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**SCREENING BOREDOM**  
THE HISTORY AND AESTHETICS OF SLOW CINEMA

Orhan Emre Çağlayan

A Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Film Studies

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Slow Cinema, a stylistic trend within contemporary art cinema, although one with a longer pre-history. Its distinguishing characteristics pertain ultimately to narration: the films, minimalistic by design, retard narrative pace and elide causality. Specifically, its aesthetic features include a mannered use of the long take and a resolute emphasis on dead time; devices fostering a mode of narration that initially appears baffling, cryptic and genuinely incomprehensible and offers, above all, an extended experience of duration on screen. This contemporary current emerges from a historical genealogy of modernist art films that for decades distended cinematic temporality and, furthermore, from the critical and institutional debates that attended to it. This thesis, therefore, investigates Slow Cinema in its two remarkable aspects: firstly, as an aesthetic practice, focusing on the formal aspects of the films and their function in attaining a contemplative and ruminative mode of spectatorship; and, secondly, as a historical critical tradition and the concomitant institutional context of the films' mode of exhibition, production and reception. As the first sustained work to treat Slow Cinema both as an aesthetic mode and as a critical discourse with historical roots and a Janus-faced disposition in the age of digital technologies, this thesis argues that the Slow Cinema phenomenon can best be understood via an investigation of an aesthetic experience based on nostalgia, absurd humour and boredom, key concepts that will be explored in respective case studies. My original contribution to knowledge is, therefore, a comprehensive account of a global current of cultural practice that offers a radical and at times paradoxical reconsideration of our emotional attachment and intellectual engagement with moving images.

The introduction chapter begins with a discussion of the Slow Cinema debate and then establishes the aims of the thesis, its theoretical framework and elaborates on the adopted methodologies, namely formal analysis and aesthetic historiography. Chapter 2 examines Béla Tarr in light of the evolution of the long take and attributes Tarr's use of this aesthetic device as a nostalgic revision of modernist art cinema. Chapter 3 explores the films of Tsai Ming-liang, which embrace incongruous aesthetic features, envision an absurdist view of life, create humour through duration and are situated within the minimalist trends of the international film festival circuit. Chapter 4 focuses on Nuri Bilge Ceylan, whose films emerge from the aftermath of the collapse of a domestic film industry and intervene into its historical heritage by adopting fundamental features of boredom as well as transforming its idleness into an aesthetically rewarding experience. The conclusion chapter incorporates the case studies by stressing the role of Slow Cinema within the complex negotiations taking place between indigenous filmmaking practices and the demands of global art cinema audiences as well as the circulation of art films through networks of film festivals and their respective funding bodies.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

This thesis examines Slow Cinema, a stylistic trend within contemporary art cinema, although one with a longer pre-history. Its distinguishing characteristics pertain ultimately to narration: the films, minimalistic by design, retard narrative pace and elide causality. Specifically, its aesthetic features include a mannered use of the long take and a resolute emphasis on dead time; devices fostering a mode of narration that initially appears baffling, cryptic and genuinely incomprehensible and offers, above all, an extended experience of duration on screen. This contemporary current emerges from a historical genealogy of modernist art films that for decades distended cinematic temporality and, furthermore, from the critical and institutional debates that attended to it. This thesis, therefore, investigates Slow Cinema in its two remarkable aspects: firstly, as an aesthetic practice, focusing on the formal aspects of the films and their function in attaining a contemplative and ruminative mode of spectatorship; and, secondly, as a historical critical tradition and the concomitant institutional context of the films' mode of exhibition, production and reception. Before moving to a detailed exposition of my argument, however, I want to briefly set out the critical debate from which this research project has emerged and, even if temporarily, situated Slow Cinema at the centre of scholarly attention through its resonance with the journalistic discourses on art cinema.

In the April 2010 issue of *Sight and Sound*, the journal's editor Nick James inaugurated what was later called the Slow Cinema debate. In his editorial piece, Nick James outlined two acts of passive aggression against the Hollywood domination of the film industry, namely the Slow Criticism and Slow Cinema movements. Slow Criticism, a term borrowed from the Dutch critic Dana Linssen of *Filmkrant*, stands for "one response to the growing redundancy of so much tipster consumer reviewing of films," while Slow Cinema, within this context, simply refers to a strand of international art films renowned for their slow pace and minimalist aesthetics. James argued that both of these acts, although on the surface an instance of rebellion against the mainstream media, were nevertheless passive forms of resistance. In other words, James suggested

that the recent changes in filmmaking and its criticism suffered from a certain problem: the radical nature of the films would gradually become clichés in their own right and eventually “offer an easy life for critics and programmers” since they “are easy to remember and discuss in detail because details are few.” Because many of these films are commissioned by the same festivals that exhibit and distribute them, James suggested a conspiracy theory in which films opposing the politics of mainstream capitalism were in fact deliberately ordered by festival professionals, mass produced by art cinema directors and shallowly reviewed by film critics. Explicitly referring to the recent Golden Bear winner *Honey* (2010), James wrote “there are times, as you watch someone trudge up yet another woodland path, when you feel an implicit threat: admit you’re bored and you’re a philistine. Such films are passive-aggressive in that they demand great swathes of our precious time to achieve quite fleeting and slender aesthetic and political effects.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, James was dubious of the minimalist aesthetics at work in these films and hesitant in ascribing a political value to the films for their passive functions.

James’s provocative argument was immediately picked up and heavily criticized by a certain Harry Tuttle, the author of the blog *Unspoken Cinema*, an Internet haven for Slow Cinema aficionados.<sup>2</sup> Tuttle characterizes James’s editorial as “anti-intellectual banter” and accuses James of misunderstanding “Contemporary Contemplative Cinema” – the label he uses for Slow Cinema, for various reasons explained later – essentially arguing that the sheer number of details (such as plot, character, etc.) in any film or artwork does not constitute any bearing over its aesthetic value, as witnessed in various minimalist films and artworks. Ultimately, Tuttle urges Nick James and other film critics to deal with the matter “frontally,” in other words, explain why some slow films are masterpieces and some are not, rather than complaining whether they are boring or enjoyable. Although Tuttle’s criticism is a borderline case between a personal insult to James and a passionate defence of Contemporary Contemplative Cinema, his reaction reveals an obvious, albeit often overlooked aspect of Slow Cinema. Although slowness in cinema can accommodate positive and productive aesthetic functions, as I will argue later in this thesis, it does not automatically entail a higher aesthetic, artistic or cultural value. In other words, as Harry Tuttle writes, Contemporary Contemplative Cinema “is not a formulaic trend that only produces masterpieces. It is an alternative

way to make films, a new narrative mode, a different angle in storytelling, and it gives a new perspective to the audience. You can't judge it with your subjective mainstream prejudices.”<sup>3</sup> Although Tuttle’s argument aims at defending the virtues of Slow Cinema, it fails on the account for demonstrating any empirical reasoning or engagement with film theory to support his claims and even further alienates its attackers by refusing critical evaluation.

Following Tuttle’s blogpost, the controversy regarding the cultural and aesthetic value of Slow Cinema diffused into various other media channels. For example, Steven Shaviro wrote a response in his blog and sided with Nick James, essentially arguing that contemporary Slow Cinema does nothing but recycle the experiments carried out by art cinema directors of the 1960s, minus their political daringness and provocations.<sup>4</sup> Vadim Rizov took a similar stance by arguing that apart from a few odd “premiere practitioners,” such as Béla Tarr and Tsai Ming-liang, much of the films by contemporary Slow Cinema directors “simply stagnate in their own self-righteous slowness.”<sup>5</sup> Various film bloggers, including critics such as Danny Leigh, further referenced the debate by summing up the main positions as well providing other parameters in defence of Slow Cinema, albeit without pursuing any of the historical, theoretical and aesthetic problems worth considering.<sup>6</sup> Weeks later, James defended his position by rephrasing his argument, namely suggesting that “this loose cultural tendency [...] is in danger of becoming mannerist, and that the routine reverence afforded to its weaker films by a largely worshipful critical orthodoxy is part of the problem.”<sup>7</sup> The second part of James’s editorial foregrounds the ways in which boredom, both as an everyday experience and as an aesthetic value, relates to contemporary cinema and culture and James emphasizes how defenders of art cinema regard the use of the word with antipathy. While letters from readers sporadically surfaced in *Sight and Sound* and Tuttle continued his fierce attacks, a similar debate focusing on boredom resurfaced in the *New York Times* in an article penned by Dan Kois.<sup>8</sup> In a series of personal and tongue-in-cheek anecdotes, Kois admits his naïve belief in “view[ing] aridity as a sign of sophistication” and eventually identifies consuming “slow-moving films” with “eating cultural vegetables.”<sup>9</sup> The broader point, which Kois refers to is the odd belief that we watch films that we do not thoroughly enjoy, but keep doing so because we think that we should – or in other words, we feel

that consuming such high-brow products somehow increases our cultural and social status. *New York Times* critics Manohla Dargis and A. O. Scott responded to Kois by defending virtues of boredom and Kent Jones wrote a scathing critique of Kois's arguments, while *Salon.com*'s Andrew O'Hehir further rounds up the positions.<sup>10</sup> In short, the setting of the Slow Cinema debate evolved from film blogs towards a more journalistic context, albeit mostly written online, with professional critics as well as a wider readership involved. The whole debate was revisited in a panel with filmmakers and critics under the AV Film Festival *As Slowly As Possible* in Newcastle in March, 2012 and the conceptual questions within and beyond the debate culminated in an academic symposium "Fast/Slow" at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, which took place in April 4-5, 2013.<sup>11</sup>

The theoretical questions arising from the Slow Cinema debate are manifold. Firstly, the debate itself presents the question whether these films are in fact politically or aesthetically engrossing, or if they are just self-conscious, complacent artworks made-to-order for cultural elitists. The pace in which the debate developed and its effortless reappearance in various Internet sites, social media platforms, blogs, forums and online discussion boards bear witness to how digital technologies and the new media meddle so swiftly in our affairs with cultural productions as well as intellectual matters. Furthermore, the debate demonstrated that many of the films travelled halfway across the globe, transcending national and cultural boundaries, and yet were able to speak to different groups of people that share similar sensibilities concerning cinema and its aesthetic, cultural and political functions. As perhaps the most exciting art cinema current in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, the Slow Cinema debate also engaged with the critical discourse probing what it meant to write about art cinema in the wake of mainstream blockbuster dominance. It created wide-ranging scholarly attention to international film festivals as "cultural gatekeepers" and their trend-setting, powerful agendas within the cinema industry.<sup>12</sup> In this respect, Slow Cinema as a critical discourse operated at an intersection where vital questions into cultural research were born and accommodated with ease. These concerns ranged from generic inquiries into the nature of transnational art cinema, film history and aesthetics, matters of taste and value, film spectatorship and cinephilia, to very specific and complex questions regarding the negotiations, appropriations and exchanges between global networks of

production, exhibition, distribution and local articulations of native traditions. In short, Slow Cinema and its debate were, to put it simply, a treasure house charged with an abundance of potential avenues for cultural research.<sup>13</sup>

But what exactly was Slow Cinema and under what conditions and circumstances did it originate? From what film historical genealogy did it emerge? To what extent was Slow Cinema a new practice and in what sense was it a radical – or to use James’s phrase, a “passive aggressive” – movement? What aesthetic and stylistic devices did the filmmakers use and how did audiences make sense of these films? Slow Cinema has received much journalistic attention in cinephile publications, but has thus far enjoyed at best piecemeal scholarly regard. This thesis aims to correct this lacuna by tracing the historical precedents of this contemplative filmmaking, starting with the late 1950s modernist and minimalist wave of films, and exploring its influence on contemporary Slow Cinema. The historical background in which films associated with Slow Cinema will be examined through a concentration on their production history and the ways in which certain local aesthetic traditions are appropriated for international sensibilities. Through close readings of contemporary films, the main focus of this thesis is to examine the different aesthetic strategies, across which similar cinematic devices are used for various reasons in order to attain often very different emotional effects, such as nostalgia, absurd humour and boredom. This study, then, examines the Slow Cinema phenomenon in its most salient characteristics: while nostalgia designates the sentimental overtones through which the films negotiate and mourn the eclipse of modernist art cinema and explicitly reference the latter’s aesthetic features, absurd humour identifies a key artistic influence, namely the Theatre of the Absurd, and furthermore delineate the type of laughter found in the films’ reception as one based on the concept of the absurd – in other words, a form of comedy that is out of synch, out of place and, above all, out of time. Boredom, finally, functions as both a descriptor of Slow Cinema’s narrative concern and its mode of spectatorship; while the films depict modernist themes such as alienation, ennui and anxiety over the historical circumstances of contemporary living, the films mirror this mood to their audiences by emphasizing idleness and boredom as a productive and receptive state of mind. In this respect, this thesis argues that Slow Cinema transforms boredom into an insightful, aesthetically rewarding and elated experience, in which preceding concepts of nostalgia

and absurd humour co-exist in an interrelated fashion. These three moods are not only crucial in understanding the aesthetic features of these films, but are also pertinent in their critical and historical reception and are furthermore explored in detail through consecutive case studies, dedicated to Béla Tarr, Tsai Ming-liang and Nuri Bilge Ceylan respectively. In addition, the narrative forms will be fruitful in discussing some of the issues raised within film theory, especially in terms of defining narrative agency, the problems of tense in narration and the levels of meaning and meaning production in film. Finally, as Slow Cinema's fundamental aesthetic device, the evolution of the long take will be discussed in relation to its use in narrative and experimental cinema as well as its allusion to a "golden age" of filmmaking. The shifting role of the long take across dramatic changes in the technology from analogue to digital will also be noted, underlining its specificity in the recently digitized motion picture industry. Before moving into detail, however, I shall now offer an overview of how Slow Cinema has so far been approached and defined through journalistic discourses.

### **1.1 – Defining Slow Cinema**

Even when the debate was at its highest peak, many scholars and those interested in cinema were puzzled about what Slow Cinema meant. Jonathan Romney first coined the term in his review of a tendency within art cinema that overtly surfaced during the 2000s. Romney's article was published as part of *Sight and Sound's* tribute to the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century cinema, a list in which out of 30 films, numerous titles belonged to the Slow Cinema tradition. Romney described Slow Cinema as a "varied strain of austere minimalist cinema that has thrived internationally over the past ten years." Its primary mission, according to Romney, was "a certain rarefied intensity in the artistic gaze, [...] a cinema that downplays event in favour of mood, evocativeness and an intensified sense of temporality."<sup>14</sup> Referring to contemporary auteurs such as Béla Tarr, Pedro Costa, Lisandro Alonso, Tsai Ming-liang and Carlos Reygadas, Romney pinpoints Slow Cinema as a particular branch of art cinema; one that has almost become synonymous with cinephilia in the wake of the diminishing and ever self-recycling mainstream industry. Elsewhere, James Quandt summarizes this "international art-house formula" as follows:



*adagio* rhythms and oblique narrative; a tone of quietude and reticence, an aura of unexplained or unearned anguish; attenuated takes, long tracking or panning shots, often of depopulated landscapes; prolonged hand-held follow shots of solo people walking; slow dollies to a window or open door framing nature; a materialist sound design; and a preponderance of Tarkovskian imagery.<sup>15</sup>

In many ways slowness functions as a significant descriptive factor and refers to the ways in which these art cinema films oppose, resist or deliberately rebel against the dominance of fast-paced, industrial productions of mainstream cinema, much like the dichotomy between the Slow Food movement and the fast food enterprise (of which, more later). However, Romney and Quandt use a variety of adjectives and moods to describe the phenomenon: slow, poetic, contemplative, ruminative, muted, austere, spiritual, oblique, quietude, anguish and reticence, often leading to a conflation (as well as confusion) of all aspects of Slow Cinema into a single factor that may not sufficiently describe its entire aesthetic properties and emotional tone.

As a matter of fact Matthew Flanagan first emphasized the emergence of slowness in contemporary art cinema, although acknowledging the influence of Michael Ciment's address to the audience of the San Francisco Film Festival in 2003. Published in 2008, Flanagan describes the common stylistic tropes of these films as "the employment of (often extremely) long takes, de-centred and understated modes of storytelling, and a pronounced emphasis on quietude and the everyday."<sup>16</sup> However, attention to slowness was more than an aesthetic flourish, as Flanagan writes: "In light of the current prevalence of these stylistic tropes, it is perhaps time to consider their reciprocal employment as pertaining not to an abstract notion of "slowness" but a unique formal and structural design: *an aesthetic of slow.*" According to Flanagan, the very existence of this cinema "compels us to retreat from a culture of speed, modify our expectations of filmic narration and physically attune to a more deliberate rhythm."<sup>17</sup> While lacking depth, the article is in many ways the first to illustrate acutely the stylistic elements and historical trajectory of these films and the ways in which they shift emphasis from conventional modes of storytelling to a much more refined dedramatization of narrative events, a project that is expanded and elaborated further in Flanagan's PhD thesis. In what is perhaps the first manuscript-length study of Slow Cinema, Flanagan reframes this tendency in a much broader context that includes

experimental and avant-garde films since the 1960s, realistic forms of documentaries that focus on the monotony of everyday life and effects of globalization and contemporary artists' film and video, hence certain forms of gallery exhibitions and installations.<sup>18</sup> In other words, Flanagan conceives the “aesthetic of the slow” in an extensive framework, formed of various screen media and diverse modes of representation and transgressing the boundaries of the contemporary art-house cinema circuit. Although initially reserving a suspicion for the label “slow,” Flanagan nevertheless settles for this term for its “subtle evocation of temporality and subjective positioning in relation to the world.” I shall now briefly outline why the label slow is, indeed, “the most fitting container.”<sup>19</sup>

In a response of Flanagan's essay, Harry Tuttle finds the description of “slow” redundant and offers “contemplative” as a much more sufficient term to describe these films.<sup>20</sup> Despite Tuttle's frequent use of colloquial, blogosphere rhetoric and unmotivated aggression towards established film critics, some of his arguments relate to my purposes here. The label contemplative rightly designates the central aspects of contemporary Slow Cinema, such as its aesthetic experience and mode of address. As I will argue in the case studies to come, much of Slow Cinema hinges on a negotiation between the spectator and the film in pursuit of a narrative meaning, motivation and/or resolution. While the films deliberately avoid and reduce narrative action, contemplation becomes the meaning-seeking process by which spectators can critically engage with the films. However, contemplative as a label overlooks the fact that contemplation in cinema is not wholly specific to Slow Cinema; in other words, many mainstream films outside the Slow Cinema circle invite their spectators to contemplate a topic or a subject by way of graphic provocation, witty dialogue or other means. What separates Slow Cinema from these films is their perpetual stillness and monotony; in other words, Slow Cinema is generally characterized by a persistent approach to the reductive manipulation of temporality and pacing, hence the label “slow.”

Judging from the history of the blog, we can readily conclude that Tuttle is wary of the term “slow” in the critical reception of these films. The main reason for this is the ways in which film critics use the word “slow” as a synonym for “boring,” implying that the films are often in contradiction to cinema's *raison d'être* (i.e. entertainment).

This rhetoric often follows two strategies: either the word “slow” is paired with other negative adjectives (“painfully slow”) or it comes across as a negative state (“slow but haunting”).<sup>21</sup> Another problem in using the term “slow” is its apparent vagueness in terms of its descriptive power: does it refer to a “slow moving camera” or the lack of rapid editing that we find in these films? Or does it describe the characters’ actual slowness in terms of their movement and acting in front of the camera? Or, perhaps, it refers to the general slowness of the film in terms of its pace in which narrative information is communicated? Clearly, the three options here refer to different aspects of cinema. In sum, slowness can refer to (1) the film’s aesthetization of style (long takes, slow tracking movements), or (2) the time in which the profilmic action unfolds (actual bodily movements of the characters, staging), or (3) the speed in which narrative information is delivered (narrative form, uses of dead time). As discussed throughout this thesis, Slow Cinema films demonstrate a combination of all three aspects of slowness, although (1) and (3) are often ubiquitously performed throughout many of the films mentioned here.

But to what extent is such an unhurried approach to temporality and an aesthetics of slow specific to contemporary art cinema? The answer is not. Although the Slow Cinema debate surfaced in 2010, the terms of the debate are as ancient as the history of art cinema. In other words, the aesthetics of slow emerges from a specific film-historical genealogy that only recently has intensified due to external factors such as industrial changes (international film festivals), technological changes (demise of the analogue and rise of the digital) and cultural/artistic changes (response to dominant modes, etc.). “Time in modern European cinema,” writes Mark Betz, “is frequently held as the hallmark of its particular formal innovations in narration and storytelling.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, the extended duration we normally find in Slow Cinema is in many ways an exaggerated revision of what modern art cinema routinely performed since the 1960s: “art cinema works the extremes of the temporal-spatial-narrative continuum, testing the boundaries among foregrounded aesthetic construction, spectatorial engagement, and narrative intelligibility.”<sup>23</sup> Despite the fact that such experimentation of temporality in art cinema led to rapid editing techniques such as the jump cuts in Jean-Luc Godard’s *A bout de souffle* (*Breathless*, 1960), according to Mark Betz, “the sum produced by adding the variables ‘time’ and ‘art film’ is [more often than not]

‘slow’.” More than fifty years ago, the audience at the 1960 Cannes Film Festival found Michelangelo Antonioni’s *L’Avventura* (1960) outrageously slow and boring and protested against the film’s relaxed tempo by whistling and shouting “Cut!” during scenes where dead time and stillness presided over causal action. While the public denied and disowned the film, next day the festival jury felt obliged to make an announcement proclaiming the film as a modern masterpiece in support of Antonioni’s “cerebral and contemplative (as opposed to instinctual and dynamic) art film.”<sup>24</sup> In many ways Antonioni’s early 1960s works, the so-called great tetralogy including *L’Avventura*, *La Notte* (1961), *L’Eclisse* (1962) and *Red Desert* (1964) represent key prototypes for Slow Cinema with their reserved pace, persistent use of dead time and foregrounding of visual composition. Within the history of art cinema, however, there are many more examples. As early as 1948, James Agee hailed Carl Theodore Dreyer’s *Day of Wrath* (1948) as a “quiet masterpiece,” albeit acknowledging his disdain for films that “depend on very slow movement.”<sup>25</sup> Italian Neorealism often produced works that displayed a slower tempo, drifting characters and a contemplation of everyday life against the extraordinary adventures experienced by Hollywood heroes. Furthermore, Henry Miller notes that the critical reception of certain Scandinavian films, such as *The Phantom Carriage* (1921) by Victor Sjöström, were in fact considered “slow” by many film critics (once again, opposed to the regular Hollywood fare) and as such the terms of the Slow Cinema debate were already present in the early 1920s.<sup>26</sup> From Yasujirō Ozu to Robert Bresson, from Andrei Tarkovsky to Miklós Jancsó, the history of art cinema is filled with figures who have employed similar aesthetics and are therefore forerunners of the Slow Cinema tradition.

Additionally, Slow Cinema harbours a variety of influences from sources outside the art cinema circuit. The aesthetization of film style, foregrounding duration and temporality and a careful evasion of narrative causality are aspects of avant-garde and experimental film that many Slow Cinema films display. In this respect, films such as Andy Warhol’s monumental *Empire* (1964), an eight-hour still study of the Empire State Building in New York, or Michael Snow’s *La Région Centrale* (1972), a three-hour meditation on a Canadian landscape established by a camera setup rotating around itself, represent a tradition of films that emphasize observation as a mode of engagement and aspire to achieve a hypnotic and contemplative effect on their

spectators by equating their films' screen duration with an uninterrupted, real and actual duration. Such avant-garde practices and manipulation of temporality were in many ways the outcome of what Pamela Lee terms as the "chronophobia" of late modernity, in other words a sense of uneasiness and obsession with the concept of time. As the acceleration of life rendered its meaning obscure and unobtainable, Lee argues that the artists strived either to "master its passage, still its acceleration, or to give form to its changing conditions."<sup>27</sup> In this respect, a great number of artworks of the 1960s, from contemporary art to art-house film, literature to avant-garde and experimental film, can be considered as a prelude to our own cultural anxiety over temporality today. For Mary Ann Doane, the seeds of this anxiety towards the representability of time germinated during the early days of modernity, when "time became palpable in quite a different way – one specific to modernity and intimately allied with its new technologies of representation (photography, film, phonography)."<sup>28</sup> Doane argues that throughout capitalist industrialization, time was standardized to the extent that its "incessant rationalization" was "made tolerable" within "a structuring of contingency and temporality through emerging technologies of representation."<sup>29</sup> In this respect, slowness was fundamental to the perceived need for representing time by focusing on its fleeting occurrences – through the ephemerality of stillness and contingency as well as a remarkable emphasis on photographic and temporal indexicality. For Laura Mulvey, too, the developments in technology enabled newer ways of experiencing films, in which the ability to pause the individual frame reveals a hidden stillness in between moving images – a discovery that, as Mulvey argues, re-evaluates our relationship to film and its history.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to such aesthetic and philosophical features, slowness as a label has its own advantages in describing Slow Cinema as a distinct and discursive contemporary phenomenon. Firstly, as Flanagan points out, this can be in the form of a rebellion against a "culture of speed," and in this respect Slow Cinema has a close affinity to other movements with a similar agenda, such as Slow Food, Slow Science and Slow Criticism. Robert Koehler, for example, points out that "[j]ust as the intensity and mass-marketing of fast food produced a slow-food counterculture, [...] the saturation in pop culture of increasingly faster images [...] has made slow cinema a kind of counterculture of its own."<sup>31</sup> The Slow Food movement began as a direct

response to American fast-food chains in Italy during the late 1980s with the intention of promoting the rich history of local cuisines and emphasizes the culture of producing and consuming regional products, which in effect preserves the larger ecosystem.<sup>32</sup> By reducing long-distance trade, hence the time necessary to transport products, the Slow Food movement emphasizes freshness as a prime quality for nourishment. Secondly, preparing and cooking slowly preserves the nutritional value of the food, resulting in an efficient, healthy, ecological and economic way of life. “Central to the movement,” wrote the *New York Times* editorial that introduced the movement to the American public, “is the belief that meals prepared the old-fashioned way – with time as a major seasoning – are not only healthier but more pleasurable as well.”<sup>33</sup> In the Slow Science Manifesto, on the other hand, a group of scientists demand that “[s]cience needs time to think” and “scientists must *take* their time.”<sup>34</sup> Although embracing “the accelerated science of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” the Slow Science Organization emphasizes the need to slow down and take time to read and think for achieving a better grasp on reality, all in favour of practicing better science. Note that both of these movements promote virtues of patience, sustainability and concentration, not only for sheer pleasure, but also for achieving sound judgement and a profound perception of reality. In short, despite differences in focus, the Slow movements share a common underlying attitude: in a world under rapid transformation and influenced by an increasing pace of consumption, slowness is a marker for genuine taste, authenticity and wisdom, characteristics which situate slowness at the top of the hierarchy of cultural production. When applied to the aesthetics of Slow Cinema, these debates focus in and around notions of cultural value and active spectatorship.

