cases) disguised in order to achieve (the appearance of) unbroken shots. This

description—including its parenthetical qualifiers—introduces a host of new questions

and suggests further problems for employing the technical vocabulary of film in anything

like a traditional way. Is it proper to speak of "editing" where there are no cuts? I suggest that "editing" as a term connotes not only cuts, dissolves, fades, and wipes; it also refers to principles of editing, whether Hollywood continuity, Soviet disjunctive, or otherwise. So while identifiable "edits" may not be discernable in these films, their long takes nevertheless find cinematographic alternatives to the problem of not cutting that follow the internal editing logic of the film's formal goals. Having already referenced carefully-disguised cuts hidden by whip pans, I will elaborate in what follows using additional examples of "editing" that may not always fit the conventional definition. As the body of films illustrating this point is itself notably small, the three films examined in this chapter comprise not so much a sampling as a near majority of ultra-long-take films (see Appendix for more examples). As such, the implications regarding the politics of the image as well as power dynamics behind the camera *within* this class of films are weighty.

Background: Celluloid & Digital

Less than two decades after the outset of cinema's turn toward digital acquisition—the process of capturing images through sensors and binary code rather than photochemical reaction on celluloid—there exists a vocal bloc of cinephiles from various quarters united by their insistence on preserving cinema's filmic future at the levels of both production and exhibition. From high-profile directors, to projectionists, to grassroots fans, these lovers of films and film are united by their shared affinity for the nominal medium of cinema. At *The Hollywood Reporter*'s 2012 "Director Roundtable"—featuring directors all described in the article as "auteurs" and,

significantly, all men—Quentin Tarantino vented, "I can't stand all this digital stuff. This is not what I signed up for. Even the fact that digital presentation is the way it is right now—I mean, it's television in public…I came into this for film."[99] Tarantino's impassioned statement reflects the inseparability some cinephiles perceive between cinematic art and the medium of film, displaying a concern that a shift in medium disrupts the essence of cinema as such, if not dispensing with it altogether. This ranking system places a premium on cinema and celluloid while relegating digital to the lower, more private realm of TV.[100] Exhibiting more openness to alternative media but also underscoring the importance of the auteur to the discussion, Christopher Nolan in 2015 explained, "I'm not anti-digital in any way, but I'm absolutely committed to getting this choice back into the hands of the director…It's the director's right. It's their choice."[101]

Even more recently, Kodak announced in November of 2016 the opening of large-format 65mm processing facilities in the U.K. Citing the rich heritage of 65mm celluloid in epic films from the 1950s and 1960s, the company's press release—which chalks up the new opening to "the revival of real film" and a "renaissance" of 65mm— lists a number of high-profile upcoming productions that will also utilize the format. Steve Overman, a president at Kodak, proclaims, "The film comeback is accelerating, and the epic, big-screen experience is truly back. The creative and aesthetic

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[99] "Director Roundtable: 6 Auteurs on Tantrums, Crazy Actors, and Quitting While They're Ahead," Stephen Galloway & Matthew Belloni, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 11/28/2012, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/ben-affleck-quentin-tarantino-4-394576?page=2, last accessed 11/11/2016.

[100] Footnoted on the first page of this chapter is an anecdote about director Kelly Reichart, a woman whose familiarity with film did not preclude her from planning a digital shoot, only to switch back to film at the last minute. A subsequent chapter will examine women directors in relation to long takes, but for now it suffices to acknowledge that the revolt against digital is a charge led chiefly by male directors.

[101] "Christopher Nolan fights to keep film alive," Hugh Hart, *Director's Guild of America*, Summer 2015, http://www.dga.org/Craft/DGAQ/All-Articles/1503-Summer-2015/Industry-Film-is-Dead.aspx, last accessed 11/11/2016. For purposes of clarity, this chapter will use the term "digital" in a way consistent with Nolan's, not only as an adjective but also a noun. Thus, "digital" will stand as shorthand for digital technologies and media within the broadly cinematic landscape.

distinctiveness of 65mm film is still well beyond the capability of digital capture…[O]nly real film delivers."[102] But beyond grand epics, Kodak notes the trans-media breadth of the celluloid resurgence, appealing to diverse examples of recent 65mm use ranging from music videos (Adele's "Hello"), to commercials (a Burberry advertisement directed by Steve McQueen), and to documentaries (a 3D IMAX production for The National Parks Service), along with 16mm and 35mm productions "from low-budget independents to multi-million dollar Hollywood blockbusters." Kodak thereby announces not only the opening of celluloid processing facilities but also the company's continued investment in and dependence upon film thriving in various corners of motion picture production.

But do these examples constitute simply a nostalgia for the stuff of traditional cinema, film itself, or the death throes of a disappearing practice? If the cinephile-directors are to be believed, the future prospects of film remain in crisis. If Kodak's word is trustworthy, then the digital shift could be seen as producing a slingshot effect, launching cinema back toward film, if not a peaceful coexistence along with digital, à la Nolan's suggestion. An illuminating account of film's survival in the face of the fast and furious onslaught of digital suggests that powerful (white male) directors (if not necessarily "auteurs") are partially responsible. By mid-2014, Kodak, the last remaining manufacturer of motion picture film stock, saw its production nosedive 96% over an 8-year period. Before shutting down Kodak's New York operation, C.E.O. Jeff Clark visited Hollywood to discuss film's future prospects with studio heads. After being told to "buzz off," Clark met with Christopher Nolan, who in turn built "a coalition" of fellow

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[102] "Film Revival Gets Boost with New Large Format 65mm Processing Facilities in the UK," *Kodak Motion Picture Film*, 11/11/2016, http://motion.kodak.com/US/en/motion/About/News/Film_Revival_Gets_Boost_with_New_Large_Format_65mm_Processing_Facilities_in_the_UK/default.htm, last accessed 11/11/2016.

directors invested in maintaining the life of film, among them Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese, and J.J. Abrams. "Within 48 hours" of these directors vouching for celluloid, Clark says five out of the six major studios had called him, and by February 2015 deals had been struck between Kodak and all the major studios to purchase "contractually specified quantities of film stock from Kodak over the next several years."[103]

These factors shed light on the current movement to save (or salvage) celluloid filmmaking, if not celluloid exhibition, by shifting power away from industrial efficiency and prioritizing the director's artistic authority. Nevertheless, these directors recognize that industrial entities—such as studio heads and film stock companies—are key players in allowing them to exercise artistic freedom. But how exactly does film as a medium (for present purposes, distinct from digital) contribute toward cinematic art from the perspectives of these directors? When Tarantino proclaimed his love for film over digital, Ben Affleck—also present at the roundtable discussion—responded, "[F]ilm's over."[104] So what undergirds such strong convictions and motivates these extensive efforts to utilize a medium seemingly on its way out? The reasons given by the cast and crew of the recent celluloid-shot *Too Late* in its "Why 35mm?" featurette are overwhelmingly dominated with claims of film being "more real," "much purer," "beautiful and powerful," and possessing a certain "feel" or "something magical."[105] Hyperbole often abounds in these interviews, with one cast member swooning, "It's day and night. To see film again, I could just die." Nostalgia quickly becomes the dominant discursive mode accounting for this particular film's use of celluloid and the way in which the cast proselytizes its own filmophilia—a neologism I use here to denote "love for *celluloid*

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[103] Hart, ibid.

[104] Galloway et al., ibid.

[105] *Too Late: "Why 35mm" Featurette*, web video, 3:05, http://www.toolatemovie.com.

cinema over and above digital," also technically distinct from cinephilia—in the film's marketing.

Long Takes in Celluloid and Digital

While both advocates and critics of the long take's current prevalence clash over whether to celebrate or censure it, both agree that long takes presently carpet much of the contemporary cinematic landscape. Scarcely remembered are previous historical moments in U.S. cinema that presage the more recent obsession. Aside from the single, unbroken (albeit short) shots constituting the entirety of early cinema—prior to the innovation of editing—1930s and 40s Hollywood testifies to a growing interest in long takes. William Wyler and Orson Welles, in particular, prolifically collaborated with cinematographer Gregg Toland to choreograph camera movements that recomposed shots midstream at the levels of framing and focus, spurning the impulse to change every angle with a cut. Despite this reticence, the films tend to abide quite comfortably within the rules of continuity editing that Griffith and others had helped institute decades earlier within the formal grammar of classical cinema. Compliance with, say, the 180-degree rule or even analytical editing as a style does not necessitate cutting. A mobile camera can respect an axis of action as well as a slow zoom or tracking shot can zero in on and analyze a pocket of space, all without cutting. Continuity editing conventions revolve primarily around the camera's navigation of spaces—whether through edits or movement—and presenting perspectives that advance the narrative without disorienting the audience. Long takes, then, can certainly adhere to the continuity system.

Before scrutinizing particular techniques that either cooperate with that system or reconfigure the means toward its ends, some introductions. *Too Late*'s value as a cutting-edge artifact of contemporary filmophilia extends beyond merely the "raw" materials used for motion capture and exhibition. Concurrent and overlapping with the celluloid-digital debates for cinema's future is the current interest in long takes. *Too Late* situates itself within a relatively small body of historically experimental mass-market films characterized by their use of ultra-long takes, shots with durations lasting as long as the camera's capacity allows. In the case of Hauck's film, virtually all of *Too Late* consists of long takes using the vast majority of the 1,000-foot reels of film the camera magazines could hold. Upping the ante, Hauck chose to shoot in 2-perf Techniscope, doubling the maximum duration of a 1,000-foot film reel from about 11 minutes to around 22 minutes.[106] *Too Late*, which was also distributed exclusively across North America in venues equipped with 35mm projectors, arrived on the scene about 15 years after the dawn of the digital shift and in a moment of digital domination over film exhibition, if not also production.

In that moment 15 years prior, another American film with mass-market aspirations performed a feature-length experiment of long-take form, exploiting the limits of digital capture far beyond the capacity of any celluloid camera heretofore.[107]

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[106] Techniscope film exposes images on 2-perf 35mm film stock in 2.33 format, which is then cropped to 2.39 in post-production (consistent with frame-ratio standardization), anamorphized, and doubled in order to be compatible on 4-perf projectors. For present purposes, the significance of this data lies in the format's capacity for twice the amount of footage to be contained in a camera magazine. An ultra-long-take film using this format, then, may shoot nearly 22 minutes of footage instead of just under 11. "Film Formats – Page 1," *Internet Encyclopedia of Cinematographers*, http://www.cinematographers.nl/FORMATS1.html, last accessed 10/31/2016; and Patricia Thompson in "Celluloid Antihero," *American Cinematographer* 97.5 (May 2016), 26.

[107] By "long-take form," I mean a formal approach to film driven first and foremost by the long take. This term makes no claims as to whether a film is ultimately composed of a single long take, produces the effect of a single long take, or (as in the case of *Timecode* hereunder), consists in more than one simultaneous

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Timecode (Mike Figgis, 2000) was shot ostensibly free of edits according to the usual definition. Along with *Too Late*, these films represent noteworthy minority voices illustrating inventive possibilities that deviate from formal and industrial norms, employing very long takes and nonconformist cinematic media to make their points. These possibilities are only realized when filmmakers invest in solutions to (self-created) problems created by such deviations. If standard filmmaking practice, whether studio or independent, facilitates certain aesthetics through industrial and technological modes of production, then aesthetic divergences such as ultra-long takes also become industrial or technological ones. And since these divergences *de facto* deviate from standard practice, problems arise in the production of ultra-long-take films. The solutions to these problems require informed and adept navigation within industrial (e.g., studio or independent) and institutional (e.g., art, experimental, or mass-market cinema) spaces allowing a film's production to clear new hurdles created by the goal of extremely long takes. These films, I argue, work to clear those hurdles through resourceful substitutes for traditional editing. This, my central concern of the chapter, is reflected in a remark by Steadicam operator Larry McConkey (*Goodfellas*, *The Silence of the Lambs*, and *Basic Instinct*). When asked how he organized and executes "a long, unbroken shot," McConkey answered,

> One reason editing is nice is that it allows you to do a section of the scene from a fixed position, or as a dolly or crane move, until it stops working for some reason. A new angle is established and the scene continues, perhaps with some unnecessary action cut out as well. If I am asked to do an unbroken Steadicam shot in the same situation, I have to figure out another solution.[108]

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long take. I limit the criterion for "long-take form" to film form guided and driven by the long take, with other techniques and stylistic elements taking the back seat to it. As cited in another chapter, *Gravity* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2013) would be excluded from long-take form based on its primary formal interest in immersive spectacle, as evinced in the filmmakers' acknowledgement of cutting "short" its 12.5-minute opening long take so as not to detract from the film's other goals.

[108] Larry McClonkey, from Serena Ferrara, *Steadicam: Techniques and Aesthetics* (Boston: Focal Press, 2001), 122.

McConkey verbalizes the dilemma of navigating shots that cannot be dissected in the editing room, going on to describe the myriad solutions he and other cast and crew members devised in the renowned Copacabana Club sequence shot in *Goodfellas*. Because long takes, by definition, resist the impulse to cut, I will show how each of these films devises unique alternatives to traditional editing even while reflecting the goals and effects produced by editing conventions.

Goals

This chapter will (1) triangulate long-take practice with celluloid film and analog editing as embodied in *Rope*, (2) examine how digital filmmaking impacts the editing of unbroken shots in *Timecode*, and (3) explore the ramifications of digital and celluloid long-take filmmaking on cinema in the current mixed-media moment, with special attention given to *Too Late*. This significance reflects combatting yet compatible political ideologies of film historiography, specifically how the celluloid-digital feud and the stakes of cinema's future ultimately reinstates the dominance of the auteur at the crucial juncture of art and mass-market cinemas. At stake is the question of how filmmakers— not only directors but, importantly, editors—seek to overcome numerous practical obstacles impeding the success of long takes, obstacles almost universally avoidable by exchanging the long take for an edited sequence of shots. Do digital technologies, often lauded as a democratizing agent of cinema and new media, indeed level the playing field of film production? If not, does the celluloid resurgence, in its nostalgic appeal to history, revive Walter Benjamin's 1936 claim of film's utility for the proletariat? Consistent with this work's broader project, I show how the authorially unique possibilities of long takes

contribute to a strikingly stable construction of the auteur across various film contexts in the face of numerous contingencies.

Historical Context & Industrial Practices

In the years separating *Timecode* from *Too Late*, digital acquisition has become the industry standard, with only a handful of movies released each year shot on celluloid—and even these are, with rare exceptions, subject to digital intermediaries and computer-generated manipulation. A super majority of films shot in the present moment undergoes digital transformation in post-production on top of those already originating through digital optics. The newly ubiquitous extensions of digital technologies—beyond the special effects that initially garnered digital's popular awareness in the 1980s and 1990s—directly contribute to the development of long-take practices.[109] The surge of interest in long takes thus should be seen less as coincidental than causal. The exponential increase of image capacity in digital cameras enables, invites, and even dares filmmakers to execute extremely long takes, and particularly virtuosic ones. Given the legendary history of long takes and their famous practitioners, it comes as no surprise that budding technologies such as digital would be used to pioneer new technical and aesthetic territory by way of a long-established technique.

But new complications introduced by digital, the journey from set to screen still include required post-production work including, but not limited to, editing. If the shot (including its various preconditions) is the most elemental instrument in the filmmaker's

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[109] At the same time, it bears acknowledgment that digital has also invited more rapid editing patterns, testifying again to the flexibility of the technology with regard to film style.

toolbox, then the edit comes in a close second.[110] French director Robert Bresson has

famously stated that his films are born three times, a notion easily applicable to all films:

first in concept, then during the shoot, and finally in the editing room.[111] As these

elemental forces of film technique go, the process of constructing a shot effectively

begins during the film shoot and ends in post-production, with digital now offering

filmmakers exponentially more options for shot enhancement and alteration in post-

production. While digital images render the image-enhancement process simpler in

principle than their filmic counterparts do (especially when that process is itself digital in

nature), computer-based image augmentation becomes something of a Pandora's box,

raising innumerable possibilities of tweaking and fiddling, a fact that in itself has spurred

film theorists to argue that the digital image is both intrinsically and pragmatically

dissimilar from the photochemical image.[112] Having originated well within cinema's

celluloid era, long takes were one of many techniques that digital cinema has used to

exploit its expanded capacities over traditional film. Digital long takes can flaunt an

otherworldly length, dwarfing celluloid's limits both in terms of postponing the call to

"cut" on set as well as post-hoc image and sound corrections that forgive the on-set

mistakes so prevalent during long-take shoots. So perhaps it was only a matter of time

before a zealous cinephile like Hauck would use lengthy strips of film stock to participate

in the tacit long-take contest, pitting analog against digital to exploit the durational

capacity of celluloid within the exploding digital era.