While notions of slowness and contemplation are often used to emphasize Slow Cinema’s active spectatorship, scholars such as Tiago de Luca examine the phenomenon as a realist tendency in contemporary art cinema in order to better understand its formal features and ruminative mode of spectatorship. This tendency, as de Luca explains, “is steeped in the hyperbolic application of the long take, which promotes a contemplative viewing experience anchored in materiality and duration.”<sup>35</sup> Similar to earlier arguments, “narrative interaction is dissipated in favour of contemplation and sensory experience,” writes de Luca, while Slow Cinema spectators “are invited to adopt the point of view of the camera and protractedly study images as

they appear on the screen in their unexplained literalness.”<sup>36</sup> De Luca rightly points out how the majority of these films obsessively portray characters and figures wandering in vast and desolate landscapes, while the basic function of the camera is reduced to its incessant recording of whatever reality is unfolding in front of its viewpoint. As such, de Luca argues that the contemporary realist cinema’s aesthetic and political power lies in its dedication to Bazinian realism, namely the non-interrupted capture of reality and its transformation into an aesthetically virtuous vision. According to de Luca, contemporary realist cinema relegates politically sensitive issues into simple, albeit breathtaking and aesthetically pleasing visuals. As I will argue later in this thesis, Bazinian realism takes its interest in the objective perception of reality as well as its accurate representation in cinema, while Slow Cinema shifts this interest into a different, exaggerated, mannerist and quite often distorted subjective perception of reality.

Whether Slow Cinema sustains a valuable political agency is the central concern also for Karl Schoonover, who not only revisits the Slow Cinema debate but also provides a more rigorous examination of its critical terms. Schoonover argues that the Slow/Fast dichotomy generally pertains to the amount of time spent in film spectatorship and its debate begs the question whether or not watching slow art films can qualify as productive labour, in the sense that the spectator is either actively or passively engaged. “Today,” writes Schoonover, “these persistent debates get restaged around the opposition of time wasted versus time labored. If time is the way that the art film makes the question of labor visible in the image, then exactly what does nonproductivity look like?” Following this line of inquiry, Schoonover locates Slow Cinema historically within art cinema currents and argues that “[w]hen considered alongside this moment from its prehistory, the slow film is not [...] simply in a pointless headlock with Hollywood’s temporal economy,” but “speaks to a larger system of tethering value to time, labor to bodies.”<sup>37</sup> In this respect, Slow Cinema accomplishes an active political role within contemporary culture by virtue of its capacity to confront previously endorsed norms of temporal economy, narrative pace and scrutinizes a reassessment of what is meant by labour and productivity.

In his attempt to establish a theory of nonproductive labor on and off the cinematic screen, Schoonover turns back to Italian Neorealism, perhaps the beginnings of what we call art cinema today as well as a significant influence for contemporary slow film. Furthermore, Schoonover distinguishes between two bodies of slowness: the body on-screen, the actors and/or actresses, and the body off-screen, namely the spectator. The interaction between the two remains Schoonover's focus. According to Schoonover, this discussion reveals an "implicit political fault line of an aesthetic debate" that can be "posed as the question of whether the art film promotes a particular kind of viewing practice in order to sooth anxieties about the value of our own labor and that of others, or to aggravate those anxieties to generate a different account of the very idea of productivity;" or rather simply put, Schoonover is pursuing the question of whether Slow Cinema is "politically decadent or politically subversive."<sup>38</sup> The on-screen bodies are, on the one hand, exemplified by art cinema's many drifting characters, those who lack clear motivations in the traditional sense, the "seers" for Deleuze, or what Schoonover terms the "wastrels," who not only engage in uneventful activities and waste valuable time, but are also treated as such. On the other hand, the on-screen bodies are represented by the unprofessional actors of Neorealism, whose unique physical characteristics were revered for their direct expression of their real life experiences, a practice that later became the very defining quality of Neorealism. Such naturalistic performances are fundamental in the famous neorealist sequences such as the young maid grinding coffee in Vittorio De Sica's *Umberto D.* (1952), in which "the body functions onscreen to amplify and expand the aesthetic registers of a slower spectating, demanding a different kind of labor from the offscreen spectating body." While paraphrasing Bazin's treatment of this scene, Schoonover refers to the "corollary perceptual acuity on the part of the spectator, a careful look that mirrors the camera's lingering," or in other words, the moment in which cinematic realism offers a completely different way of seeing things, one that cannot be relegated to ordinary looking.<sup>39</sup> As such, long duration and inactivity allows the spectator a more profound ability to observe and discern reality, an aspect of Slow Cinema that I will briefly return to in Chapters 2 and 4 in this thesis.

This takes us back to the second body: the body off-screen, or the art cinema spectator, whose boredom is exploited by the art cinema through a transformation of



boredom into “a kind of special work, one in which empty onscreen time is repurposed, renovated, rehabilitated.”<sup>40</sup> Here Schoonover reconstructs the relationship between two bodies as reverse mirror images: “a belabored spectator mirrors in reverse the nonbelabored body of the character onscreen,” or in other words, the inactivity of the aimless character as well as the unprofessional actor elicit an unusual form of labour on part of the spectator. Schoonover suggests, “the history of the moving image might in this sense be recast as a series of recognitions of divergent types of laboring bodies,” as well as the exchange between the on and off screen bodies.<sup>41</sup>

As an unusual example, Schoonover refers to Jia Zhang Ke’s *24-City* (2008), which makes visible this exchange across its various diegetic levels. In the film, Chinese actor Joan Chen plays a woman called Xiao Hu, but within the story world she is frequently mistaken for her self, the actress. According to Schoonover, this self-reflexivity goes against “ordinary cinema’s instrumentalization of bodies,” as well as being in opposition to a particular tradition of stock characters in art cinema. Referring back to the on-screen bodies, the “aimless drifting figures,” in art cinema, Schoonover lists the neorealist bodies as well as “the quintessential performers of art house auteurs: Antonioni’s Monica Vitti, Fassbinder’s Hanna Schygulla, Pasolini’s Franco Citti, and Tsai Ming-liang’s Kan-sheng Lee.”<sup>42</sup> This list can be prolonged by listing some of Slow Cinema’s auteurs and their protagonists, for instance: Béla Tarr’s Lars Rudolph, János Derzsi and Erika Bók; Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s Mehmet Emin Toprak and Muzaffer Özdemir; Pedro Costa’s various Cape Verdians and the amateur protagonists of Carlos Reygadas. In a remarkable similarity to Italian Neorealism, a large number of these characters are played by unprofessional actors, who are either selected for their visual and physical characteristics or their kinship to the relevant director. These drifting characters will also be my focus in the following chapter, where I examine their choreographed movements within the film in relation to Béla Tarr’s baroque camerawork.

This section has examined the ways in which Slow Cinema has been theorized by film critics and scholars. Notwithstanding the two PhD theses devoted to it (by Flanagan and de Luca respectively), the Slow Cinema phenomenon is yet to be investigated in full detail. While many of its stylistic features are commonly referred to

throughout these examples, I will nevertheless examine their variations through three distinctive case studies and probe their aesthetic effects through concepts of nostalgia, absurd humour and boredom. The journalistic discourse addressing Slow Cinema has largely focused on establishing the terms of the critical debate and called for a deeper understanding of slowness as well as its cultural and political value. Before ascribing a particular value to such activities, Schoonover argues, we first need to understand “what labor looks like and [determine] what counts as productive.”<sup>43</sup> Although acknowledging the formal and aesthetic qualities of Slow Cinema, Schoonover advocates a methodology that re-examines the political and cultural functions of such aesthetic discourses. Moreover, an important lesson we can extract from Schoonover’s argument is to think *historically* about Slow Cinema and examine its cultural value after locating its status within the larger art cinema genealogy. Consequently, in the next section I will examine the traditional theories of art cinema by referring to the seminal texts by David Bordwell and Steve Neale. The polarity in their approach necessitates a comprehensive account of art cinema currents and I will elaborate on this binary methodology further in this chapter.

## 1.2 – Understanding Art Cinema

To better understand Slow Cinema, we need first to understand its origins and film historical genealogy. Articles exploring Slow Cinema and its resemblance to modernist art films of the 1960s abound in contemporary film criticism, although none of them meticulously examine the historical circumstances, artistic currents, aesthetic debates and theories regarding the formation of European art cinema. Within this critical discourse, the use of the word art cinema is often elusive and merely functions as an incentive to list the giants of modernist art cinema, such as Antonioni, Tarkovsky, Bresson, Ozu and Angelopoulos. As most of the scholarly works attest, there is a consensus in viewing Slow Cinema as part of an ongoing art cinema framework. Approaches to art cinema traditionally oscillate between two complementary views. These can be summarized on the one hand by David Bordwell’s claim that art cinema functions as “a mode of film practice,” through the dialectics of authorship and realism, and on the other hand by Steve Neale’s view that art cinema operates “as an institution”

in ways that are not much different from the various commercial strategies employed by the Hollywood industry.<sup>44</sup> Although similar in certain aspects, what separates the two approaches is the former's reliance on formal and textual parameters and the latter's focus on economic and industrial circumstances. Most importantly, however, in both approaches art cinema modifies itself as a certain category of cinema that inherently, and historically, opposes the American domination of film consumption as well as mainstream forms of film narration. This section will briefly illustrate these two distinctive approaches and conclude by claiming that they are in fact complementary ones, and in order to understand any contemporary art cinema phenomenon, we need to adopt a comprehensive approach that takes account of both approaches.

According to David Bordwell, art cinema can be defined as an aesthetic contrast against the classical narrative cinema paradigm, namely the Hollywood studio system that chiefly presided over other narrative forms since the end of silent cinema in the late 1920s. Hollywood cinema, in this instance, is motivated by principles that accentuate the coherence and clarity of its stories, therefore, the classical paradigm includes formal traits such as a cause-effect link between different events, goal-oriented characters and most crucially, a standardization of film style that purposefully advances narrative progression as clearly and as efficiently as possible for the appreciation of film audiences. Art cinema, on the other hand, opposes such devices and instead is organized through two distinctive principles: realism and authorial expressivity. For Bordwell, art cinema on the one hand shows us "real locations (Neorealism, the New Wave) and real problems (contemporary "alienation," "lack of communication," etc.)," as well as "psychologically-complex-characters."<sup>45</sup> The protagonists in art cinema closely resemble real-life people; they lack motivations, have real problems, aimlessly drift from one place to another, and are often portrayed by real, unprofessional actors. Other aspects of cinematic narration often accompany such realistic subjectivity: for example, conventions of documentary realism, manipulations of temporality (such as *temps mort*) and accidental, episodic narratives are frequently employed in films that roughly belong to the art cinema tradition. "In brief," writes Bordwell, "a commitment to both objective and subjective verisimilitude distinguished the art cinema from the classical narrative mode."<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, art cinema displays authorial expressivity as one of its fundamental principles, in which "the author becomes a formal component, the

overriding intelligence organizing the film for our comprehension.” In this sense, art cinema is not only a natural outcome of the auteurist film criticism that surfaces at roughly the same time (mid-1950s), but is furthermore a cultural discourse created around such a central, unifying concept. The director of the film occupies such a central role that “a small industry is devoted to informing viewers of such authorial marks,” as Bordwell writes, “[i]nternational film festivals, reviews and essays in the press, published scripts, film series, career retrospectives, and film education all introduce viewers to authorial codes.”<sup>47</sup> The art cinema spectator is expected to make sense of films depending on its individual director; for example, a certain technical element, a signature style or a subtheme might gain a specific meaning under one director, while some films are only made sense when put in context with others, for example the various trilogies, pairs or serials made by the same director. These complex variables and formal parameters often make art films difficult to grasp for audiences normally accustomed to the classical paradigm.

Furthermore, Bordwell notes that realism and authorial expressivity are difficult to merge with one another in a single text, because “verisimilitude, objective or subjective, is inconsistent with an intrusive author.” Bordwell then moves on to the third unifying aspect of art cinema, the device of ambiguity, which effectively resolves the contradiction between the opposing aesthetics of realism and authorial expression. Since art cinema avoids the coherent and clear narratives of classical cinema, it lends its viewer certain “gaps and problems,” or questions that are answered either through “realism (in life things happen this way) or authorial commentary (the ambiguity is symbolic).” In short, when faced with ambiguity in an art film, the art cinema spectator initially engages in a realistic reading, asking whether such uncertainties are representative of a subjective depiction or a particular cultural milieu in which the film takes place. If such a reading is not applicable, then the art cinema spectator moves on to seek authorial motivation, or in other words attempts to decipher what exactly is being ‘said’ by the author-director through an analysis of related circumstances. A typical example of the use of ambiguity in art cinema is the open-ended narrative, in which “the lack of a clear-cut resolution” is illustrative of “the film’s episodic structure and the minimization of character goals.”<sup>48</sup> “Furthermore,” Bordwell writes, “the pensive ending acknowledges the author as a peculiarly humble intelligence; s/he knows

that life is more complex than art can ever be, and the only way to respect this complexity is to leave causes dangling, questions unanswered. With the open and arbitrary ending, the art film reasserts that ambiguity is the dominant principle of intelligibility, that we are to watch less for the tale than the telling, that life lacks the neatness of art and *this art* knows it.”<sup>49</sup>

With Bordwell’s investigation, we can already establish art cinema as a distinctive mode of cinema with its own set of formal principles, narrative conventions, audience expectations as well as other generic marks. Referring back to one of art cinema’s greatest purveyors, André Bazin, we can say that a great part of art cinema is often characterized by long takes, deep focus cinematography, temporal manipulations rendering causality and narrative structures ambiguous, and a rather restrained and reserved mode of storytelling as well as engaging in a perceptual play on the spectator.<sup>50</sup> Slow Cinema revisits many of these characteristics, although in a much more intensive, exaggerated and embellished manner, to such an extent that narrative features are eclipsed in favour of stylistic innovation. The concept of ambiguity, then, remains a fundamental aspect of Slow Cinema. In this respect, while classical cinema deals with elements of story, “in the art cinema, the puzzle is one of *plot*: who is telling this story? how is this story being told? why is this story being told this way?”<sup>51</sup> In other words, the art cinema spectator is often challenged and invited into self-reflexive questions regarding the nature of cinematic representation and narration.

In addition to art cinema’s own self-governing rules and formal aspects, Bordwell concludes with two additional remarks concerning the art cinema and its interaction with tangential cinematic modes. Firstly, Bordwell refers to a type of modernist cinema, which is marked by a “set of formal properties and viewing protocols that presents, above all, the radical split of narrative structure from cinematic style, so that the film constantly strains between the coherence of the fiction and the perceptual disjunctions of cinematic representation.”<sup>52</sup> Such an adjacent mode of cinema only appears marginally in works such as *October* (1928) and *Playtime* (1967) and relies on viewing procedures different to the art cinema, while sharing a defining quality of ambivalence and ambiguity. The similarities as well as the differences between art cinema and modernist cinema are recast in detail in Bordwell’s later work, especially in

*Narration in the Fiction Film*, in which the modernist mode is replaced with the term parametric narration. The term as well as its contrast to art cinema will be addressed later in the chapter since it depends on the element of style as well as the Neoformalist analysis as a valid methodology. Bordwell's second remark, however, is related to the interaction between art cinema and the dominant, classical mode. Here Bordwell notes the ways in which certain Hollywood movies adopt art cinema conventions as well as the ways in which art cinema cites and refers to classical Hollywood. As we shall see later, such an interaction later creates huge overlaps between two separate modes and further blur their boundaries, rendering it difficult to determine whether a film can be deemed to belong to an art cinema tradition or to the classical tradition.

Written only two years later, Steve Neale's essay takes a different route in defining the art cinema phenomenon. As opposed to Bordwell's focus in formal traits as well as aesthetic qualities, Neale explores art cinema as an institution. Although acknowledging certain aesthetic traits of art cinema, Neale claims "[t]here was never any systematic analysis of its texts, its sources of finance, its modes and circuits of production, distribution and exhibition, its relationship to the state, the nature of the discourses used to support and promote it, the institutional basis of these discourses, the relations within and across each of these elements and the structure of the international film industry."<sup>53</sup> According to Neale art cinema emerges in certain developed European nations as a means to counter the Hollywood dominance in their respective motion picture markets, motivated by both economic and cultural aspirations to establish an indigenous, national film industry. If attaining such a cultural difference to Hollywood was crucial, Neale suggests, then it was almost certainly inevitable that art films would be "shown in different cinemas and be distributed by different distribution networks," as well as "marked by different textual characteristics." Although art cinema's differences to Hollywood were varied, Neale argues "that variety is contained both by the economic infrastructure of Art Cinema, its basis in commodity-dominated modes of production, distribution and exhibition, and by the repetitions that tend to mark cultural discourses in general and the discourses of high art and culture in particular."<sup>54</sup> From then on, Neale proposes three case studies, France, Germany and Italy respectively, and illustrates the ways in which art cinema takes shape as an institution amongst different cultural, economic and social contexts. An important argument that binds all case

studies together is the way in which Neale establishes art cinema not only as a means of expression, but furthermore as a market in which such expressions are commodified and traded, that is, essentially, relying on an economic structure that is not that different to the governing principles of Hollywood.

Without going into specific details of such case studies, we can extract several important conclusions from Neale's influential article. Firstly, Neale's research confronts the popular and to some extent the critical assumption that Italian Neorealism laid the foundations of art cinema in the period immediately following the end of World War II. From a variety of examples, Neale demonstrates that the defining qualities of the art cinema discourse were in existence as early as 1910s, during which nation states were already attempting to establish their own domestic film cultures in opposition to foreign intrusions. Although art cinema and the 'new waves' were much more prominent in the 1960s and 1970s than they were in earlier histories of cinema, certain modes of production and distribution were already in place in France, Germany as well as Italy. Evidence of these practices in early cinema testifies to the significance of revealing art cinema's historicity, in other words, art cinema was not only always defined in opposition to Hollywood and/or the mainstream, but aspired for a mode of filmmaking that achieved a higher cultural significance, for example, the adaptations of canonical literary texts, lavish costume and set designs aiming to resurrect the glorious past of the empires, and so on. As much as art cinema was seen as a politically subversive movement during its breakthrough in the 1960s, it was, in its most primitive form, a rudimentary act of nation-building and cultural revival.

Secondly, Neale's analysis of three distinctive national cinemas displays the crucial role of state involvement regarding the development of their respective art cinemas. In these cases the government not only functions as an official source of funding for the art cinema institution, for instance through tax concessions, cultural grants and funds, subsidies or interest free loans, but also is an important regulator of the distribution and exhibition network of such films. For example, import quotas determine a delicate balance between domestic and foreign films, more often than not favouring domestic productions, while tax concessions or various other incentives proliferate the number of art-house theatres dedicated to the exhibition of art films. The

state, however, has not always supported the dissemination of art films, especially those that were critical of the mainstream conservative ideology, for example the Andreotti Law of 1949 aimed at suspending, and eventually terminating, the release and exhibition of neorealist films in and outside of Italy because many of the filmmakers and critics associated with neorealism were also closely related with leftist political parties that were in fierce opposition to prime minister Andreotti's Christian Democrat Party.<sup>55</sup>

Thirdly, unofficial national institutions, such as cine-clubs, film journals and magazines were instrumental in the development of domestic film markets as well as the niche art cinema circles. As mentioned earlier, some state incentives encouraged economically the existence of cine-clubs, who supported the production, exhibition and reception of art films. Furthermore, as Neale argues, the cine-clubs were "the exhibition basis for the subsequent emergence of Art Cinema as a distinct sector within the cinematic institution," which "was due in large part to censorship restrictions on the showing of films from the Soviet Union."<sup>56</sup> This meant that many radical films, which were subversive in terms of their use of style, theme or subject matter, were given the opportunity for exhibition to a select public, even though they would not pass state restrictions in the mainstream sector. On the other hand, film journals played an important role, as the critics of the well-known *Cahiers du Cinema* in France provided key personnel for into the Nouvelle Vague, while in Italy, those who were associated with neorealism were previously involved with the country's two major film journals, namely *Bianco e Nero* and *Cinema*, as well as the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia*, a film academy founded by the state in 1932.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, Neale explicates the international dimension of art cinema. He writes, "[a]rt films are produced for international distribution and exhibition as well as for local consumption. Art Cinema is a niche within the international film market, a sector that is not yet completely dominated by Hollywood."<sup>58</sup> That is, art films are produced locally, but the end result more often than not caters to an international, cosmopolitan audience. This audience, Neale argues, has largely changed from a proletarian one in the 1910s into a roughly bourgeoisie one following World War I.<sup>59</sup> The change in audience profiles also reflects the change from low art to high art; the former usually associated



with Hollywood entertainment and the latter describing the various radical and subversive works within art cinema. An important marketplace where the exhibition of high art takes place is the international film festival, where films from various other national backgrounds compete for a winning prize as well as the international group of critics that will determine the distribution future of the respective projects. Because the art cinema spectator is historically perceived as more sophisticated than earlier audience profiles, art cinema within the film festival context becomes a form of tourism: in many ways the film festival is transformed into a site in which cultural exchange is facilitated, and audiences are enabled to observe and engage with other cultures, understand cultural differences as if looking out from a window. According to Neale, the driving force of this market, or rather the brand name, is the director, whose name in publicity materials carries immediate expectations for its potential spectators as well as opening up future collaborations with other labels, such as the art cinema stars. What is crucial here is that in this sudden return to the auteur and the individual expression marking the defining qualities of art cinema, Neale once again emphasizes that art cinema “has always functioned in terms of a conception of film as commodity,” in effect, no more different to the systems in the mainstream industry.<sup>60</sup>

The two articles by David Bordwell and Steve Neale remain seminal and influential studies of art cinema as a cinematic category. Since then, the scholarship surrounding art cinema has ceased to redefine or re-examine its parameters and instead has concentrated on providing a myriad of new case studies along with the recognition of recently formed national cinemas. Clearly, however, art cinema as an aesthetic and industrial category has gone through many changes in parallel to the dramatic shifts in the modes of production, distribution, exhibition and consumption of cinematic works. While the rise of digital and increase of globalization have altered recent media scholarship, their effects on art cinema circulation have been largely neglected. It is within this atmosphere that a recent anthology of essays was introduced as a way to address such changes in art cinema – the edited collection *Global Art Cinema* by Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover aims to fill this gap by re-examining art cinema through incorporating various methodologies and critical practices. In addition to the important task of redefinition, Galt and Schoonover also situate art cinema within a global context insofar as to rectify its former status as a Eurocentric phenomenon.

Rejecting notions of world cinema and international co-productions, the volume aims to go beyond the Hollywood-Europe binarism and establish an understanding, or at least a rigorous questioning, of art cinema across nations and cultures.

Galt and Schoonover take up the challenge of defining art cinema in their illuminating introduction. Going beyond the classic formalist/industrial distinction put forward by Bordwell and Neale, the authors stipulate that a comprehensive approach needs to be taken; one that takes questions of form and style as well as historical, economic and geopolitical contexts into consideration. At this point a rudimentary definition of art cinema is offered: art cinema “describes feature-length narrative films at the margins of mainstream cinema, located somewhere between fully experimental films and overtly commercial products.”<sup>61</sup> But what are the defining characteristics of these films, in terms of their formal aesthetics and the cultural and historical contexts out of which they emerge? A useful starting point here is to indicate the ontology of art cinema – what makes art cinema art cinema?

In an unexpected, but extremely productive turn, the authors resolve the difficulties of defining art cinema and its unusual ability to conform to different contexts by stating that art cinema is categorically impure. Galt and Schoonover “contend that the lack of strict parameters for art cinema is not just an ambiguity of its critical history, but a central part of its specificity, a positive way of delineating its discursive space.” Furthermore, the authors “propose as a principle that art cinema can be defined by its impurity; a difficulty of categorization that is as productive to film culture as it is frustrating to taxonomy.”<sup>62</sup> In other words, art cinema has now become such a broad concept with a wide range of features that it transcends classification. Moreover, it is now impossible to claim that art cinema attains certain formal aesthetics that are completely at odds with mainstream cinema. For example, the complex storytelling structures adopted by some mainstream films draw their influence from the formal innovations that the modernist art films have introduced since the 1960s, including experimentation on narrative form as well as film style. Conversely, films that are not aesthetically unique are today considered to be art films for reasons other than formal innovation, most likely depending on their country of origin. In a similar vein, the most cherished aspect of art cinema by the audiences, namely its auteur-based

production system, is prevalent more than ever within the mainstream industry. To sum up, there are several features of art cinema that are either not specific or which overlap with other categories. Many of these features seem critical, yet insufficient, to an explanation of art cinema, thereby justifying its impure nature.

There are, however, a variety of ways in which the categorical impurity of art cinema can be understood, and here the editors list five important areas for consideration: impure institutional space, transnational and international nature, ambivalent relationship to stardom and authorship, troubling notions of genre and finally peculiarly impure spectatorship. The institutional space refers to art cinema's capacity to move in between the high and lowbrow as well as the commercial and the artisanal cinematic spaces. While the art house theatre and the film festival occupy a unique aspect of art cinema exhibition, recent developments show that some filmmakers "mix theatrical space with gallery space in practices that are as close to the avant-garde as to commercial cinema." Furthermore, the editors emphasize how the tensions between the national and the international have been critical in understanding art cinemas. On the one hand, international distribution marks art cinema's crucial facet, while on the other, "representations of locality [...] play a major role in the creation of canonical national cinemas."<sup>63</sup>

In terms of stardom and authorship, the creation of canonical personalities has always been a celebrated part of art cinema, and the comparison to Hollywood here reveals fundamental distinctions. The most important argument here is how the auterist impulse within art cinema in a global context provokes the option of "thinking [of] the potential of art cinema as a platform for political agency."<sup>64</sup> While doing so, art cinema refuses the rubric of genre typologies; its lack of stable iconographies or aesthetic modalities has clearly stumped scholars trying to fit art cinema into conventional descriptions of genre. Finally, the mixture of intellectual engagement and emotional affection sufficiently defines the art cinema spectatorship. The authors argue that art cinema's "openness to aesthetic experience is not unconnected to its openness to minority communities who have formed a significant part of art cinema's audience as well as its representational politics."<sup>65</sup> For this reason, art cinema has adopted certain conventional films from minority cultures as its own, once again effacing the boundary

disputes between the mainstream and the artisanal. All of the aforementioned impurities of art cinema consequently bring forth important questions of categorization into place; and the editors argue that this model “holds the potential to open up spaces between and outside of mainstream/avant-garde, local/cosmopolitan, history/theory and industrial/formal debates in film scholarship.”<sup>66</sup>

### 1.3 – Theorizing Slow Cinema

But how does Slow Cinema fit into the larger art cinema framework? In this thesis I pursue this question by situating Slow Cinema within a unique strand of contemporary art cinema that eschews conventional aspects of narrative action and instead concentrates on creating mood and atmosphere through deliberate stylization of the filmic image and temporality. In other words, I argue that Slow Cinema should first, and foremost, be understood as a particular mode of narration that not only opposes the more dominant, mainstream modes of storytelling, but also to a certain extent breaks away from the conventions of art cinema most crucially defined by Bordwell and Neale. In this particular mode of narration, the role of style retains an elevated status in comparison to other aspects of film: certain elements of style, such as a tracking camera that exploits or exaggerates *temps mort*, a particular way of staging the profilmic action, or a specific sound effect, obtain saliency and are often structured in patterns, acquiring specific meanings through repetition and dictating the emotional tone of the film. In other words, they prevail as organizing and unifying principles that replace the lack of narrative action and causality. Sometimes other visual or sonic features intercede and function prominently; for example, the foregrounding of the Russian landscape by Andrei Zvyagintsev, the use of high contrast stark black and white cinematography by Béla Tarr, the expressive qualities of non-diegetic music in the films by Carlos Reygadas, philosophical dialogue in Lav Diaz’s cinema, or the use of high-definition video by Pedro Costa. In each and every circumstance, however, these films are marked by a certain aesthetic of reticence, in the sense that they restrain the flow of meaning and resist interpretation. This is where the role of narrative becomes crucial: because the films resist our natural temptation for interpretation and narrativization, we need to come up with alternative models – or schemas, to use a cognitivist term – to engage

with as well as to make sense of these films. As such, Slow Cinema as a mode of narration favours minimalist aesthetics and the films require a different type of emotional and intellectual engagement from its audiences.

Nevertheless, Slow Cinema is not all style, long take and dead time. Although formal aspects take prominence over story action, many of the films are shaped around particular emotions, themes and narrative tropes. Prescribed by the films' explicit style, the emotional tone in Slow Cinema is often centred around a pessimistic vision of the world: feelings of anxiety, depression, desperation, boredom, alienation, spiritual exhaustion, revelation and monotony frequently surface and account for many of its characters. Perhaps the most common theme across Slow Cinema is a prolonged interest in the rituals of daily life, often resulting in either portrayals of the chores of an individual occupation, such as the woodcutter's daily routines in *La Libertad* (2001), or a protracted depiction of daily activities such as walking and eating, as evidenced in *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000) and *Gerry* (2002). Other narrative tropes include those that explore and meditate on what it means to be human by focusing on improbable relationships, for example *Las Acacias* (2011) and *Distant* (2002); archetypal or allegorical narratives chronicling national and cultural history, *Evolution of a Filipino Family* (2004) and *Independencia* (2009); films based on local and regional belief systems and folk rituals, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010) and *Le Quattro Volte* (2010); self-reflexive films contemplating the current status of cinema, art and contemporary culture, *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003); spiritual narratives exploring notions of guilt, redemption or revelation, *The Banishment* (2007) and *Battle in Heaven* (2005); and films that cut across well-known genres and play down their conventions, *Meek's Cutoff* (2010) and *Police, Adjective* (2009).

The current literature treats Slow Cinema as a reaction against contemporary mainstream culture, particularly against notions of globalization, digitalization, the culture of speed and the monotony of the everyday. Clearly these films proliferated in the early 2000s by attracting international festival audiences, culminating in an unofficial global movement, whose significance film scholarship has so far overlooked. I argue that although Slow Cinema is often seen as a strictly 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon, it is in crucial respects a nostalgic rebirth of the 1960s modernist art cinema and its

formal experimentations, most notably its distinctive uses of camerawork and duration. Nevertheless, Slow Cinema offers a different experience of spectatorship as opposed to the earlier movements. I claim that while use of the long take has previously been attributed as a device to capture an aesthetic of reality, within Slow Cinema it becomes the very central device to elicit an aesthetic experience based on feelings of nostalgia, absurd humour and boredom. Clearly these feelings take place in other areas of cinema, but in completely different circumstances, to a different effect and finally, accompanied with different stylistic choices. Here, the use of long take cinematography takes precedence over other elements of style, taking us back to the age-old aesthetic battles between Eisensteinian montage and Bazinian realism, faithfulness to reality and faithfulness to image, expressionism and realism, fiction and documentary. In many ways, long take cinematography functions as the *sine qua non* of Slow Cinema, its enunciative mark and its single most important aesthetic contribution.

Secondly, in addition to its unique narrative and stylistic forms, Slow Cinema can be theorized as a particular form of discursive activity, which, on the one hand, involves a specific mode of critical practice, and on the other, a unique blend of production and exhibition circumstances that remarkably echo the roots of art cinema as Steve Neale has demonstrated. This second aspect is crucial: Slow Cinema is not only a *historical style*, but it is also a *historical (and critical) set of practices, debates and ideas*. In other words, the economic and institutional context behind the production, exhibition and reception of these films are a significant part of their nature. Hence, the thesis adopts a secondary objective: outlining the historical evolution of this style of filmmaking through a study of its production, exhibition and reception history. In a remarkable similarity to its formal aspects, the critical reception of Slow Cinema also revolves around concepts of nostalgia, boredom and humour. These three concepts become the basis in which these films are evaluated for their political effects, cultural functions and/or artistic contribution. The debates on whether Slow Cinema is valuable or subversive clearly resonate with Nick James's editorial piece, when he coined the phrase The Slow Cinema debate, and Karl Schonover's article, which calls for a re-examination of the meaning of value, labour and nonproductivity. In both cases, the Slow Cinema debate alone has attracted a wide range of attention in various cinephile circles as well as academic and scholarly institutions. The defenders of Slow Cinema,

on the other hand, are those cinephile critics, who regularly bemoan the death of cinema in general and the decline of the European art cinema in particular.

An examination of the production history reveals the ways in which various official and unofficial national institutions such as cine-clubs, film journals, state funds, cultural magazines, film festivals, intellectual circles and educational institutions were involved in the various stages of Slow Cinema's development. The role of international film festivals as well as their subsidiary sections and markets are pivotal in the creation of films associated with Slow Cinema. As is well known, many of these films are commissioned by particular film festivals, that is, the production of such films are funded by festival mechanisms on the one hand, and later on are disseminated into their own controlled exhibition circuits and eventually sold to international distribution companies within their own distribution and sales markets. As such, every major film festival now comes with its native funding mechanisms, each promoting a particular type or brand of art cinema that potentially appeals to its own audience profile. Well known examples include the Hubert Bals Fund awarded by the International Film Festival Rotterdam since 1988 and named after its influential director for many years, the World Cinema Fund initiated by the Berlinale in 2004, and the now discontinued Monte Cinema Verita run by the Locarno Film Festival.<sup>67</sup> In terms of the production and distribution markets, Cannes Film Festival has an enormous lead with its Marché du Film enterprise, but on the other side of the spectrum there are smaller co-production markets in festivals as varying as the Cinemart in Rotterdam Film Festival and the Crossroads Co-production Forum in Thessaloniki International Film Festival.

Moreover, films that secure funding from these production schemes are often invited to premiere the same festival in the following years. This brings us to the secondary, but perhaps the most important function of the international film festival: a chief site for the exhibition for Slow Cinema. Excluding the dedicated theatres within the art house-loving cities of Europe and North America, Slow Cinema hardly exists outside the boundaries of the international film festival. In other words, it would be absurd for any cinephile to expect the latest Pedro Costa film in a local multiplex. In this respect, Slow Cinema is an institutional discourse insofar as it almost exclusively belongs to the international film festival sphere. In many ways the degree to which

slowness is exercised is highly proportional to the extent to how peripheral the screening takes place in comparison to mainstream productions. In other words, the slower the film, the more difficult it is to see it on the big screen and the more chances that it will be in a festival theatre.

Furthermore, film festivals are sites in which younger generations of filmmakers are offered the opportunity to establish their work within the context of pioneering national cinemas. Through programming facilities directed towards the discovery of new talent, certain filmmakers were able to sustain their presence within the complex funding mechanisms and exhibition matrices of the film festival circuit. In this respect, the brand value of the director plays an important role in attaining a wider distribution network. For example, the latest films by Béla Tarr and Nuri Bilge Ceylan, *The Turin Horse* (2011) and *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (2011) respectively, received a good amount of critical attention in the UK as “contemporary masters of cinema” and were distributed on a wider scale than, say, a film by Lisandro Alonso or Lav Diaz would have. *The Turin Horse* and *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* initially premiered in Berlin and Cannes the same year and there followed a run in art house cinemas as well as local cinemas that occasionally show the art house fare. At the other end of the Slow Cinema spectrum, films by directors such as Diaz and Alonso exclusively remain for the film festivals, or special screenings for special occasions. Even within the context of film festivals, Diaz, in the words of Nick James, was only recently able to “graduate to the Cannes festival’s Un Certain Regard section” by his latest feature *Norte, The End of History* (2013), despite years of approval by Rotterdam.<sup>68</sup> As a matter of fact no film by either Alonso or Diaz has been theatrically released in the UK to this date, not least due to the temporal challenges these films pose. For instance, Diaz’s *Death in the Land of Encantos* (2007) runs for a total of 9 hours, which renders it impossible for viewing in an ordinary theatrical environment. An equally striking factor that determines the film’s fate is its textual style and the temporal economy; for example, the actual pacing and the lack of narrative causality in Alonso’s *Liverpool* (2008) is virtually unacceptable for a regular film-goer who is used to the linearity and straightforwardness of mainstream cinema. In addition to these factors, certain films employ a perpetual sense of stillness and monotony in the visual image, rendering cases in which what we understand as dead time is even further elongated, exaggerated and overstated, with seemingly no



deliberate purpose other the preference of extending it and resisting to cut. The end result is films such as *A Casa* (1997), *Colossal Youth* (2006) and the 14-hour documentary *Crude Oil* (2008), where the spectators are confronted with impenetrable, baffling compositions of wandering characters, elusive and obscure dialogue, with no sense of heuristic direction or motivation whatsoever.

Sceptics and critics of Slow Cinema might use these examples to discredit and underestimate its aesthetic, cultural and political value. They might disagree with the idea that Slow Cinema plays an important role within contemporary culture, because these films are often marginalized, difficult to grasp, challenge our perceptual capabilities, resist meaningful interpretation, are rarely screened and lack broad availability and visibility. They will often claim that because there is nothing happening on the screen, there is nothing to look at and because there is nothing to look at, we as film critics tend to probe deeper for symptomatic readings and interpretations with no real motivation other than formal and stylistic curiosity. However, a study of the slow tradition in cinema reveals more than a re-examination of the aesthetic debates between the slow and the fast, the high and the low. This research is important because understanding the specific aims and effects of Slow Cinema will enable us to comprehend the larger aims of international art-house production and engage with the debates concerning reactions against globalization, digitalization and the exponential increase in the speed in which we pace our lives. Aspects of Slow Cinema have appeared throughout film history, but only within the last decade or so has it evolved from a network of filmmakers into a global phenomenon. Transgressing national boundaries, Slow Cinema is currently the one of the most exciting, thought-provoking, daring and evocative currents within the art cinema circuit. The experiences involved in our engagement with Slow Cinema, namely nostalgia, humour and boredom are central to my argument in this thesis. Although these experiences initially might carry negative and undesirable connotations, I argue they that benefit us through various processes of critical and active engagement, reserving a pleasing and productive condition at the end, given that we are open and receptive to their unusual qualities. Therefore, I claim that these experiences offer a radical, and often paradoxical, reconsideration of our emotional and intellectual attachment to moving images. This tendency can be observed in the aesthetic features of the films as well as their production histories and critical

reception. As such, this project combines two approaches, namely formal analysis and aesthetic historiography, in order to better understand the Slow Cinema phenomenon. In the following two sections, I elaborate further on the methodologies I use for my investigation, before moving onto the rationale behind the choice of my case studies.

#### **1.4 – Methodology 1: Formal Analysis**

Throughout this thesis I deliberately refrain from using the phrase textual analysis and instead choose formal analysis for various reasons. Within Film Studies, textual analysis implicitly refers to the collective efforts of a range of scholars working during the 1970s, whose influence and methods were largely drawn from Saussurean linguistics, Lacanian psychoanalysis and Althusserian Marxism. These treat cinematic works as text, unified system of codes, which the critic is meant to decrypt in order to explain the broader cultural, social and ideological discourses that are concealed within the complex language of cinema. Such post-structuralist projects sought to negotiate the relationship between the cinematic signifier (the marks in the text as well as the image, elements of film style, etc.) and the signified (gender relations, political agency, social structures, etc.).<sup>69</sup> In this respect, textual analysis is the outcome of a structuralist and post-structuralist agenda – or what is often termed as the “Grand Theory” by David Bordwell and Noël Carroll – that aims to demystify the codified language of cinema and relating this language to “broader features of society, history, language, and psyche.”<sup>70</sup>

Textual analysis as a methodology is widely associated with the works of scholars such as Stephen Heath, Thierry Kuntzel, Peter Wollen and Raymond Bellour, whose concerns remain more ideological than they are aesthetic.<sup>71</sup> There were, however, critics with an increased sensitivity towards the language of cinema; for instance, Stephen Heath’s extended analysis of *Touch of Evil* (1958) and Christian Metz’s “Grand Syntagmatique,” despite their ideological intentions, paved the way for a more nuanced engagement with and understanding of the cinematic form and its stylistic elements.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, textual analysis as described above often ignored the ways in which film style pertained to narrative meaning or aesthetic experience, and instead ascribed thematic or formal patterns across films to ideological meanings. Moreover, textual

analysis in this period is marked by its tendency to arrive at general assumptions from very specific examples, for example looking at a specific example of Hollywood cinema and drawing totalizing conclusions about the entire system, in effect eschewing contextual parameters in favour of the individual text and its manners of operation.<sup>73</sup> According to Judith Mayne, development of textual analysis also encompasses “the transition from structuralist studies of narrative, concerned with the overall modes of coherence and stability in the text, to post-structuralist studies, concerned more with what exceeds or puts into question those very modes of coherence and stability.”<sup>74</sup> Mayne notes that the classical film text generally provides “predictable patterns” for structuralist theories of narrative for its “transparently realist text” and the shift to post-structuralism in theory “put[s] into question the totalizing dominance of such transparency.”<sup>75</sup> Such a close affinity with post-structuralist thought designates a type of spectatorship that is often seen passive, as Judith Mayne concludes, so much so that “one of the legacies of textual analysis is a notion of the film viewer as held, contained, or otherwise manipulated by the mechanisms of a cinematic institution which finds its most succinct expression in the various textual strategies of delay, resolution, and containment that engage the spectator.”<sup>76</sup> Such analyses pursue psychoanalytical and ideological ramifications through exposing what has been repressed or marginalized; processes that are unveiled by probing structural elements of typical narratives. In this sense the post-structuralist project concentrates on questions that have ideological and psychosexual implications, rather than those that pursue aesthetic questions. This tendency nearly results in viewing the classical narrative cinema as the manifestation of an unseen and ideological control, loosely defined as a regulation of human activity by the dominant mode of production, political institutions as well as forces of patriarchal society.

Conversely, my aim in analysing Slow Cinema films is more than identifying patterns that permeate these films, but rather to interrogate the ways in which film style achieves a higher order of importance, particularly against or in relation to other elements of narrative. By returning to formal analysis, I aim to distinguish this thesis from the various post-structuralist ideas about artworks functioning as texts as well as totalizing conclusions about broader relationships, in effect, issues that are normally associated with the phrase textual analysis. My main concern remains with the formal

aspects of the films, including narrative structure as well as film style. This entails that I subscribe to the approach that refuses a split between form and content whilst analysing films. The view that splits artworks into form and content aim to differentiate between aspects of style, for instance the technical devices and methods used while filming and editing, and elements of content, for example, information flows regarding character and narrative structure.<sup>77</sup> Instead, I concur with the approach that warrants an integral relationship between meaning and style, in the sense that the meaning we derive from a film is more often than not dictated by its conscious formal decisions, namely the elements of style combined with elements of narrative structure, characterization and so on. Refusal of such a model, for example, would imply that the spectator could gain knowledge of a particular character independent of any of the formal aspects listed above, which would be impossible since any depiction or portrayal is dependent on such formal features. In Neoformalism, the crucial word form encompasses both aspects of style and aspects of narrative and, as such, meaning with all of its varieties is taken to be an integral part of the artwork.

Throughout this thesis, my analysis of Slow Cinema films is informed by the Neoformalist approach largely set out by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. In the early 1980s, Bordwell and Thompson developed this approach by exploring the work of the Russian Formalist critics, a branch of literary criticism that peaked in the 1920s Soviet Russia, including scholars such as Viktor Shklovsky, Yuri Tynianov, Boris Eichenbaum and Vladimir Propp.<sup>78</sup> These influential thinkers adopted a scientific study of poetic language and brought linguistics as well as the artwork's form to the fore. My main aim in close analysis is to isolate organizing principles that play an important role in these films. Informed by the Russian Formalist methods, I analyse these films in terms of their formal aspects and investigate the ways in which style shapes meanings. Because the Neoformalist method isolates aspects of style and form separately, it proves to be a useful tool for comprehending the ways in which style functions within art cinema.

In many ways the Neoformalist approach challenges the preceding notion that films should be treated as texts, based on a communications model composed of a sender, a medium and a receiver. This model, largely arising from narratological

studies, emphasizes a practical function of art, such as the transmission of meanings and messages, and requires that we treat artworks by evaluating their efficiency as well as their worthiness, for example, judging the cultural value present in the message sent. At the heart of Neoformalist analysis, however, resides the claim that artworks in general are essentially different from other cultural artefacts, because they refer to an aesthetic realm instead of a practical one. Artworks, according to Russian Formalists, offer an *aesthetic* experience, in which the viewer's perceptual and mental capabilities are tested and challenged against ordinary everyday practices. A playful interaction between the viewer and the artwork thus renders an active participation on the part of the viewer, whose engagement with the artwork facilitates through emotional, mental and perceptual processes.<sup>79</sup>

Central to this engagement is the way in which artworks transform everyday reality into an unfamiliar, however profoundly fascinating practice, which the Russian Formalists call *defamiliarization*. Victor Shklovsky writes, “[t]he purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived, and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar,” to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.”<sup>80</sup> In Thompson's words, art “defamiliarizes our habitual perceptions” by reassembling them into “a new context” and replacing them with “unaccustomed formal patterns.” Neoformalism, then, argues that defamiliarization is “the basic purpose of art in our lives,” and is an important factor in determining the ways in which artworks can take different shapes in different historical contexts. Thompson writes, “Defamiliarization is thus an element in all artworks, but its means and degree will vary considerably, and the defamiliarizing powers of a single work will change over history.” For Thompson, such a degree of defamiliarization also helps the critic determine the value or originality of the artwork: “The works we single out as most original and that are taken to be the most valuable tend to be those that either defamiliarize reality more strongly or defamiliarize the conventions established by previous art works – or a combination of the two.”<sup>81</sup>

In this sense defamiliarization as a creative process is precisely what is at stake in Slow Cinema. Many of the films discussed throughout this thesis primarily aim to

subvert previously established conventions and representations of everyday life. Slow Cinema's most recognizable formal properties, namely the exaggeration of cinematic temporality and screen duration are often established in differentiation to older artworks and constantly require comparisons with earlier films that challenge our perceptions in similar ways. For example, the scene with the young maid grinding coffee in *Umberto D.* posed a temporal challenge for the audiences who saw the film in 1952 insofar as it prompted André Bazin as well as other critics to see such sequences as revolutionary in terms of their deployment of unabridged real time. This, Italian Neorealism's much admired sequence, might appear quite ordinary to us today, considering it merely runs for several minutes. As such, its emotional impact to contemporary audiences might be less forceful, especially compared to the way in which similar scenes are portrayed throughout film history in an increasingly expanded manner: for example, Delphine Seyrig cooking and cleaning in *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), Lars Rudolph walking aimlessly for minutes in Béla Tarr's *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000), or perhaps the most hyperbolic of all, John Giorgio sleeping for five hours in Andy Warhol's *Sleep* (1963). Because Slow Cinema makes daily and ordinary practices appear unfamiliar, defamiliarization is an appropriate concept for describing its aesthetic virtues. Although defamiliarization has been criticized as applicable only to artistic, original or avant-garde films, Thompson's analysis of classical Hollywood narratives in terms of their relationship to stylistic norms, conventions and expectations testify to its effectiveness as a valid methodology for filmmaking in general.

Analysis and interpretation under the Neoformalist approach also depend on concepts of function and motivation. Function refers to "the purpose served by the presence of any given device," or in other words, function is the way in which a particular device (as in any technical, formal or thematic element) has a relationship to other devices across the artwork.<sup>82</sup> Function, in this sense, should not be conflated with interpretation: interpretation is the critical activity of explaining the meanings found in artworks, while identifying functions refers to explaining the systematic role that the artwork assigns to several devices. Motivation, on the other hand, refers to the activity in which the viewer attempts to make sense of the artwork depending on a certain conceptual framework. In other words, the artwork motivates the viewer to understand the function of a particular device, whereas the critic is motivated by the self in order to

interpret the artwork. Thompson outlines four types of motivation in artworks: compositional, realistic, transtextual and artistic.<sup>83</sup> Essentially, all devices across artworks have an artistic motivation. However, artistic motivation may not be immediately recognizable for the viewer, because all devices might also contain more salient motivations, such as realistic, compositional and/or transtextual. In the viewer's perspective, then, "artistic motivation is present in a really noticeable and significant way only when the other three types of motivation are withheld." In some narrative films, such saliency of artistic motivation can be "systematically foregrounded," "and artistic patterns compete for our attention with the narrative functions of devices," in which case Thompson writes that "the result is parametric form."<sup>84</sup> Thompson continues: "In such films, certain devices, such as colors, camera movements, sonic motifs, will be repeated and varied across the entire work's form; these devices become parameters. They may contribute to the narrative's meaning – for example, by creating parallelisms or contrasts – but their abstract functions exceed their contribution to meaning and draw our attention more."<sup>85</sup> The parametric form is fundamental in understanding Slow Cinema as a unique mode of narration and will be addressed shortly.

Before returning to the parametric form as a mode of narration, we need to focus on an important conceptual dichotomy in Neoformalist analysis, the distinction between the *syuzhet* and the *fabula*. Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell borrow these terms from the Russian Formalists, who used them to analyze literary narratives. *Syuzhet* is chiefly the set of visible and audible events presented in the film in a causal manner. The film will present the events either directly or by reference through characters, and the ordering of the events will often be out of its chronological order, especially if there is a flashback or a flashforward. Typically the viewer should understand the flashback either through conventions or by retrospective judgement and begin reconstructing the events chronologically, which the Neoformalists term as the *fabula*. *Fabula*, then, is the set of events rearranged by the viewer in terms of their temporal as well as causal order. Fundamentally, the *syuzhet-fabula* distinction reveals the ways in which narratives defamiliarize the temporal order of events. Virtually every narrative film has a beginning and an end, and the *syuzhet-fabula* distinction is useful to consider the way in which different narrative structures may ascribe different emotional or artistic effects.

Although a useful analytic tool, the syuzhet-fabula distinction has little value and application when taken literally. According to Bordwell, fabula construction is “psychologically implausible” due to the lack of such a place inside our brain where such rearrangement could take place. For example, it would be extremely demanding to ask a viewer to pause a film like *21 Grams* (2003) or *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and then ask her to list the temporal outline of events. Such complex narratives might give an overall sense of temporal order, but Bordwell points out that fabula as such is not consciously accessible whenever we need to.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, the distinction between the fabula and the syuzhet is a necessary one, because it crucial in understanding various modes of narration, distinctions that will eventually help us identify the ways in which Slow Cinema produces a meaningful experience.

The creation of the fabula through an exchange between the syuzhet and style is often labelled as narration. Thompson defines narration as “[t]he process whereby the syuzhet presents and withholds fabula information in a certain order.” She writes, “[n]arration thus continually cues our hypothesis-forming about fabula events throughout the course of viewing the film.”<sup>87</sup> Similarly, David Bordwell defines narration as “the process whereby the film’s syuzhet and style interact in the course of cueing and channelling the spectator’s construction of the fabula.”<sup>88</sup> In other words narration is the systematic way in which style shapes the syuzhet (or vice-versa) and enables the construction of the fabula by the spectator, therefore includes aspects of style as well as aspects of narrative. In his *Narration in the Fiction Film*, David Bordwell puts forward four distinctive “historical modes of narration,” or in other words “historically distinct set of norms of narrational construction and comprehension.”<sup>89</sup> Apart from the classical narration model (for example, Hollywood cinema), which essentially entails the subordination of style in service of the syuzhet and the historical-materialist narration best exemplified in the Soviet silent cinema of the 1920s, the remaining two of Bordwell’s modes are of great relevance to my investigation of Slow Cinema. The art-cinema narration is in many ways an extended version of Bordwell’s view of art cinema initiated in his article “Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice” and distinguished by its opposition to the classical mode by virtue of its realistic motivation, authorial commentary and flexible syuzhet-style relationship. Parametric narration, on the other hand, is less historical, “applies to isolated filmmakers and fugitive films” and



is difficult to pin down in relation to “a national school, period or genre of filmmaking.”<sup>90</sup> It is, however, a mode of narration in which “the film’s stylistic system creates patterns *distinct from the demands of the syuzhet system*. Film style may be organized and emphasized to a degree that makes it at least equal in importance to syuzhet patterns.”<sup>91</sup> In other words, parametric narration *precisely* describes Slow Cinema as a distinctive mode of narration.<sup>92</sup> It involves a systematic application of “parameters,” or filmic techniques and devices independent of the demands and motivations of its narrative structure.<sup>93</sup> I shall be elaborating on parametric narration further in the case studies, however, it is important note here that Bordwell is very specific with the number of filmmakers that exercise the parametric form and limits its use to several examples, ranging from the consistent practitioners (Robert Bresson, Yasujiro Ozu) to those who sporadically display its various aspects (Fritz Lang, Carl Theodor Dreyer, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Alain Resnais).

The deliberate lack of the word modernism in Bordwell’s study largely prompts Mark Betz to pursue the question whether parametric narration is applicable to contemporary “modernist” art cinema. Betz writes:

three of the limitations [Bordwell] claims are inherent to the parametric mode no longer seem to apply, if indeed they ever did: that such narration is not a widespread filmmaking strategy; that its principles do not constitute a widespread viewing norm; and that the development of the “intrinsic stylistic norm” of a parametric film is unlikely to be perceivable in one cognitive sitting. In short, one cannot dismiss so easily the possibility that parametric narration has in fact settled in, and cinematic modernism extended over, the past two decades in such a way as to become not only widespread and perceivable, but also more recognizable, watchable, and marketable.<sup>94</sup>

In other words, Betz argues that although parametric narration was in a marginal existence from the perspective of the 1980s, when considered alongside modernism, the emergence of Slow Cinema in the 21<sup>st</sup> century demonstrates its continuation through various historical periods and waves of art cinema directors. Throughout his article, Betz is not only referring to contemporary art cinema directors who “display modernist styles and narration,” (Haneke, Denis, Dardennes, et al.) but also refers to a group of minimalist filmmakers, in other words Slow Cinema directors, that exemplify the

“sparse approach” of parametric narration, naming figures such as Miklós Jancsó, Aleksandr Sokurov and Theo Angelopoulos as some of its pioneers. According to Betz, such a belated re-emergence of modernism and modernist aesthetics “emphasize[s] the degree to which *historical time* is *palimpsestic* and *dispersive* in all cultures, how aesthetic forms may be translated across cultures in multiple circuits of exchange and appropriation.”<sup>95</sup> As such, Betz argues that the “cognitive perceptions of these operations are not separable from the cultural codes available to the spectator – and it is here that the question of global versus local knowledges and histories come to the fore.”<sup>96</sup> Betz’s plea in accounting for the “transnational negotiations,” the complex local, cultural and historical context often found in global art films utilizing parametric narration largely motivates my secondary methodology. In the following section, I discuss how an approach that is best labelled as aesthetic history can gauge a better understanding of Slow Cinema and its modes of production, exhibition and reception.

### **1.5 – Methodology 2: Aesthetic History**

This methodology is film historical in focus and is composed of several components. My main purpose in applying this methodology is not only to balance the explication of Slow Cinema’s aesthetic and formal features against a cultural and historical background, but also to account for the reasons why Slow Cinema has suddenly developed into a largely incognito critical practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery state that the “aesthetic film history is the predominant form of film history and has been so since the beginnings of film study in United States and Europe” in their seminal book *Film History: Theory and Practice*.<sup>97</sup> As opposed to the social, economic and technological approaches, aesthetic history focuses on the history of cinema as an art form. As we shall see in a moment, this approach is formed of many components, several of which I will intensify my efforts throughout this thesis. I largely identify my approach here with the ways in which Allen and Gomery explicate their theory against what they call “the Masterpiece Approach,” hence I want to quickly establish the theoretical framework and the questions asked in such an approach.