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[110] Indeed, as any given "shot" is always bracketed by edits, even this ranking quickly becomes a non sequitur.
[111] Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer* (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), 7.
[112] See David Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

If digital experiments like *Timecode* and *Russian Ark* showcased the potential of the new format for cinema by way of extremely long takes, then *Too Late* uniquely expresses the role of filmic cinema in an age of digital mixed media through long takes punctuated by pronounced edits. More broadly, it appears that the prevailing discourse currently situating the present moment of film history as one rich with new digital innovations has invited film traditionalists to demonstrate the continuing possibilities of celluloid for creative breakthroughs. *Too Late* stands out among the recent influx of mostly-digital ultra-long takes in recent years by parading itself as a piece of 35mm filmmaking and, despite executing the longest-possible analog takes, it draws special attention to celluloid's inevitable need to cut. As such, *Too Late*'s shot lengths and editing practices—along with its self-reflexive diegesis and narrative structure—imbue it with film-ness.

A historical examination of long takes shows that filmmakers have consistently used ambitious shot length to stretch the technological constraints of image capture that they faced in their respective historical moments. Their distinctive efforts to do so have challenged the egalitarian potential within these technological innovations often proclaimed by film theorists. With many cinematic innovations have come accompanying proclamations of their democratic potential, e.g. Super 8 offered a cheaper inlet for aspiring directors and iPhones let anyone with a $600 phone become a filmmaker. And so, in spite of disparate variables setting celluloid long takes apart from digital ones, important points of continuity render them historiographically similar. The trans-historical relationships linking these long takes bring cinema's various formats and technologies together by exposing the intrinsically (but not essentially!) cinematic

ideologies exuded by filmmakers' motivations. These motivations have had

transformative effects on extant theoretical heritages of cinematic technologies. Whereas

film theorists have proclaimed the political potential of both traditional photochemical

film (Walter Benjamin) as well as digital cinema (Thomas Elsaesser), the practice of

long-take filmmaking strains these optimistic conceptions and positions cinema in a

realm of relatively unbending auteur-driven technique, suggesting the futility of a format-

based theory of cinema.[113] The problem—now borne out at the level of film production,

industries, and institutions—surely stems from critical discourses intent on establishing

and perpetuating film as art and directors as its artists. As discussed in the previous

chapter, the key early contributor to the association between the long take and the auteur

was André Bazin, who praised use of the technique in the silent films of Erich von

Stroheim and F.W. Murnau, then the sound films of Orson Welles and William Wyler.[114]

Here, then, I probe historical transitions of cinematic technologies in relation to

long takes, giving special attention to editing limitations, innovations, and practices. In

formal terms, the shot and the edit exist in necessary relationship with one another. Since

long takes typically function differently from other shot types within narrative contexts, it

follows that some of film history's longest takes also feature unconventional editing;

Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948) stands as a germane example. Whether in an effort to disguise

cuts through camera trickery—and in so doing extend the effect of a long take—or

emphasize edits—effectively marking the cinematic compulsion to shift the scene in

some way—films like *Rope*, *Timecode*, and *Too Late* manifest contrasting intellectual

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[113] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969): 217-252; Thomas Elsaesser, "Digital Cinema: Convergence or Contradiction," in *Oxford Handbook of Sound and Digital Media*, eds. Carol Vernallis et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013): 13-44.
[114] André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 26, 33.

approaches to editing when shots are prolonged beyond conventional duration. So although this critical approach must attend to such variations within the frame, it does so through the lens of editing rather than cinematography per se; emphasizing limits of the long take at the point of cutting and effectively identifying how long-take practices have obscured the boundary between editing and cinematography.

<u>The Films</u>

Insofar as art cinema occupies territory often perceived as between mass-market and experimental cinemas, experiments at the outskirts of mass-market films can produce hybrid or liminal films that resist compatibility in either category. The central films of this chapter were produced domestically, to varying degrees associated with mass-market film production. All produced at least in part by independent production companies, they illustrate how experimental projects at the level of overall film form get made, distributed, and exhibited in their respective historical moments. For present purposes, these formally radical independents embody precisely the kind of risk that large studios eschew and that characterizes historic art cinema.

Rope, infamous for experimenting with long takes and disguised edits, was a formal experiment that Hitchcock (and others) considered a failure. Historically situated near the very beginning of the postwar era, *Rope* fundamentally exemplifies film's capability (and filmmakers' desires) to perform these unbroken shots prior to the digital turn that began over 50 years later.[115] *Timecode*, on the other hand, near the beginning of the digital 'era' explores interweaving narratives and characters using four simultaneous

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[115] I qualify this statement with the observation that an increase in the capacity of camera magazines would eventually allow longer takes, but (1) nothing permitting a feature-length unbroken shot and (2) nothing impacting the ability to disguise edits.

90-minute takes, exhibited on a screen split into four quarters. Employing the format of distinct visual quadrants suggests editing not at the shot level, as is customary in film practice, but on the screen or the image itself. Further, *Timecode* modulates sound amplification to underscore which of the four frames invites the viewer's primary attention. In so doing, sound editing becomes a tool negotiating the absence of traditional editing for narrative clarity and audience comprehension.

Too Late, a somewhat extraordinary yet emblematic film of twenty-first century celluloid nostalgia, was shot using five ostensibly unbroken 20-minute shots on the rarely-used Techniscope Super 35mm format. With each shot running nearly the entire length of its reel, the film belongs within the Introduction's taxonomical category of "Ultra-Long Celluloid," along with *Rope* and Miklos Jancsó's 1972 *Red Psalm*, though the reels on those films each topped out around 10 minutes. Following its lengthy period of production—the shoot began in 2012 and lasted "several" years[116]—distributors exhibited *Too Late* on an exclusive "35mm tour" throughout North America in 2015-6, on the heels of the more widely-publicized "70mm roadshow" of *The Hateful Eight* (Tarantino, 2015) only a few months prior.[117] But unlike Tarantino's longer-running, larger-image, and higher-budget film, the independent *Too Late* trades on its long takes allied with film material to provide "a much purer experience," according to one of the film's actors, and displaying "a ballsy but awesome move," according to another.[118] When studied next to recent digitally-shot films with long takes, such as *Victoria*

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[116] Jacob Knight, "Fantastic Fest Interview: TOO LATE Writer/ Director Dennis Hauck," *Birth. Movies. Death*, http://birthmoviesdeath.com/2015/09/30/fantastic-fest-interview-too-late-writer-director-dennis-hauck, last accessed 11/30/2016.
[117] [citation about roadshow]
[118] "Why 35mm?" *Too Late* featurette, http://www.toolatemovie.com. Note the gendered verbiage here, a common linguistic trend one notices in publicity and criticism of "long-take films."

(Sebastian Schipper, 2014), *The Revenant* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2015), and *Hardcore Henry* (Ilya Naishuller, 2016), *Too Late* represents a new object reflecting celluloid's resurgence in the face of digital cinema and also a potentially troubling cinematic fetish that reinstates an aura upon film and the filmmaking auteur that is exclusivist in its attitude toward novelty (when convenient) and authoritarian in its re-elevation of the director as the film's singular visionary.

Celluloid Long Takes, Round One: *Rope*

An unlikely brief experimenter with and innovator of the long take during cinema's celluloid years was Alfred Hitchcock, whose films were so characterized by their identifiable editing patterns that producer David O. Selznick referred to the idiosyncrasy as "goddamn jigsaw cutting," a practice not unrelated to Hitchcock's eventual parting of ways with Selznick.[119] Selznick's description of Hitchcock's penchant for editing has been characterized as Hitchcock's "stamp," the overarching component following which all his other techniques came secondary. Biographer Leonard J. Heff writes of Hitchcock's 1946 film *Notorious*,

> The rhythm of the close-ups, the concentration on objects, and the depiction—largely through the editing—of a world of constricted vision are typically Hitchcock. Frame by frame, shot by rapidly shifting shot, *Notorious* not only broke with the Selznick ethos but fully anticipated the director's masterpieces of the 1950s, all works that created unnerving cinematic environments through montage.[120]

Hitchcock's creative disagreements with Selznick often stemmed from the producer's insistence that the director extend shots before editing and also edit in a more "invisible" style, one emphasizing continuity and narrative flow. Hitchcock, however, hoped to

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[119] Leonard J. Leff, *Hitchcock and Selznick* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), 278.
[120] Leff, 216.

subvert Hollywood conventions by positioning "climactic shots to play against each other without harmonizing effect."[121]

These aspects of Hitchcock's style raise the question, why would Hitchcock choose in his 1948 film *Rope* to abandon the cinematic tool that plausibly defined his trademark style? The narrative offers at least one clue. The film revolves around two young men who, inspired by an academic mentor's ideology that "intellectually superior" individuals may transcend "moral concepts of right and wrong," plan and commit murder together, then hide the victim's body in the same room as a dinner party that they host through most of the film's running time. Among other guests are the murder victim's family as well as Rupert, the mentor whose elitist thinking gave rise to their crime but who will express disgust and contempt for the young men in the film's ironic finale. Although all taking place within a single day, gradual temporal ellipses compress time over the film's 80 minutes utterly apart from the film's unusual editing pattern, which I will examine shortly. While elliptical editing functions as a standard technique for truncating real time into the confines a feature-length film, Hitchcock and editor William H. Ziegler marshal the film's editing toward quite different aims. Indeed, the narrative's focus on two men performing a highly risky experiment—one that ultimately fails within *Rope*'s diegesis—finds strong parallels in Hitchcock and Ziegler's experiment in editing that, Hitchcock eventually believed, also failed. *Rope*'s story, then, is emblematic of its plot. The narrative acts as a synecdoche of the film's own precarious production.

But a separate clue reveals another rationale for the film's eccentricity: *Rope* was the first film Hitchcock directed following his schism with Selznick. Might Hitchcock have shown off his newfound freedom in Hollywood apart from Selznick by directing a

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[121] Leff, 164.

film that stylistically backhanded his former partner? Other factors complicate the matter.

During this postwar period, the Hollywood industry was marked by an "economy wave"

consonant with the 1948 Paramount Decision. Hitchcock hypothesized, in developing the

film, that the long take could constitute a thrifty measure saving time and money.[122]

David Bordwell points out that, as Hitchcock's first venture under his own production

company at Transatlantic Pictures, cutting costs would conceivably have been a

supremely important factor in the making of *Rope*.[123] Regardless of these possible

contributing factors, the production of *Rope* convinced Hitchcock that the experiment

was ultimately "quite nonsensical," a conclusion that may have helped persuade

generations of filmmakers that movies composed of multiple ultra-long takes are fruitless

exercises, no more inherently interesting to audiences than they are rewarding to cast and

crew.[124]

At the level of editing, however, *Rope* stands out for its fascinating and

alternating mode of cutting. Since the Technicolor cameras used to film *Rope* could only

hold 952 feet in each magazine, shots were limited to about 10 minutes, accounting for a

few seconds to get the camera gears operating at the proper sync speed.[125] And although

the film's legend has since claimed that *Rope* was built on eight 10-minute takes,

Bordwell parses the more complex reality of the film's decoupage. First, only three shots

in *Rope* push at the limits of a film reel by lasting about 10 minutes. The opening credits

roll over a static establishing shot—about 2 minutes long—and the rest range from 4.6 to

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[122] Leff, 269ff.
[123] David Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 37.
[124] Leff, 273.
[125] Bordwell, 33.

8.11 minutes.[126] For present purposes, more striking than the disparate lengths of these

shots are the joints connecting them: some cuts are "hidden" through image blackouts

while others are not. Strictly speaking, these edits are cuts, although they purport not to

be edits at all. In such moments, the camera will track extremely close to a dark object

such as a character's back or piece of furniture, so close that the screen blackens

completely, only to dolly away from the darkness after "invisibly" cutting while the

screen is effectively black.

In what would become the mythic story of *Rope*—a myth Bordwell attributes to

decades of the film's viewing inaccessibility aside from rare 35mm prints and the

occasional television showing—it was said that these "hidden" cuts account for all of the

edits in the film, which was often thought to feature no visible editing at all.[127] But

excepting the cut from the credits/establishing shot to the main diegesis, five cuts are

disguised, designed to be indiscernible to the viewer, while four are not. Curiously, the

edits oscillate throughout the film from these "blackout cuts" to undisguised cuts (usually

eyeline matches) and back again. Operating under the assumption that Hitchcock's

investment in long takes and camouflaged edits render the visible cuts anomalous,

Bordwell locates the solution to this "problem" in exhibition practices of the day. Prior to

the single-platter projection system developed in the 1980s, the capacity of theater film

projectors was limited to about 2,000 feet of film. A film like *Rope* would have been

exhibited on five double reels, double the 1,000-foot reels that fit in the Technicolor

cameras. Hitchcock apparently planned the filming of *Rope* so that the blackout edits

were those spliced together to form a double reel. But, apparently aware that the

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[126] Ibid., 35.
[127] Ibid., 32.

beginning and end of the film strips would eventually show wear after multiple projections, Bordwell surmises that Hitchcock knew the futility of blackout cuts at these junctures and opted instead for traditional cuts.[128]

Given Hitchcock's well-established penchant for formal experimentation, from the transparent ceiling in *The Lodger* (1927) to the dolly zoom in *Vertigo* (1958), it should come as no surprise that he experimented with editing and shot length in 1948. Given, too, Bordwell's breakdown of shot lengths and editing rhythms in *Rope*, it's clear how *Rope* was conceived and executed as an ultra-long-take film dependent on carefully and unusually stitched-together edits. Hitchcock's camera choreography and montage practice in *Rope* were essentially fused, with camera movements anticipating the work of the editor as well as the functionality and limitations of film projection through blackout close-ups and standard cuts. On account of these barriers, *Rope* runs only 80 minutes long, more than 10 minutes shorter than any of Hitchcock's other Hollywood features. The blackout cuts are distracting visual oddities, and camera movements rather than cuts transport the viewer through diegetic space. Absent are any examples of parallel editing, match cuts, or cutaways present in much of Hitchcock's other work.

I maintain, however, that this ultra-long-take film nevertheless fits comfortably into Hitchcock's established proclivities precisely by the central role its unconventional editing plays. Problems of auteur criticism being what they are, *Rope*'s position as Hitchcock's first film as director-producer would generally indicate more, not less, authorial freedom; and the 20 years following *Rope* would produce a swath of Hitchcock productions celebrated for their innovative editing techniques. Editing in *Vertigo* (1958) connected disparate times, spaces, and subjectivities. Such were those cuts that Gilles

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[128] Bordwell, 34.

Deleuze would heavily appeal to the film in his formulation of "the crystal-image" in his

monumental *Cinema 2*. The last two cuts of *North By Northwest* (1959) provocatively

take the film's protagonists from mortal danger to comfortable safety, abruptly eliding

the couple's climactic rescue, then taking us from a romantic train bunk to the notorious

and suggestive image of the train entering a tunnel. *Psycho*'s (1960) editing pattern in the

shower scene is more than well documented, as is the peculiar and rule-breaking editing

of the gas station scene from *The Birds* (1963). By limiting its central technique to the

long take confined to a single apartment—an experiment demonstrably born out of

Hitchcock's new freedom as both a director and a producer—*Rope* consolidates its

potential technical breadth but amplifies Hitchcock's own function as *auteur*. Although I

have pointed out ways in which the film has been characterized as a failure—in

Hitchcock's view as well as critics'—its legendary status and the myths it produced

testify to its overwhelming success at perpetuating the image of Hitchcock as master

director.

Digital Cinema and the Long Take: *Timecode*

Practically no sooner than digital filmmaking became possible, at least two

directors seized the moment to perform experiments of ultra-long-take form. For all its

newfound hegemony within the movie industry, digital cinema is still essentially a

teenager. Digital special effects through computer-generated imagery (CGI) slowly began

the digital revolution in filmmaking as early as 1982 in Steven Lisberger's *Tron*.

Animated films created digitally—such as *The Rescuers Down Under* (dir. Hendel Butoy

& Mike Gabriel, 1990) and *Toy Story* (dir. John Lasseter, 1995) complicate the question

of what is the "first digital film," but it is at least likely that *Rainbow* (dir. Bob Hoskins, 1996) was the first live-action, feature-length, theatrically-released film that was shot using a *digital* format as opposed to celluloid or video technology.[129] The seemingly constant innovations of digital technologies since their beginnings have kept filmmaking and film exhibition in a state of instability and perpetual experimentation. In this section, the digital shift's relevance applies primarily to filmmaking and secondarily to the exhibition possibilities borne out of digital. The subsequent section will attend to both, so a brief word on exhibition. The shift to digital projection has taken far longer than the shift to digital motion capture, simply because a change in exhibition format is far more systemic and expensive, impacting numerous companies involved not only in exhibition but also distribution. Ostensibly a simple technology requiring more-or-less "plug-and-play" operation for projection, finicky issues still require troubleshooting by technicians, though these technicians are often accessible to projectionists only through central call centers. Marketed as a massive technological step forward beyond outdated analog standard, numerous variables in digital film production, distribution, and exhibition complicate the matter significantly.[130] The question of image quality, for example—which medium provides the "better" picture—assumes a problematic either-or dichotomy easily complicated by such variables as digital's potential superiority for shooting darkness and celluloid's arguable archival security over the ever-shifting file formats necessary for digital preservation. As some filmmakers have been at pains to argue, the two each offer different benefits. In an ideal world not driven by capital and its efficiencies, analog and digital would coexist.