“The Masterpiece Approach,” on the whole explores the history of cinema as an art form, focusing on “great” individual films or filmmakers that deserve attention, whose “aesthetic significance transcend that film’s historical context,” and takes its principal objective as the “critical evaluation of films.”<sup>98</sup> As such, the Masterpiece Approach is limited in its scope and represents a problematic methodology. Not only does it ignore a huge body of work falling outside “great works of art,” it also wrongly assumes that the meaning enveloped by the film is independent of the historical context or the perspective of its viewer. It disregards the economic and technological factors leading to the adoption of many aesthetic strategies and stylistic features. It seeks to evaluate films rather than explain their cultural or social significance and emergence in certain periods of history. Allen and Gomery stress the explicative aspect of aesthetic film history and list several questions that such an approach would pose: “Why [...] did certain aesthetic styles emerge at particular times and not at others? Why did particular filmmakers make the aesthetic choices they did and how were these choices circumscribed by the economic, social, and technological context they found themselves in?” and perhaps the most important of which asks “What have certain cinematic devices meant to audiences at various points in film history [...] and how was this meaning created?”<sup>99</sup> These questions are largely similar to the ways in which I approach Slow Cinema and my particular case studies throughout this thesis.

In their reformulation of the aesthetic film history approach, Allen and Gomery propose several components or factors that the historian needs to take into consideration. Stylistic factors, such as changing norms, use of explicit filmic techniques across particular periods of history, are largely related to the ways in which I employ the Neoformalist method and David Bordwell’s taxonomy of the historical modes of narration. In fact, Bordwell’s “historical poetics” attempts to merge the Neoformalist method with aesthetic history, chiefly in purpose of understanding the stylistic choices of filmmakers in historical terms.<sup>100</sup> Similarly, Allen and Gomery propose “intertextual background” as a reference to the codes and conventions that a group of films (genre, national school, movement, tradition) informally share and exercise. By considering Slow Cinema within a larger art cinema framework as well as a historical mode of narration in its own right, I aim to establish a theory of Slow Cinema that includes its codes, conventions and clichés as much as its radical break in

style. The phrase mode of production, on the other hand, essentially refers to the historical production circumstances of the films in consideration. As Allen and Gomery write, “the overall structure of production organization of a film: the reasons for the making of the film, division or production tasks, technology employed, and delegation of responsibility and control, and criteria for evaluating the finished film” are all important aspects of Slow Cinema as I have outlined in the earlier sections.<sup>101</sup> As such, many of the case studies to follow will include production, distribution and exhibition information, from the role played by international film festivals and their production schemes to transnational distribution companies and national sources of funding. The authorship component in many ways justifies my rationale for carrying out this research in case studies dedicated to individual directors. Although I will refrain from a romantic understanding of the auteur, my case studies will largely focus on the works of individuals and their biographical, cultural and intellectual backgrounds will be considered. When approached from a production standpoint, I also aim to establish a sense of the wide range of aesthetic practices at play within Slow Cinema: how certain national traditions are negotiated with an international art cinema style, the relationship between the scriptwriting and acquiring international funding, editing to shooting ratios, are all part of the various parameters that differentiate Slow Cinema directors from each other.

The final, and perhaps the most important, factor that Allen and Gomery discuss is the aesthetic discourse on the cinema. “A study of the critical discourse on the cinema,” Allen and Gomery write, “like advertising discourse [...] tends to establish the critical vocabulary and frames of reference used not only by reviewers, but by film audiences as well.”<sup>102</sup> Thus, my intentions for beginning this thesis by summarizing the Slow Cinema debate were in part aiming to establish the terms of the debate at a particular given point in time, namely the 2010s. As such, “critical discourse on the cinema has had an “agenda-setting” function in aesthetic film history; that is, it has not told audiences what to think so much as it has told them what to think *about*.”<sup>103</sup> In other words, the Slow Cinema debate does not only reflect the agenda of publications that display serious film criticism, such as *Sight and Sound* or *Film Comment*, but was also present in more popular forms of the film-reviewing industry, from newspapers to erudite online blogs and discussion boards. Barbara Klinger notes that “reviews are not

just pieces of failed criticism, but types of social discourse which, like film advertisements, can aid the researcher in ascertaining the material conditions informing the relation between film and spectator at given moments.”<sup>104</sup> Instead of ignoring such discourses, then, Klinger suggests a methodology to embrace them and incorporate them into a broader understanding of the social and cultural forces at play. “Among other things,” she writes, “the critic distinguishes legitimate from illegitimate art and proper from improper modes of aesthetic appropriation,” and “[a]s examples of such arbitrations of taste, film reviews do more than provide information about how a particular film was received. They also offer some insight into broader cultural attitudes toward art and the public during given historical periods.”<sup>105</sup> In many ways the critical reception of Slow Cinema reflects a public attitude towards such elusive, baffling and difficult films.

As evidenced throughout this thesis, some serious and professional film critics have spent a good amount of attention to Slow Cinema and its many incarnations. It is by no coincidence that the critical discourse on Slow Cinema is largely created by a group of cinephile film critics such as Nick James, Jonathan Rosenbaum, Adrian Martin, Jonathan Romney, Manohla Dargis and Nicole Brenez. As much as evaluating taste and value in films, these critics adopt an explicative and adventurous approach to their writing. The main concern of such film criticism is less the latest mainstream success, but probing a virtually unknown and yet undiscovered piece of film that might, possibly, activate a critical dialogue and lead to a celebration of contemporary cinema in its fullest sense. In other words, Slow Cinema provides a springboard for converging various dialogues and discourses of cinephilia, art cinema, transnational cinema and film criticism. In this respect, Slow Cinema functions as a testament to contemporary understandings of cinema, art and criticism and thus might serve as both “an agent” and “a source” of history, as the film historian Marc Ferro would put it.<sup>106</sup> As a source, it demonstrates the ways in which artists respond to the rapid transformation of societies and negotiate the exchanges between global and local cultures. As an agent, it carries elements of 21<sup>st</sup> century counter-culture currents. This line of enquiry also investigates the nature of Slow Cinema as a category of cultural production. Is it a historical mode of narration, an official movement, a cycle or a tradition? Following the case studies I will return to this question in the conclusion.

## 1.6 – Outline of Chapters

In the remaining chapters of this thesis, I examine Slow Cinema through three distinctive case studies, respectively devoted to the works of Béla Tarr, Tsai Ming-liang and Nuri Bilge Ceylan. As the short outline for my methodologies reflect, all case studies begin with sections contextualizing the historical background from which these directors emerge. These directors are chosen on the basis that they are well-known examples of Slow Cinema, demonstrate its diverse stylistic features and its geographical spread across the globe. Perhaps the only drawback for this selection is the lack of any filmmaker representing the Americas; either North or South. However, I aim to balance this lack by frequently giving examples from various directors working in this geographical region.

Chapter 2 considers the work of the Hungarian director Béla Tarr, perhaps one of the most frequently cited exemplars of Slow Cinema. Although Tarr's films emerge from a rich history of Hungarian cinema and regional conventions, I largely explore his films in relation to the defining aesthetic features of Slow Cinema in order to establish his work against the historical genealogy of modernist art cinema. In this respect, I begin by outlining the function and evolution of the long take and its centrality to Bazinian realism. Dead time as a dedramatization technique also receives a lengthy treatment in this chapter: firstly through a brief examination of Gilles Deleuze's "time-image" and secondly via Gerard Genette's taxonomies of narrative tense, most notably the descriptive pause. Tarr's combination of the long take and dead time leads to a unique mode of spectatorship that stresses the structures of looking and I examine this contemplative aesthetic by drawing its parallel to the flâneur figure, a quintessentially modern subject that strolls and observes reality, much in the same way that Tarr's characters and camera do. In addition to the long take, however, Tarr's films are marked by an obsession in framing and duration and I examine these stylistic tendencies in relation to modernist filmmakers such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder. This largely motivates my next section on nostalgia, in which I discuss Slow Cinema's role in evoking nostalgic feelings about the glorious past of art cinema and the ways in which slow films "cite" this aesthetic experience by a protracted application of the long take, in other words a retro art cinema style that appears at once out of date and *à la mode*.

Yet, I argue that Tarr's films are nostalgic in a secondary sense and hence examine the use of black-and-white cinematography, another central element to Tarr's uniquely macabre and dark tone. Such experimentations in monochrome photography situate Tarr alongside other regional filmmakers, some of which can also be considered part of the Slow Cinema movement.

Chapter 3 explores the work of the Malaysian-born Taiwanese director Tsai Ming-liang, whose work is often considered in the context of the Taiwan New Cinema movement that originated in the early 1980s. Despite this association, Tsai in fact began working in early 1990s and his work is in many ways stand in contrast to directors such as Hou Hsiao-hsien and Edward Yang. What is common amongst Tsai's work is the ways in which certain aspects of narrative are completely ignored, while rudimentary causal links are normally present. However, Tsai enacts narrative action at such a speed that the overall pacing of his films progresses in a glacial manner. Through a combination of the use of dead time, stillness and ambiguity, Tsai delays conventional narrative comprehension, often resulting in comic effects. While referring to theories of humour and its relation to film spectatorship, I associate Tsai's sense of humour with the Theatre of the Absurd as well as figures such as Jacques Tati, whose humorous staging borrows aspects of silent comedy. In this chapter I offer an extended analysis of Tsai's *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003), a film noted not only for showcasing the Slow Cinema aesthetic, but also for taking cinema as its subject matter. I discuss the film's critical reception, which demonstrates an obsession with the death of cinema in 21<sup>st</sup> century and an anxiety towards the rise of digital technologies, in other words arguments very much in line with the debates concerning the demise of cinephilia. I emphasize the shift in cinephiliac approach from a critical practice towards a nostalgic practice and conclude with the ways in which such debates are foregrounded within the realm of Slow Cinema.

In Chapter 4, I turn my focus to the Turkish filmmaker Nuri Bilge Ceylan. Beginning with a section exploring the historical context, national traditions and dynamics of Turkish filmmaking and film culture, this chapter ultimately argues that Ceylan's work should be seen as a radical intervention within Turkish cinematic conventions. However, Ceylan's work rose to prominence not in his home country, but

in Europe, where festival professionals and cinephile critics praised his work for its freshness and affinity to a certain European art-house sensibility. As such, Ceylan proves to be an important case study because he signifies the countless art cinema directors who work on two completely different platforms: negotiating with, on the one hand, a largely uninterested crowd of local film audiences and national sources of finance, and on the other, an eager mass of international cinephiles and funding opportunities. In many ways Ceylan incorporates aspects of the European art film with certain modes of production and sensibilities of Turkish cinema, resulting in a mixture popular with international film festivals but not immediately successful in its domestic market. Ceylan's main aesthetic strategy, however, is his treatment of boredom in various levels across his films. I explore boredom as an everyday experience and claim that Slow Cinema transforms it into an aesthetically rewarding experience. Returning back to the Slow Cinema debate, I argue that boredom is in many ways an aesthetic virtue that enables active participation and its idle nature often leads to other Slow Cinema descriptors such as contemplative, meditative and hypnotic. This aspect of boredom largely informs the aesthetic pleasure manifested in Slow Cinema films and hence has inspired the title of this thesis.

Chapter 5 concludes the thesis by examining Slow Cinema in a broader conceptual framework. I begin this chapter by addressing whether Slow Cinema is an official, structured or consistent artistic movement and examine it in relation the notion of *optique*. *Optique* in this context refers to the presence and function of various stylistic devices at a given historical period and enables a rigorous investigation of the relationship between film style and its targeted audiences. In this respect, I re-emphasize the complex nature of Slow Cinema, in other words its existence through complex networks of film production, exhibition and reception and offer alternative and future avenues of research that concern different aspects of Slow Cinema. Before moving on to summarizing my case studies, however, I concentrate on the historical evolution of Slow Cinema within the past four decades. I offer a graphic representation of the proliferation of Slow Cinema between the years 1975-2013, which is adapted from a tentative list of films also available in the *Appendix*. After noting the potential inaccuracies, flaws and benefits of this filmography, I draw the thesis to a close by briefly incorporating the conclusions of my case studies.



## CHAPTER 2

### Nostalgia for Modernism: Béla Tarr and the Long Take

This chapter expounds the dominant stylistic principles of Slow Cinema through a sustained case study that examines the work of the Hungarian director Béla Tarr. Because Tarr's films manifest the distinguishing characteristics of Slow Cinema, much of this chapter is focused on the aesthetic features of the films and the ways in which these techniques evoke the works of modernist art cinema directors. In this respect, this chapter calls for an extensive reconsideration of these stylistic devices, namely the long take and dead time, and offers theoretical frameworks that manifest a fitting description of the Slow Cinema aesthetics. On the one hand, this aesthetic rests on cinema's privileged relationship to reality and capacity to express temporality, ideas that are briefly explored via references to the works of André Bazin and Gilles Deleuze. On the other hand, however, Tarr's baroque camera movements and claustrophobic framing strategies encourage sheer observation and relegate the role of narrative intelligibility, generating a mode of narration which is at once engaging and self-reflexive for its historical roots in modernist cinema. In this respect, following an exhaustive explication of the long take and dead time, I turn my focus to the specificities of this narration, where the figure of the flâneur serves as an apt metaphor, and then concentrate on discourses of nostalgia, which, as a concept determines the relationship between modernist techniques and Slow Cinema aesthetics.

#### 2.1 – Introduction

Today Béla Tarr is often celebrated as a major proponent of Slow Cinema as well as a distinctive and unique voice within European art cinema. Ever since esteemed critics such as Susan Sontag and Jonathan Rosenbaum lauded his monumental *Sátántangó* (1994), Tarr has embraced an esoteric and elusive auteur persona.<sup>1</sup> *Sátántangó* similarly obtained a legendary status: up until it was released on DVD in 2006 it remained relatively unseen, acquiring a mythical status akin to Jacques Rivette's

*Out 1: noli me tangere* (1971), which for identical reasons constituted one of the holy grails of art cinema. Both films achieved notoriety among cinephiles and functioned as prized marathons, not least for their colossal runtimes (450 and 760 minutes respectively), but also for their enormous investment into what initially seemed as uneventful action (dedramatized sequences, dead time, monotonous activities, inconsequential plots) and a bleak atmosphere (mysterious conspiracies with unknowable resolutions, dark and prophetic characters, apocalyptic overtones); all portrayed through an extremely sparse, reticent and restrained approach to cinematic storytelling. Both films were similarly praised enthusiastically as enthralling, hypnotic, mesmerizing, contemplative, ruminative, poetic and transcendental. In short, *Sátántangó* represented a rebirth of modernist cinema – always elusive, usually difficult, highly stylized and self-reflexive, flauntingly ambiguous and politically conscious.

Despite his successes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Tarr has made films since the late 1970s, with considerable stylistic and aesthetic differences. Films from his earlier “proletarian trilogy,” including *Family Nest* (1979), *The Outsider* (1981) and *Prefab People* (1982), were shot in cinéma-vérité style, invoking the films of John Cassavetes through their improvised performances of mostly non-professional actors. Shot in black-and-white and taking place in claustrophobic settings, these realist dramas explored the problems of the underclass in Communist Hungary with an overt emphasis on human faces, inexpressive and miserable against tragic circumstances. *Almanac of Fall* (1984) similarly investigated the relationships between the occupants of a large apartment building and although shot in colour, the film displayed the beginnings of Tarr’s signature style, namely the elaborate camera movements that frame the story action from a diverse range of perspectives. While these early features do signal some of Tarr’s stylistic trademarks, this chapter will focus on the cycle of films beginning with *Damnation* (1988), after which Tarr maintains his collaboration with novelist-screenwriter László Krasznahorkai, composer Mihály Víg and Tarr’s long-time spouse and editor Ágnes Hranitzky.<sup>2</sup> In addition to *Damnation* and *Sátántangó*, this collaboration includes *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000), *The Man From London* (2007) and *Turin Horse* (2011), allegedly Tarr’s swan song. All of these films explore the darker side of human nature and contain a great number of similarities, not only in

terms of Tarr's easily recognizable style, but in terms of narrative tropes. The films are preoccupied with an apocalyptic and bleak vision of humanity; existential crises are represented through characters (drunkards, wrecks, swindlers and failures of all kind) unable to escape the limitations of their environment. In terms of visual style, all films are shot in stark, high-contrast black-and-white, stylized even further with flamboyant and baroque camera movements. The bizarre atmosphere surrounding the films is further enhanced with visual details (muddy and dirty streets, never-ending rain, various incarnations of fog and mist) and sound effects (howling wind, rhythmic drone effects, melancholic music). Part of this much-admired dark, mysterious and macabre tone emblematic of Tarr's later works is sourced from the writings of Hungarian author László Krasznahorkai, whose novels and short stories provide the basis for much of the films' minimalist narrative structures.

Whilst praised by cinephiles and film festival audiences, to date Béla Tarr's work has only received journalistic attention. In one of the earliest pieces on Tarr's films, Jonathan Rosenbaum admits the "lack of a comprehensive Hungarian [cultural] context," but nevertheless claims that this absence does not "create any serious obstacles to the great deal of pleasure Tarr's movies provide."<sup>3</sup> In this respect, these initial texts often function as critical introductions to Tarr's films, which understandably remain at the margins of art cinema, not least for their difficult narratives, but also because lack visibility and access for their exclusive existence within film festivals. However, with the international success of *Werckmeister Harmonies*, cinephile journals such as *Film Comment* and *Sight and Sound* began to offer in-depth studies of Tarr's films and interviews with the director as well as scholarly articles that examine their cultural context.<sup>4</sup> The only exception to these texts is András Bálint Kovács's recent book, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr: The Circle Closes*.<sup>5</sup> In essence an auteurist investigation, Kovács's book offers a detailed examination of Tarr's films in terms of the evolution of his style and themes and, due to the personal connection between the author and the director, reveals insightful information regarding the latter's filmmaking practices.

While I shall similarly pay considerable attention to formal analysis, the primary objective of this chapter is to present a film-historical understanding of Slow Cinema through exploring the various developments of long take and dead time. Thus, I begin

the next section with framing the long take aesthetic across different periods in film history and outline André Bazin's influential and archetypal view of its inherent characteristics. I then move on to the dedramatization strategies in art cinema and offer a theoretical understanding of the concept of dead time, through a brief foray into avant-garde and experimental cinema to discern their various stylistic similarities to contemporary Slow Cinema. After demonstrating several examples from Tarr's *Sátántangó*, I focus on his *Werckmeister Harmonies* and analyse the function of his camera movements. I argue that underlying the contemplative mode of spectatorship often found in Tarr's films is a triangular relationship between the protagonist, the camera and the spectator, a relationship that is emulated through the figure of the flâneur, whose constant movement and alienated gaze in many ways resembles Tarr's camera.

Such a mode of narration clearly descends from the various formal strategies of modernist filmmaking, which reflects a significant facet of Slow Cinema: its ability to evoke nostalgic feelings for art cinema's historicity. The following sections therefore explore this modernist tendency firstly via Tarr's framing strategies and draw comparisons with other modernist directors such as Michelangelo Antonioni and Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Secondly, the final section explores the concept of nostalgia in relation to film theory and asserts that Slow Cinema's stylistic appropriation of modernist techniques achieves a self-reflexive nostalgic mode that generates a critical discourse often confused with pastiche, or sheer imitation of earlier forms of representational systems. I argue, however, that Slow Cinema and Béla Tarr respectively follow the modernist legacy not merely as a blithe form of pastiche citation, but explicate the urgency of slowness more so through an aesthetic strategy grounded in what might be more accurately described as a retro-art cinema style, in other words a deliberate exaggeration of the long take and dead time that is meant to evoke 1960s modernist art cinema. The ways in which Tarr's films elicit such reactions are not merely determined by the long takes, but also through a consistent use of black-and-white cinematography. In this respect, I argue that black-and-white cinematography not only refers to modernist films of the 1960s, but also situates Tarr's films in a larger geopolitical framework, namely the East Central Europe, where other filmmakers similarly exercise experimentation in monochrome imagery. I then conclude the chapter

by referring to the global consumption of these films through international film festivals, aspects of Slow Cinema that I will examine in detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

## **2.2 – The Long Take: the Dominant and Bazinian Realism**

The long take is the primary and immediately visible aesthetic feature in Béla Tarr's films. While Tarr's cinematography is often praised for its elaborate choreography, the long take aesthetic itself encompasses a rich genealogy within film history. As such, this section offers an assessment of the aesthetic history of the long take, beginning with a reference to Barry Salt's statistical analysis of editing across different periods in film history, which reveals the striking difference between contemporary norms of cutting rates and Slow Cinema's own conventions. Because the long take represents a constitutive part of Slow Cinema aesthetics, I closely examine some of its functions, both from the filmmaker's and the spectator's perspective, before returning to how film theory has viewed the long take. For André Bazin, the long take functions as a principle element of an aesthetic of reality due to its uninterrupted portrayal of profilmic action and in which the spectator is confronted with reality in its actual temporality. However, Slow Cinema takes Bazin's aesthetic realism to an extreme by divorcing narrative motivation away from its representation, attaining expansive moments of dead time and dedramatizing sequences. Following several examples from Tarr's *Sátántangó*, I conclude the section by examining the ways in which the "time-image," Gilles Deleuze's novel version of dead time, is appropriate for understanding Slow Cinema's aesthetic effects. The following section then elaborates on the notion of dead time by exploring the relationship between narrative action and pacing.

Among the major formal and stylistic elements on offer in Slow Cinema, the long take emerges as perhaps the most fundamental aesthetic feature that pervades many of the films discussed in this thesis. By the long take, I specifically mean units of "unusually lengthy shots" in terms of their duration, as simply put by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, in which the narrative action is portrayed in its actual temporality without the interruption of editing measures.<sup>6</sup> However, as Ed Gallafent attests, such a definition is "deceptively plain" as the "perceived length of a shot

depends on many considerations,” ranging from the “length of shots in the rest of the film, the average shot length in the specific area of cinema and historical period of the film’s production” to “the content of the shot, how it draws our attention to its length or chooses not to do so.”<sup>7</sup> As such and as I will outline in the rest of the section, the mere definition and application of the long take is not only determined by various historical conventions, but also the ways in which it obtains a perceived aesthetic function by way of its contrast to other formal elements such as editing and *mise-en-scène*.

In this respect, statistical and historical analysis of films helps us better understand the nature of the long take. By closely examining conventions of cutting rates across different periods of history, for instance, we can postulate that a shot can be defined as a long take only if it significantly surpasses the average shot length within that historical period. Alternatively, a shot might be recognized as a long take when, for instance, its relative length compares vastly excessive against much faster cutting rates within the same film.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the perception of the long take is largely determined at once by a broader, macro-level set of historical conventions and filmmaking practices as well as on a more micro-level, the general formal structure of the work in question. Similarly, comparisons between different areas of film genres (experimental vs. narrative cinema, art-house vs. blockbuster) are significant in terms of understanding the functions of the long take. In order to understand these fluctuations, Barry Salt conceptualizes the Average Shot Length (ASL), which systematically and statistically measures and analyzes the degrees of cutting rates across different periods of film history. Simply stated, ASL is the whole runtime of the film divided by the number of shots; it is a mean average of the film’s shot lengths expressed in seconds.<sup>9</sup> Such statistical studies clearly depend on the ways in which films are sampled from different historical periods in question as well as various national cinemas. In this respect, generalized accounts of Hollywood or European ASLs largely differ from each other and admittedly Salt’s study concentrates on the oppositions between North American and European films.<sup>10</sup> A brief explication of his study below should reflect the stark contrast between the cutting rates in mainstream film and Slow Cinema as well as assist in placing Béla Tarr in the course of a historical process by which cutting rates are exponentially increasing.

According to Salt, ASLs fluctuate across film history chiefly for technological and aesthetic reasons. The advent of sound, for instance, briefly increased the cutting rates in Hollywood cinema (1928-1933, 10.8 seconds; 1934-1938, 9.0 seconds), but following 1939 certain filmmakers (William Wyler, Orson Welles, etc.) began utilizing the long take, resulting in a brief increase of mean ASL (1940-1945, 9.5 seconds; 1946-1950, 10.5 seconds). Filmmakers in this period also began to integrate various camera movements within their staging of the long take scenes, which created an aesthetic demand by filmmakers for technological developments such as dollies and tracks. In this vein, films such as *Rope* (1948) and *Under Capricorn* (1949) can be seen as “not isolated instances that appeared from nowhere, but the culmination of a trend to which Hitchcock did not contribute at first.”<sup>11</sup> Other technological innovations such as the Cinemascope are also believed to briefly increase mean ASL, mainly because directors engaged in visual composition as opposed to editing, but Salt argues that statistically these effects remained marginal.<sup>12</sup> From 1950s onwards, however, the ASL levels regularly decrease in North America, while the sample from European cinema during the 1964-1969 period demonstrate a visible increase in long take filmmaking, of which Salt associates “with high artistic ambition in feature films.”<sup>13</sup> Despite fluctuating ASL levels in the 1970s and 1980s (between 7.0 and 8.4 seconds), the modal (i.e. the most frequent value) steadily decreases from 9 (1952-1957) to 6 (1970-1981) and eventually to 5 (1981-1986, last period in Salt’s study).<sup>14</sup> In other words, while there was a vast spread of ASL values throughout the 1980s that included several long take scenes, filmmakers most frequently employed rapid cutting techniques. The 1990s and the turn of the century, however, bear witness to an exponential increase in ASL levels, hence a much more sustained application of rapid cutting techniques across popular cinema. In what David Bordwell calls the “*intensification* of established techniques,” much of mainstream cinema now displays ASL levels below 5.0 seconds, albeit maintaining the spatial continuity across dialogue and action scenes.<sup>15</sup> Along with other stylistic tactics, Bordwell argues that the intensified continuity style has now become “the baseline style for both international mass-market cinema and a sizeable fraction of exportable art cinema” and as such signifies a global trend in dominant forms of cinematic representation.<sup>16</sup>

Slow Cinema in general and Béla Tarr in particular, however, demonstrate a stark contrast to intensified continuity filmmaking in terms of cutting rates. For example, in contrast to an ASL of 3.6 seconds in *Bourne Identity* (2002), Tarr's *Werckmeister Harmonies* displays an enormous ASL of 219 seconds, far beyond even the highest of level ASLs found in previous periods.<sup>17</sup> While most Slow Cinema films deploy conventionalized techniques of the long take (i.e. tracking shots or cameras mounted on dollies and tripods), much of it also depends two particular technological advancements. Firstly, Steadicam has enabled filmmakers to smoothly follow moving characters across space without having to lay down tracks (which may be unpractical or uneconomic) or compromise to jerky hand-held camera movements. Steadicam was invented by the cinematographer Garrett Brown and introduced in 1976, albeit its most well-known and iconic use happened in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), in which the camera imitated the movements of a tricycle.<sup>18</sup> Secondly and more widely, digital recording technologies have not only enabled long take scenes more practical and economically viable, but were also instrumental in achieving even longer durations of long takes than was possible with analogue filmmaking. Previously only video technologies were available for filmmakers to attain longer duration and as we will see in the next section many experimental filmmakers, such as Michael Snow and Bill Viola, used the analogue tape to attain longer sequences for observational effect. Digital technology in contrast enables recording times that are virtually limitless by replacing the finite film cans with digital hardware storing facilities. As such, digital technologies have finally enabled productions such as *Russian Ark* (2002), the first-ever feature film that is composed of a single long take. On the other hand, because digital devices were relatively inexpensive and lightweight in comparison to film cameras, filmmakers were able to utilize them practically for their own aesthetic purposes. For example, digital cameras were extremely suitable for Pedro Costa's *In Vanda's Room* (2001) and *Colossal Youth* (2006), both of which were shot in Lisbon's Fontainhas neighbourhood under impoverished conditions (narrow alleyways, tiny bedrooms, and so on). Similarly, digital technologies are even more pertinent for filmmakers like Lav Diaz, whose films emerge from a derelict film industry by way of producing guerrilla-style films, quickly shot with digital cameras and later edited in user-friendly post-production suites. As such, both filmmakers embrace digital technologies (including shooting as



well as post-production) in order to create modest films that contradict conventions of mainstream cinema. Despite several advantages of digital technologies, however, many Slow Cinema filmmakers, including Béla Tarr, have in fact shot on celluloid and only used the technological advancements of the digital in post-production stages. In short, throughout film history, technological advancements in cinematography have often influenced cutting rates and altered the use of the long take by supplying filmmakers with different devices.