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[129] Gregory Goodell, *Independent Feature Film Production* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998), 208.
[130] Email interview with festival projectionist Sergio Andres Lobo-Navia, 8/25/2016.

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But if every new technology represents two steps forward and one step backward, certain filmmakers have gambled with new, largely untested digital tools in attempts to advance cinema's ever-expanding frontiers. By every available indication, *Timecode* stands as the first feature-length single-shot film, an achievement only possible through digital video (DV). The film's very title announces its status as "video," referring to the imprint on every video frame "used as a reference guide to assist in locating sections or segments of video."[131] As a film lacking traditional edits, the "time code" would stand as a supremely important post-production tool in this instance, particularly since this film's success requires it to be synchronized with itself. Complicating its status as a "single-shot film," *Timecode* consists in four simultaneous unbroken shots, all situated on a screen divided into quadrants and with a guiding narrative that periodically intersects the action of the four spaces. These four ever-shifting spaces trace a handful of characters connected through the story of an independent film production company in Hollywood known as Red Mullet, also the name of the real-life production company behind *Timecode* itself and headed by director Mike Figgis. Alex Green (played by Stellan Skarsgård) runs Red Mullet and finds himself severely depressed by work-related stress and also embroiled in a romantic crisis involving his wife Emma (Saffron Burrows) and his girlfriend, Rose (Salma Hayek). Rose is involved with Lauren (Jeanne Tripplehorn), whose jealously prompts her to surveil Rose during one of her trysts with Alex. At Red Mullet, Alex's employees worry about Alex's mental health. Eventually, Alex experiences a breakdown of sorts while an avant-garde videographer, Ana (Mía Maestro), pitches to Red Mullet an experimental film to be shot in a single long take. The film's climax occurs toward the

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[131] Jeff Rutenbeck, *Tech Terms: What Every Telecommunications and Digital Media Professional Should Know* (Burlington, MA: Taylor & Francis, 2006), 246.

end of this scene when Lauren invades the conference room and vengefully shoots Alex. Ana uses her digital video camera to document Alex's death as blood pools around his body.

With various work and love triangles in the film, which begins in four disparate spaces, characters' relationships draw nearer to one another as they evolve throughout the film but apart from a goal-oriented plot. Without precedent for a feature-length single-shot film, then, Figgis directs a truly experimental film, one that defies conventions of screen space, plot, and editing. Each quadrant is an ultra-long take spanning the entire film, which plays out in real time. The lack of any cuts or ellipses means that narrative action in some quadrants often rests in relative stasis.[132] These ostensible "breaks" in parts of the storyline help guide the audience's attention toward the most narrative-dominant quadrant(s), but the film's sound mixing acts as the primary vehicle for directing the viewer's gaze. As if to ensure some level of audience accessibility—and avoid the confusion that would be produced by four overlapping soundtracks—the film shifts the dominant soundtrack from one quadrant to another, guiding the film's main plotline and allowing the narrative to proceed as conventionally as its experimental form seems to allow.

But if the film is nearly always limited to a single, drifting sonic perspective at a time, all four perspectives are simultaneously visible to its audience throughout the film's duration. *Timecode*'s division of multiple, concurrent perspectives of narrative action into screen quadrants acts as an alternative editing device, one devoid of cutting but achieving

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[132] This is not to say that the image itself is still or paused, only that the narrative action is minimal at best. For example, one quadrant features a lengthy sequence of a character sitting in the back seat of a limousine listening closely to the action in a separate quadrant by way of a surveillance device. The character essentially sits still for the duration of this segment before a confrontation with another character advances her plotline.

some of the same ends thereunto. Non-conventional sound mixing and multiple screen

quadrants, then, innovatively work to solve the problem of how to shoot a feature-length,

unbroken shot but with parallel story action visible in a variety of locales. Although new

digital technology could have achieved the possibility of a feature-length ultra-long take,

a typical single unbroken shot unfolding in real time constrains the camera to one

perspective and precludes parallel cutting, the editing technique that instantaneously

transitions the audience's perspective on the central action from one space to another

without temporal ellipsis.[133] *Timecode*'s narrative, however, demands an alternative to

parallel editing without compromising the goal of a feature-length unbroken shot.

Marilyn Fabe observes some political consequences stemming from Figgis'

decision to tell the story so non-conventionally. The "spatial montage"—a helpful term

encapsulating how the multiple quadrants do the work of editing—of *Timecode*

potentially liberates the spectator from the mercy of the director in traditional parallel

editing sequences by allowing an (ostensibly) omniscient, if untraditional, point of view.

Audiences here are privy to more parallel narrative information than they would have

access to in the case of a typical cutaway from one scene to another. Despite *Timecode*'s

use of shifting audio to guide the viewer's attention, its use of four visual quadrants

allows us to "transcend human limitations in time and space to perceive at a glance

actions taking place simultaneously in real time in four separate spaces."[134] One could

respond to Fabe's observation that it naïvely suppresses how even such a technique as the

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[133] "Parallel editing," according to numerous reference guides (including the *Oxford Dictionary of Film Studies*), is otherwise known as "crosscutting," "intercutting," "parallel editing," and "parallel montage." I choose the term "parallel cutting" because it not only emphasizes the temporal simultaneity of narrative action ("parallel"), it also specifically names the technique as "cutting." I want to reserve use of the term "parallel editing" for a film such as *Timecode*, in which the effect of parallel *editing* is produced through without actual "cuts."
[134] Marilyn Fabe, *Closely Watched Films: An Introduction to the Art of Narrative Film Technique* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 233.

shifting soundtrack maintains the director's control over the audience, or how the

simultaneously visible action of four separate quadrants expands but still limits the

viewer's perspective(s), or—better yet—how multiple perspectives might act as a Trojan

horse to conceal the film's subtler ideological commitments. For example, the film's

narrative focus on a white male heading up his own company, who is also entrenched in

the gazes of three women who desire him romantically or economically, can easily be

read as regressive. Fabe goes on to refer to *Timecode*'s "unprecedented illusion of

omniscience," also acknowledging a contradiction in the film's postmodern form, "in that

Figgis appears to be saying simultaneously that what you are seeing is for real *and* that it

is all totally ridiculous."[135] Regardless of how truly a spectator of *Timecode* can

"transcend human limitations," Fabe helpfully observes how *Timecode* tends to portray

"the more significant action taking place on the bottom half of the screen" and, through

intersecting narrative threads, "gives certain moments…double emphasis, to ensure the

viewer does not miss something important."[136] This formal technique, along with its

spatial montage and drifting sonics, potentially commercialize an otherwise avant-garde

film, rendering it more palatable to a mass market while maintaining its experimental

approach.

   The film's unusual form, then, produces a tension in the audience. Fabe states that

spectators, in a sense, "edit" the film themselves by choosing which quadrant to watch;

but she also points out how the shifting soundtrack attempts to steer the viewer's

attention to the primary narrative space.[137] The film's alternative editing, Fabe believes,

aligns with Eisensteinian montage, whereas its use of long takes makes a case for

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[135] Ibid. 236.

[136] Ibid. 232.

[137] Ibid. 232ff

Bazinian realism. In an attempt to resolve this apparent tension, Fabe makes the claim

that "*Timecode* reveals that the dichotomy between the montage style and that of the long

take is a false one." In support of the point, she appeals to *Timecode*'s "great deal of

camera movement, which achieves many of the same effects as cutting."[138] The false

dichotomy between Bazin and Eisenstein, now exceedingly well documented, is certainly

a safe claim to make. But to impose this rather dated antithesis onto *Timecode* while also

equating its moving camera with editing glosses the crucial distinction between an edit

and an unbroken shot, which is precisely the basis of *Timecode*'s highly unusual form.

One may safely reject the ideological dichotomy between these two filmmaking tools, as

well as the essentialism of each tool that the dichotomy assumes, without reducing a tool

(like editing) to one of its effects (like a different perspective on diegetic space).

As Fabe writes elsewhere, however, *Timecode*'s important innovation next to its

"spatial montage" is its exploitation of this technique with the possibilities of DVD

technology. The ability to "remix" the film's soundtrack—giving sonic access to any of

the quadrants—actually does give the spectator control over one of the two primary

alternative-editing tools. This option creates myriad possibilities that ultimately

complicate a stable singular notion of "the film," since a virtually limitless number of

viewer's cuts (as opposed to "director's cuts") is now not only possible but even

encouraged by "the film" as accessed on DVD. Herein lies a noteworthy effect of

Timecode as a product of conventional and avant-garde approaches, evincing "the

'control vision' of interactive screens." "Here," as D.N. Rodowick has it, "the spectator is

no longer a passive viewer yielding to the ineluctable flow of time but rather alternates

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[138] Ibid. 238.

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between looking and reading as well as immersive viewing and active controlling."[139]

Timecode almost appears to possess self-consciousness about Rodowick's point. In addition to its title, which in this context significantly alludes to the temporally synchronized movement of images that cross-reference (read: "edit") one another, the film plays out in unbroken real time, privileges shots of clocks, and has a production company executive pitch a film about time travel called *Time Toilet*. Time as a concept is ubiquitous in *Timecode*. If the film's "spatial montage" weds Bazin and Eisenstein by way of the Gilles Deleuze of *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, then its obsession with the temporal may place it within Deleuze's *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. According to Deleuze, the "action-image" (a central component of the "movement-image") is defined by its rationality, its cause-and-effect character that subjugates temporality to action and allows a "sensory-motor link" to produce an "action-image" in the spectator.[140] Inaugurating an important cognitive shift following the trauma of World War II marking "a new form of reality,"[141] Deleuze recognizes the "time-image." With "weak connections and floating events" temporally disconnected from one another, these "pure optical-sound images" break down the linear continuity of cause and effect and the particular way in which traditional editing maintain that continuity. With less spatial bearing, seemingly random or haphazard assemblages activate the mind's internal circuits, allowing shock and the discovery of new perceptions. But keeping Rodowick's point in mind, *Timecode* best fits what Kristen Daly terms "Cinema 3.0," in which "new

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[139] D.N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 177.
[140] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson & Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 206.
[141] Interestingly, this phrase is Deleuze's characterization of Bazin's own recognition of a postwar shift in film form, as evident in the works of Italian neorealism. Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1989), 1.

forms of narrative requir[e], as part of the enjoyment, interaction in the form of user-participation and interpretation."[142] Daly effectively extends Deleuze's conceptual history of cinematic images from 1.0 (movement) and 2.0 (time) to a third in which images incorporate a social element inviting not a viewer but, rather, a user. Digital media's emphasis on audience immersion has given birth to a new ecology following Deleuze's agent of movement-images and seer of time-images, now a "viewser" of interactive images, simultaneously a viewer and a user. The spectator of *Timecode* on DVD can in this sense be called a "viewser."

The film's innovations and historical status being what they are, the film may still stand, as Fabe puts it, as "a successful failure."[143] Harnessing new possibilities borne by digital, its particular use of spatial montage has not become absorbed into conventional practice, aside from occasional and temporary uses of split-screen in some films. In terms of conferring on Figgis the status of *auteur*, *Timecode* appears to have been more failure than success. His tenth feature-length film as a director, the film was a financial disappointment, recouping about one-quarter of its budget.[144] Since *Timecode*, Figgis has directed only three feature-length films, sticking mostly to shorts, television, and documentaries while working as a professor of film at The European Graduate School. With a bio page on the university's website insisting that he "has always had an uneasy relationship with Hollywood," it bears acknowledgment that *Timecode*—a low-budget but nevertheless $4 million experimental film with numerous high-profile actors—was released just four years after the 1996 Academy Awards, where Figgis was a nominee for

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[142] Kristen Daly, "Cinema 3.0: The Interactive-Image," *Cinema Journal* 50 No. 1 (Fall 2010), 82.
[143] Fabe, 239.
[144] "Box office / business for *Timecode* (2000)," *IMDb*, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0220100/business?ref_=tt_dt_bus, last accessed 2/10/2016.

Best Director and Best Adapted Screenplay for *Leaving Las Vegas* (1995).[145] One

wonders whether such a project as *Timecode* would have been feasible for a director

(even one with his own production company) without the cachet derived from multiple

Oscar nominations. Figgis' current persona, as represented on his faculty page along with

his reputation within film scholarship (in which he now participates), can also be

conceived as a kind of "successful failure." Anyone can view his lectures on "Narration

and the Art of Film" on YouTube or buy his book *Digital Filmmaking* from Amazon.com

to inspire "no-budget movies."[146] Proclaiming his disinterest in Hollywood productions

and "the big bucks" that come with them, Figgis's auteur status is infused with all things

digital and the democratic politics often attributed to it.[147] One might then see Figgis as

rejecting the success-failure binary that Hitchcock embraced and exemplifies exploratory

experimentalism with cutting-edge technologies outside industrial contexts. However,

Timecode's budget, cast, scale of production, and distribution platform all bear witness to

its goal of being a commercially successful product with wide exhibition. Peaking at 130

screens during its theatrical run in the U.S., *Timecode* contrasts with another independent

film from 2000 such as *You Can Count On Me* (dir. Kenneth Lonergan). This film also

featured a cast of recognizable stars, operated on a much smaller budget ($1.2 million),

and peaked at 150 screens but had the staying power to gross more than $9 million. So

while a retrospective view of *Timecode* might deem it successful in certain respects, it

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[145] "Mike Figgis," The European Graduate School Website, http://egs.edu/faculty/mike-figgis, last accessed 2/10/2016.
[146] "Mike Figgis. Time Code, Narration and the Art of Film. 2008 1/5," YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKG2f83LwMs, last accessed 2/10/2016; Mike Figgis, *Digital Filmmaking* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 2007).
[147] The European Graduate School Website.

seems clear that the film's leap of faith to introduce a new form of storytelling montage did not land on welcoming ground.

Celluloid Cinema: Revived or *Too Late*?

Despite the digital shift and its progressive potential, it seems that celluloid is not dead yet. A recent journalistic study found that approximately 39 movies in the U.S. were shot on 35mm in 2014, as compared with about 64 in 2015 and around 29 in 2016.[148] However, various factors muddle these numbers, particularly the apparent celluloid burst in 2015 compared with 2014. The journalist found that a number of the films from 2015 were shot only partially in 35mm, such as Danny Boyle's *Steve Jobs*, shot in three segments respectively in 16mm, 35mm, and digital. In addition to these mixed-format films, a few 2015 releases had been in production for a number of years, in some cases prior to the digital shift, making them almost de-facto shot on 35mm. The author subtracts these exceptions from the overall total of 64 films and comes up with 46, "maybe a hair more than last year."[149] Five of the top eleven domestically grossing films of 2015 were shot using 35mm: *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (#1, J.J. Abrams), *Jurassic World* (#2, Colin Trevorrow), *Cinderella* (#9, Kenneth Branaugh), *Spectre* (#10, Sam Mendes), and *Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation* (#11, Christopher McQuarrie).[150] In addition to these, two high-profile and awarded films were shot on other celluloid formats: *Carol* (Todd Haynes) on 16mm and *The Hateful Eight* (Quentin Tarantino) on

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[148] Vadim Rizov, *Filmmaker Magazine*, http://filmmakermagazine.com/88971-39-movies-released-in-2014-shot-on-35mm/#.VykUomP88Q2, http://filmmakermagazine.com/97320-64-films-released-in-2015-shot-on-35mm/#.VykUl2P88Q0, and http://filmmakermagazine.com/101600-27-movies-shot-on-35mm-released-in-2016/#.WLHQWhiZOHo.
[149] Ibid.
[150] http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?yr=2015

70mm, the latter with a widely-publicized roadshow at specially-equipped theaters supporting the format. Consider the fact that the first big-budget film shot digitally was George Lucas' 2002 *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones*, and it becomes clear how, in little more than a decade, the tide has turned from celluloid as the dominant medium to digital.[151] Supporting these films' use of the film medium was an agreement reached in early 2015 between Kodak and major Hollywood studios to keep film literally rolling. Disney, 20th Century Fox, Paramount, Sony, NBC Universal, and Warner Bros. struck a deal to purchase an undisclosed amount of 35mm film for a similarly undisclosed number of years.[152] Outspoken lobbyists supporting the agreement included Tarantino, Abrams, and Martin Scorsese.[153] As for the seemingly high drop in 2016, the author notes that the decrease "seems like an anomaly, not a permanent trend." He cites reasons including the aforementioned "high-profile push" to keep Kodak in business and a dearth of new films by "[s]ome celluloid regulars (Spielberg, Nolan, Abrams, Tarantino)." Limited data and mixed-media films obscure the bottom line, especially in 2016 films, but this series of annual reports offers a general, if precarious, barometer.

These names help link the project of celluloid preservation with the current practice of long takes. Indispensable to the effort to sustain the use of film stock in feature filmmaking has been leveraging by prominent directors. The auteur status of these directors ranges from the slam-dunk to the "vulgar," but clear at least are the ambitions toward auteur status in all of them.[154] Whether a senior-level director such as Scorsese, a

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[151] Helen Alexander and Rhys Blakely, "The Triumph of Digital Will Be the Death of Many Movies," *New Republic*, 9/12/2014, https://newrepublic.com/article/119431/how-digital-cinema-took-over-35mm-film, last accessed 2/10/2017.
[152] http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/behind-screen/kodak-inks-deals-studios-extend-770300
[153] http://variety.com/2015/biz/news/kodak-will-continue-to-supply-film-stock-to-studios-1201424033/
[154] http://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/a-few-thoughts-on-vulgar-auteurism

well-established raconteur like Tarantino, or a relatively young fanboy-turned-director committed to celebrating New Hollywood practices like Abrams, the unique power and credibility of respected directors have proven instrumental not only in maintaining celluloid's continued use in institutional filmmaking but in associating celluloid with a pure, conservative auteurism. And just as the films of each of these directors (Scorsese included) exhibit innumerable callbacks to film history, so also is a younger generation of directors now paying homage to them. But simple tribute has never been enough to establish a director as distinctive, let alone bestow auteur status. Enter the long take, which (as I have argued) currently functions as a key yardstick of aesthetic validation in the production of auteurs. Dennis Hauck's *Too Late* acts as the perfect exemplar of this dual phenomenon of auteur production. In narrative structure and generic tone, the film is a rehash of Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (itself a rehash of film and literature tropes, though a more creative one) and Polanski's *Chinatown* (typically characterized as a neo-noir and, thus, also a kind of throwback). In terms of style and technique, *Too Late* puts most of its eggs into the long-take basket.

However, as I have suggested, the film's final act breaks with its editing pattern only minutes before "perfectly" accomplishing its ostensible goal of five unbroken 20-minute shots. Despite the relevance of production history informing Bordwell's analysis of *Rope*, I want to sideline the question of just how this apparent idiosyncrasy in *Too Late* came about. After watching some of the many marketing videos featuring cast and crew discussing the umpteen hurdles to successfully shooting each scene of the film, one might wonder whether the film's last shot—or, better put, "scene"—encountered a failure and the crew was forced to include edits so as to avoid errors such as flubbed lines or errant

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camera framing in the final cut. Subsequently, I will examine this scene with reference to the film editor's comments about its function. But regardless of the filmmaker's intentions or snafus, the film's final minutes formally subvert the form that precedes it. The edited sequence at the finale stands as an oddity for its conventionality, producing a fascinating statement on film editing.

Too Late was shot on 2-perf Techniscope film, as explained earlier, a format that anamorphizes and doubles the size of the image in post-production, thereby doubling the real estate of the footage on a single reel of film and, be extension, the length of an unbroken shot. However, a byproduct of Techniscope's traditional process of optical image enlargement degrades the film's overall image quality. And so, somewhat ironically, *Too Late* includes itself among recent Techniscope films by using a digital intermediate to maintain visual fidelity.[155] *Too Late* revolves around Mel Sampson (John Hawks), a detective who, according to the film's promotional materials, "is tasked with tracking down the whereabouts of a missing woman from his own past."[156] This missing woman is Sampson's daughter Dorothy, though she never learns the truth of their relationship. Dorothy accidentally discovers incriminating photos of a man whom in turn has Dorothy killed. In Sampson's quest for revenge, a handful of characters are killed and he fails to apprehend Dorothy's murderer. By all appearances, Sampson himself is killed by movie's end.

But the film's presentation of this seemingly straightforward storyline complicates the audience's experience of it. *Too Late* organizes its story of five parts non-chronologically in a 3-1-2-5-4 plot order, a plot device that reveals story information

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[155] "Film Formats – Page 1," ibid.; and Thompson, ibid. Regarding *Too Late*'s use of a digital intermediate, Hauck's acknowledgement of this fact prior to the screening I attended clearly disappointed him.
[156] "Too Late," *Feltner Films*, accessed May 18, 2017, http://www.feltnerfilms.com/toolate.

strategically and withholds a crucial narrative element until the finale, à la *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994).[157] Only in the final act do we learn that Sampson and Dorothy, who heretofore have shared close moments that can be initially (mis)read as romantic in nature, are father and daughter. Although the relationship contains none of the darkly realized incest of characters in Roman Polanski's 1974 seminal neo-noir *Chinatown*, *Too Late*'s self-conscious cinephilia, its lineage in *Chinatown*'s L.A.-set neo-noir tradition, and the placement of this potentially incestuous reveal at the film's finale arguably all hearken back to Polanski's film.[158] For the sake of clarity, I will briefly outline the story's chronology in 1-5 order, also reiterating where each scene arrives in the film's plot structure by distinguishing Story Scene (SS) order (i.e., chronology) from Plot Scene (PS) order (i.e., the film's organization of the story).

For purposes of reference, the shot lengths of the scenes—which I now arrange as they are organized in the film—are as follows (PS = Plot Scene, scenes as the film presents them; SS = Story Scene, scenes as they occur chronologically):

    PS1/SS2 (overlook): 22:18
    PS2/SS4 (house):   20:48
    PS3/SS1 (strip club): 20:15
    PS4/SS5 (drive-in):   20:03
    PS5/SS3 (hotel):   19:27; 0:11; 0:02; 0:04; 0:02; 0:03; 0:02; 0:03; 0:08; 0:01

As is evident in this breakdown, the film's structure and shot length are intertwined and function synergistically, at least in the sense that the scenes are almost entirely committed to lasting as long as one full film reel. The last scene's concluding

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[157] Here and elsewhere, I use the conventional disciplinary distinction between "story" and "plot," with "story" denoting the chronology of events taking place within the film's diegesis and "plot" as those narrative elements presented on screen that may or may not be organized chronologically.

[158] Incidentally, *Chinatown* predates *Pulp Fiction* by 20 years, and *Pulp Fiction* predates *Too Late* by almost the same number. As such, these two loudest but inconspicuous citations in *Too Late* (I exclude much less well-known films we see playing in the background or on posters) are marked by multi-generational New Hollywood and Independent film traditions.

continuity-style edits notwithstanding, *Too Late* exhibits a strikingly consistent shot

length, with five consecutive shots timing in between 19:27 and 22:18. (I will return

shortly to the significance of the final sequence of the film, the only one marked by a

traditional editing pattern.) Shot on 2-perf Techniscope format, a single reel of this 35mm

film accommodates up to 22 minutes of footage, high by any celluloid standards and

around double the 11-minute maximum capacity of most 35mm camera magazines.[159] In

an interview, Hauck states that he used Techniscope on a short film prior to making *Too

Late*. "That's when I realized you could do a twenty-two minute [single take] in this

format…Then I started thinking, 'you put four or five of these together, and we've got

yourself [sic] a feature.'"[160] Hauck clearly maximized this potential within the constraints

set by his commitment to 35mm, knowing that digital cinema could have not only

extended the length of the shots but rendered the on-location production simpler. (In the

same interview, Hauck acknowledges, "[Y]ou can obviously do this with digital.")

Regarding the filmmakers' hyper-awareness of this highly unusual project, Hauck

informed me before a screening of *Too Late* that someone was going to look into whether

Guinness World Records could confirm the unprecedented use of so many ultra-long

celluloid takes in a single film, but he didn't know what came of it. As for production

challenges created by the commitment to film, three of the film's four promotional videos

focus on just these hurdles, as manifest in the video titles: "Why 35mm," "Steadicam

Handoff," and "22 Mins in Real Time" [sic].

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[159] "TOO LATE Filmmakers Release Wide on 35mm," *Kodak Motion Picture Film*,
http://motion.kodak.com/us/en/motion/blog/blog_post?contentid=4294995176, last accessed 10/28/2016.
[160] Jacob Knight, "Fantastic Fest Interview: TOO LATE Writer/ Director Dennis Hauck," *Birth. Movies.
Death*, http://birthmoviesdeath.com/2015/09/30/fantastic-fest-interview-too-late-writer-director-dennis-
hauck, last accessed 12/2/2016.

In terms of cinematography, three out of the film's five scenes (PS3/SS1, PS4/SS5, and PS5/SS3) clearly enlist the use of Steadicam,[161] with the image gliding smoothly through the various scenes' spaces. The opening shot of *Too Late* (PS1/SS2) is structured by a lengthy crane shot paying homage to *Touch of Evil* (Orson Welles, 1958), another film classifiable as a B-film noir with an opening crane long take ending with a shocking death. Subsequently in *Too Late*, PS2/SS4 (at the house) stands out as the only handheld shot in the film without the obvious fluidity of the Steadicam. Whereas the film as a whole is "usually [just] two people talking," the house scene gives attention to "five people all yelling on top of each other," as Hauck puts it.[162] Identifying the scene as the one that intimidated him most, Hauck confesses having to ask himself in the midst of the scene's narrative commotion, "[W]here do I put the camera?" The result is a scene in which the camera zooms in for close-ups but is then constantly forced to zoom out and whip-pan back to another character for a reaction shot, culminating in inconsistent focus and awkward framing, sometimes too close by conventional standards and sometimes not close enough. The cinematographic irregularities of the scene have invited comparison by some critics with the films of John Cassavetes, famed forerunner of the independent film movement that Hauck's film evokes.[163] Committed to exchanging shot-reverse-shot and eyeline-match cuts for the unbroken shot, the camera in the house scene attempts to compensate for this limitation with quick movements revealing the imprecise effects of moving a 35mm camera—bulkier than a digital equivalent—faster than it can smoothly accomplish while keeping up with rapid-fire dialogue involving five different characters.

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[161] This observation is confirmed by Patricia Thompson in "Celluloid Antihero," *American Cinematographer* 97.5 (May 2016): 26.

[162] Stephen Saito, "Interview: Dennis Hauck on Taking on 'Too Late'," *The Moveable Fest*, http://moveablefest.com/moveable_fest/2016/04/dennis-hauck-too-late.html, last accessed 10/24/2016.

[163] Thompson, *American Cinematographer*, 26.

Hauck shot the scene on an Arricam Lite camera with a 1,000-foot magazine and a

Fujinon T2.9 19-90mm Cabrio lens, altogether weighing in at about 16 pounds.[164] A

comparable digital camera such as the Arri Alexa Mini, on the other hand, weighs around

5 pounds lighter with the same lens. Steadicam, a 90-pound apparatus (with a celluloid

camera shifting its weight distribution and balance as the film rolls) that forgives

bumpiness during filming, would likely have been too unwieldy a piece of equipment to

allow the camera operator to move a 35mm camera so quickly in the scene.[165]

These stylistic irregularities and the technical limitations that help account for

them reflect a unique approach to the film's commitment to 35mm long takes. They also

provide the backdrop for the film's final irregularity, its sudden shift into a montage in

the film's last moments. A series of shots cut in to close-ups of Sampson getting into his

car, looking at photos of himself with Lucy, and starting the engine. In an email

communication, *Too Late*'s editor David Heinz told me that this "sequence of cuts was

intended to be rather jarring," citing Sampson's "state of mind" as warranting the stylistic

deviation. Heinz further admitted that his work on *Too Late* was "somewhat unusual," as

the film's ultra-long-take form largely limited his editing role to helping choose the best

(long) take, cut in the sound effects, and prepare the sound mix.[166] Strictly speaking, the

edited images of the finale violate the film's intrinsic norms by using shots of short

duration in a classically constructed montage rather than building scenes around

extremely long takes. The effect, ending the film *not* on a long take but a montage

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[164] Thompson, 26; https://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product/895225-REG/fujinon_19_90mm_t2_9_cabrio_pl.html; and Arricam Brochure, http://www.arrirental.com/pdf/arricam_brochure.pdf.

[165] "TOO LATE Filmmakers Release Wide on 35mm," *Kodak Motion Picture Film*, http://motion.kodak.com/us/en/motion/blog/blog_post?contentid=4294995176, last accessed 10/24/2016.

[166] Email correspondence with David Heinz, 11/28/2016 & 12/6/2016.

sequence, hearkens back to the formal ambiguity of art cinema but at least suggests the indispensability of traditional editing.

Despite the *Too Late*'s experimental nature, its remarkably self-reflexive subject matter—with characters explicitly discussing movie theaters, cinematic genre conventions, and even 35mm exhibition—conspire with formal constraints, solutions, and deviations to suggest both celluloid cinema's supreme flexibility to accommodate a profusion of film styles as well as the ultimate inability of long takes to substitute for traditional editing. The film insists on celluloid's continued relevance to the present moment by virtue of its intrinsic historical significance to cinephilic moviemaking. Many of the film's characters are knowledgeable cinephiles never hesitating to prattle on about how remarkably movie-like their situations are. The doggedness with which these characters talk about movies (and all occupy unmistakably stock genre-pic roles) only further emphasizes the argument that *Too Late* is at pains to make. Competing with digital cinema's capacity for ultra-long takes, *Too Late* maximizes traditional film's limits for unbroken shots and pushes this experiment to the point of illustrating what long takes fail to achieve. Implicit in this illustration, I believe, is also a critique of digital cinema. Adding to the foregoing analysis is the fact that the film never received digital theatrical exhibition, at Hauck's insistence. In his comments prior to the screening I attended, Hauck argued that digital exhibition via streaming platforms and home video would constitute "the afterlife" of *Too Late*, with 35mm theatrical exhibition amounting to its living soul. Hauck's aforementioned comment about the potentially record-breaking nature of his feat echoes the sense of old-school cinephilic ardor bleeding through the 20-minute shots and the genre stereotypes residing within them.

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Conclusion

        Having shown ways in which *Rope*, *Timecode*, and *Too Late* attempt

experimental ultra-long-take films within mass-market contexts through inventive

solutions to the problem of not editing, it would seem that all three experiments "failed"

to ignite movements or inspire large-scale imitators but "succeeded" to be the subject of a

critical analysis. The real success these films experienced, I maintain, is that of existing

in the first place. The success of such unconventional films being shot to completion

inherently hinges on them receiving the approval and capital from backers. In the case of

each of these films, a production company headed by the director himself raised primary

funds to pay for these unusual experiments. Whether Hitchcock's central attempt to prove

David Selznick wrong through *Rope*, Figgis's goal of reconfiguring the mode of montage

by digital means, or Hauck's filmophilic and non-linear love letter to old genre pics, each

director embodies the driving force behind his film in a way fundamental to their

existence. Although only Hitchcock among these three truly possesses auteur status, they

all share a strong degree of privileged access to resources and a desire to test or extend

the measurable limit of what a "shot" was previously thought to be. Until a static

surveillance camera producing a live feed of images is deemed "cinematic," these films

evince that directors intent on marking the frontiers of "the long take"—and those with

the means of doing so—are a handful of ostensibly diverse white men.

CHAPTER IV

POLITICS OF THE IMAGE: STASIS, SPACES, AND "VENGEFUL BITCHES"

<u>Introduction</u>

Previous chapters of this project have probed how long takes within the context of hybrid art and mass-market cinemas, historicized with reference to earlier forebears, perform politics by way of form inextricably wed with content. These films reveal implications regarding issues of race, ethnicity, and especially gender that a strictly *formal* analysis might sidestep. By using the tools of a cinematic poetics while remaining politically conscious, these chapters not only stress the indissolubility of form and content but also how sociopolitical awareness highlights the significance of formal tools and techniques when wed with subject matter (as they always are). If *Birdman* and *Too Late* marshal long-take form toward decidedly masculine ends, I have argued that *Children of Men*'s extended shots propel a forward-looking narrative in which a historical torch is passed from a white male-savior figure to a single mother of color and her infant daughter. But even less problematic films in ethical terms—such as *Children of Men*, *Rope*, and *Timecode*—can still be identified overwhelmingly as products of patriarchy. All of the films under primary consideration in this project thus far have been male-directed and arguably solicit a male gaze (to varying degrees). While a person of color directed the most socially-inclusive film among these—*Children of Men*—the same can be said of the director of *Birdman*, a film I chart as a regressive in its use of form and subject matter to proclaim the supremacy of the auteur in the film's actual and diegetic production. At the very least, these two films—directed by co-nationalists and co-owners of the same production company—resist simplistic determinations regarding a

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director's—even an auteur's—identity and the (identity) politics born out by their completed film.