In Slow Cinema, however, the long take is far more important than a statistical value or technological gimmick. It is crucial to the aesthetic experience the films offer and constitutes an important aspect of their critical reception, in the sense that many film reviewers began describing Slow Cinema films by noting their use of slow camerawork. Such an overarching use of the long take corresponds, in Neoformalist terms, to the *dominant*, an organizing formal principle that informs other stylistic and thematic patterns across the whole artwork. In the Neoformalist approach, the dominant provides a useful starting point for analysing films, as Kristin Thompson writes, “the dominant determines which devices and functions will come forward as important defamiliarizing traits, and which will be less important.”<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, “the dominant is a guide to determining saliency, both within the work and in the work’s relation to history. By noticing which devices and functions are foregrounded, we gain a means of deciding which structures are the most important to discuss.”<sup>20</sup> As I have outlined in the previous chapter, Slow Cinema’s main aesthetic elements are drawn from various uses of the long take. Yet, what is the function of the long take? What aesthetic possibilities does it offer for the filmmaker? How does it affect the perception of the spectator? In what ways is the long take broadly related to film history and culture? What are the subtle differences between the directors studied in this thesis, while all of them in fact use the long take? These are some of the main questions this thesis aims to answer. I shall now briefly contemplate some answers before moving to an examination of how other film theorists have viewed the long take.

From the filmmaker’s perspective, the long take in itself poses a technical challenge. How to stage a scene without a cut? How to arrange the choreography in the scene and achieve a harmony between the actors and the camera? Within the treasured

economy of continuity editing, such objectives may appear baffling for certain cinematographers and even more difficult for audiences. Nevertheless, many art cinema directors as well as classical Hollywood directors across a long historical trajectory have given thought on how to stage their *mise-en-scène*, not only in the most effective way, but also in a way that challenges the basic craftsmanship of filmmaking. As such, sequences that involve long takes have been viewed as a sign of technical virtuosity, for example, the opening sequence of Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958) or the final sequence in Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Passenger* (1975). While the way in which they handle plot appears contradictory, both scenes rely on technically complex series of camera setups that move in between different spaces, encompassing various mobile framing techniques and involving different characters. Because the long take is faithful to the film's spatial coordinates and temporal continuity, directors might choose to stage crucial scenes (opening scenes, finales or scenes with emotional climax) with a single uninterrupted take. As such, when executed proficiently, the long take in its viewer's perspective might generate a form of admiration for or fascination with the film's intricate display of aesthetic innovation. Thus, in the eyes of audiences, the long take often functions to prompt "artifact emotions," which Carl Plantinga describes as "emotional responses that can be solicited directly by the artifactual status of film as opposed to the content of the fiction," such as the "exhilaration at a particularly brilliant camera movement."<sup>21</sup> This often leads to particular filmmakers who frequently use the long take aesthetic in complicated ways (Max Ophüls, Miklós Jancsó, Theo Angelopoulos, Andrei Tarkovsky, and so on) to achieve a higher status in the eyes of certain groups of audiences. Béla Tarr belongs to this latter group and the ways in which his elaborate camera works evoke past modernist filmmakers will be discussed in the later sections. At this stage, however, I want to briefly focus on how and why the long take aesthetic has been championed by the French critic André Bazin.

The long take as an aesthetic feature is significant in film theory because it is often attributed a sense of realism for its ability to portray narrative action in an uninterrupted, hence "objective" manner. For André Bazin, the long take constitutes an inevitable result of deep-focus cinematography, which for the first time in film history, as Bazin argues, enables the spectator to choose what he or she wants to see rather than be dictated by the selection of montage.<sup>22</sup> The role of technological innovations

influencing aesthetic decisions is once again crucial here, as the application of deep-focus cinematography largely depended on the development of faster lenses that enabled film cameras to attain sharper focus when shooting in deeply staged *mise-en-scènes*.<sup>23</sup> As such, Bazin argues that against other Hollywood directors who largely depended on editing techniques, “Orson Welles restored to cinematographic illusion a fundamental quality of its reality – its continuity.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, as opposed to conventional editing techniques that essentially divide diegetic space into consecutive shots that appear logically or psychologically connected to narrative motivation, Bazin argues that the long take attains a special function for its ability to preserve reality’s sense of temporal continuity and spatial unity. As a result, Bazin writes: “it is no longer the editing that selects what we see, thus giving it an a priori significance, it is the mind of the spectator that is forced to discern, as in a sort of *parallepiped* of reality with the screen as its cross-section, the dramatic spectrum proper to the scene.”<sup>25</sup> While the benefit of editing is to focus the attention of the spectator into psychologically justifiable details within a scene, the long take renders the spatial and temporal aspects of the scene continuous and palpable, thus creating a sensation closer to reality.

In this respect, the long take and depth of field blended together constitute two major elements of what Bazin sees as the ultimate destiny of cinema: an aesthetic of realism, i.e. an art form that should exploit the camera’s mechanical ability to record objective reality without human interference, an ability drawn from the distinctive and “objective character of photography.”<sup>26</sup> Whilst Bazin’s understanding of the indexical relationship between objective reality and the film camera was deemed reductionist and naïve by future film theorists, aspects of his ontology have been recently recovered by several theorists, especially in relation to contemporary cinephilia by Paul Willemen and Christian Keathley, both of which I will return to in the later sections.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, Bazin’s teleological pursuit in defining film history by way of its relationship to capturing reality reveals telling distinctions amongst certain filmmakers and traditions of cinema.<sup>28</sup> As such, Bazin divides film history into two separate factions; on the one hand, “those directors who put their faith in the image” and on the other “those who put their faith in reality.”<sup>29</sup> The former group, consisting mainly of German Expressionists and Soviet filmmakers, is characterized by an overt reliance on the “plastics” of the image, in other words the artificial reconstruction of the *mise-en-*

scène or the editing techniques that shape it. Bazin, however, championed the latter group, consisting firstly of silent cinema directors such as F. W. Murnau, Robert Flaherty and Eric von Stroheim and secondly those that emerge after the advent of sound, Roberto Rossellini, Orson Welles and above all Jean Renoir, all of whom refused the imposition of montage and were instead preoccupied with the reflection of reality in cinema.<sup>30</sup> According to Bazin, the silent cinema tradition initiated by Flaherty and von Stroheim was later dominated by the continuity editing style throughout the 1930s (with the exception of Jean Renoir) and was later re-salvaged by a newer generation of filmmakers in the early 1940s. On the one hand, American directors such as Orson Welles and William Wyler challenged the continuity editing system by staging *mise-en-scène* through deep-focus long takes and thus freeing the spectators from the imposition of montage. On the other hand, Italian Neorealist directors such as Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio de Sica gave “back to the cinema a sense of the ambiguity of reality” by abandoning “the effects of montage” and thus “stripping away of all expressionism” of the “plastics” of the visual image.<sup>31</sup> In both cases, however, the long take functions as a trademark stylistic feature inherently associated with an aesthetic of reality.

Yet, the long take aesthetic in itself is not entirely sufficient to warrant an aesthetic of reality insofar as its application in various sequences in mainstream escapist cinema display contradictions to Bazinian realism. While these films often deploy the long take accompanied by deep-focus cinematography, they hardly constitute the reality effect that Bazin has thoroughly explicated in his essays. For example, *Children of Men* (2006) is constructed by many long take scenes, but through a completely different way of handling narrative action and temporal economy. While the long takes in these scenes undoubtedly function as a way to preserve the spatial unity of narrative action, its rapid rhythm greatly contrasts Slow Cinema as well as earlier forms of realist cinema that Bazin champions. As such, the film consists of mainly plan-sequences that display the movement of its characters across space and interact with the environment, but never for a moment does the film pause narrative progress in favour of revealing the structures of reality as Bazin has explained earlier. While *Children of Men* exhibits an example in which long takes are made possible through the physical combinations of mechanical technology (for example, mobile framing is rendered possible by mounting the camera

on a complex set of dollies or Steadicam), Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (2005) shows how certain long take scenes can be achieved through digital manipulation. In the film, the camera follows Tom Cruise driving his car through an urban landscape, while the mise-en-scène reveals the alien invasion that takes place in the background. In order to emphasize the magnitude of the catastrophe, the camera frequently revolves around the car achieving a wider visual perspective of the scene, but its unrealistic movements through the windscreen of the car clearly underscore the digital efforts inscribed throughout the sequence. We shall see later, for example, how Tarr's treatment of a similar version of catastrophe (albeit not involving aliens) differs from such an action-packed sequence. In short, while mainstream films also utilize the long take to preserve spatial unity and emphasize the various relationships between background and foreground, the manner in which narrative action is condensed into screen time is in many ways the opposite of Slow Cinema (and Italian Neorealism, for that matter). As such, in addition to an exaggerated application of the long take, in Slow Cinema other aesthetic strategies such as dedramatization and dead time take on an important role.

As I have outlined in the earlier chapter, undermining aspects of narrative cinema constitute a major aesthetic concern within Slow Cinema films. Similarly, Bazin's appraisal of Italian Neorealism was based on the films' dedramatization of the narrative. For Bazin, the virtue of Neorealist filmmaking was its sheer observation of reality as it is and as such "the very principle of [a Neorealist film such as] *Ladri di Bicicletta* [*Bicycle Thieves*, 1948] is the disappearance of a story."<sup>32</sup> A well-known example of Italian Neorealism, *Bicycle Thieves* concentrates on a man and his son looking for their stolen bicycle across Rome, vital for the former's recent employment, but its narrative focus throughout the film remains elusive, yet charged with emotional intensity. Much of the couple's pursuit is interrupted with moments that do not advance its plot, leading to an examination of a string of daily events. As such, referring to the film's lack of "spectacle," Bazin characterizes it as "one of the first examples of pure cinema. No more actors, no more story, no more sets, which is to say that in the perfect aesthetic illusion of reality there is no more cinema."<sup>33</sup> In other words, for Bazin, an accurate and faithful representation of reality can by and large be only determined by the complete elision of dramatic events and in this respect Bazin's aesthetic of reality confronts the artificiality of cinema as a medium.

While the rest of this chapter and indeed the remainder of this dissertation will demonstrate more concrete examples, I want to briefly illustrate here how Bazinian realism relates to the aesthetic mission of Slow Cinema. On the one hand, Slow Cinema takes the Bazinian notion of capturing reality in an uninterrupted manner to its literal extreme. Sequences become so much elongated that cuts, if there is ever one, appear unusual. Whilst defining Slow Cinema in its realist attitude and outlining its many parallels to Bazinian realism, Tiago de Luca nevertheless finds a crucial difference between Slow Cinema and Bazin's phenomenology, "relating to the way these new realisms far extrapolate the representational imperatives informing Bazin's view of realist cinema."<sup>34</sup> Because many films completely abandon narrative motivation and instead display stylistic excess, de Luca argues that this "contradicts Bazinian rules, as the temporal elongation of the shot surpasses by far the demands of the story, leaving the spectator unguided as to how to read that particular scene hermeneutically," a point that I disagree with below by referring to specific examples.<sup>35</sup> In other words, Slow Cinema films defy rudimentary notions of narrative cinema by rendering its stylistic excess unmotivated, an aspect of modernist films that I shall elaborate further in the following sections. This is not to say that, however, Slow Cinema films are not narrative films. Many of these films contain stories, albeit extremely rarefied, with recognizable characters, notwithstanding their lack of clearly identified goals or traits. The next chapter, for instance, demonstrates the ways in which Tsai Ming-liang capitalizes on the basic requirements of narrative cinema while radically avoiding more nuanced features. Even if ambiguous in nature, Tarr's films (perhaps excluding *Turin Horse*) contain separate plot lines that are intertwined with each other. Yet, many of these plot lines remain obscure and largely unintelligible through Tarr's insistence on sustained temporality.



**Figure 2.1** – *Sátántangó* (1994)

A simple walking scene from *Sátántangó* illustrates this point (see Figure 2.1). The scene follows from the rumours regarding the arrival of Irimias and Petrina, two mysterious characters previously thought to be dead by the other characters in a desolate Hungarian farm collective. The scene involves both characters walking along the length of a village street, inexplicably overflowing with a motley of debris. The camera follows the couple from their back, moving along the pathway in which the characters are trudging through and staring at the barren landscape and the emptiness of the surrounding environment. The scene as a whole takes nearly two minutes, stripped away from any action other than the constant movement of two characters – in other words no encounter, no dialogue with anybody else. While the camera records the profilmic action in the Bazinian sense – without interruption or effects of montage – its tenuous relationship to narrative motivation, as de Luca emphasized earlier, undermines the aesthetic of reality that Bazin celebrated.

As a typical scene from Béla Tarr’s later features, this sequence precisely describes Gilles Deleuze’s concept of the “time-image.” Taking his cue from Bazin, Deleuze considers post-war art cinema, particularly the Neorealist films, as those that present its viewers with “purely optical and sound situations which [take] place of the

faltering sensory-motor situations.”<sup>36</sup> In other words, while the films preceding Italian Neorealism were composed of “action-images” that intertwined events through causal and physical cues, this new generation of films disregard the sensory-motor schema by virtue of rendering empty moments as mere descriptions of situations.<sup>37</sup> For Deleuze, the “action-image” enables the viewer to perceive the physical developments in a scene, resulting in an identification with the film’s characters. In the “time-image,” however, “the identification is actually inverted: the character has become a kind of viewer,” leading to the development of “a new race of characters [that] saw rather than acted, they were seers,” a point that I will return to again briefly in the upcoming sections.<sup>38</sup> The implications of the “time-image” are the emergence of a plethora of signs and a variety of images, most of which do not relate to my arguments about Slow Cinema, albeit the fact that the Deleuzian approach has readily influenced a number of academic studies of Tarr’s films.<sup>39</sup> What is at stake in the Deleuzian “time-image” is, however, modern cinema’s obsession with representing temporality in a direct and unfiltered manner, namely through long takes and dead time, as opposed to the indirect methods of montage and *mise-en-scène*.

The scene involving the young maid from *Umberto D.* (1952) has fuelled much of this critical debate and has influenced both Deleuze and Bazin in their respective theories of modern cinema. In his review of the film Bazin writes: “The narrative unit is not the episode, the event [...]; it is the succession of concrete instants of life, no one of which can be said to be more important than another, for their ontological equality destroys drama at its very basis.”<sup>40</sup> According to Bazin, the maid scene is “conceived as the exact opposite of that “art of ellipsis” to which we are much too ready to believe it devoted.”<sup>41</sup> (I should note here that Bazin’s characterization of the scene as “an exact opposite [...] of ellipsis” is crucial for my purposes in the next section, in which I will argue that Slow Cinema achieves precisely that; the opposite of ellipsis, the descriptive pause.) Referring to the same scene Karl Schoonover writes “the body functions onscreen to amplify and expand the aesthetic registers of a slower spectating, demanding a different kind of labor from the offscreen spectating body.” In other words the film summons “a corollary perceptual acuity on the part of the spectator, a careful look that mirrors the camera’s lingering” – a look that furthermore “offers the spectator a different temporal relationship to perception, “glimpsing the fleeting presence” of



things and meanings missed by ordinary seeing.”<sup>42</sup> My analysis of typical Slow Cinema scenes in the later sections of this thesis will largely resonate with this point; in other words I shall argue that Slow Cinema, by virtue of its dedication to an intensified temporality, prompts and motivates its viewers to observe and discern reality. In this respect, despite de Luca’s initial reservations, there is a profound relationship between Bazin’s understanding of an aesthetic of reality and the aesthetic experience typically present in Slow Cinema. However, I argue that the crucial difference between the two not only relies on the fact that Slow Cinema films often border non-narrative forms by hyperbolically applying this vision, but also the aesthetic effects arising from such stylized instances cannot always be reduced to an engagement with reality or its aesthetic illusion. Accordingly, my approach to understanding Slow Cinema and its aesthetic experience is predominantly anchored in the feelings of nostalgia, absurd humour and boredom, which are elicited through the films’ stylistic elements and unique institutional backgrounds.

This section has therefore outlined a brief historical overview of the long take aesthetic and the ways in which film theorists have viewed its application across film history. While statistical analyses reflect on the changing norms of cutting rates and technological changes, viewing the long take as a formal dominant can in many ways enable the analyst to scrutinize a diverse array of functions for its respective audiences. While I have offered some answers to what long take means for filmmakers and audiences, many of my claims remain sketchy at best. The long take in itself is a complicated stylistic device that requires further attention, perhaps in the ways in which it has developed and been enhanced by various technological innovations. While in the 1940s the long take aesthetic, for André Bazin, constituted an aesthetic of reality, in contemporary mainstream cinema it has generally lost this function, as some mainstream blockbusters, even if sparingly, employ the long take as a means to flaunt technical (or often digital) virtuosity. As we shall see throughout this chapter, however, Béla Tarr’s portrayal of narrative action is much more restrained and his treatment of cinematography is elaborate, engaging and self-reflexive. The crucial difference between long takes in mainstream cinema and Tarr (and ultimately Slow Cinema) is the persistent interest in digressions from narrative action or broadly dead time. The scene from *Sátántangó* constitutes a prime example of Slow Cinema’s aesthetic mood and

such sequences will be my main point of interest in the following sections. The next section, for instance, will explore the ways in which Tarr and other Slow Cinema directors utilize dedramatization as a narrative practice and pause plot progression, albeit against the continuation of the films' narrative discourse, in effect creating moments of dead time. The section after that will consider similar walking scenes from *Werckmeister Harmonies* and argue that the camera movements often simulate the movements of a flâneur, which, along with the according movements of the protagonists establish the foundations of a contemplative mode of spectatorship.

### **2.3 – Dedramatization, Dead Time and the Descriptive Pause**

This section explores the main function of the long take in Slow Cinema, namely its capacity to dedramatize narrative action. Dedramatization is often seen as a fundamental part of art films, but it encompasses diverse variations that have not been exhaustively theorized. As such, I will briefly outline its basic parameters using specific examples and concentrate on its most frequently alluded form, dead time. After explicating instances from art cinema and Slow Cinema, I examine dead time through Gerard Genette's taxonomy of narrative tenses, which emphasizes the crucial relationship between dead time and narrative pacing, and focus on the descriptive pause as an appropriate synonym for dead time. Descriptive pause is, strictly speaking, a theoretical concept for the use of analyzing literary narratives and its application to film has previously been a matter of contention. However, I shall provide some important cases in which descriptive pause is not only applicable to our understanding of Slow Cinema, but more importantly is a fundamental part of its mode of address. As such, I take a detour in the avant-garde and experimental cinemas of North America from the 1960s up to the 1970s and explore some of Slow Cinema's stylistic precedents, where notions of dead time, stillness and monotony are even more intensely prevalent than in contemporary Slow Cinema. Following an exploration of the work of Andy Warhol, I conclude this section with several examples from Tarr's *Sátántangó*, before I moving on to an extended analysis of his *Werckmeister Harmonies*, in which I elucidate the experiential effects of dead time via a foregrounding of cinematic space and movement.

Dedramatization in art cinema occurs in many different shapes and forms, but within the context of European modernist film it has been largely associated with an extended use of the long take. David Bordwell, for instance, observes dedramatization in art cinema in two distinctive forms. On the one hand, Bordwell submits, “the filmmaker could treat [emotionally charged situations] in suppressive or oblique fashion.”<sup>43</sup> For Bordwell, a film like *Voyage to Italy* (1953) “could mute its action, even redefine what could count as action, by keying its tone to the couple’s boredom, enervation, and uneasiness.”<sup>44</sup> As such, instead of exploiting the dramatic intensity of scenes with emotional potential, these art films display a restrained attitude to storytelling. Concealing emotions or expressing them through other cinematic devices is common across many modernist art films (e.g. in the work of Bresson, Dreyer, Antonioni) and I explore certain aspects of this aesthetic strategy in Chapter 4, where I discuss Slow Cinema in relation to boredom. In this respect, one of the most important historical antecedents of Slow Cinema is Chantal Akerman’s, *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975). The film explores the daily chores of a housewife (played by Delphine Seyrig), who in addition to the ubiquitous housework also prostitutes herself in order to look after her son. Across its three-hour runtime, however, the film rarely depicts an event worthy of interest, or in other words, similar to what Bordwell writes about *Voyage to Italy*, the film attempts to redefine what constitutes narrative action. In *Jeanne Dielman*, the dramatic potential of the struggling housewife is superseded by a monotonous depiction of everyday activities: cleaning, cooking, dusting, eating and napping. Through long takes and extended duration Akerman observes various daily tasks uninterrupted and in their full entirety from a fixed camera position. For Ivone Marguiles, such a hyperrealist attitude is on the one hand paradoxically “anti-illusionist” for its extended duration, which “clearly departs from the transparency of classical realism,” and on the other hand “the alienating force of the work’s hyperrealism is enough to place it alongside other progressive currents of realist cinema.”<sup>45</sup> As such, the film and its critical reception underscore the ambiguity and ambivalence of “realism” as a concept; Akerman’s project is at once realistic and illusionist. Marguiles writes: “*Jeanne Dielman* ‘objectifies’ the character’s and spectator’s experience through its orchestration of repetition: the patterned cinematic

structure, Jeanne's routine behavior, and the spectator's endurance in the face of boredom all constitute parallel yet distinct registers of sameness."<sup>46</sup>

Methods of repetition and monotony are central aspects of dedramatization within the history of art cinema. Cesare Zavattini famously suggested that cinema should be able to portray an airplane passing twenty times, in response to an American producer's distinctions between American and Italian film.<sup>47</sup> For Zavattini, repetition establishes and elucidates truth – it reveals a deeper structure, “a surplus of reality.”<sup>48</sup> The repetitive action in *Jeanne Dielman*, therefore, stands as a complete and accurate representation of the monotony and boredom, which the character experiences. Yet, such representations may appear valid without dedicating hours of screen time to their depiction. However, Akerman's decision in portraying these events relentlessly, instead of condensing them into shorter chunks of screen time, provides an important aesthetic influence for Slow Cinema. In this respect, many Slow Cinema films follow this aesthetic strategy, if not as rigorously or programmatically as *Jeanne Dielman*. For example, repetition of mundane events is fundamental to establishing a sense of boredom in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (2011), which is analyzed in detail later in Chapter 4. Throughout the first half of the film, the procedures of the banal police inquiry are repeated on screen to the extent that they function as a narrative distraction, while at the same time the film deliberates on a deeper concern with reality and character background. Similarly, much of Tarr's *Turin Horse* is built on acts of repetition. Almost directly evoking Zavattini's ideal of the airplane, Tarr depicts the couple eating potatoes five times, in each instance from a different camera position and angle. As such the film, firstly stresses the miserable existence of the father and daughter through a repetitive depiction of their dependence on an extremely basic food supply. Secondly, however, the film not only demonstrates this monotony creatively, but also exercises a self-reflexive pondering of the infinite possibilities (camera angles, scale, duration, and so on) in direct representation. Yet, contrary to earlier art films, these moments of dedramatization appear even more exaggerated and extended without any indication towards narrative intelligibility.

While traditional art films often deploy dedramatization ultimately in service of narrative cause and effect, in Slow Cinema dedramatization occurs at the expense of

narrative intensity and causality. These films take dedramatization to a new extreme in which causal action is largely dismissed in favour of empty moments – *temps mort*, literally dead time – in which virtually nothing happens on screen, or at least, nothing of consequence to the plot. For Bordwell, the use of dead time in art cinema constitutes the second principal form of dedramatization, where story action is paused in favour of moments of contemplation, revelation or sheer inspection. Dialogue scenes “were broken by prolonged pauses, often underscored by actors frozen in place” or scenes containing “simple act of walking became prime cinematic material” for interrupting the dramatic process and engaging the audience in “trailing” (of which a detailed example from Tarr’s *Werckmeister Harmonies* will form the focus of my analysis in later sections of this chapter).<sup>49</sup> Through dead time the filmmaker chooses to foreground aspects other than narrative, demanding the spectator a closer engagement with the profilmic space. Yet, while frustrating audiences in its first instance, dead time developed its own conventions and variations. The notion of dead time in this instance remains a term that has been frequently used to describe art films. Because dead time takes various forms and guises, its effect may change not only depending to the ways in which it is used across a film, but also depending on the context in which the film is produced (country of origin, date of production, mode of representation, and so on). For example, dead time used in an experimental film from 1960s North America often achieves a completely different effect than how dead time functions in a contemporary mainstream blockbuster film (although, obviously, the latter is very rarely present). Dead time can display monotonous action (*Jeanne Dielman, La Libertad* [2001]) or completely lack human trace and dwell on images of landscapes, whether natural, urban or industrial (*Ruhr* [2009], *At Sea* [2007]). It can involve seemingly random and unintelligible dialogue (*Honour of the Knights (Quixotic)* [2006], *Turin Horse*) or complete silence where characters remain muted and frozen (many scenes in the films of Angelopoulos and Dumont). It can appear with rhythmic sounds that sustain the film’s tempo (*Sátántangó* and *Werckmeister Harmonies*, specific examples below) or it can appear through slow camera movements that explore the profilmic space (final sequences in *Damnation* and *Elena* [2011]). It can emphasize spiritual excess (Tarkovsky, Dreyer), physical and emotional decay (Costa, Bartas) or simply humour

(Tsai, Tati). In most of these cases, however, dead time should be understood as a temporal relationship between the film's screen time and its narrative time.

While such sequences are abundantly present in Slow Cinema films, Béla Tarr often takes the undramatic action to the extreme. In many scenes, narrative progression appears to be paused or stalled with no immediate or visible motivation. Part of this aesthetic strategy is derived from modernist films, such as those found in many Bresson features where the camera lingers on the space following the termination of narrative action (for instance, characters exiting the frame). Such scenes often function as rhythmic patterns that briefly allow the spectator to contemplate the sequence as well as a temporal preparation for the following scene. In his detailed analysis of *Jeanne Dielman*, Ben Singer characterizes these moments as “post-action lag, in which the camera lingers on inanimate objects for about six seconds before the cut occurs.”<sup>50</sup> The repetition and structural patterning of such sequences at once gesture towards the structural film (as I discuss below) and relate to Slow Cinema aesthetics in its depiction of dead moments. In Tarr's films, however, such moments frequently appear in the middle of scenes and are at times accompanied by camera movements independent of the narrative action. Either in between dialogues or simply at the beginning or at the end of the scene, these moments stall plot progression and divest the spectator's attention from narrative consideration.