Parallel with these political considerations, the preceding chapters focus entirely on a long take style that can be broadly characterized as one of virtuosic mobility. Even the least impressive of these films in terms of camera movement—Hitchcock's *Rope*—still features a roaming camera with an editing style requiring precise and challenging choreography among camera operator, actors, and props. A shift of primary sources is in order, then, one that does justice to both a more static style of long take as well as art cinema's legacy as a significant avenue of women gaining access to the director's chair within mainstream cinemas. On the other hand, Patricia White has argued for the feminization of art cinema as a discursive construct, with transnational implications. Arthouse exhibition, she maintains, is organized as "a middlebrow and arguably feminized taste culture" in which women directors are lauded "not necessarily because of their superior artistry, but by virtue of their sincerity."[167] The global circulation of this institution, as traced by White, forms the basic structure of this chapter. She writes, "Diasporan women directors often work at the switch point between the foreign films that are the traditional fare of art house cinemas and the independent sector that has emerged since the 1980s."[168] The two films I examine here stand as representative specimens of both spheres White acknowledges in this statement—directors of "traditional," "foreign" art films and diasporan directors in the contemporary independent sector—both of which also deploy long takes I associate with the goals and functions of art cinema. Essentially, then, this chapter studies the ramifications of White's schema at the level of long-take

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[167] Patricia White, *Women's Cinema, World Cinema: Projecting Contemporary Feminisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 68.
[168] White, 69.

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form, remaining conscious of how form produces meanings with significance toward questions of identity and social power dynamics. [return to & reinforce White's language—I'm doing a formalist version of what White's doing here politically, gesturing to how poetics & politics can work together] Productive parallels link these two films despite their 40-year gap, films directed by women whose long takes reveal identifiable political functions related but not restricted to gender. The more contemporary example of these two films fits within the context of independent cinema while the earlier film reflects art cinema's relationship with the avant garde.

French director Agnès Varda and Belgian filmmaker Chantal Akerman stand as two major pillars of European art cinema active from the 1950s to the 2010s, especially visible for being women in a male-dominated generation of filmmaking.[169] It bears mentioning that Akerman rejected a simple designation of her own work associated with gender. "I wouldn't say I'm a feminist filmmaker," she said. "I'm not making women's films, I'm making Chantal Akerman films." Going on to disavow even the possibility of a "feminist cinema," Akerman's statement subjugates her status as feminist filmmaker to her status as auteur.[170] Perhaps ironically, the declaration has typically not stopped scholars—including Patricia White,[171] Karen Hollinger,[172] and Claire Johnston[173]—from branding Akerman a feminist auteur whose films bear key importance for feminist criticism. But beyond the above association between Akerman and Varda, the two figures

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[169] It should be noted, however, that "European cinema has nurtured the highest number of women directors," and the apparent lack of women auteurs has more to do with "the male bias inherent in ideas of genius," according to Ginette Vincendeau, "Issues in European Cinema," in *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, ed. John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 444.

[170] Karen Hollinger, *Feminist Film Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 96.

[171] White, 10, 37.

[172] Hollinger, 96.

[173] Claire Johnston, "Towards a Feminist Film Practice: Some Theses," in *Movies and Methods, Vol. II*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 326.

helpfully illustrate that being women in a male-dominated cinematic institution in no way entails a uniform approach to style. Whereas Varda's early affiliation with the French New Wave and a corresponding approach to editing tend to reflect a montage style of cinema, Akerman's long(er) takes place her in the vein of fellow art-film directors of the 1960s and 1970s such as Michelangelo Antonioni and Andrei Tarkovsky. Akerman's pioneering use of long, fixed, and mostly-silent takes unquestionably belongs to the tradition of European art cinema, but her style has been teased out to reveal avant-garde as well as commercial aspirations, particularly in her 1975 film *Jeanne Dielman 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (hereafter *Jeanne Dielman*). A muted narrative, lengthy periods of silence, and an extended running time, as well as unbroken, static shots testify to influences from avant-garde filmmakers as well as Akerman's own background in experimental filmmaking. But the film's casting of a movie star (Delphine Seyrig) in the lead role and more conventional narrative patterns compared with Akerman's previous films attest to this film's commercial ambitions.[174] Indeed, *Jeanne Dielman*'s commercial success helped finance Akerman's subsequent feature film.[175]

Eschewing the flashy camera movements and multi-tiered staging of Welles, the cunning editing and classical storytelling of Hitchcock, and even the slow camera movement of Antonioni and Tarkovsky, *Jeanne Dielman* maintains static long takes in domestic settings that demand close attention to narrative rhythms, broken routines, and their relationship with mise-en-scène. Indeed, it may seem an obvious point but bears explicit statement: static long takes allow the spectator to discern the details of mise-en-scène in a way that shorter takes and mobile camera shots resist. *Jeanne Dielman*'s static

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[174] Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Movies as Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 45.
[175] Philip Mosley, *Split Screen: Belgian Cinema and Cultural Identity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 186.

long takes provide an almost literal window into the daily household regimen of the titular protagonist, a regimen that includes men paying her for afternoon sex visits, before culminating in Jeanne unexpectedly killing one of these visitors. The film divides its narrative into three sections: Day One, Day Two, and Day Three. In the first, we witness Jeanne's daily regime proceed without setback. The day plays out as a typical one, including a phlegmatic visit from a man who pays Jeanne for sex. Day Two shows Jeanne's routine beginning to unravel, and in Day Three Jeanne seems to break completely out of her established character before slaughtering a sex client without warning. Unlike her other two films from 1975—the documentary *Hotel Monterey* and short film *La Chambre*—long takes in *Jeanne Dielman* manifest this particular long-take form—one that acts in accord with a household tempo subverting domestic stereotypes— in a feature-length, narrative-fiction film context. Due to the static nature of *Jeanne Dielman*'s shots, I will examine them partially with reference to art history, consistent with this chapter's emphasis on the image and the pattern in these films to fix the camera at a standstill with little diegetic movement, hearkening to a painterly form.

Nearly 40 years later, Iranian-American filmmaker Ana Lily Amirpour saw the international release of her 2014 film *A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night* (hereafter *A Girl*). A fusion of genre tropes and aesthetics associated with the Western and vampire films, *A Girl* concentrates on a young woman who stalks, slaughters, and exsanguinates corrupt and predatory men. Like *Jeanne Dielman, A Girl* centers on a female character whose killing is represented as aimed at patriarchy and thus cannot be easily reduced to a "murderer." With narrative pacing, shot style, and an editing pattern indebted to art cinema, *A Girl* nevertheless bears points of contact for mass-market audiences through

genre play along with its musical soundtrack (often diegetic), while amplifying distinctly formal elements such as black-and-white cinematography, moments of prolonged silence or inaction, and anamorphic lenses (replete with their signature lens flares). Taken as a whole, the film's form sets itself apart from mass-market cinema, but its use of popular music and coded homages to Hollywood genre films in both form and content resituate it as a hybrid object. Industrial context aligns the film with independent cinema, an institution meaningfully linked to both art and mass-market cinemas. The film's longest take, clocking in at just over three minutes and featuring almost no camera movement, relies on close viewer attention to bodily nuances of the lead character's performance as she considers whether to prey on a male character she has lured into her home. Similar to Akerman's film, the shot is composed planimetrically, favoring 90-degree camera angles; but, as I will show, Amirpour takes an Akermanian frame composition indebted to Renaissance painting, updates it, and commercializes it. Consistent with White's framework, Akerman's film can be understood as a rather textbook—if also momentous—art film, embedded in a European context in the 1970s with formal features leaning toward the avant garde and economic ambitions gesturing toward the mainstream. Amirpour's film, on the other hand, is the product of a diasporan filmmaker participating in independent—or perhaps "indie"—American cinema through its unorthodox pre-production and with recourse to stylistic throwbacks to the arthouse as well as mass-market genres. Despite such significant and pronounced differences, these films intersect at the level of long-take practice.

<u>Thesis</u>

  In this final chapter, I advance previous attention of long take filmmaking from camera politics and editing politics to a politics of the image or of mise-en-scène. These films, products of women directors, brand themselves as auteur works outside the patriarchal status quo by virtue of operating within or across with the porous borders of international art cinema, an institution that White associates with a "feminized taste culture." Trading virtuosic mobility for subtlety and stasis, Akerman and Amirpour foreground complexities of performance and temporal coalescence within more painterly compositions in ways that spotlight gender power dynamics both diegetically—within the narrative—and extra-diegetically—institutionally fashioning an alternative to the male auteur and gesturing toward a long-take style centering viewer attention on women characters who rise up against exploitative men. Key to this argument is a contrast between long takes that position the audience with either a male POV or an omniscient one, and long takes in films by these two directors, aligning the audience with female protagonists governing their interior spaces. As I will show, these characters, though united with their domestic environs, are anything but domesticated.

  This chapter traces the shift in long-take form by women directors from an art-experimental style of *Jeanne Dielman* to an art-independent approach of *A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night*. With reference to art history, and close examination of select long takes allows us to identify a particular visual approach that, together with narrative parallels, links the two films across historical and institutional gaps. Both employ planimetric framing in domestic environs to cast the lead characters against flat backdrops and contextualize them within their respective habitations, which double as

quotidian as well as potentially predatory spaces. The shots composing these long takes are almost entirely static, framed in ways characteristic of paintings. Tableau staging lends the shots a dramaturgical character that, when paired with planimetric framing in the context of long takes, invite a spectatorial mode distinct from the films from previous chapters as well as most included in the taxonomy of long takes (see Appendix). I argue that the visual approach of long takes in *Jeanne Dielman* and *A Girl* use mise-en-scène to politicize audience expectations of narrative. These "vengeful women" narratives redirect spectator attention from the camera's potential for movement toward mise-en-scène, using stasis to bring the experience of the painting and the stage into the experience of cinema.

Jeanne Dielman 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles

Long takes in *Jeanne Dielman* can be divided according to three categories, which will in turn find points of contact and contrast with the compositional style of *A Girl*: planimetric framing, tableau staging, and shot duration. Dissecting these shots in all their strategic visual orchestration will show how Akerman's film underscores its political objectives by undercutting narrative expectations. Even to highly supportive audiences of relatively "slow" European art cinema leading up to 1975, *Jeanne Dielman*'s slow narrative pacing and sparse plot progression stood out. During its ongoing festival run in 1977, reviewers for *Film Quarterly* and *Camera Obscura* noted the film's lengthy running time in their first few sentences and proclaimed its "unconventional style"[176] with shots that are "long in duration, frontal, and unmoving."[177]

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[176] Marsha Kinder, "Reflections on *Jeanne Dielman*," *Film Quarterly* Vol. 30, No. 4 (Summer 1977), 2.
[177] Janet Bergstrom, "*Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* by Chantal Akerman," *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* Vol. 1, No. 2-2 (1977), 115.

Particularly during the film's longest takes, Akerman's shooting style in *Jeanne Dielman* can be productively explored through David Bordwell's application of "planimetrics," a term describing image composition appropriated from Heinrich Wölfflin's historicizing of the "planar style" in paintings. A planimetric, or planar, composition emphasizes the planes within an image by featuring a background that "is resolutely perpendicular to the lens axis," with "figures stand[ing] fully frontal, in profile, or with their backs directly toward us."[178] Lines produced within the mise-en-scène create planes, and planimetrically inclined paintings foreground perpendicular lines creating an effect of two-dimensionality. Wölfflin argues that this painterly style peaked in the 16th century, and the 17th century's propensity for a "recessional type of composition" deviated from it. Planimetrics "orders the [elements of the] picture in strata parallel to the picture plane," in verticals and horizontals. A work defined by a recessional style, on the other hand, tends "to withdraw the plane from the eye, to discount it and make it inapparent, while the forward and backward relations are emphasised."[179]

A cinematically planimetric image contrasts with deep-focus photography, which highlights depth of space and aligns with Wölfflin's label of "recessional" compositions. André Bazin distinguishes these cinematic approaches not only visually but also based on their oppositional treatments of subject matter and spectatorship. For Bazin, Soviet montage uses "superimpositions" that "played tricks with time and space" in a manner meant to direct the audience's thoughts and affections. In 1930s Hollywood, visual style was organized around the preeminence of drama and, similar to the Soviet approach, obliged the spectator to accept the director's judgments without inviting the audience to

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[178] David Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 167.
[179] Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1950), 73.

draw their own conclusions.[180] In 1940s American cinema, however, deep-focus

photography experienced increased usage. Bazin perceived this development as evolving

cinema beyond the more monolithic pre-war status quo in which a didactic visual style

produced a passive spectator. Bazin maintains that Welles and William Wyler helped

correct this tendency (in films shot by cinematographer Gregg Toland, who goes

uncredited by Bazin) by "reintroduc[ing] ambiguity into the structure of the image"

specifically through depth of focus.[181] A film like *Citizen Kane*, Bazin insists, "is not

trying to deceive us" in the preceptive manner of Soviet montage. Bazin explains that

Welles's film uses "temporal realism" to present planes of depth that complicate the

"unity of meaning" assumed by the school of Kuleshov.[182]

     Against this backdrop from the 1920s-40s, Bordwell notes, mid-century art

cinema found new strategies to dampen a scene's action as well as its intelligibility,

extending in an invitation to audiences to wrestle with uncertainties relating to films'

characters and their worlds. Channeling Wölfflin, Bordwell identifies a new recessional

style—as seen in Antonioni and the Italian neorealists—as less hyperdramatized than

Welles and thus more ambiguous. The planimetric approach that manifest in the 1960s,

found again in Antonioni as well as in Godard and Akerman, puts characters in frontal,

profile, or back-facing positions with shallow depth, often a flat background or one

rendered flat by way of a telephoto lens or shallow-focus photography. Bordwell aligns

this graphic configuration with political modernism, one that foregrounds its own

constructedness and creates "disconcerting optical puzzles."[183] Post-1967 European art

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[180] André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 24.
[181] Bazin, 36.
[182] Bazin, 36-37.
[183] Bordwell, 167-168.

cinema has been classified as modernist through its attempts "to reconstruct the concept of reality"—often visually so—and to "exercise a direct impact on social, political, or ideological debates."[184]

Figure 20: *Vivre sa vie* **(Jean-Luc Godard, 1962): Anna Karina framed planimetrically against a flat backdrop.**

Figure 21: *Red Desert* **(Michelangelo Antonioni, 1964): Monica Vitti framed planimetrically through shallow depth of field, in effect flattening the background.**

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[184] András Bálint Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 356.

Jeanne Dielman fits quite naturally within these criteria, in part by way of its planimetric compositions that replace the more common visual schemas of deep space, montage, and classical continuity with geometrically-inclined images of compressed depth and unusual duration rejecting traditional editing patterns and well as spatial configurations. If Bazin is correct to stress an emphasis on narrative in pre-WWII American cinema, a didactic quality in Soviet montage, and the reintroduction of ambiguity through deep space in post-WWII Hollywood, then Akerman's film announces itself as operating in an entirely different—and politically modernist—mode through emphatically shallow compositions of ambiguous narrative significance. Unlike deep space and divergent montage styles, Akerman's technique highlights unmitigated duration. *Jeanne Dielman*'s planimetric compositions present deceptively uncomplicated images, the sheer temporal scale of which drive toward minor shifts culminating in a major climax.

The long, planimetric takes that compose *Jeanne Dielman* are not merely indebted to a painterly style, but they invite a mode of cinematic spectatorship that borrows from the still art world. This is not to suggest a lack of character movement in the film or equivocating cinema with painting, but rather to note that the film replaces the experience of—in the words of Marsha Kinder's *Film Quarterly* review—"male-dominated action films" with women's "actions that are considered non-dramatic," thus evoking the stillness of painting above the movement of male-centered motion pictures.[185] Kinder's use of the word "action" to describe both styles helpfully refuses to yield the term over to the genre of "action cinema," insisting that action unfolds in a kitchen as much as it does on a battlefield. On account of painting's lack of movement (in cinematic terms), a

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[185] Kinder, 4.

spectator's experience of painting involves attention to a single static image, regardless of how long the spectator holds their gaze. Similarly, *Jeanne Dielman*'s complete disavowal of camera movement as well as its consistent propensity to frame the camera perpendicular to the background mise-en-scène engenders a cinematic experience echoing that of the painting. By grounding the camera, refraining from pans and tracking shots, and employing very long takes throughout the film, *Jeanne Dielman* allows the spectator time to absorb each image comparable to the manner of viewing a painting.

Figure 22: Jeanne Dielman preparing veal in a planimetric composition.

The perpendicularity of the film's images exists at the levels of both *perspective*—pivoting from 90- and 180-degree angles—and *the image* per se—composed chiefly of horizontal and vertical lines framing subjects in a "mugshot" style. Most shots position the lead character frontally or from her side, rarely using oblique or recessional views. The camera's framing typically situates her sans relief against a flat background, with the vertical and horizontal lines of the frame cooperating with those within the mise-en-scène such as tables, cabinets, doorways, and—most significantly—

the perfectly square tiles behind Jeanne in her kitchen. Figure 3 exemplifies all the elements of this motif, including the horizontal line of the cabinet running parallel with the top of the film frame, the backdrop of gridded tiles, and the curtain and doorframe edge vertically situated to the far right of the frame. These together produce an effect of balance and flatness against which Jeanne stands in notably "undramatic" poses.[186] Similar to what Bordwell calls "dedramatization," the term connotes a lack of histrionic melodrama rather than a lack of theatrical frontality.[187] This positioning of Jeanne within her environs along with a bichromatic color scheme—rendering her not quite camouflaged but certainly chromatically neutralized within her environment—keeps her conjoined with the spaces she inhabits and produces very little visual relief. Mary Jo Lakeland observes that these "long [take] sequences in the apartment" adhere to "a strictly ordered and rigidly limited two-color palette" of "reddish brown and a range of blue-green-gray" with the result that Jeanne "becomes part of the overall pattern of the set; she 'melts' into the background."[188] The seeming visual stability of these shots, through mise-en-scène of color and geometry, downplays Jeanne as a visual presence and presents her as being absorbed in her routine and domestic space.

To emphasize Akerman's use of planimetrics in *Jeanne Dielman*, particularly in kitchen scenes, a compositional counter example with analogous narrative undertones from the world of painting may help illustrate the point. Dutch painter Gabriel Metsu's *A Kitchen Maid Peeling Apples* (1655-1658, Fig. 23) depicts a domestic woman in what

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[186] Ivon Marguiles, "A Matter of Time: *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*," *The Criterion Collection* website, https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/1215-a-matter-of-time-jeanne-dielman-23-quai-du-commerce-1080-bruxelles.
[187] Bordwell, 157.
[188] Mary Jo Lakeland, "The Color of *Jeanne Dielman*," *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* Vol. 1-2, No. 3-1 3-4, 6/1/1979: 216.

appears to be a kitchen, wielding a knife, and surrounded by household objects, all with a complementary color scheme. Despite the woman ostensibly facing forward, this is not a planimetric composition. The back wall appears to be angled into a corner, the shadow on the back wall throws the woman into relief (emphasized by her white bonnet and collar), and the objects in the foreground recede into the background on the left side of the painting. Still, the woman is reminiscent of Jeanne in her kitchen. Perhaps a deceptively tranquil setting, the woman not only brandishes a rather sizable knife but, slightly to her left, a rabbit's carcass is strewn, visually balancing with the pile of apples she is peeling on the right. Taken together, the woman is depicted alongside the death of "a nuisance animal…too timid for an aristocrat to consider worthy to hunt"—placing the woman in a position of dominance—and preparing fresh fruit long associated with a woman's primal temptation of a man.[189] Art historian Adriaan E. Waiboer describes the women subjects of Metsu's paintings as "seductresses" characterized by their "sexual willingness."[190] To Waiboer, *A Kitchen Maid* "establish[es] eye contact between the sensually smiling woman and the spectator."[191]

[189] Diane Scillia, "Hunter Rabbits/Hares in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Northern European Art: Parody and Carnival?" in *Parody and Festivity in Early Modern Art*, ed. David R. Smith (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012), 39.
[190] Adriaan E. Waiboer, *Gabriel Metsu Life and Work: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 51.
[191] Waiboer, 52.

Figure 23: *A Kitchen Maid Peeling Apples*, Gabriel Metsu, (1655-1658)

Why does this image matter, and how does it relate to *Jeanne Dielman* beyond its narrative similarities? I mean to solicit an example from painting, a form from which *Jeanne Dielman* borrows, to illustrate that Akerman's compositions use mise-en-scène to break down narrative expectations whereas Metsu's uses his to amplify them. Unlike the kitchen maid, Jeanne bears a greater frontal relation to the camera without breaking the fourth wall. Absent the suggestive mise-en-scène present in the painting, the film's narrative content provides the context of Jeanne's impending moment of retribution while its mise-en-scène defuses the spectator from placing too much stock in, for example, her afternoon trysts with men. The film presents these appointments with utmost dispassion, as if they are as much integrated into her unremarkable life as preparing dinner or babysitting the neighbor's child. Precisely here, however, the film foreshadows Jeanne's ultimate break with her routine with narrative shifts subtly detectable via mise-en-scène. If Metsu's painting exploits visual cues that its subject is something more than an innocent housemaid, then Akerman's film downplays them nearly to the point of using

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mise-en-scène as a smokescreen concealing Jeanne's rhythmic nuances over the course of

three days. During Day One, Jeanne's programmatic life proceeds smoothly and, based

on her movements and gestures, predictably. In separate incidents on Day Two, Jeanne

forgets to cap the money jar (hidden in plain sight on the table), overcooks the potatoes

(postponing dinner), drops a fork, fails to wash the dishes, and forgets to straighten her

hair after her afternoon liaison (her son notices this and comments on it). These

aberrations—all deviations from the pattern of ordered mise-en-scène visible in Day

One—derail the pattern of Jeanne's perfectly timed first day and set up Day Three's even

more heightened shifts. Then, Jeanne leaves her robe unbuttoned, seems to forget what to

do when she enters rooms in her apartment, loses a button on her son's coat, over-

explains her personal life to a store proprietor, abruptly leaves a café upon learning her

usual waitress is gone and her usual seat taken, and struggles to calm the child she

babysits.[192]

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[192] Jayne Loader, "*Jeanne Dielman*: Death In Installments," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, No. 16, 1977, online.

Figure 24: Jeanne's mussed hair during Day Two

The repeated images of Jeanne in her kitchen through all of these days bear both basic and complex similarities with Metsu's painting. Separate long-take sequences of *Jeanne Dielman* portray Jeanne monotonously peeling potatoes and preparing raw meat for dinner, in one case what appears to be veal and in another meatloaf (Figures 22 and 24). The sheer duration of these scenes and repetition of imagery attest to their intrinsic importance to the film; insofar as *Jeanne Dielman* has a guiding image or space, this is it. This is also where we witness the tedium of Jeanne's routine, which in turn becomes part of the audience's viewing routine. Pressing at and possibly exceeding what is deemed a reasonable length for a feature film at three hours and twenty minutes, *Jeanne Dielman* culminates with Jeanne calmly and silently killing one of her male clients with a pair of household scissors (which we have seen Jeanne use earlier in the film). Although the climactic stabbing and aftermath take place in the bedroom and dining room, respectively, the kitchen scenes set up the rhythmic household work against which Jeanne's afternoon prostitution transgresses. The film presents her prostitution as equally

banal as the rest of her regimen, reflecting how comfortably this otherwise illicit source of secondary income operates within patriarchy's boundaries, which limit Jeanne's social roles to domestic worker and agent of sex. Prior to the stabbing, Jeanne suddenly appears to resist the advances of her client in bed. He responds by forcing himself upon her until she capitulates. The killing that immediately follows this interaction, then, is legible as an act of discrete vengeance against both a man who proceeded sexually without consent as well as a society that restricts women's work to the home and women's bodies to the bedroom. If Metsu's *A Kitchen Maid* proposes an unconsummated narrative of veiled female predaciousness, then Akerman's film exploits cinema's narrative possibilities by realizing a female subject whose domestic routine conceals but insinuates a seething unease progressing toward a violent requital against a synecdoche of patriarchy.

Jeanne Dielman presents this domestic routine using planimetric compositions exuding stasis. The flat horizontals and supporting verticals evince a kind of restfulness that diagonal lines—particularly in compositions with less balance of mise-en-scène—sabotage. Consider the harsh diagonals and sharp angles of an Expressionistic style in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Fig. 25) or in its heir of a film noir such as *The Third Man* (Fig. 26). These geometric arrangements have been long associated with psychic anxieties, a "neurotic gloom" that Carol Diethe maintains "can scarcely be overstressed."[193] Narratives in these film movements trade on uncertainty, ranging from the fine line separating reality from madness (*Caligari*) to the disturbing reappearance of a morally dubious man believed to be dead (*The Third Man*). But whereas every formal feature in those films radiates unease, the visual form of *Jeanne Dielman* seems to

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[193] Carol Diethe, "Anxious Spaces in German Expressionist Films," *Spaces in European Cinema*, ed. Myrto Konstantarakos (Portland, OR: Intellect Books, 2000), 52.

suggest the opposite. The flat, even, and mostly-balanced shots of *Jeanne Dielman*

ostensibly embody calm, leveled stasis, predictability on the verge of boredom.

Nevertheless, Jeanne's position, sometimes slightly askew, matches the film's rhythmic

irregularities, such as when she forgets to put the lid on the money jar, overcooks dinner,

or sits motionless at the kitchen table for a prolonged period while her doorbell rings.

Figure 25: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, **Robert Wiene (1920)**

Figure 26: *The Third Man*, **Carol Reed (1949)**

One of *Jeanne Dielman*'s longest takes occurs about 2.5 hours into the film,

during Day Three, a shot lasting 3:37 of Jeanne preparing a meatloaf for dinner while she

is alone at home (Fig. 27). Perfectly fitting the above description of a planimetric

composition and replicating a composition now very familiar to the spectator, Jeanne spends nearly the entire duration of this long take standing at her kitchen table. With a frontal relationship to the camera, she stands in a medium/medium-long shot, slightly decentered to the right, with the top of the frame usually just above her head and the table in front of her just below waist level. As with the rest of the film, no non-diegetic music plays, with only the sound of Jeanne's fingers mixing the raw ground beef acting as a soundtrack. In terms of color, the red meat stands out from the rest of the mise-en-scène, with white along with pale greens, yellows, and blues dominating the image. The blood-red meat here as well as in Jeanne's dinner preparation from Day Two hint toward the blood she will shed at the finale of Day Three. The tiles occupying most of the background amplify the image's perpendicular geometry, taking the planimetric composition to an extreme. Jeanne's bodily movements are confident, careful, and above all routine, proclaiming a quotidian repetition as she prepares a dish renowned for its banal normality.

Figure 27: Jeanne preparing meat loaf.

Strikingly, it is during the film's longest takes when the least happens, narratively speaking. Jeanne's preparation of breaded veal cutlets for Day Two's dinner takes place in a shot lasting just over four minutes. The aforementioned meat loaf preparation for Day Three's dinner is encapsulated in a shot lasting just over three-and-a-half minutes. The film's final shot, during which Jeanne sits somewhat stoically but clearly exhausted following the killing, nearly breaks the six-minute mark. The climactic sequence of *Jeanne Dielman* arrives at the very end of the film just prior to the longest take and comprises three separate shots, to which I will refer as the Bed Shot, the Stabbing Shot, and the Table Shot. As with all shots in the film, these three are static and feature the titular Jeanne prominently. The Bed Shot lasts 2:41 and consists in a static high-angle shot of one of Jeanne's male customers on top of her in bed. As aforesaid, here Jeanne appears briefly to resist her client's advances, pushing against him and grabbing at the blanket beside her before burying her face in it while experiencing orgasm. This is Jeanne at her most affective in the film, an aspect of her performance directly connected with her apparently unplanned murder of the man in the following shot. Since the audience only witnesses Jeanne in bed with a man this once, we are left to assume based on the pattern of her broken daily rhythms that the orgasm of this encounter breaks with previous trysts. In classic art film form, the moment plays out but is not explained. On the scale of narrative surprise in *Jeanne Dielman*, it ranks high but still in no way suggests to the audience an imminent murder to follow.

The subsequent Stabbing Shot is the shortest of this string of three shots, lasting 1:40. It repeats an image from earlier points, a slightly oblique angle of Jeanne's vanity mirror in her bedroom positioned in such a way as to frame her (sitting in front of the

mirror) as well as her bed in the background (where her client lying on his back). During

this shot, Jeanne picks up a pair of household scissors from the dresser, walks over to her

bed, and stabs the man in the throat, apparently killing him. The shot holds for another 30

seconds as the man lies lifeless on the bed and Jeanne exits the frame. The Table Shot

that follows (Fig. 28) features Jeanne sitting at the dining room table for nearly six

minutes (5:53). The room is darker than we have ever seen it, with Jeanne sitting almost

completely still for the entire duration, seemingly in a trance, with blood on her blouse

and some moving shadows cast on the wall in the background by passing cars, which we

hear throughout the shot's duration. The jar where she collects cash from male clients is

to the extreme right of the screen, while Jeanne is, finally, entirely centered in the frame.

Figure 28: *Jeanne Dielman*'s **final shot and longest take**

The lengthiness of the shot's time span provides a formally consistent conclusion

depicting Jeanne in an ambiguous state: perhaps peaceful, perhaps disturbed, perhaps

something else entirely. By concluding on such an extended shot seemingly devoid of

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plot progression, the film imposes a visual schema attendant to mise-en-scène in real time, apart from montage or camera movement, training the audience's attention on Jeanne's bodily gestures and expression. If, as Bordwell has suggested, "[T]he slogan of art cinema might be 'when in doubt, read for maximum ambiguity,'" then the final shot of *Jeanne Dielman* performs the mode of art cinema through an elusive image presented in long take and orienting spectatorial attention primarily on an individual's reaction rather than her action.[194] As part of "a cinema of psychological effects in search of their causes," *Jeanne Dielman*'s bold art film-ness executes a character study chiefly by studying the protagonist's psychological effects with the camera as a fixed conduit framing her rhythms and gestures as the only points of entry into her psyche. Her reaction to what can only be considered a momentous event—maintaining the appearance of unresponsiveness that has defined her throughout the film—corresponds to the camera's own apathy. She is no more motivated to cover up or report the killing than the camera is to depict it sensationally or the editing is to offer multiple views of it. Instead, the film holds a dispassionate shot of a woman whose daily life bore the oppressive weight of a patriarchal society. Her world acts as a microcosm of this society, with the men in her life functioning as synecdoches of patriarchy's overbearing forces. Her dead husband renders Jeanne a widow, an ostensibly impotent wife whose identity remains fettered to an absent man. Jeanne's son establishes Jeanne as mother, a woman susceptible to critique as mother from a son who remarks when her hair is disheveled. An adolescent, her son already occupies a paternalistic role by imposing a standard upon Jeanne rendered impossible by the third male force in Jeanne's life, her afternoon customers. Jeanne's need to have sex with these men is presumably driven by financial need, based on the

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[194] Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*, 156.

film's attention to Jeanne discreetly stashing money generated from these liaisons. Jeanne's economic survival, then, is dependent on her social identity as a sexual conduit to male pleasure. The film's climax suggests that Jeanne's experience of pleasure in the moment of her exploitation may motivate her vengeance against the man who represents this sexually predacious patriarchal presence. As I have shown, *Jeanne Dielman* employs flattened imagery of Jeanne as a highly industrious agent nearly subsumed by her environment, the latter being legible as the society in which her life is reduced to her function as a worker. Jeanne is subjugated to a function of service to male figures in her life (legible as patriarchy) using static long takes and planimetric mise-en-scène to disrupt audience expectations.

A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night

If *Jeanne Dielman* imports avant-garde form into an art film of a widowed mother performing monotonous domestic duties in order to subvert the central character's revenge against patriarchy, then *A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night* art-cinematizes more commercial genre tropes and the suggestive cliché embodied in its title to do the same. While this project does not attend directly to the metrics of average shot length (ASL), even the most casual spectator of these two films would recognize the ASL of *Jeanne Dielman* to be significantly longer than that of *A Girl*. Whereas Akerman's film invests in long takes as a defining formal characteristic shot throughout *Jeanne Dielman*, *A Girl* employs a very long take in only one scene, a climactic moment when the titular girl—a vampire—appears prepared to pounce on a vulnerable young man.

Figure 29: Background Bodies in *A Girl*

The film, billed popularly as "the first Iranian vampire Western," is set in a

fictional dystopia of Bad City, a setting resembling a post-apocalypic Iran where, near the

beginning, a character walks past a trench inexplicably filled with human corpses unfazed

(see Fig. 29). The film's distributor, VICE Films, proclaims that the film "basks in the

sheer pleasure of pulp" and flaunts it as a "joyful mashup of genre, archetype, and

iconography" with "prolific influences span[ning] spaghetti westerns, graphic novels,

horror films, and the Iranian New Wave."[195] The film has a Farsi spoken-language track

but was shot in California locations, funded primarily by the 2010-founded Spectrevision,

a production company headed by actor Elijah Wood that claims to have been "created to

tell character-driven stories tackling emotional and human experiences that test the

boundaries of the genre space."[196] Amirpour is a second-generation Iranian-American

from Bakersfield, where most of the film was shot. Having only visited Iran, she

nevertheless insisted on this her first feature being in Farsi and cast a "mass of Iranian-

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[195] "A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night," *VICE Films*, accessed May 1, 2017, http://films.vice.com/a-girl-walks-home/.
[196] "About Spectrevision," *Spectrevision*, accessed May 1, 2017, http://spectrevision.com/who-we-are-2/.