One way to account for these sequences in terms of their narrative function would be to turn to Genette's categorization of tense in literature. Broadly, tense refers to the temporal relationships (or “temporal distortions”) between the narrative text (the discourse, the act of narrating, or what Genette terms as the *discours*) and its story (*histoire*, in this case the actual chain of events inferred), where this relationship can be broken down into the components of order, duration and frequency.<sup>51</sup> Very briefly, order refers to the succession of units of events and the way in which these events connect to each other through spatial or temporal parameters, while frequency is in many ways a statistical account that deals with the rate of certain reappearing events and their significance to the overall narrative.<sup>52</sup> At this stage I will largely ignore issues of order and frequency because much of Slow Cinema, and particularly Tarr's films, often work in a linear fashion without repeating the exact same event more than once

(although repeating similar groups of actions or situations such as walking and eating). However, I shall concentrate on duration, which although in itself is self-explanatory, can roughly be defined as the time in which something, that is either the act of narrating or a unit of story action, takes place or continues.<sup>53</sup> According to Genette, duration has four major types: ellipsis, summary, scene and descriptive pause. Table 1 visualizes these types, including the fifth type slow-down suggested by Mieke Bal, outlining the temporal relationships between narrative time (in this case the discourse or the runtime of the film/sequence) and story time (units of action and events in the story).<sup>54</sup>

	<b>Narrative Time (nt)</b>		<b>Story Time (st)</b>
Ellipsis	Narration Stops	(nt=) 0 < n (=st)	Action continues
Summary	Narration	Nt < st	Action
Scene	Narration	Nt = st	Action
Slow-down	Narration	Nt > st	Action
Descriptive Pause	Narration continues	(nt=) n > 0 (=st)	Action stops

**Table 1 Five typical relationships between narrative time and story time**

Ellipsis refers to the story action omitted by the narrative discourse, in other words the type in which the story action continues, but the narration stops. Ellipsis is usually retrospectively perceivable in film as the spectator realizes later on that a significant story element might have been skipped. Although ellipsis is typically associated with art cinema, strictly speaking it is present in virtually all narratives, insofar as these narratives are composed of events selected and condensed from a larger story, as such excluding experiments such as Hitchcock's *Rope* in which there is no selection nor condensation and the full story time equals narrative time. Summary occurs when a larger number of story events are condensed into a shorter narrative time; a very typical example in Classical Hollywood cinema would include montage sequences "summarizing" the events between two important plot points. Because art

cinema largely favours ellipsis, examples of summary are rather scarce and virtually non-existent in Slow Cinema. A scene is said to be occurring when narrative time and story time are concurrent, in other words scenes with continuous dialogue or a single long take that capture a rather realistic interaction or situation belong to this type. Earlier examples from *Jeanne Dielman*, for instance, can be considered as scenes. Furthermore, a large part of Slow Cinema films, occurring through continuous long takes, thus can be identified as scene. Yet, scene occurs only when there is narrative action is involved: as such I argue below that in cases where story action is abandoned, we need to look at descriptive pause as a more distinguishing marker. Mieke Bal introduces the slow-down as a typical cinematic type of duration, in which the slow motion creates a longer perception of narrative time than its story time. Bal cites the famous Odessa steps sequence in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), which, as opposed to the condensation function of the summary, expands and enlarges story time into a longer narrative time.<sup>55</sup> Finally, descriptive pause is another extreme point in which while narration continues, story action stops. In other words, the information and action flow in the film retain their continuity, whereas plot progression or story events appear to be *paused*. As a counter-intuitive type, descriptive pause has its inherent difficulties, because it suggests that there is meaning through the narration process despite the lack of actual story action. As such, descriptive pause as an aesthetic strategy gestures to art cinema in general and Slow Cinema in particular as well as forming immediate associations with avant-garde and non-narrative artworks. While the descriptive pause has an extremely wide-ranging use in 19<sup>th</sup> century literature, particularly in the realist novel where the author tirelessly portrays the surrounding environment through lengthy descriptions and avoiding plot progression, its application in cinema, so far, has been a matter of contention.

The difficulty lies in the fact that any shot in any film is not only descriptive in its own right, but also more often than not provides rudimentary elements of plot in addition to its descriptive power. Brian Henderson, for instance, finds that descriptive pause is difficult to achieve in film because even “if no action occurs in this shot or in this setting, the time devoted to them builds expectations for action to come; they too are ticks on the dramatic clock.”<sup>56</sup> In other words, because every shot creates a dramatic expectation for the spectator, Henderson argues that there is always a continuation in



plot as much as there is one in the discourse. However, a similar expectation also occurs in literature; in any lengthy description it would be more than normal for a reader to expect that the description will lead into a particular action, therefore this does not entirely render why descriptive pause is inapplicable to film. Moreover, expectation is something that the viewer infers from the formal signals the artwork communicates, therefore is not exactly a part of the narrative text itself. Genette specifically mentions that only the narrative text (the *discours*) is available for us to analyse, because categories such as the story and narration are inferences made by the viewers through perceptual and cognitive processing.<sup>57</sup>

Descriptive pause is a durational type that is possible to achieve in cinema, notwithstanding the fact that it confronts the purpose of narrative film. In other words, since pausing eliminates action and causality from representation, it renders any narrative sequence unintelligible. However, there can be a number of ways in which even mainstream cinema can make use of the descriptive pause. For example, it has been often used for the creation of a particular mood: a depiction of a certain landscape without any action may speak for feelings and emotions in a way that narrative causality is unable to. Alternatively, pausing can be used for humorous purposes; for example, if the absence of action in a particular scene creates a conflict with our narrative expectations, the result may be self-conscious laughter. More frequently, however, the descriptive pause is used purely as an aesthetic and observational device in experimental cinema territory. Part of this discussion will be revisited in Chapter 4, in which the descriptive pause serves as an integral facet of an aesthetic of boredom that I examine in relation to Nuri Bilge Ceylan's films. Before returning to Slow Cinema and specifically Béla Tarr, I will now examine the use of descriptive pause in avant-garde and experimental cinema, which are significant stylistic antecedents in Slow Cinema's historical genealogy.

There is a great number of North American experimental films, and more specifically structural films, that use fixed long takes to depict scenes of inactivity, idleness and emptiness, completely disavowing narrative expectations. Here I borrow the term from Adams Sitney, who finds the "fixed camera position" as an essential characteristic of the structural film, typically represented by the work of artists such as

Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton and Tony Conrad.<sup>58</sup> When considered in parallel to the work of Béla Tarr, as well as other minimalists such as Tsai Ming-liang, Lisandro Alonso and Pedro Costa, the recurrent use of fixed camera position is an important affinity between structural film and Slow Cinema and attempts to achieve a similar emotional effect on the spectator. Sitney suggests that “the structural film approaches the condition of meditation and evokes states of consciousness without mediation; that is, with the sole mediation of the camera.”<sup>59</sup> The recognition or acknowledging the stasis of the camera, therefore, is an integral part of the structural film aesthetic and hence parallels my discussion of boredom as an aesthetically rewarding experience. Michael Snow’s films, for example, portray landscapes or spaces in their entirety with no (or extremely sparse) human interaction and insist on doing so through the use of fixed cameras. In *Wavelength* (1967) as well as *La Région Centrale* (1971), we are left alone with empty spaces with very little narrative action (a glimpse in the former and none whatsoever in the latter). Sitney writes that in “the work of Michael Snow and Ernie Gehr, the camera is fixed in a mystical contemplation of a portion of space.”<sup>60</sup> As we have seen so far, Slow Cinema follows this aesthetic, but marries the fixed camera position (or autonomous camera movement, as argued in the next section), the structure as an organizing principle and the contemplative stasis with a rudimentary understanding of narrative causality. The structural film, however, takes different shapes and forms: the flicker in Tony Conrad’s *The Flicker* (1965) and the films of James Benning in 1970s offer different aesthetic experiences with different methods.<sup>61</sup> Despite these esoteric works, Sitney argues that the “major precursor of the structural film [...] was Andy Warhol,” by then a famous painter.<sup>62</sup>

The work of Andy Warhol represents another challenge to the use of descriptive pause in cinema because many of his films are controversial in terms of their running time as well as their lack of meaningful action. *Sleep* (1963), for example, is a six-hour film of a man sleeping, shot at 24 frames-per-second, but projected in 16 resulting in an effect of “an unchanging but barely perceptible slow motion.”<sup>63</sup> In fact his early films are structured around banal actions or places with a relatively monumental sense of duration: *Eat* (1963), *Kiss* (1963) and most notoriously the eight-hour *Empire* (1964) which depicts an ostensibly unchanging vision of the Empire State Building in New York through a single shot across a whole evening. For Adams Sitney, the greatest

provocation of these films is the ways in which they “challenged the viewer’s ability to endure emptiness or sameness,” a challenge that evolved into a question of “how to orchestrate duration; how to permit the wandering attention that triggered ontological awareness [and] guide that awareness to a goal.”<sup>64</sup> In this respect Warhol’s films share an important affinity with Slow Cinema films, particularly those by Béla Tarr and Lav Diaz, for both of their films challenge the spectator’s resilience to a monotonous experience of distended temporality. The sheer runtime of films such as *Sátántangó*, *Melancholia* (2008, both seven-and-a-half hours) and *Evolution of a Filipino Family* (2004, nine hours) declares provocations of endurance and to a great extent complicates their commercial distribution. Consisting of runtimes far beyond the typical mainstream and art-house films, these films demand to be endured in the cinema and confront the very act of watching and consumption. Such a daring aesthetic challenge of viewing-as-endurance goes back to Warhol’s *Empire* and its famed screenings across New York in the 1960s. In what seems to be an ultimate and extreme version of the descriptive pause coupled with an immense projection of boredom, Warhol’s films, according to Pamela Lee, are “at the same time both *representation* and *experience* of duration, both subject and object,” which offer “a perversely meditative experience, fidgeting continuously between moments of sheer restlessness, boredom, and pronounced anticipation.”<sup>65</sup> Warhol infamously enjoyed boredom and boring things, presumably finding its infinite banality and emptiness paradoxically interesting, meditative and receptive. As such, Warhol’s use of dead time and the descriptive pause in his early works, along with other structural films of 1960s and 1970s are in many ways a historical precedent of the main aesthetic strategy employed in Slow Cinema.<sup>66</sup>

In contrast to Slow Cinema, however, Warhol’s films were completely divorced from *any* aspect of narrative. In other words, works of Warhol and other structural filmmakers on the whole are predominantly non-narrative; therefore there is no story action to be paused to begin with. Slow Cinema directors, however, routinely exercise the use of descriptive pause throughout their works, albeit in a relatively understated manner in comparison to the structural film. As argued in the introduction, despite the lack of plot detail, Slow Cinema films are nevertheless narrative films; they contain series of actions, sometimes bound by cause-effect links, sometimes completely inconsequential. The next chapter, for instance, will argue that Tsai Ming-liang adopts

rudimentary notions of narrative structure but delays narrative comprehension by slowing down action and eliminating cause-effect links, hence creating scenes in which humour replaces the role of causality in the spectator's engagement with the film. In addition to pausing plot progression, the descriptive pause functions primarily as an observational and contemplative aesthetic device. Within Slow Cinema, scenes that prompt its spectator to slow down, observe and contemplate represent its core aesthetic allure and play an important role in generating a ruminative mode of spectatorship. As such, the employment of descriptive pause as a stylistic device by and large enables Slow Cinema films to be described as hypnotic, mesmerizing and contemplative. Throughout this thesis I will focus on numerous examples, most of which use the descriptive pause along with other typical stylistic feature of Slow Cinema. The next section, for example, considers several walking scenes in *Werckmeister Harmonies*, in which the camera tracks along with the principal characters and emulates the movement of the flâneur. The next chapter conversely looks closely at a scene with unbearable stillness in Tsai Ming-liang's *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003), where the director invests minutes of screen time to portray an empty cinema with very little trace of human interaction. The former scene demonstrates a continuation of action, but its monotony is so overemphasized through deliberate long takes that its relevance to plot progression becomes trivial and negligible. The scene from *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, however, exhibits the slow movement of a limping ticket woman, who exits the scene after several minutes and the image eventually becomes fully devoid of any action whatsoever. Despite the lack of narrative meaning in either scene, the narration continues by pausing plot progression, even if this means a portrayal of an empty setting. Similarly in Chapter 4, I examine various interludes in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's films that stall plot progression, often in purpose of creating atmosphere, but more frequently for foregrounding an aesthetic of boredom that functions as a contemplative elation for the spectator.

Béla Tarr's films frequently display moments of descriptive pause and examples from his *Sátántangó* should illustrate my point here. Very little happens in terms of story action across the seven-hour stretch of *Sátántangó* and Tarr pauses the action numerous times while the camera persists in recording the prolonged stillness. The scene in which Irimias and Petrina arrive at the local pub is provides a good example.

Both characters enter the pub and order drinks and cigarettes at the bar, while their dialogue is choked by background sounds and chatter sourced from the local clientele. Gradually, a faint noise emerges from an unknown source that attracts Irimias's attention, who, for a moment wonders if it is coming from a machine, but suddenly shouts towards the pub folk demanding them to stay quiet (See Figures 2.2 and 2.3). At this point the camera changes its position to the other end of the pub, framing Irimias and Petrina away from the crowd, all of which remain still and muted, frozen for an unexplained reason, yet unmistakably alive (Figure 2.4 and 2.5). Meanwhile, the camera elevates very slowly with hypnotic sounds edited in the soundtrack. When the camera reaches the top, Irimias moves slightly and performs an aggressive monologue (at this point the camera switches back to its previous position, see Figure 2.6). Following his obscure statements, both characters exit the pub and the camera tracks their movement, eventually focusing on a local drunkard and lingering on his face until the scene cuts (Figure 2.7). What happens throughout the scene hardly qualifies for a story event and its action *literally* pauses. The presence of camera movement and sound effects, however, mean that narrative time or the cinematic discourse continues without any link to story action, thus meeting the criteria for the descriptive pause. Perhaps the only narrative clue is Irimias's apocalyptic monologue that follows from the camera movement, but the monologue in itself remains elusive and does not directly relate to the narrative situation.



**Figure 2.2** – *Sátántangó* (1994)



**Figure 2.3** – cont.



**Figure 2.4 – cont.**



**Figure 2.5 – cont.**



**Figure 2.6 – cont.**



**Figure 2.7 – cont.**

The implications of this scene for our viewing experience are twofold. Firstly, this sequence demonstrates how sound design is in many ways crucial to the exhilarating aesthetic experience that Slow Cinema typically furnishes. Although Slow Cinema is very frequently praised for its visual flair, the various ways in which filmmakers use ambient sound, modified noise, drone effects and expressionistic music largely contribute to their aesthetic design and such a meticulous attention to sonic motifs is especially prominent in the works of directors explored throughout this thesis. In the moments where the physical action remains stilled, frozen or monotonous, these manipulated sonic features intervene into the narration and sustain a temporal rhythm that captivates audiences. The opening sequence of *Sátántangó* illustrates this claim perfectly. The sequence begins with the depiction of a large farm building and its adjacent muddy cattle yard; an image that in itself does not invite any specific interpretation for its inescapable banality. Moments later, however, the cattle come out to graze and the soundtrack, which previously featured a subtle howling wind, fills in with an enthralling drone effect – possibly made by reverberating church bells tolling – and screeching bellow of the cattle that resonates hypnotically until the scene ends. In

the remainder of the sequence, the camera follows the cattle through the village, with no evidence of human action and no motivating connections to its narrative progression. In what appears to be another example of the descriptive pause, the sequence completely depends on its varying use of sound effects (the wind, the bells, the bellows) while in visual terms it simply lacks causally meaningful activity.

The absence of causal links determines the second implication I want to discuss in regards to these sequences from *Sátántangó*. While narrative progress is arrested through pausing action, the sequence as a whole prioritizes the profilmic space, i.e. the *mise-en-scène*, which in turn lends itself for interpretation in the absence of clear-cut entry points. In cognitivist terms, our narrative schema is unable to warrant an explanation for the lack of contextual and narrative markers. In other words, because of our hard-wired predisposition towards narrativizing seemingly unconnected or unrelated events, such sequences appear, at least in the first instance, baffling, cryptic and genuinely incomprehensible.<sup>67</sup> As David Bordwell has often suggested, one of the ways to escape this dead-end is to resort to metaphorical or allegorical readings and auteurist interpretations, which habitually offer rather simplistic, reductive and arbitrary solutions.<sup>68</sup> I shall argue here, however, that sequences similar the ones I have examined in *Sátántangó* constitutes the fundamental characteristic of Slow Cinema's aesthetic allure. If Italian Neorealism celebrated the inherent ambiguity of reality, then Slow Cinema valorises it through a mode of spectatorship and aesthetic experience that evidently flaunts the absence of causality and embraces the visually opaque. As such, Slow Cinema and Béla Tarr films habitually prompt its spectator the study the visual image by depicting uniquely atmospheric scenes of stillness through barely perceptible motion. Because there is no narrative detail, the spectator begins scanning the visual aspects of the image – its framing, composition, scale, colour, etc. – and notices barely visible differences between separate moments. The camera movement in the first scene I have examined, for example, not only becomes prominent against the complete stillness of all the actors in the scene, but its precise framing furthermore accentuates its extremely slow elevating movement. Notice the slight visual differences in Figures 1.4 and 1.5, where the vertical movement of the camera is noticeable in respect to the table by the lower left edge of the frame. The longer the scene pauses, the longer we engage in scanning the image for details that we may otherwise miss. The constant

interrogation of the mise-en-scène and camerawork operates through a dynamic form of spectatorship and ultimately figures a self-reflexive realization of temporal flow and rhythm. For Andrei Tarkovsky, the rhythm of the film is “determined not by the length of the edited pieces, but by the pressure of the time that runs through them,” which is often achieved by Slow Cinema directors through the application of the long take that, by virtue of its capacity to express continuous temporality, achieves a sense of stillness and monotony.<sup>69</sup>

The contemplative absorption into scanning and inspecting the visual image will be the focus of the next section, in which I closely examine scenes of walking in *Werckmeister Harmonies* and its accompanying camera movements through the figure of the flâneur. This section, on the other hand, explored the ways in which Slow Cinema has appropriated forms of dedramatization largely through borrowing its use from modernist art cinema and avant-garde film. Historically, many art films have employed dedramatization devices, yet we find that in Slow Cinema their application often supersedes narrative motivation, purpose and function. In this respect, Slow Cinema displays a resemblance to many experimental films of the 1960s and 1970s, notably from the structural film in North America and the early works of Andy Warhol, a historical genealogy that I will be revisiting in the later sections. The aesthetic device that binds together many of these historically disparate movements is the employment of dead time, a moment in which narrative progression is paused for no immediate or discernable reason. To better understand the effects of dead time, I have turned to Gerard Genette’s taxonomy of narrative tense, from which the descriptive pause emerges as a sufficient and comprehensive marker for what Slow Cinema and ultimately Béla Tarr use and demonstrated its effects with specific examples. While I have explored the descriptive pause in its literal sense, I also want to point out that its effects remain similar when employed figuratively. In other words, in the examples I have drawn from *Sátántangó*, story action is *literally* paused, but throughout the rest of the film some of the story action runs equivalently to narrative time. However, even in scenes where story and narrative time run parallel to each other, the sequences often remain divorced from narrative concerns. As such, some of the examples I analyse through the remainder of this chapter (and indeed, the thesis) may not, strictly speaking, appear to be moments of descriptive pause, but their narrative function will often be



reduced or obliterated through sheer repetition, ambiguity or lack of causality. Thus, the aesthetic effect that descriptive pause generates largely prevails throughout many of the examples I discuss in this thesis, especially those that I address in the next section.

#### **2.4 – Lingering Movement and Flânerie in *Werckmeister Harmonies***

This section focuses on Tarr's *Werckmeister Harmonies* and explores the ways in which camera movement is choreographed in relation to the movement of its actors. The simple act of walking with no immediate narrative motivation is frequently emphasized throughout the film and I argue that such an insistent portrayal of walking, with the addition of Tarr's signature moments of dead time, produce a mode of narration that simulates the gaze of the flâneur. As such, I begin by outlining how Tarr eliminates causality in the film by rendering much of the narrative action elusive and inconsequential and then move on to a brief discussion of the flâneur figure. As a quintessential subject of modernity, the flâneur has received much attention in film theory, either through an examination of its relationship to cinema or in terms of the drifting art cinema characters that often resemble its alienated movement. I draw a parallel between such arguments and *Werckmeister Harmonies*'s protagonist Janos, but also propose the camera and its autonomous movements as a significant facet of its mode of narration. In the film, the camera often attains a privileged relationship to Janos, sometimes rendering the events he witnesses, sometimes executing movements beyond his gaze. More often than not, however, the camera gazes upon actions that undermine narrative intelligibility and Tarr sustains their temporal elongation through long takes and an obsessive framing that emphasizes the profilmic space. In the following section, I examine these formal aspects of the film in relation to the "cinephiliac moment" and "panoramic perception," both of which are influenced by Bazin's notion of aesthetic realism and elucidate the spectator's role in engaging with Slow Cinema films.

In terms of its narrative setting, *Werckmeister Harmonies* further accentuates the dark, enigmatic and uncanny atmosphere that Tarr had already established in his earlier films *Sátántangó* and *Damnation*. The film tells the story of an unidentified Hungarian

town, whose dwellers increasingly become agitated, eventually descending into madness following the unexpected arrival of a circus show. The circus includes a giant stuffed whale carcass that is brought to the middle of the town centre and a freak show starring “The Prince,” a peculiarly mysterious yet unidentified figure. Witnessing these bizarre events is Janos Valuska (Lars Rudolph), the local newspaperman who, in addition to his tedious profession, regularly interacts with the town folk at the local pub and takes care of the eccentric György Eszter (Peter Fitz), an intellectual obsessed with Andreas Werckmeister and his music theory.<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile, in response to the ill-conceived circus show, the town folk gather around the town square to voice their protest and anger. Their unexplained rage slowly goes out of control, developing into a revolt in which the angry mob storms a hospital. At this point, “Aunt” Tünde (Hanna Schygulla) – Eszter’s separated spouse – visits Janos and blackmails Mr Eszter into tricking the angry mob and secures support for Tünde’s organization, which turns out to be some sort of military dictatorship. Following the chaotic outbreak, Janos attempts to escape the town, but is caught and later on finds himself in an asylum-like hospital, where Mr Eszter visits him and explains the new order at work. In the final scene, Eszter visits the whale, which quietly sits in the town square, its inscrutable glass eye bleached by light.

While the film depicts a catastrophe, much of its narrative action remains in the background and its cause-effect structure is rendered obscure. On the one hand, the film presents a bleak vision of humanity indicated through post-apocalyptic iconography: stark black-and-white photography, tanks roaming in the streets, an extreme climate, unidentified characters and bizarre events. However, contrary to the generic features of a disaster film, Tarr downplays narrative action into events that lead nowhere. There is no narrative resolution, nor any causal link between events that take place. Why does the mob storm the hospital? Why do they stop? What affect does the Prince exactly radiate? How does the whale fit in this story? What benefit do Tünde and the military officers retain out of this situation? As much as we see on-screen, there’s a great deal of information left either unexplained or off-screen. We cannot logically link the cause-effect chain in many cases simply because Tarr omits valuable and vital information from the story. We are shown large gaps of silence, a lot of walking, obscure dialogue, as opposed to motivations behind the events or any form of explanation. In other words,

Tarr suppresses narrative action by foregrounding scenes woven together with moments of dead time, all of which help create its macabre mood and unique atmosphere. But how does the film let us engage with it? What alternative devices fill in for the lack of narrative complexity?

In this analysis of the film, I shall concentrate on the act of walking performed by its characters as well as the camera movement that accompanies it. Walking occurs sporadically throughout; in fact many scenes are dedicated to this simple activity. In an interview, Tarr was asked whether the film is an allegory of Hungary's totalitarian history or an elaborate depiction of man's descent into existential terror, yet his reply was: "I just wanted to make a movie about this guy who is walking up and down the village and has seen this whale."<sup>71</sup> As such, a specific interest in walking and seeing has been part of the film since its inception. All characters walk incessantly: there are no cars, except the burned-out one in Tünde's yard and rest of the vehicles turn out to be moving at walking speed, such as the circus van. The helicopter that appears at the end of the film initially circles around Janos, but later remains at a still position as if observing him.

The abundance of walking and observing bring to mind the notion of *flânerie*, literally meaning "to stroll" or "strolling" in French. In the wake of massive urban developments throughout Paris in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the French poet Charles Baudelaire defined *flânerie* as a mode of strolling, which was instrumental to experiencing the 19<sup>th</sup> century modern city. For Baudelaire, *flânerie* is a specific mode of strolling in which the *flâneur* exercises a spatial practice, observing the interior and exterior public spaces of a city, reading the population and its social texts. "Observation is the *raison d'être* of the *flâneur*," Rob Shields writes, "and seeing visual lures is the key to the *flâneur's* movement, drawn from sight to sight."<sup>72</sup> Baudelaire himself describes the aims and pleasures of being a *flâneur* as follows: "To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world."<sup>73</sup> As such, the *flâneur* is "a man of crowds;" he exists within society, occupying a central position, yet at the same time he is invisible from it. In this respect, the *flâneur* personifies an oddly double identity, at once a native and a foreigner, an insider and an outsider, with his alienated gaze

studying various social and cultural formations. Through the writings of Walter Benjamin, the practice of flânerie came to be associated with modernity, an experience of the present moment as of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century context. “If at the beginning, the flâneur as private subject dreamed himself out into the world,” writes Susan Buck-Morrs, “at the end, flânerie was an ideological attempt to reprivatize social space, and to give assurance that the individual’s passive observation was adequate for knowledge of social reality.”<sup>74</sup> In other words, Buck-Morrs points towards a transformation of the flâneur from an idealistic dreamer to a passive observer, a transformation that will be important in clarifying a narrational strategy in *Werckmeister Harmonies*. In short, flânerie is a means of distancing one from him/herself and is associated with observing and witnessing, or to put it simply, it is precisely the ways which modern man/woman contemplates his/her environment and nature.

As an exemplary register of modernity and typifying the quintessential modern subject, the concept of flânerie offers a fruitful perspective to understand Slow Cinema.<sup>75</sup> On the one hand, the flâneur’s overall lack of purpose and walking with the sole purpose of walking challenges the accelerating pace and productivity of modernity. On the other hand, however, it is concerned with the very act of experiencing modernity, which essentially involves becoming part of its mechanism. As such, flânerie is at once resistant to and dependent on modernity. “Within the space of urban perception, a panoramic panoply of views and details transmits itself with dizzying swiftness,” Mark Betz writes, “the flâneur, who defines and distinguishes himself by his leisurely pace, contradicts the speed of modern life at the same time as he constitutes its focal point through his attentive watching.”<sup>76</sup> As I shall argue, such an attitude towards wandering and looking is largely identified in an abundant number of characters present within Slow Cinema (as well as its antecedents within the history of art cinema); more importantly, the very act of flânerie substantiates the claims for aesthetic slowness. In this respect, Betz writes, the flâneur’s “slowness is also what enables him to absorb and filter, to render meaningful, the myriad shocks that the city in its very newness emits” and “to slow the speed of modern life so as to witness it not as a blur but as discrete developments within history.”<sup>77</sup> Before returning to my analysis of *Werckmeister Harmonies*, I shall briefly consider the ways in which the figure of the flâneur is a stylistic trope within the history of art cinema.

The history of art cinema is generously stocked with figures that resemble the flâneur. In fact, aimless wandering is by and large a significant narrative trope of the art film. The roots of this proclivity for drifting originate in Italian Neorealism. André Bazin, for instance, characterizes *Bicycle Thieves* (1946) as a film about a father and a son walking through Rome.<sup>78</sup> According to Karl Schoonover, the non-professional actors within Neorealist films possess “a particular gait, a certain wandering” and as such their peculiar striding significantly influences their casting.<sup>79</sup> Following Neorealism, drifting characters frequently feature in modernist art films of the 1960s and beyond. For Mark Betz, the “female characters of modern European cinema collectively present the image of a flâneuse engaged in a quest for meaning as she wanders the terrain of a changing Europe.”<sup>80</sup> In this respect, Mark Betz examines the flâneuse as a narrative agent in films such as *And God Created Woman* (1956), *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1961), *La Notte* (1961) and *Vivre sa Vie* (1962), all of which depict the flâneuse’s alienation as witnessing not only the demise of European colonial powers, but also the birth of a newer national identity. Such drifting characters regularly feature in art films in the following years. Throughout the 1980s, for example, drifting characters are regularly associated with homelessness, particularly in films such as Varda’s *Vagabond* (1985) and the early films of Leos Carax (*Boy Meets Girl* [1984], *Mauvais Sang* [1986], *Lovers on the Bridge* [1991]). Following this period, however, the notion of the flâneur and the drifting character becomes an integral part of global art cinema. From Tsai Ming-liang’s Lee Kang-shee to Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s Mehmet Emin Ceylan and up to Lisandro Alonso’s meandering characters, the flâneur is ubiquitous in Slow Cinema, in which walking – seemingly for the sole purpose of walking – remains one of its essential characteristics.