American actors."[197] Before being able to secure financing through Elijah Wood's

company, the film's initial producers campaigned for money through the crowdfunding

platform Indiegogo.[198] So in terms of economics and production, the film is resolutely an

independent U.S. production. However, its foreign setting, non-English dialogue, and

diasporan director place it potentially in the space of Iranian cinema.

Figure 30: James Dean

Figure 31: Arash embodying James Dean

A Girl revolves primarily around a young man, Arash, and a young woman

known only as The Girl. Arash is characterized as a responsible, upstanding, and hard-

working gardener with a widowed father addicted to heroin by way of a drug dealer

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[197] Robert Ito, "The Shadow in the Chador: Ana Lily Amirpour's World: 'A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night,'" *The New York Times*, last modified November 12, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/16/movies/ana-lily-amirpours-world-a-girl-walks-home-alone-at-night.html?_r=0.

[198] Paula Bernstein, "How They Funded It: 'A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night' Brings Iranian Vampire Tale to Life," *IndieWire*, last modified January 9, 2015, http://www.indiewire.com/2015/01/how-they-funded-it-a-girl-walks-home-alone-at-night-brings-iranian-vampire-tale-to-life-66473/.

(Saeed) to whom he is indebted. Arash drives a classic Ford Thunderbird that Saeed steals from Arash as collateral for his father's debt. A fitted white t-shirt, affinity for cigarettes, and similarly coiffed hair, all allude to the iconography of James Dean (Figs. 30 & 31). Arash also matches the image of Dean by virtue of an ill fit with the society he inhabits, a rebel youth disconnected from his parents and on the cusp of a romantic encounter that will drive much of the film's narrative. The Girl, like Arash, is a loner introduced initially as an ominous, mysterious presence who stalks characters of dubious morals. We quickly learn that she is a vampire, one whose traditional hijab headscarf doubles as a shroud reminiscent of classical vampire iconography (Fig. 32). Her targeting of especially depraved men contextualizes her as a serial vigilante, a role appropriate to the moral backdrop of a town called "Bad City." An unlikely bond forms between Arash and The Girl, the latter who eventually kills Arash's father and who also considers killing Arash in the scene under the section's central analysis.

Figure 32: Hijab as vampire headdress in *A Girl*

This scene is shot in a long take just exceeding three minutes, a duration easily exceeding the next-longest take in the film. Parenthetically, some acknowledgment and explanation may be necessary to account for not only this film's dearth of long takes but

also the relative lack of long takes in contemporary American independent cinema,

particularly in films directed by women. A prevailing attitude currently conceives of

women directors as somewhat outside the mainstream (read: mass-market) industry's

priorities on action, virtuosity, and spectacle, and the relationship between the costs

incurred creating those effects with box office returns. Head of Lucasfilm Kathleen

Kennedy somewhat infamously claimed in 2016 that the high-profile studio subsidiary of

Disney—housing projects such as the Star Wars and Indiana Jones franchises—"want[s]

to make sure that when we bring a female director in to do 'Star Wars,' they're set up for

success…They're gigantic films, and you can't come into them with essentially no

experience."[199] So despite recent Star Wars movies featuring female lead characters—a

feature clearly compatible with the studio's goals toward financial success—the studio

balks at the notion that women directors possess the capability to direct such big-budget

films. The article in which the above quotation is cited points out inconsistencies with

Kennedy's statement, namely the studio's hiring of two relatively inexperienced male

directors helming recent Star Wars films.

In a fascinating parallel with relevance to *Jeanne Dielman* as well as *A Girl*,

hurdles to women directing high-profile films mimic those of women employing long

takes in the context of films about, for, and directed by women. Independent director

Anna Biller's feature films *Viva* (2007) and *The Love Witch* (2016), for example, explore

experiences of female characters navigating and dominating markedly patriarchal

societies. The films use their central characters to overturn genre conventions through

women who subvert familiar narrative and visual tropes that have traditionally placed

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[199] Kate Erbland, "'Star Wars': Lucasfilm Chief Kathleen Kennedy Says Studio Is Struggling to Find Female Directors With Proper Experience," *IndieWire*, last modified November 28, 2016, http://www.indiewire.com/2016/11/star-wars-lucasfilm-kathleen-kennedy-female-directors-1201750361/.

women in places of subjugation, victimization, and objectification. Despite their heavy references to mass-market cinema and visual culture, Biller's films occupy a decidedly independent space in terms of industry and audience. As is often the case with independent cinema, the films aspire to a wider market, a fact legible in their production as well as post-production. When I asked Biller about her recent film's evocation of *Jeanne Dielman* and whether she had considered shooting in longer takes like Akerman, she answered, "I love Jeanne Dielman [sic]. I tend to film my shots longer but [cut] them shorter since audiences get restless."[200] In addition to directing these films, Biller is also writer, editor, producer, costume designer, production designer, and composer. Deeply invested in every aspect of their production, it may come as surprising that this auteur would seemingly cater to mass-market audiences by compromising her vision of shot length. But as reflected in Kennedy's statement, such are the factors that women directors must often take into account in order to be deemed successful and win funding for future projects, especially those aimed at broad audiences. In *A Girl*, the long take under analysis is the exception to the film's rule, a momentous shot announcing a particular gravity in part by sustaining the shot for so long. It takes place during a moment of pivotal narrative significance, addressing head-on the question of whether The Girl will allow Arash live and establishing their relationship through the rest of the film. While the film's guiding camera style privileges stasis and its editing pattern avoids a clashing or disorienting montage style, its shots by and large clock in well under one minute, the foremost exception being a three-minute long take in The Girl's bedroom.

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[200] Anna Biller (@missannabiller), Twitter post, April 29, 2017, 5:08 p.m., https://twitter.com/missannabiller.

In the film's long take, these camera and editing practices work chiefly to draw audience attention to mise-en-scène. The longer the take and the more static the frame, the longer a spectator can employ a more painterly eye on compositional details, blazoning the significance of mise-en-scène in a way distinct from montage. This relationship is evident in an earlier scene key to apprehending the long take that arrives later. Having witnessed the drug dealer Saeed acting as pimp to an unwilling woman, The Girl coaxes him into bringing her to his apartment. This moment plays off the conceit of the film's title by overturning the image of a girl walking alone at night in a dangerous urban space, the audience already being aware that The Girl embodies a more dangerous force than Saeed. Having arrived at Saeed's home, The Girl stands in the entryway a few steps above Saeed as electronic dance music playing diegetically. Saeed snorts cocaine and counts cash on his couch as she watches in the manner of a predator observing her prey. Beyond The Girl being a vampire, the film invites this metaphor by way of mise-en-scène and cinematography. Regarding mise-en-scène, the setting is richly decorated with taxidermic animal heads on the walls as well as blankets, rugs, and pillows with animal print and furs. These carcasses create a visual stench of death, decorating a den with slaughtered and stuffed wildlife to subvert the assumed upper predatory hand of the space's pimp owner by the more powerful "girl" he aims to exploit. Saeed himself, whom we already know as the drug dealer who has led Arash's father into heroin addiction and stolen Arash's prized car, has tattooed on his neck "SEX." The word explicitly marks him as aggressively carnal while also hinting that precisely this appetite will be his undoing: the horizontal placement of the word forms a line across his throat, as in a death gesture.

Meanwhile, shadows and dark clothes partially obscure The Girl and distinguish her from Saeed's environment. A low-angle view of the scene in a deep-focus, recessional composition emphasizes the shadowed figure of The Girl on higher ground. Although centered, she is obscured in darkness, with minimal light cast on her face and bright shirt. Had the film presented this image only once and only briefly, we might not even notice her. But the film finds a way to subvert the darkness at the heart of the image's vanishing point to render her visually prominent and menacing (Fig. 33). This shot is given twice in an edited sequence, lasting a total of only 11 seconds. However, the sequence is heavily edited and this is the longest combined period in the scene with both The Girl and Saeed sharing the frame. The audience thus has more visual access to the mise-en-scène of this image than any other in the scene. This threatening low-angle composition directing the eye up, center, and slightly back has some precedent in German Expressionist horror films, such as F.W. Murnau's 1922 *Nosferatu*, despite a nearly-inverted use of black and white (Fig 34). Saeed's body, by contrast, maintains a cool disregard toward The Girl by facing away from her in a vulnerable open area. He eventually stands, walks to the stereo, turns up the music, briefly lifts handheld weights, and eventually approaches The Girl while dancing seductively. Mise-en-scène as performance, bodily gesture, and set design set the stage for the unfolding plot progression in this scene and the upcoming one that echoes it.

Figure 33: Ominous recessional composition in *A Girl*

Figure 34: Ominous recessional composition in *Nosferatu* **(Murnau, 1922)**

The narrative elements of a predator-prey relationship and the suspense born out through their social dynamic find fairly straightforward points of contact in the subsequent scene in The Girl's room. However, mise-en-scène in the disparate spaces serves a characterizing function fundamentally juxtaposing Saeed with The Girl. Importantly, as the scene in Saeed's house progresses, the editing takes on a strongly analytical pattern following the establishing shot of The Girl positioned above Saeed. Following the establishing shot, subsequent views includes all manner of shot scales—ranging from long shot to close-up—as well as editing techniques—shot-reverse-shot, eyeline match, and over-the-shoulder shots respecting the 180° line—as The Girl

continues to feign interest in Saeed until revealing her fangs to him, biting off his finger, feeding it to him, and killing him. After inspecting some of Saeed's CDs, The Girl exits the apartment, whereupon she briefly encounters Arash for the first time. In the scenes that follow, Arash enters Saeed's apartment with the goal of regaining his car only to find Saeed dead. In a moment of spontaneity, Arash takes the car keys as well as Saeed's drugs and money. He then dresses as a vampire before heading to a club to sell the drugs. Once there, he is pressured to take an ecstasy pill. Leaving the club, The Girl finds Arash under the influence and disoriented on a sidewalk. She pushes him home on her skateboard.

Figure 35: Arash & The Girl in her room.

In the establishing shot immediately introducing the decisive long-take scene, we see Arash and The Girl in her bedroom (Fig. 35). Arash is in the center of the frame seemingly passed out on her bed while The Girl stands to the right and places a record on her turntable. The shot's planimetric framing positions the camera perpendicular to the room's back wall with The Girl facing screen right, standing in profile to the camera. Utterly unlike the recessional image in Saeed's apartment, this arrangement appeals to a divergent visual schema, one to which art history attests via Wölfflin's bifurcation of

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styles and periods. The conduciveness of a planimetric image—with its verticals and horizontals—toward stasis matches a recessional composition's propensity toward an Expressionistic style, with diagonals often conjuring anxiety and instability. As we see from the disparity of shots and scenes, *A Girl* does both in a way that *Jeanne Dielman* does not. The shot here also bears the distinct distorting marks of a wide-angle lens to the extreme left and extreme right of the frame, with the otherwise vertical lines of the space (a doorframe and a vanity mirror) bent outward. The result amplifies the anamorphically-warped lines and stylizes the black-and-white image, particularly by placing the two characters against a backdrop of posters featuring pop music stars. Narratively, the space suggests a predatory lair in ways different from Saeed's apartment. Most obviously, we already know The Girl is a vampire who targets "bad" men. Also, her room evokes Western culture in a way that Arash embodies by way of James Dean, as if she is luring him into a sense of security. Finally, motifs from the earlier scene repeat themselves, with The Girl standing while her potential prey is not, a character playing music diegetically, and a desiring man eventually approaching The Girl. Despite these narrative points of contact with the previous scene, mise-en-scène and cinematography cut through the scene's suspense as to whether The Girl will kill Arash.

Importantly, the diegetic nature of the music further draws attention to its source within the mise-en-scène and establishes The Girl's control over the space. The record she plays at the scene's outset is the ominously-titled song "Death" by the British indie rock group White Lies. (I will return to the significance of the song shortly.) The music rouses Arash from his lethargy, as he slowly lifts himself up on the bed as the frame maintains a static hold on the scene. The Girl continues to face her vanity mirror in

profile relation to the camera and away from Arash. Along with The Girl wearing a white shirt with dark stripes, her physicality runs counter with her posture and position in Saeed's apartment. Rather than reconnoitering her environs and targeting her quarry, here she appears pensive and in a state of self-examination, as if vacillating between disparate courses of action. Arash, still in a stupor, stands and spins a disco ball hanging from the ceiling, hailing flecks of light around the room throughout the rest of the scene, slowing as the minutes pass. At this juncture, the only cut within the scene transitions from medium long shot to medium close-up, an analytical gesture placing The Girl to the extreme right of the frame—still in profile—and leaving more than two-thirds of the frame "empty" for Arash to occupy. As the song "Death" plays, the shot holds still for a full 25 seconds with only subtle breathing movements by The Girl. With Arash nearby but out of frame, the ostensibly blank space occupying most of the frame pairs with the lyrics we hear during these moments ("As I'm crying, so frightened of dying/ Relax, yes, I'm trying/ This fear's got a hold on me") to create a sense of foreboding that perhaps The Girl will treat Arash differently than Saeed. The background posters on the wall are slightly blurred through shallow focus—a technique seen above in earlier iterations of art-film planimetrics—but as Arash enters the frame, Michael Jackson's *Thriller* album holds the central position on the wall between him and The Girl (Fig. 36). The album cover calls to mind the lyrics to "Thriller," ambiguously identifying The Girl with "something evil…lurking from the dark" and "the beast about to strike." Further, Arash's high-collar vampire cape and The Girl's hajib-less clothing reverse the expected roles the characters occupy. Approaching the moment by way of art-cinema patterns, the reversal is ambiguous; potentially suggesting Arash's predatory gaze on The Girl, his garb can

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also be read as artificial to the point of being ironic, further underscoring his vulnerability before The Girl.

Figure 36: *Thriller* **as backdrop in** *A Girl*

Although the stylized long take bears this abstruse quality, formal techniques encourage stronger audience engagement with The Girl than with Arash. First, this scene transpires with the audience's awareness that Arash is high on ecstasy and that The Girl is a vampire. While we can imagine Arash's fascination with the strobe, the scene's other elements are constructed with a stillness corresponding to The Girl's contemplative mood rather than Arash's inebriated one. Also, the editing shift into the long take aligns us with The Girl for nearly half a minute before Arash enters the frame. When he does, The Girl's reflective poise renders Arash dazed by comparison. His eyeline aimed at The Girl is a diegetic male gaze defanged by the absurdity of such a harmless man wearing a campy costume reminiscent of *Nosferatu*. (Arash's innocence is evident in the one act of violence he commits in *A Girl*, when he breaks his own hand punching a brick wall after Saeed steals his car. He wears a cast through the rest of the film, visible in the first shot of this scene.) Slowly, Arash comes very close to The Girl, their heads eventually melding into a shared silhouette by way of the shot's low-key lighting. With equal slowness, The Girl turns 180° to face Arash head-on before their eyelines match. The

Girl reaches up and pulls Arash's head backward, exposing his neck before moving her mouth toward his Adam's apple. This activates the only camera movement in the shot—nearly unnoticeable—a very slight upward tilt and pan-left to keep Arash's head in frame and neck in the crosshairs of the image. Lingering there for a moment as the stupefied Arash acquiesces, The Girl finally rests the side of her head on his chest with her face toward the audience. She eventually releases hold of Arash, who rests his head on hers. After a moment in stasis, a cutaway takes us to a new scene.

Long take planimetrics and slow movement here foreground mise-en-scène to motivate the audience's subjective access into The Girl's state of mind and reiterate Arash's defenselessness, rendered more emphatic by his oblivious attraction to her and our awareness of Saeed's fate. Amirpour's camera and editing yield to the actors' performances, lighting, costume, and background orchestrated to crescendo the film's central narrative strategy of undermining the banal image of a helpless and victimized woman at the mercy of predatory men. The camera's nearly immobile frame encases Arash's delirium, The Girl's ruminative stance, the visually dampened background, the dizzying effect of the strobe lights, and the ambient music all contributing to the scene's overall melancholy that aligns with The Girl's apparent dilemma whether to exsanguinate Arash in a manner consistent with the "bad" men of Bad City. The Girl's ultimate decision to allow Arash's survival and a romantic relationship with him together defy the traditional narrative trope of horror cinema that keeps the monster at a distance and blends it with the ambiguous ending of an art film.