As the principal character in *Werckmeister Harmonies*, Janos can be designated as an archetypal flâneur. He exercises strolling throughout the film and he is ever-present across all scenes, observing and witnessing the bizarre events. We experience the film through accompanying Janos and his movement. While the camera is travelling through the desolate spaces in the film, we are following Janos and are guided by his trajectory. According to Walter Benjamin, “the social foundation of flânerie is journalism,” thus Janos’ profession as a newspaperman furthermore qualifies himself as the one who spreads the word.<sup>81</sup> Similar to the flâneur, Janos occupies a dual identity; at

once familiar to the rest of the characters of the film and yet alienated from them for his eccentric interests in cosmology – which enables him to painstakingly observe them throughout the film.



**Figure 2.8** – *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000)



**Figure 2.9** – cont.



**Figure 2.10** – cont.



**Figure 2.11** – cont.

At the same time, however, Janos is characterized as a village idiot, an outsider figure who parallels a similar social position occupied by classical the flâneur. The conventions of casting and the film’s critical reception largely support this claim. Firstly, the German actor Lars Rudolph previously played similar roles in which he portrayed characters that are outsiders to the society, often because they are mentally disturbed.<sup>82</sup> Tarr notes in an interview that meeting Rudolph was an inspiration for him to shoot the novel, he had finally found “his Janos.”<sup>83</sup> As such, Rudolph’s uneasy appearance and his eccentric wide eyes are salient features, useful in adapting some essential personal traits of Janos from Krasznahorkai’s book to the film. In addition, Rudolph is particularly skilful in his manner of speech in the sense that his calm and soft voice amplifies his character and body movement. Even though he is dubbed into Hungarian in *Werckmeister Harmonies*, his voice never appears to be unnatural. Secondly, the film’s critical reception ceaselessly emphasized Janos as a village idiot.

Many critics described Janos as a “holy idiot,” “a wise fool” or “a Dostoyevskian holy fool.”<sup>84</sup> While such characteristics are implicit in the film, the novel holds these observations true. Krasznahorkai introduces Janos as “terminally lunatic” and characterizes him as a drifting outcast.<sup>85</sup> In this respect, a typical village idiot is also an outsider to the society and as such often embodies a particular social position, especially in literature. Because the village idiot is an outsider, he/she embodies a distanced but critical approach towards society, often questioning its moral foundation. In terms of this social distance, then, there is a significant parallel between Janos as the village idiot and Janos as the flâneur.

The important aspect of identifying Janos as a flâneur relies on his social position as opposed to his social class. When Baudelaire and Benjamin wrote about the flâneur, they employed the term to associate it with the bourgeoisie, a kind of social class that normally would not be associated with a character like Janos. Establishing Janos both as a village idiot and an outsider enables him to scrutinize the foundations of society, a task that Baudelaire and Benjamin attempted to emphasize throughout their writings. This aspect of Janos is evident during the scene where he wanders through the town square for the first time, walks past the groups of people and turns his head to investigate the facial expressions of the people. His curious gaze, however, is never returned and Janos remains as the only one looking. Later on in the film, certain individuals from the angry crowd become very hostile to Janos, who at this stage becomes an alien to them, perhaps due to his persistent curiosity. In this respect, Janos is the beholder with the alienated gaze and such characteristics entitle him to be described as a flâneur in the traditional sense.

I suggest, however, that there is another subject that could more aptly be identified as the flâneur, namely the camera. Walter Benjamin, for instance, claimed that the “audience’s identification with the [film] actor is really an identification with the camera,” referring to the ontological difference in our engagement with the stage actor and the film actor.<sup>86</sup> Our engagement with the stage actor is direct, unfiltered, while the audience in film engages with the film actor through the camera and largely depends on the ways in which *mise-en-scène* is constructed. In many ways the camera influences our perception of the actor through infinite combinations of angles, distance,

editing (or lack thereof), lighting, framing and movement. While such claims are clearly evident in many films in which cinematography and *mise-en-scène* influence our perception of the film, in Tarr's films the role of cinematography takes on an additional function. Tarr's camera often leads us away from narrative concerns of the film and in this respect our engagement with it is realized not only through Janos, but also through the camera's unique state in its own right. The camera is the subject that strolls through the street, is omnipresent and has an undisputed control over the film's narrative. As such, the camera emulates the function of the flâneur; while its continuous movement over space imitates strolling, its independence of narrative concerns renders it autonomous.<sup>87</sup> Referring to Tarr's *Almanac of Fall* and *Damnation*, Jonathan Rosenbaum writes "the story and *mise en scene* are constructed in counterpoint to one another, like the separate melodic lines in a fugue."<sup>88</sup> Rosenbaum's observation is crucial, because Tarr repeats this aesthetic strategy across many of his films as his signature style. As such, the camera is often the sovereign, dominant stylistic device within the film's narration; it bears autonomous movements, at times focusing away from the present dialogue, at times circling the characters to provide a more comprehensive perspective, or at times doing it all through its perpetual staring at stillness and movement. Yet, in many ways the various camera movements reclaim the function of the fictional character.

There is a specific relationship between Tarr's camera and his protagonist. Dudley Andrew observes a similar tendency in Kenji Mizoguchi's work: despite the characters' control of the narrative situations, "the audience soon identifies with the camera via its quasi independence," which is "attributable to the aestheticized compositions of many scenes and to the noticeable ellipses between actions."<sup>89</sup> Similarly in *Werckmeister Harmonies*, although the camera often follows the movements of Janos and is guided by his trajectory, through impossibly long takes and occasional focus on unrelated issues, it achieves a sense of autonomy. As such, the camera's ultimate control over the narrative and the causal structure undermines Janos's function and relegates him to the role of a secondary narrative agent. This relationship is perhaps most evident in the hospital scene, where the camera slowly enters the building and roams from room to room, depicting the mob storming the hospital and attacking its patients. In the scene, the camera's movement is paced at a walking speed, enabled by

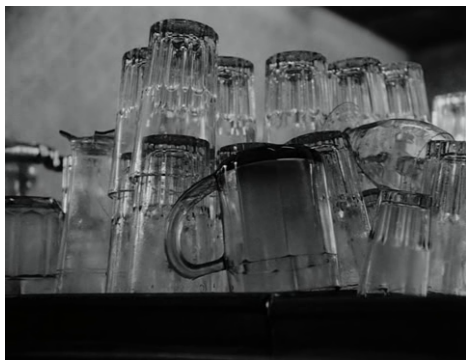


Steadicam technology, while its smooth pans and tilts often mimic a person walking and looking around the room. At the end of the scene, the camera moves away from the action and returns to Janos and his stare, his mouth agape with terror. In other words, the camera movements do not simulate the point of view of the protagonist; rather they appear as independent sections that deliberately compel the spectator to view the narrative action and at the end return to find the protagonist's response. In other words, Tarr achieves a triangular relationship between his camera, the protagonist and the spectator, in which the identification of the spectator often switches in between the two agents.

The dynamic and shifting relationship between the camera, the flâneur and the spectator contributes to a mode of spectatorship that reveals and emphasizes various structures of looking and contemplating. In other words, our engagement with the film occurs through an arrangement of doubled flâneurs, in which both the camera and Janos move in accordance to each other. In this respect, there is constant movement in the film, in contrast to several scenes of stillness in Tarr's earlier features. In short, the contemplative experience transpires via a narration that emphasizes both the narrated and the narrator through constant, but often paradoxically monotonous, motion. The spectator may align himself/herself with Janos through structures of sympathy and the film experience is thereby transformed into the gaze of the outsider. We tend to follow Janos through the mob in the square, vicariously occupying his gaze and contemplating the world around us/him. On the other hand, it is also the camera that possesses some sort of autonomy in the narrative through its endless movements, ceaselessly surveying the landscape. The film achieves this mode of narration through simulating the movements of the flâneur, the prototypical modern subject, which is at once immersed in and distanced from society. Tarr's camera functions similar to the flâneur by moving in accordance with the actors, closing in and framing them, but at the same time reserving a distanced attitude to the film's narrative causality. The camera movements are central to Tarr's narration, but we can ascertain other aspects of filmmaking that corroborate the means of dynamic narration, such as framing and duration. These aspects of the film will be my focus in the next section.

## 2.5 – Framing, Duration and “the Cinephiliac Moment”

In this section, I examine the framing strategies that Tarr implements throughout his films. I argue that the foregrounding of space and the surrounding environment largely functions as a way of accentuating a mode of narration that stresses observation, which I have outlined in the preceding section. On the one hand, Tarr’s obsessive framings foreground space and invite comparisons with other modernist directors, such as Michelangelo Antonioni and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, which I briefly set out in terms of their similarities and differences. On the other hand, through an application of dead time and idleness, these obscure images invite the spectators to scan and scrutinize the visual image; a form of spectatorship that I examine through the concepts of “cinephiliac moment” and “panoramic perception.” These assumptions are largely present across *Slow Cinema* and emphasize its relationship with earlier forms of modernist art cinema, which becomes my central concern in the following section.



**Figure 2.12** – *Damnation* (1988)



**Figure 2.13** – *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000)

Through an obsessive use of framing and duration, Tarr systematically transfigures the camera into an independent observer. His insistence on spatio-temporal continuity, in the words of Erika Balsom, “engages in a sort of magnification of the world” up to a point that it becomes an equivalent of looking and “rendering the miniature gigantic.”<sup>90</sup> The recording of the camera is matched with the spectator’s gaze and at times runs parallel to Janos’s gaze, attaining the triangular relationship suggested earlier. In the carefully choreographed scenes, there is an attention to the details of the surroundings where the camera lingers on objects seemingly irrelevant to narrative causality (See Figures 2.12-2.13). David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson have argued

that in the films of Yasujirô Ozu, spaces are foregrounded and are independent of the narrative in an unusual manner. The presentation of independent spaces and objects disrupt the spatial continuity and interrupt the cause-effect chain. The stylistic elements to produce such an effect, Bordwell and Thompson suggest, are cutaways, transitions, colour and focus.<sup>91</sup> In many ways, Ozu's playful approach to editing is key to his attempt to subvert cinematic conventions. He largely ignores the 180-degree rule and deliberately excludes establishing shots to disorient his viewers, destabilize the narrative flow and reflect on cinematic style; common tendencies found within modernist film aesthetics.

Tarr, on the other hand, manipulates narrative causality and disorients viewers by utilizing the long take. Because Tarr shoots films in a *plan-séquence* manner, in the sense that the whole scene is staged through a single long take, there is often a different relationship between the spectator and the ways in which the films develop narrative action. Observing a similar tendency in the Miklós Jancsó's *The Confrontation* (1969), David Bordwell writes: “[b]ecause the long take makes a stylistic unit (a shot) also a syuzhet unit (a scene), there is an unusually tight connection between narrative comprehension and spatial perception.”<sup>92</sup> In other words, the spectator's understanding of the narrative unfolds through cues and other spatial information represented within the shifting relationship between the setting and the characters, rather than through temporal manipulations via editing. In this respect, the use of long take in *Werckmeister Harmonies* suppresses narrative causality through restricting the viewer's orientation to a sheer perception of spatial dimensions within the film, mainly through the foregrounding of space, setting and landscape.

At this point I want to draw a brief comparison between Béla Tarr and Michelangelo Antonioni. According to Seymour Chatman, Antonioni uses the landscape and the setting in order to “represent the characters' states of mind.” In this respect, the treatment of landscape, space and the built environment serve as an objective correlative in the sense that T.S. Eliot proposes: “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.”<sup>93</sup> The objective correlative refers to a narration that bases its

storytelling on the surface, or the appearance of things through metonyms, rather than relying on metaphorical interpretations. As such, objects, places, or anything that bears a physical existence may become a reflection of the character or theme within the film. Chatman provides a plethora of examples ranging from objects to spatial elements for the objective correlative stemming from Antonioni's filmography. For instance, in *L'Avventura* (1960), Sandro and Claudia come across a deserted town while looking for their disappeared friend Anna (See Figure 2.14). According to Chatman, the abandoned town not only documents the "disaster of Fascist architecture and planning," but also proves that "[b]ad architecture is simply one visible, concrete manifestation of the *malattia dei sentimenti* [malady of emotional life: the existential anxiety that Antonioni refers to in his interviews and speeches]."94 The alienation of the characters is matched by the town's physical state: empty, abandoned and forgotten. The correlation between the characters and the setting strengthens when Claudia asserts her inability to cope with the silence of the town and the couple decide to leave, showing their failure to connect even with a ghost town.



**Figure 2.14** – *L'Avventura* (1960)



**Figure 2.15** – *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000)

Tarr treats his settings in a similar manner, albeit with a different attitude and intention. He notes that one of his working methods includes gathering "impressions" from the settings before starting to shoot, impressions which have an enormous influence over his stylistic decisions.<sup>95</sup> Landscapes, therefore, are more than backgrounds and constitute a significant aspect of the emotional tone of his films. Desolate landscapes, rundown buildings and muddy streets frequently feature in films with varying functions. The depiction of the town square in *Werckmeister Harmonies* is a good example to demonstrate the ways in which Tarr uses the objective correlative to

create a meticulous atmosphere. We see the town square four times and its portrayal gradually changes between each long take. In the first one, Tarr depicts the square in a manner to arouse curiosity as the camera follows Janos walking through groups of people standing on the square. The hazy fog in the background and the eerie silence of dusk fuels our curiosity until the circus begins its operation. In the second scene, however, the depiction is slightly different. András Bálint Kovács writes: “Tarr for the first time depicts the crowd assembling on the square not with the social empathy characteristic of him, but as a terrifying, murderous mob.”<sup>96</sup> The square is now presented not as a social gathering space, but rather a space of spectacle, protest and danger. Indistinguishable chatter and background noise replace the silence while the hazy fog slowly turns into smoke coming from bonfires. The uncertainty surrounding the square is escalated in the third take, portrayed during the night, as the bonfires become more visible and the crowds become more and more agitated. In the fourth depiction, also the final scene of the film, Tarr portrays the square with Mr Eszter looking at the aftermath of the events as the debris from the revolt covers the square. All seems to be lost, except for the absurd placement of the giant whale carcass in the centre of the square, which prepares the spectator and Mr Eszter towards an ambiguous closure (See Figure 2.15).



**Figure 2.16** – *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000)



**Figure 2.17** –cont.

Tarr’s treatment of profilmic space and the built environment is similar to other modernist art cinema directors, in a way not only to reflect further on the characters but more so to establish the camera as an observing agent. This is largely evident in scenes where Tarr tends to frame the action through doorways or corridors, a stylization that is reminiscent of Rainer Werner Fassbinder (cf. Figures 2.16-2.19). While Fassbinder uses

these compositions to emphasize the entrapment of his characters and their isolation from society at large, Tarr's self-consciously arranged objects function as obstacles to the nature of seeing and cues the spectator into a more meticulous inspection and examination of the cinematic image. The voyeuristic vision attained through framing is reinforced by the camera movements occurring at strolling speed, as these movements are not invisible to us. We are fully aware of the camera movement, whether it is a tracking shot or Steadicam, however this awareness does not alienate us. On the contrary, movement is one of the ways in which we can engage with the image on screen as our focus between the camera and Janos changes respectively, through a shifting relationship that I have termed as triangulation earlier. The effect of the image on the spectator becomes purely and essentially contemplative when the camera assumes the position of a flâneur.



**Figure 2.18** – *In a Year with 13 Moons* (1978)



**Figure 2.19** – *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1974)

An example of the observing nature of Tarr's camera is apparent in two subsequent scenes. The first scene takes place in Tünde's flat, where Janos visits her to show his and Mr Eszter's support for her cause. We quickly realize that Janos has interrupted an awkward scene wherein Tünde is manipulating the drunk police chief. Tarr conveys the scene through one shot where the camera is placed in the narrow corridor, in between two rooms, thus being able to frame both sides of the action. The space that Janos occupies is a well-lit kitchen while the army officer is ranting in the dim-lit bedroom. The conflict between the two is clear: the scene not only represents the clash between good and evil but also provides a situation where a private space has been breached. The army officer appears as an intruder and is separated from the space that

Janos occupies. After Janos leaves, Tünde and the officer are shown through the doorway, which frames them with black borders in each side of the image. The camera tracks backwards while both keep revolving around each other dancing to a symphonic military march (See Figure 2.16). The music connects us to the next scene, where Janos visits the officer's children after agreeing to undertake the favour Tünde has asked of him. This scene is played in a similar manner, a doorway separates the spaces that the actors occupy, but the tracking movement is the opposite (See Figure 2.17). The camera zooms in towards the children while they keep dancing and stomping feverishly against the same symphonic military march. While both scenes deploy an abstraction of narrative action into frivolous events, they also gradually intensify the film's macabre tone. These scenes display our inability to grasp plot details, as we never get the idea of what is really going on or why these events are shown to us. In both scenes, Janos is present for a limited time and interacts with the other characters in the film up until the point where he leaves the scene. Following his exit, the camera continues to capture the scene through a corridor and a doorway respectively. As such, narrative motivation is momentarily suppressed and such frustration even exacerbates the film's dark mood.



**Figure 2.20** – *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000)

Such a division of filmic space through framing mimics the shot as a look and the pictorial composition formally embodies the alienated gaze of the flâneur. As if

literally affirming the dynamic relationship between the dual flâneurs and the spectator, Tarr reiterates this motif in diverse forms as his camera lingers on spaces, objects or situations for an unusual amount of time. At this point I want to focus on another scene from the film in considerable length to illustrate the arguments presented above as well as for the purpose of moving my discussion to another facet of Slow Cinema. The scene involves Mr Eszter and Janos leaving the house, following their surrender to Tünde's requests. We see their faces in close-up and the camera tracks along their pathway following their movement. In the first few seconds Janos suggests Mr Eszter to go to the town square and see the whale, but upon the latter's indifference both characters remain silent and they simply keep walking, while the camera keeps pacing the same distance, following their footsteps. The silence and the camera's tracking movement are maintained for an unexpected amount of time – about one minute. What takes place in this minute is not an event, nor anything that is substantially supporting the narrative, but is a moment of dead time (See Figure 2.20). Although their walking time is depicted in its entirety, I argue here that this scene can also be considered as a descriptive pause because the film momentarily abandons its narrative concerns by pausing its action through a monotonous movement. In effect, the scene plays out as a parody of the walk-and-talk sequence so central to mainstream narrative films and frequently deployed in television serials. Walk-and-talk sequences involve at least two characters in conversation, typically moving across a corridor, an office or a street. While its lineage can be linked back to classical Hollywood, the walk-and-talk sequence finds its emblematic use in television serials, in which not only the characters find the opportunity to discuss the subject matter reserved for that specific episode, but also move through the familiar spaces of its story world, thus reaffirming its spatial parameters and glancing at its subtle changes.<sup>97</sup> As such, the walk-and-talk sequence keeps the spectator occupied with a constant flow of information, in ways that contradict the scene from *Werckmeister Harmonies*. In other words, while television serials use the walk-and-talk sequence to move the story, in *Werckmeister Harmonies* the lack of dialogue and employment of the close-up (which limits our perspective of the surrounding environment) pauses its narrative current. Instead of a conventional cut to a scene with another action, Tarr focuses on the inexpressive faces of his muted characters for an unprecedented amount of time.



Tarr's persistent interest in closing in on faces distinguishes his use of dead time from other art cinema counterparts. In Michelangelo Antonioni's films, for example, dead time is often employed through medium or long shots in order to contemplate images of empty spaces, architectural figures or shapes, where human existence can only be traced rather than represented (See Figure 2.14). In contrast, Tarr's images linger on human faces in close-ups to impose a similar effect of contemplation, coupled with an even further exaggerated sense of temporality. Such an interest in human faces is largely present at the end of several scenes, for instance, the first scene with the bartender, a kitchen scene with the hotel porter kissing his mistress, the hospital scene with Janos's gaze, two scenes that end with Mr and Mrs Harrer's faces respectively, and so on. All of these images are, however, static representations of human faces, in contrast to the one with Janos and Eszter with continuous movement. What is furthermore unusual in this scene is not only the extraordinarily long depiction of a seemingly irrelevant event, but rather the manner in which it is portrayed. The two characters walk side by side with only their heads filling up the frame, against a barely perceptible background of the alternating walls and windows of a large building with no apparent physical quality. Eszter strangely holds on to his hat, while Janos occasionally glimpses at him, perhaps in the hope for chatting further about the whale or perhaps bemused at Eszter's eccentricity. In short, although the framing and the duration of the scene emphasize their facial and bodily features, they remain inexpressive, opaque and enigmatic, leaving the spectator baffled against yet another fascinating scene of emptiness and monotony.

There are several layers of stylistic devices at play in this scene. Firstly, Tarr's camera mimics the walking trajectory and pacing of his characters. By assuming the position of the flâneur it simulates an absorbed, yet distanced spectatorship. Secondly, the depiction involves a subtle exchange of looks between the characters, in addition to the spectator's very similar engagement with the image, as we are fixed to images of facial expressions by an extreme close-up. The structure of looks – between the characters as well as the spectator and the image – accentuates my first point: we are at once immersed in the image through its fluid camera movement and its extreme close-up, yet at the same time its lingering mode and disregard for story action is estranging and self-reflexive. Thirdly, as such, the scene nourishes a process of interrogation, in

which the spectator questions the scene's dramatic importance. Because the film persists in concealing its narrative motivation, the spectator further engages in this process, contemplating its style of narration. As the tracking shot continues, however, we begin registering the sonic variations in its soundtrack; a subtle mix of wind, footsteps and the rhythmic noise caused by Janos thumping his lunch box. As such, the sequence substitutes the conventions of a walk-and-talk scene with patterns of movement and rhythm, image and sound, in short, an aesthetic experience that hardly requires interpretation, but through a series of subtle stylistic tricks manages a suspended sense of idleness, perhaps similar to boredom, an aspect of Slow Cinema which I will discuss in detail in Chapter 4.

The fundamental basis of this contemplative mood is Tarr's specific use of the long take as an experiential event, in which duration itself becomes palpable through the camera's emphasis on monotony as opposed to narrative action. Steven Marchant, for instance, writes "the shot [...] does not evoke, describe, analyze or represent the event – the shot *is* the event."<sup>98</sup> The long take undermines our conventional expectations of narrative and substitutes itself for an open event, which compels us to question the passing of time, as well as offering a realisation of the numerous stylistic manipulations that abound in cinema. This Deleuzian time-image therefore offers its viewer an opportunity to acknowledge the wholeness of the reality represented in this image. Yet, Marchant furthermore argues that *Werckmeister Harmonies* "models the shot not as a look but as an event and with that implicitly rejects the redemptive possibilities contained within the neorealist inheritance," mainly because Janos does not qualify as a seer in the sense that Deleuze has introduced it in relation to Neorealist films.<sup>99</sup> In this respect, Marchant's conclusion contradicts the ways in which I have described the film's mode of narration as a simulation of the flâneur. Despite the fact that several examples Marchant mentions do envision Janos as turning a blind eye to his surroundings (such as the scene in his kitchen), in many other scenes that I have described above he accommodates the typical features of a conventional seer. I argue that Janos is not only witnessing these events through his constant movement and gazing, but also the camera accompanies his wanderings by adopting an observational mode. As I have argued earlier, the exemplary scene for this claim is the hospital scene in which the mob attacks patients. In this scene the camera literally roams from room to

room, as if impersonating the movements of an invisible bystander. Through these stylistic devices, *Werckmeister Harmonies* prompts its spectator to contemplate things in their wholeness, enticing a mode of spectatorship invested in the fleeting, evanescent and mystifying detail of its audio-visual image. By pausing narrative action entirely, these sequences deliver a prolonged aesthetic experience that gives prominence to its evocative power. Such scenes are clearly abundant across various Slow Cinema films and as I have argued earlier they are in many ways its brand images, typically disseminated through cinephilic publications.

Scenes with such evocative and captivating features are frequently revisited in discourses of cinephilia, largely because their opacity often attracts critical and at times subjective interpretations. Before concluding this section, therefore, I want to briefly consider the function of these scenes in relation to film history and cinephilia through two concepts, namely Paul Willemen's "cinephiliac moment" and Christian Keathley's "panoramic perception." Reasons for this brief foray into cinephilia are twofold: first, because these ideas are largely based on André Bazin's theory of aesthetic realism and the ontology of the photographic image, both of which I have outlined in the first section in this chapter. Secondly, both instances involve an examination of the role of spectator in the face of cinema through the viewer's obsession with cinema's representation of materiality, narrative structure or stylistic aptitude (more on what I mean by this below). In his 1992 conversation with Australian critic Noel King, Paul Willemen describes the basis of cinephilic practice and criticism as the explication of "the cinephiliac moment," which the viewer "perceive[s] to be the privileged, pleasure-giving, fascinating moment of a relationship to what's happening on a screen."<sup>100</sup> For Willemen, such "fetishizing" and "epiphanic" moments, typically composed of gestures, looks, dialogue or images, "spark something which then produces the energy and desire to write, to find formulations to convey something about the intensity of that spark."<sup>101</sup> As such, Willemen postulates that the cinephiliac moment is "a moment of revelation" and that "what is revealed is subjective, fleeting, variable, depending on a set of desires and the subjective constitution that is involved in a specific encounter with a specific film."<sup>102</sup> In other words, cinephiliac moments are those exceptional and cinematic instances detached from the causality of narratives and rather spring from a delicate engagement to various cinematic devices (gestures in staging, a camera

movement, a particular shade of colour, a peculiar sound effect, etc.) as well as grounded in our own subjective and contingent feelings. For Christian Keathley, the cinephiliac moment is “a kind of *mise-en-abyme* wherein each cinephile’s obsessive relationship to the cinema is embodied in its most dense, concentrated form.”<sup>103</sup> In this respect, the cinephiliac moment offers a revelation to its viewer, which mainstream narrative cinema does not: it offers a sort of realization of reality very much in line with Bazin’s aesthetic of realism that I will return to below.

Several scholars have addressed similar instances that exceed the demands of narrative motivation and are furthermore inexplicable by conventional methods of interpretation. From Roland Barthes’s “obtuse meaning” to the Neoformalist “stylistic excess,” many of these theoretical concepts will, mainly for reasons of space, remain outside my focus.<sup>104</sup> Perhaps the most apt metaphor, however, is Keathley’s “panoramic perception,” through which “the cinephile has a particular perceptual/spectatorial posture that facilitates the experience of these [cinephiliac] moments.”<sup>105</sup> This posture, which Keathley derives from a mode of perception that describes 19<sup>th</sup> century railway travel, resembles the distanced yet immersed position of the *flâneur* that I have outlined earlier. Keathley writes:

the cinephile is, on the one hand, focused in the way that the film’s makers would want him or her to be; but, as the most “literate” of film viewers, the cinephile is able to “read” what is on offer with comparatively little effort and thus has a certain amount of perceptual energy left over. This energy is then devoted to a posture that facilitates the panoramic scanning of the image (in the same way that the *flâneur* employed it for a panoramic scanning of the city).<sup>106</sup>

In other words, through “panoramic perception,” the cinephile is able to discern the fleeting qualities of the image. Underpinning both Willemen’s “cinephiliac moment” and Keathley’s “panoramic perception,” is Bazin’s ontology of cinema and his celebration of the evanescent moment. Willemen, for instance argues that cinephilia and Bazin’s ontology “are in solidarity with each other,” because Bazin’s polemic essentially relies on luring the cinephile to appreciate the “dimension of revelation that is obtained by pointing [the] camera at something that hasn’t been staged for the camera.”<sup>107</sup> Such a statement immediately contradicts the films of Béla Tarr, because

they are densely and deliberately staged and their painstaking choreography is carefully planned prior to shooting. Because they are based on mainly plan-sequence shots, the camera movements and framings are often precisely arranged, leaving little room for improvisation. Yet, their employment of the long take achieves a similar function to what Willemen and Keathley describe.