This subversion belongs in part to a recent trend of horror and independent cinema. Ken Gelder points out a new kind of vampire in Tomas Alfredson's Swedish

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vampire film *Let the Right One In* (2010), one that can perhaps "be lived with, and even loved." Gelder shows how that film relocates the truly monstrous aggressiveness from the vampire to the school bullies from whom the vampire protects the main character. Channeling Freud, Gelder shows that the figure of the neighbor constitutes the threat of theft, exploitation, and humiliation, thus offering a proximity empowering a vampire neighbor more than a distant one. In *Let the Right One In* as well as *A Girl*, the vampire is a "girl." Their gender becomes particularly significant in light Jules Zanger's grievance, cited by Gelder, that contemporary vampires lack their antecedents' association with metaphysics and religion, now embodying a "new, demystified" ethnic identity.[201] Both of these films revolve around vampire characters with an ethnicity corresponding to the spaces they inhabit. But both are girls, displacing the ethnicity angle of Gelder's critique with a gender one. But, particularly in *A Girl*, the film's ethnic "othering" of the entire cast and space from its site of production dissociates The Girl from being a pointedly ethnic monster within her context. Like *Jeanne Dielman*, *A Girl* seems clearly more invested in unsettling audience (and fellow character) gender biases, largely through its use of mise-en-scène.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how long takes in *Jeanne Dielman* and *A Girl* temporalize spaces in which mise-en-scène centralizes issues of gender and toys with audience expectations. Both directed by women, the films offer distinct yet analogous long takes, their shared features differentiating them from those in preceding chapters

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[201] Ken Gelder, "Our Vampires, Our Neighbors," *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology*, eds. Caroline Joan S. Picart & John Edgar Browning (New York: Palgrave Macmilla, 2012), 35.

from films directed by men. Women directors often occupy unique relations to art, mass-market, and independent cinema institutions. Aforementioned examples include mass-market cinema's resistance to allowing women access to directing as well as an independent director's concessions to audiences precisely at the level of shot length. Claire Johnston's important 1973 essay "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema" insists on the need to develop a strategy "which embraces both the notion of films as a political tool and film as entertainment," a binary that she says has been "too long…regarded as two opposing poles with little common ground." She goes on, "[W]omen's cinema must embody the working through of desire: such an objective demands the use of the entertainment film" in "a two-way process."[202] If Patricia White's aforementioned assertion regarding art cinema's "feminized taste culture" carries weight, then the bleeding of art cinema into mass-market cinema might constitute a shift toward the utopia that Johnston imagined two years prior to *Jeanne Dielman*'s release. Further, *A Girl* can be seen to embody "the working through of desire" from a female character's point of view by a diasporan woman director in ways hearkening back to the long takes of art cinema while participating in mainstream genres.

Like *Jeanne Dielman* and *A Girl*, a swath of recent films directed by women outside mass-market exhibition spaces focus on vengeful female characters often framed planimetrically and statically as they contemplate killing men who embody patriarchy's suppressive forces. Among the instances I recognize of this trend, only *A Girl* uses a very long take in harmony with planimetrics to allow the audience extended time to observe mise-en-scène's political function. In three different cases, other distinctly genre elements

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[202] Claire Johnston, "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema," in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 126.

deploy mise-en-scène toward very similar feminist aims but without the painterly

spectatorial mode invited by static long takes. Accounting in part for the rarity of long

takes in this context, Anna Biller's admission regarding *The Love Witch*'s lack of very

long takes taps into how the goals and styles of these filmmakers tend to resist—or be

resisted by—mass-market cinema far more than those of their male counterparts. As

such, I situate Amirpour's *A Girl* as a somewhat extraordinary case with regard to the

long take. At the same time, the film is one of a significant sampling of independent

films—an arena with strong ties with both art and mass-market cinemas—employing

similar shots of predatory women—or, "vengeful bitches," as one film puts it—within

domestic spaces while envisaging the annihilation of rapacious men. This trend is visible

at least annually in films produced from 2014-2017 and released within the exhibition

circuit of art cinema, illustrated in images below: *A Girl* (2014), *The Lure* (Agnieszka

Smoczynska, 2015), *The Love Witch* (Anna Biller, 2016), and *The Beguiled* (Sofia

Coppola, 2017). If *A Girl* can be classified as an independent film using genre play and

employing techniques of art cinema, then *The Lure* is a foreign film produced by "the

largest nationally-owned film producer in Poland," also blending multiple genre elements

as well as exploitation, comfortably situating the film as a descendent of art cinema.[203]

The Love Witch is a U.S. independent film that heavily emphasizes its *art*istic mise-en-

scène and riffs heavily on the horror genre but also contains doses of melodrama, camp,

and exploitation with a strongly feminist accent. Finally, *The Beguiled* is another U.S.

independent film premiering in competition at the Cannes Film Festival—marking its

arthouse ambitions—and being marketed as a period-piece auteur product with hints of

horror—by Sofia Coppola, who stacked the film with a high-profile cast ensuring a

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[203] "Documentary and Feature Film Studios, WFDiF website, http://www.wfdif.pl/en/about-us.

broader audience.[204] Provocatively, all of these films can be typified through the lens of

genre play, trading on patterns of horror and other genres by way of art cinema,

producing an effect legible in contemporary independent cinema.[205]

Figure 37: Gridded backdrop as in *Jeanne Dielman* and character positioning as in *A Girl* in *The Lure* (2015)

Figure 38: Planimetric framing of a culinary scene akin to *Jeanne Dielman* in *The Love Witch* (2016)

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[204] The fact that Coppola has been able to cast famous stars beginning with her first feature likely testifies to name recognition associated with her father Francis Ford Coppola, but I maintain that insofar as nepotism is in play, it is nepotism indissolubly linked with art cinema. Francis embodies a commitment to art cinema and has clashed with the mainstream on numerous occasions and in a variety of ways.

[205] Clark Buckner, for example, makes a similar case regarding the Coen brothers film *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001) in *Apropos of Nothing: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, and the Coen Brothers* (New York: SUNY Press, 2014), 61.

Figure 39: Planimetric framing of female dominance in profile in *The Beguiled* (2017)

As *Jeanne Dielman* extended Chantal Akerman's experimental filmmaking into the space of art cinema and thereby found a broader audience, so are these women directors utilizing genre tropes and techniques—most often that of horror—to tell similar stories of vengeful women preying on men who reduce them to their patriarchal roles. *A Girl* stands out as the film that most boldly echoes *Jeanne Dielman*'s employment of a planimetric long take to highlight a woman's control over a man in a way that, like *Children of Men* before it, reflects a more hopeful future than the one realized in *Jeanne Dielman*. This parallel importantly disarms any charges of essentialism toward the gender of a film's director and further manifests how heterogeneous approaches to long takes can nevertheless share a political common ground. Like most of the directors whose films this project examines, Amirpour situates herself at the intersection of mass-market and art cinemas by way of independent cinema, as do the above women directors who tell similar stories—most of which are independent productions—testifying to an extra-diegetic and already-realized hopefulness for women directors if not necessarily for the long takes they might aspire to use.

Michael Z. Newman's study of independent film culture in the U.S. identifies genre play as one approach taken by "indie" directors reflecting an oppositional stance to mainstream film.[206] He also observes that characters in independent films are often emblems of social engagement who reflexively establish the directors as emblematizers, by extension suggesting that The Girl in *A Girl* bears some important marks of identification with Amirpour herself. Newman goes on to claim that while independent cinema's social engagement, inspired by multiculturalism, "is a self-styled progressive social agenda, in independent fiction films it is often depoliticized to the point that the goal of socially specific representation becomes reflexive rather than critical."[207] But Newman's exhaustive 2011 book on the subject predates the trend I trace here, a trend that takes on increased weight exceeding the allegedly non-critical stance a particular film might take. Rather, the surge of these narratives by women directors not comfortably situated within art or mass-market cinemas itself can be understood as a collective utopic feminist vision. The place of the long take within this vision is only partially realized and may never hold the prominence it did in Chantal Akerman's films, most notably in *Jeanne Dielman*. And so perhaps the storylines of these films, motivated by the same critique of patriarchy found in *Jeanne Dielman*, constitutes the legacy of Akerman's approach, having now migrated from experimental art cinema to an art cinema reaching more popular audiences, and from long-take mise-en-scène to genre-accented mise-en-scène.

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[206] Michael Z. Newman, *Indie: An American Film Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 43.
[207] Newman, 31-32.

EPILOGUE

One is told that when performing an in-depth analysis of a relatively narrow field of study, the findings will likely raise more questions than answers. Nevertheless, understanding the technique called "the long take"—a part of film grammar comparable to a phoneme—only assumes or requires fluency in the most primal elements of that grammar—graphemes, we might say. These smallest elements, scoured in the introduction, include the shot, a seemingly unassuming term that can ultimately take on a number of different meanings. But, as this project has shown, long takes are in many ways conduits for cinematic expression that (to varying degrees) draw attention less to themselves and more to a host of other elements and complex relations between those elements. If a "shot" can mean upwards of five different (but often overlapping) things, how does one constitute a "long take," even before the process of studying examples of its employment at the intersection of mass-market and art cinemas?

It is the aforementioned relations that have constituted the biggest hurdles to this project. In Chapter Two, the image of a screaming mother and her dead son just *prior* to *Children of Men*'s longest take seems to invite more attention and suffuse more significance into the extended shot that follows than perhaps any frame in the long take itself. So the long take in this case derives part of its gravity from sound and mise-en-scène in a previous shot. Chapter Three develops the relational nature of the long take further. If long takes seem at some intuitive level to be a camera technique, what of the cuts (or other editing techniques) that launch and cap them? If, as I have maintained, long takes resist the impulse to cut, then the ensuing edit marking its completion also delineates a point at which the goal of that cinematographic technique has been met or

succumbs to its limit. Chapter Four, in a germane nod to art history, explores how some long takes seem to allow cinema to borrow from age-old forms of composition and artistic media. Paintings do not "move," per se; and although motion pictures by definition do move, an immobile camera trained on a kind of still life engenders a nuanced viewing strategy unlike the prodigious camera movements intended to wow more popular audiences. All of these chapters have acknowledged the relationship of the director or *auteur* to the long take, but the last chapter considers directors whose ties with the figure of the auteur is at least one step removed on account of being women. Despite their more marginalized position (historically speaking), long takes become a point of entry toward that esteemed status. And so, again, an important part of the scholarly significance of long takes is how they function as means to other ends, as elements in an ecosystem of relationships.

In the process of this inquiry, I have interviewed two film projectionists, two film editors, and two directors (one of whom is also an editor). While one director (Dennis Hauck) was so invested in long takes that he built his entire film around them, another (Anna Biller) flatly told me, "The length of [the] take should go with what the script is trying to convey."[208] In the former case, long takes themselves formed the kernel of the film, around which the script was structured. In the latter, the duration of a shot gives way to the demands of the script and, as a result, the film lacks any particularly long takes. But an amalgam of external forces influence choices, assumptions, accidents, adjustments, traditions, and conceptions demand sensitivity as to how a technique such as the long take *becomes* a technique, as well as a technique with the eminence it has. My project matters primarily for this, not as an exhaustive account or history of the long take

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[208] Email interview with director Anna Biller, 2/25/2017.

but to exemplify how a component of film grammar that comes to occupy reverential status actually functions in a social context accounting for practitioners, audiences, industries, technologies, and a profusion of other techniques.

My introductory comments testify to the centrality of pedagogy to my scholarship, a pedagogy by which the institution of film and media studies thrives. Constrained in introductory, historical, and critical-analytical courses to impress the importance of cinema's tools upon students, it is incumbent on instructors to master the network of instruments through which films are created. Often not much more than a footnote in texts on film aesthetics, the long take floats in a liminal space, beyond the basic vocabulary of style but in a realm removed from other critical media discourses such as political and theoretical approaches. My hope for this project has been to bridge that gap, to make the basic concepts of film criticism alight with political and theoretical import, to reject the notion that "formal analysis" is inherently apolitical, and to highlight the concerns with status quo films and filmmakers as well as crucial developments by those often isolated from the mainstream. It goes without saying, at this late stage, that there is no such thing as "the long take," there are only "long takes." But lest the weight of this truism be lost, it also suggests that an object is never a naked object but always embedded in a context rich with associations and always inseparable from historical forebears.

APPENDIX

LONG TAKES IN POST-1945 CINEMA (~ > 3 min.)

The following constitutes a sampling of long takes in a variety of broad "styles" as described in this dissertation. Placement of the films into these headings both establishes and destabilizes them as aligned with a particular approach. See especially films fitting into more than one category. This list is not meant to be comprehensive in any respect, rather a sampling of mass-market and international art films that often tend to be directed by names given auteur status. To remain consistent with the rest of this project, these long takes all clock in at around three minutes or longer. While an ostensibly arbitrary cutoff point, this time marker drastically limits the number of shots that could otherwise be included in this Appendix.

Virtuosic Mobility
Soy Cuba (Mikhail Kalatozov, 1964, 3:22)
The Passenger (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1975, 6:32)
Strange Days (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995, 3:12)
Snake Eyes (Brian De Palma, 1998, 12:30)
Children of Men (Alfonso Cuarón, 2006, 4:08 [1]; 6:19 [2])
Gravity (Alfonso Cuarón, 2013, 12:29)

Crane-Driven
Touch of Evil (Orson Welles, 1958, 3:11)
Soy Cuba (Mikhail Kalatozov, 1964, 3:22)
The Passenger (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1975, 6:32)
The Player (Robert Altman, 1992, 8:08)
Too Late (Dennis Hauck, 2015, 22:18)

Sequence (Steadicam/Tracking)
Ride the Pink Horse (Robert Montgomery, 1947, 2:50)
Gun Crazy (Joseph H. Lewis, 1950, 3:28)
La Ronde (Max Ophüls, 1950, 5:04)
Story of a Love Affair (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1950, 3:13)
Touch of Evil (Orson Welles, 1958, 3:11)
"Gare du Nord" (Jean Rouch sequence from omnibus film *Six in Paris*, 1965, 8:54)
Weekend (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967, 6:10)
The Red and the White (Miklos Jancsó, 1967)
Red Psalm (Miklos Jancsó, 1972, 5:14)
Halloween (John Carpenter, 1978, 4:08)
Goodfellas (Martin Scorsese, 1990, 3:02)
Bonfire of the Vanities (Brian De Palma, 1990, 4:42)
Strange Days (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995, 3:12)
Boogie Nights (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1997, 2:54)
Code Unknown (Michael Haneke, 2000, 8:09)
Children of Men (Alfonso Cuarón, 2006, 4:08 [1]; 6:19 [2])

Atonement (Joe Wright, 2007, 5:06)
Gravity (Alfonso Cuarón, 2013, 12:29)
Too Late (Dennis Hauck, 2015, 20:48 et al.)

Static
Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles (Chantal Akerman, 1975, 5:53)
Stalker (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1979, 9:26)
Caché (Michael Haneke, 2005)
A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night (Ana Lily Amirpour, 2014, 3:02)

Small-Space Movement
Ride the Pink Horse (Robert Montgomery, 1947, 2:50)
Rope (Alfred Hitchcock, 1948, multiple)
Ordet (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1955, 7:07)
"Gare du Nord" (Jean Rouch sequence from omnibus film *Six in Paris*, 1965, 8:54)
Red Beard (Akira Kurosawa, 1965, 5:23)
The Godfather (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972, 2:58)
Flowers of Shanghai (Hou Hsaio-Hsien, 1998, multiple)

Title/Opening Sequence
Ride the Pink Horse (Robert Montgomery, 1947, 2:50)
La Ronde (Max Ophüls, 1950, 5:04)
Touch of Evil (Orson Welles, 1958, 3:11)
The Godfather (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972, 2:58)
The Conversation (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974, 2:56)
Halloween (John Carpenter, 1978, 4:08)
Stalker (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1979, 3:02)
The Sacrifice (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1986, 9:26)
Bonfire of the Vanities (Brian De Palma, 1990, 4:42)
The Player (Robert Altman, 1992, 7:47)
Strange Days (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995, 3:12)
Boogie Nights (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1997, 2:54)
Flowers of Shanghai (Hou Hsaio-Hsien, 1998)
Snake Eyes (Brian De Palma, 1998, 12:30)
Gravity (Alfonso Cuarón, 2013, 12:29)

Ultra-Long Celluloid
Rope (Alfred Hitchcock, 1948)
"Gare du Nord" (Jean Rouch sequence from omnibus film *Six in Paris*, 1965, 8:54)
The Sacrifice (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1986, 9:26)
Flowers of Shanghai (Hou Hsaio-Hsien, 1998)
Too Late (Dennis Hauck, 2015)

Ultra-Long Digital
Timecode (Mike Figgis, 1999)
Russian Ark (Alexander Sokurov, 2002)

Ana Arabia (Amos Gitai, 2013)
Birdman (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2014)
Victoria (Sebastian Schipper, 2015)

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