In the penultimate section I have argued that the descriptive pause triggers Slow Cinema's core aesthetic allure by prolonging the films' temporal continuity. In many ways these sequences attempt to create the cinephiliac moment by displaying still, monotonous, yet evocative imagery – moments that are largely divorced from narrative, but nevertheless exhibit stylistic sophistication (through camerawork, temporality, colour, etc.) – or simply put, the descriptive pause in itself is designed to generate such a spectatorial activity. This section has, therefore, examined several scenes from *Werckmeister Harmonies* that similarly prompt looking in a ruminative, contemplative mode, not least through Tarr's specific foregrounding of space and landscape, but also through protracted emphasis on the faces of his characters. Such framing strategies stress the various structures of looking, scanning and inspecting the image, which Keathley terms "panoramic perception" and leads to what Willemen calls the "cinephiliac moment." These debates, once again, by and large refers back to Bazin and the Italian Neorealism, in effect a nostalgic reminiscence that I shall be examining in detail in the next section.

## **2.6 – Nostalgia, Modernism and the Retro Art Cinema Style**

In this section I propose nostalgia as a crucial concept in understanding Slow Cinema and its complex film-historical genealogy. Much of the critical reception of Slow Cinema films, including those by Béla Tarr, frequently recall the ways in which the films recycle and exaggerate previous conventions of art cinema and the word nostalgia occasionally figures within such critical discourses. However, a detailed theoretical and film-historical examination of nostalgia in relation to Slow Cinema is yet to be carried out. In this respect, I begin this section by looking at what nostalgia exactly means, mainly through its various uses within post-war American culture. Following a brief

history of nostalgia, I turn towards the “nostalgia film,” an aesthetic mode famously introduced by Fredric Jameson in reference to various Hollywood films that exhibit the lavish liberal lifestyles of the 1950s suburban America. The nostalgia film bears little resemblance to Slow Cinema, however the critical literature that addresses this phenomenon reveals important aesthetic methods that evoke nostalgic feelings. In this respect, I conclude the section by referring to “deliberate archaism,” in essence a formal principle that helps the artwork evoke and refer to previous artistic styles through emphasizing their distinctive qualities, appearances and shapes. As such, the long take emerges as a specific stylistic feature that produces an aesthetic link between Slow Cinema and previous forms of modernist art film.

Although nostalgia as a term refers to a sentimental longing in everyday language, within post-war American culture, it became a routine keyword to describe “a national obsession with the material, visual and popular culture of bygone times.”<sup>108</sup> As such, its specific use within the post-war context delineates sentimental feelings of longing or yearning for a better and familiar past, chiefly collected through happy, affectionate or wistful memories. While the nostalgic experience can take on different objects, within American culture the Fifties has been one of the most dominant nostalgic periods represented in American audio-visual media and thus has been the one addressed most proficiently.<sup>109</sup> Hollywood was a main component of this mythmaking. Many films flourished during the 1970s, such as *American Graffiti* (1973) and *The Wanderers* (1979), which depicted the isolated suburban American lifestyle during the 1950s. More importantly, many of these films concentrated on positive aspects of the period, avoiding the various disturbances of the decade’s social, political and economic climate. For Marxist critics like Fredric Jameson, nostalgia was in many ways a post-modern aesthetic mode that refused the audience access into a truthful past. Jameson writes:

Nostalgia films restructure the whole issue of pastiche and project it onto a collective and social level, where the desperate attempt to appropriate a missing past is now refracted through the iron law of fashion change and the emergent ideology of the generation. The inaugural film of this new aesthetic discourse, George Lucas's *American Graffiti* (1973), set out to recapture [...] the henceforth mesmerizing lost reality of the Eisenhower era; [...] the 1950s remain the privileged lost object of desire – not merely the stability and

prosperity of a pax Americana but also the first naive innocence of the countercultural impulses of early rock and roll and youth gangs.<sup>110</sup>

According to Jameson, the nostalgia film takes its object the Fifties as a mythical construct and turns an actual period of history into a commodified past by recycling its stylistic peculiarities and generating an affect of longing. In other words, The Fifties is reconstructed through repetition of various visual codes; most vividly identifiable in the films' lavish mise-en-scène compromising of inanimate props regularly associated with post-war American liberalism. For Jameson, the nostalgia film effaces history by reassembling facts or evading the undesirable elements of the decade. As such, the typical 1950s nostalgia film portrays the American suburb setting as an idealized, imagined historical construct by neglecting the grim realities of the period, such as Cold War politics, the Korean War, McCarthy witch-hunts, fears of nuclear warfare and racist oriented violence. The nostalgia film, therefore, functions as a selective memory; it transforms, interprets and most importantly fabricates the historical period in question. Jameson writes: "This mesmerizing new aesthetic mode itself emerged as an elaborated symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way."<sup>111</sup> In other words, because nostalgia films imitate older visual styles through pastiche, Jameson asserts that such an affective use of nostalgia represents the creative bankruptcy of the post-modern period in history, following the demise of modernist arts that flourished in the immediate post-war period that once provided its audiences an access to an authentic past.<sup>112</sup>

Traditionally, film theory has viewed nostalgia in the context of political critiques of historical films. In this respect, Jameson's conception of the nostalgia film may not appear to be immediately applicable to Slow Cinema or the films of Béla Tarr. In fact, the films discussed throughout this thesis seldom focus on particular periods of history and as such share little affinity with historical films. Indeed, Béla Tarr's films are perceived as baffling in terms of their historical accuracy; against the background of derelict and isolated rural settings and the material lack of modern technology (both of which imply a seemingly Medieval epoch), unexpected interferences by technological devices (such as the helicopter in *Werckmeister Harmonies*) and the complete absence of authoritative, contextual historical markers further confuse the historical period in

which the film takes place. As such, Tarr's films rarely invoke feelings of nostalgia for historical periods, but rather render historical accuracy unobtainable, ambiguous and obscure. However, an affectionate remembrance of a distant past constitutes only one dimension of nostalgia. Paul Grainge, for instance, provides a distinction between the nostalgia mood and the nostalgia mode. While the nostalgia mood "is a feeling determined by a concept of longing and loss," "the nostalgia mode articulates a concept of style, a representational effect with implications for our cultural experience of the past."<sup>113</sup> The distinction between mood and mode does not entail a binary opposition, but according to Grainge "represents the conceptual tendencies of a theoretical continuum" and "should not be taken to suggest mutually exclusive categories."<sup>114</sup> In this respect, I argue that Béla Tarr's films represent a strong case for Slow Cinema, which by and large manifests a nostalgic revision, if not recycling, of the modernist art cinema style. Through what I call a retro-art-cinema style, or in other words through a combination of the long take and dead time reminiscent of modernist cinema from the 1960s, Slow Cinema evokes feelings of nostalgia for art cinema's "golden-age" period. By adopting stylistic conventions from art cinema's distant past, Slow Cinema films execute a self-reflexive nostalgia mode that appeals to audiences previously familiar with and at the same time bemoaning the passage of a glorious past.

Whether Slow Cinema recycles previous representational systems of art cinema or subtly revises them has largely been the focus of the Slow Cinema debate I have outlined in the previous chapter. These debates echo the ways in which Fredric Jameson views the nostalgia film; an aesthetic mode that simulates the artistic spirit, style and design of older representational systems by way of sheer imitation, through a procedure that Jameson calls pastiche. The end result, according to Jameson, offers little aesthetic value, not so different from its preceding counterpart while its lack of accurate historicity forecloses the possibility of a truthful representation of the past. Not all cultural critics agree with Jameson, however. In his study of the black-and-white image, Paul Grainge "maintains a sense of nostalgia's relationship with postmodernism, existing as a retro style, [but] rejects the assumption of amnesia and historicist crisis common to much post-modern critique."<sup>115</sup> As such, Grainge investigates the monochrome image (which I will return to later in relation to Tarr) as a fertile ground in which specificities of American visual culture and politics of national memory are



reconstructed, represented and preserved. Vera Dika, on the other hand, explores films that utilize nostalgia as an aesthetic mode without its conservative emotional qualities of yearning and longing, in effect creating a contradiction that benefits critical viewing.<sup>116</sup> For Christine Sprengler the act of critical viewing is present in *Far From Heaven* (2002), which Sprengler argues, is not a conventional nostalgia film in the way that *American Graffiti*, *Forrest Gump* (1994) or other similar nostalgia films are. Rather, *Far From Heaven* is “nostalgic for what Sirkian cinema accomplished during the 1950s, how it managed to move audiences, to offer both visual and analytical pleasures at the same time as it launched a stinging critique of postwar life.” As such,” Sprengler writes, “it manages to rescue not only nostalgia, but Fifties nostalgia as something that can be divorced from its conservative uses.”<sup>117</sup>

I argue that Slow Cinema functions in a similar way within the realm of modernist art cinema. In other words, by reclaiming radical stylistic strategies and audacious narrative forms, Slow Cinema *references* modernist art cinema and bemoans its demise, at the same time attempting to resurrect it by way of exaggerating its aesthetic practices. In this respect, an understanding of Slow Cinema becomes clearer against the historical and aesthetic genealogy of art cinema. However, I should note here that this claim is not an attempt to relegate Slow Cinema into a mere pastiche of modernist film, as several film critics initially thought within the so-called Slow Cinema debate, but to emphasize Slow Cinema’s urgency in re-salvaging the modernist framework against the background of the self-recycling mainstream industry.<sup>118</sup> In many ways these arguments recall Svetlana Boym’s distinctions between the restorative and reflective nostalgia. For Boym, restorative nostalgia “manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time.”<sup>119</sup> Restorative nostalgia stresses the long lost objects of desire and involves a truth quest or an aggressive attempt in reinstating status quo. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, concentrates on the practices of reminiscence; its focus is “not on recovery of what is perceived to be an absolute truth but on the meditation on history and passage of time.”<sup>120</sup> I will be revisiting these distinctions in relation to Tsai Ming-liang’s *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* at the end of the next chapter, largely focusing on reflective nostalgia. In

the meantime, however, I want to briefly turn to the ways in which Tarr's films evoke nostalgia through several stylistic idiosyncrasies.

There are two general aesthetic approaches prevalent across nostalgia films that elicit nostalgic feelings. According to Marc Le Sueur, the first method is "surface realism" and "period detail," or in other words genre iconography (setting, mise-en-scène and costume) that help the films establish a sense of authenticity as well as thematic verisimilitude in relation to the actual historical period.<sup>121</sup> The second aesthetic stance appropriated by nostalgia films, according to Le Sueur is "deliberate archaism," which "entails the artist's desire to recreate not only the look and feel of the period in question but to give his artifact the appearance of art from that distant time."<sup>122</sup> As such, deliberate archaism is more a stylistic method of evoking nostalgia in film than it is thematic and visual. As opposed to pro-filmic elements such as mise-en-scène or non-diegetic inserts such as music, deliberate archaism shapes the whole structure of the artwork by drawing its resemblance to that specific past through non-representational codes. In this respect, deliberate archaism is also self-reflexive, as it demonstrates the artists' knowledge of artistic conventions from the historical period in focus. Le Sueur notes that several French New Wave directors such as Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut "incorporated ancient stylisms such as iris shots and fade outs," while "Laszlo Kovacs went to great lengths to achieve a 30's look in *Paper Moon* [1973] by shooting and developing the film in black and white," which at the time was extremely unusual.<sup>123</sup> Christine Sprengler, on the other hand, reintroduces deliberate archaism as an aesthetic strategy in light of more contemporary examples: Martin Scorsese's digital imitation of the two-strip Technicolor palette in *The Aviator* (2004), Steven Soderbergh's use of authentic 1940s camera lenses and shooting with a single camera in *The Good German* (2006) and finally Todd Haynes' use of colour grading in *Far From Heaven* (2002) reminiscent of the post-war melodramas of Douglas Sirk.<sup>124</sup> A final example of deliberate archaism can also be observed in Pablo Larrain's *No* (2012), which depicts the public referendum that took place in Chile in 1988 that would determine the future of Pinochet's military dictatorship. The film focuses on an advertising executive who is consulted by the opposing political party to mount an effective advertising campaign that would eventually win the public opinion and change the course of Chile's history. While much of the mise-en-scène corresponds to this

historical period, the film is furthermore visualized by an “Eighties” appearance through its full-frame aspect ratio and colour grading reminiscent of Betacam technology.

Deliberate archaism is a useful concept to approach Slow Cinema because it reveals other non-representational codes that can invoke feelings of nostalgia. While the study of nostalgic devices in film encompasses many aspects of visual codes including colour, costume, period casting and props, a stylistic and temporal device such as the long take has been largely overlooked. As such, I argue that the long take functions as deliberate archaism in terms of evoking nostalgic reverberations towards art cinema’s historicity. Christine Sprengler, for example, views deliberate archaism “as a form of pastiche that involves self-conscious simulations as well as reinterpretations of past visual styles.”<sup>125</sup> As such the elaborate long take scenes in Tarr’s films often bear comparisons to the complex long take sequences by Welles, Antonioni and Jancsó, some of which I have outlined in the first section of this chapter. In this respect, very application of the long take in such a hyperbolic and embellished manner within Tarr’s films, especially today against the exponential increases in cutting rates, appear as a sort of retro art cinema style, deliberately referring to and recovering past aesthetic conventions. At this point I should call to mind an earlier argument from the preceding chapter, in which Mark Betz recovers the “parametric mode of narration,” initiated by David Bordwell in reference to “isolated filmmakers and fugitive films.”<sup>126</sup> You will recall that Betz pointed towards a belated reappearance of (modernist) parametric films that emerged somewhere in the late 1980s to the early 1990s, a period in which the sparse and minimalist strands of global art cinema gradually radicalized their stylistic experimentations by way of extending their bold temporal economy. I argued that parametric narration precisely describes the mode of narration often present across Slow Cinema films, in which stylistic features often overthrow conventions of narrative causality and instead replace it with an elusive application of long take and dead time, both of which dominate the film’s narrative system.



Figure 2.21 – *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000)



Figure 2.22 – *Working Class Goes to Heaven* (1971)

Yet, the long take is not the only reason why I consider Béla Tarr's films nostalgic. The previous section, for example, demonstrated Tarr's adoption of certain framing strategies often employed by art cinema directors such as Antonioni and Fassbinder. In this respect, Tarr's films frequently display visual allusions to various art cinema directors and specific films, albeit through an exaggeration of temporality and the long take. Consider the scene in *Werckmeister Harmonies* where the angry mob is marching along the street (See Figure 2.21). The scene itself recalls Elio Petri's *The Working Class Goes to Heaven* (1971), a political film that similarly begins with the march of workers through a relatively lengthy street (See Figure 2.22). Both scenes are depicted through a low angle camera position that looks down on the marching workers and the slight diagonal tilt emphasizes the depth of field, or the extent to which the queue stretches out to the background. While the frame grabs resemble each other, the similarity remains as an allusion, not a direct imitation. While Petri cuts together images of the workers' faces and displays their miserable conditions through editing, Tarr's camera simply moves around the workers throughout the sequence, at times closing in on particular faces, at times through an elevated position.

Finally, Tarr's films evoke discourses of nostalgia because they are persistently shot through black-and-white cinematography. The stark monochrome image is central to the uniquely dark atmosphere that Tarr creates in these films and its consistency recalls other black-and-white art films varying from Italian Neorealism to the modernist waves of the 1960s. The historical effect of the black-and-white image is not coincidental, as Paul Grainge suggests the monochrome image "is first and foremost a documentary aesthetic," in the sense that it is able to distinguish "news from chronicle"

and “function as a visual signature of history and historical meaning.”<sup>127</sup> Many films commonly use the black-and-white image to evoke a sense of “pastness.” Yet, as a complex representational code, the monochrome image bears other functions. “Whether for its graphic quality, its dependence on light and shade, its association with gritty realism or aesthetic refinement,” Grainge writes, “black and white has specific properties that have been taken up in various genre forms and film traditions,” for instance, it has “a tonal quality that is often used quite deliberately in genres like film noir.”<sup>128</sup> In this respect, the documentary aesthetic is merely one effect of monochrome cinematography. Films such as *Pi* (1998) and *Sin City* (2005) use its graphic quality to create an atmosphere of insecurity, tension and uncertainty. Its use in various drama films, for example in *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005) or more recently in *Much Ado About Nothing* (2012), appear as chic and stylish, connotations of the monochrome image for which decades of photojournalism practices are responsible. While these functions can be ascribed to Tarr’s use of the black-and-white image, I argue that this resolute aesthetic also bears a geopolitical explanation.

In this respect, Tarr’s films can be situated alongside dissident filmmakers that originate from the other side of Europe, namely the Eastern part of the continent. Beginning their work in the state-controlled film industries of the Soviet Union or its many satellite countries, these filmmakers deploy a very specific depiction of life beyond the Iron Curtain. Comprised of directors as varying as Kira Muratova, Aleksei German, Vitali Kanevsky, Aleksandr Sokurov, Šarūnas Bartas and György Fehér, this regional tradition of filmmaking aims to paint a miserable, desolate and bleak representation of life under Soviet rule. In addition to a mutual interest in narrative subject, these filmmakers, some of whom embrace Slow Cinema aesthetics, can also be grouped together in regards to their experimentation in monochrome photography, either in the form of high-contrast black-and-white or mellow tones of sepia. Dina Iordanova, for example, draws attention to the “vision of metaphoric greyness,” which “powerfully asserted [life as] colourless, monotonous and dull, murky and ominous.”<sup>129</sup> As in my examples earlier, Tarr’s films often take this aesthetic feature to the extreme by eliminating shades of grey and white (see Figures 2.23-2.24; which are actual frame grabs without black borders). In these scenes, the framing reveals little information to the spectator and the darker shades literally dominate the image. As such, the pitch-

black areas of the frame occlude meaning and escape narrative comprehension, while rendering the films absurd – a fundamental condition of humanity divorced from a meaning of life and a frequently exercised aspect of Slow Cinema, which I will explore further in the following chapter in relation to Tsai Ming-liang.



**Figure 2.23** – *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000)



**Figure 2.24** – *Turin Horse* (2011)

This section has therefore explicated the concept of nostalgia as a crucial element of the aesthetic experience present in Slow Cinema films. While nostalgia in period films has often been considered conservative for critics writing in ideological-symptomatic mode (e.g. Fredric Jameson), I argue that its relevance to Slow Cinema reveals a historical genealogy of modernist cinema, characterized best as a tradition of filmmaking dedicated to formal experimentation and aesthetic innovation. As such, Béla Tarr's use of the long take and dead time often carry a retro-style outlook that alludes towards previous art films and function as deliberate archaism, a method in evoking nostalgia that I will briefly revisit in the next chapter. Yet, the long take represents only one dimension of Tarr's relationship to Slow Cinema. In this respect, this section has briefly examined the role of black-and-white cinematography and situated Tarr's work in relation to a geopolitical grouping of filmmakers that similarly portray a pessimistic vision of life under the Soviet Union. This grouping largely rests on the application of monochrome imagery, but for reasons of space and relevance has remained sketchy at best. However, similarities between directors as varying as Sokurov, Tarr, Bartas and German testify to stylistic variations and geographical differences frequently present in Slow Cinema. While the relationship between local or regional traditions and Slow Cinema as an international style has not been emphasized

in this chapter, the next chapters will examine this relationship through Taiwanese and Turkish cinemas respectively.

## **2.7 – Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the various stylistic modalities of Slow Cinema by focusing on the analysis of its dominant formal principles. I have argued that Béla Tarr's use of the long take and dead time contributes to a mode of narration that emulates the movements of the flâneur and emphasizes sheer observation. Furthermore, Tarr's elaborate strategies in framing and duration frequently recall modernist directors that employed similar practices. In this respect, Tarr's films exercise nostalgia for modernist filmmaking through adopting techniques that flaunt ambiguity and aim to overwhelm, suppress and dissipate narrative action. My investigation of these techniques began with a reassessment of the evolution of the long take. For André Bazin, the long take constitutes an aesthetic of reality that liberates the spectator from the impositions of editing, while for Gilles Deleuze long takes confront the spectator with images that express temporality in its pure state. Yet, I have suggested that the aesthetic experience felt in Slow Cinema films is based on slightly different effects and offered other functions of the long take. For example, from the filmmaker's perspective, the application of the long take due to its complicated mechanical procedures presents a technical challenge, while from the spectator's point of view it manifests emotions of fascination and admiration in the face of such technical virtuosity. Following this study, I have examined dead time within the broader conceptual framework of dedramatization and outlined the relationship between story and narrative action in terms of their respective pacing. Navigating through Gerard Genette's taxonomy of narrative tense, I have argued that the descriptive pause manifests a suitable container for quintessential Slow Cinema moments, some of which I have closely examined here.

For example, I have analyzed scenes from *Werckmeister Harmonies* and argued that the slow camera movements simulate the movements of the flâneur and encourage the spectator in engaging with the profilmic space, an engagement that is further reinforced through Tarr's specific framing strategies. These stylistic tendencies

altogether embody the ways in which Tarr's films elicit nostalgic feelings towards modernist art cinema and, as such, I have offered a brief explication on the ways in which nostalgia as a phenomenon has been treated by film theory. Whilst for critics like Fredric Jameson nostalgia functions as a conservative aesthetic mode, within the context of Slow Cinema I argue that nostalgia not only laments the modernist project of the 1960s, but through devices such as deliberate archaism offers newer and fresher strategies of representation as well as revealing geopolitical links. Tarr's employment of black-and-white cinematography, for example, positions his work within the context of East Central European directors that portray their respective cultures with a variety of stylistic tendencies, but nevertheless experiment with monochrome imagery to establish an atmosphere best described as grotesque, absurd, poetic and brutally realistic. The complex matrix of filmmakers adopting similar strategies emphasizes Slow Cinema's role within negotiations taking place between local practices and global demands. The next chapters will endeavour in detailing these discourses by interrogating the ways in which filmmakers re-appropriate, recycle and subvert local traditions of filmmaking and tailor them for an international aesthetic largely disseminated through international film festivals. Tsai Ming-liang, for instance, largely builds his work from the New Taiwan Cinema, an inward looking cultural movement that gained success at international film festivals in the wake of the diminishing European art cinema scene. Yet, the manner in which Tsai adopts conventions of absurd humour places him alongside a distinctive artistic trajectory.



## CHAPTER 3

### **Less is Absurd: Humour in the Films of Tsai Ming-liang**

This chapter explores the films of Tsai Ming-liang who entered the global art cinema scene in the early 1990s, quickly achieving respect at international film festivals. I argue that Tsai's presence on the international film festival circuit can be attributed to a complex interaction between the historical legacy of the New Taiwan Cinema movement and his films, which incongruously display aspects of contrasting genre conventions, minimalist and camp aesthetics and a sense of humour best described as absurd. If the principal constituent to Béla Tarr's long take aesthetic is movement, then for Tsai it is stillness. In fact, the narrative pacing in Tsai's films often pushes the limits of Slow Cinema through a staunch interest in the retardation of narrative structure. While acknowledging the difficulties of approaching Tsai's work from a Western "modernist" perspective, this chapter nevertheless examines Tsai's films part of a broader Slow Cinema framework in which elements of narrative are offset against other aspects of visual storytelling, most of which are directly inherited from the Theatre of the Absurd movement as well as other art films of the 1960s. As such, following a brief exposition of the historical New Taiwan Cinema movement, this chapter investigates the ways in which Tsai appropriates Slow Cinema aesthetics to fashion an absurdist view of contemporary culture.

#### **3.1 – Introduction**

Emerging to international attention with films in the early 1990s, Tsai Ming-liang has received a great deal of critical and scholarly attention, in contrast to other Slow Cinema directors. Part of the reason for this interest is the numerous ways in which his films received institutional support. On the one hand, Tsai entered onto the international film festival stage at a time when films from East Asian cultures displayed newer waves of national cinemas and his films thus enjoyed critical attention in journalistic publications. On the other hand, Tsai's work coincides with an emerging scholarly

interest in transnational Chinese cinemas, a complex conceptual framework that is at once both an area of cinema and a field of study.<sup>1</sup> While providing an exhaustive survey of this critical literature is beyond the scope of this chapter, the initial scholarly work on Tsai can be broadly divided into two major tendencies that moderately overlap in their methodology. Firstly, a number of critical texts regard Tsai's films in relation to the discourses of modernity, in essence arguing the ways in which Tsai's films are representations of global post-modern malaise and reflect the Taiwanese experience of negotiating the dialectics of tradition and modernity.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, critics have examined Tsai's films by investigating the voyeuristic portrayal of gender and sexuality, discussing the ways in which the politics of these representations are representative of the emerging social and political discourses in Taiwan.<sup>3</sup> Both of these critical tendencies, however, adopt formal analysis to investigate the ways in which the films relate to political or cultural discourses. Furthermore, Tsai's work presents a compelling case study for auteurist interpretations, because the films are built on recurrent elements of visual imagery, thematic obsessions, symbols and a narrative arc that virtually connects all individual stories.

Despite an abundant number of journal articles and book chapters, there is still no book length study of this unique director, whose films regularly invite comparative analyses to other major modernist art cinema directors (Antonioni, Fassbinder, Tati, and so on) often based on hollow and perfunctory thematic or stylistic readings. In this respect, Emilie Yueh-yu and Darrell William Davis argue that the present literature is unable to identify why Tsai is "special, funny and entertaining," chiefly because the modernist framework alone is not sufficient to offer a comprehensive account for the films' varying degrees of incongruity – in other words, the marriage of minimalist and camp aesthetics, evocations of genre conventions within an art cinema context and simultaneous references to François Truffaut, King Hu and Mandarin pop music.<sup>4</sup> As such, in what is perhaps a singular example across the critical literature on Tsai, Jean Ma takes the films as a vehicle for critical inspection that takes as "its starting point a rethinking of the concatenated categories of modernism, art cinema, and national cinema in view of the transformations these categories have undergone between the post-war period and the present moment."<sup>5</sup> In other words, while Tsai's work functions both as a mirror that reflects the contemporary ills of Taiwanese society and a capitalist

commodity exchanged between festival organizations and their audiences, at the same time these films challenge the legitimacy of the very conceptual frameworks that ought to define them in the first place. The incongruity that is doubly present across the films and their critical and scholarly reception is, therefore, a fundamental element of my approach to understanding Tsai's films.

In this respect, the main objective of this chapter is to contextualize Tsai within the broader Slow Cinema tradition. While many articles emphasize Tsai's use of the long take aesthetic, very few explicitly investigate his films in relation to Slow Cinema.<sup>6</sup> Generally, however, Tsai's films are often considered in relation to the ways in which the international film festivals exhibit works from Asia that adopt minimalist aesthetics, a tendency that originates in the New Taiwan Cinema movement in the early 1980s and intensifies throughout the 1990s. Therefore, in the first section of this chapter, I argue that the emergence of New Taiwan Cinema and its popularity with international film festivals have largely functioned as a springboard for Tsai's entry into a global exchange between the local and the international. The second section closely examines Tsai's films in terms of their production history, which demonstrates an evolution from locally funded films into transnational art films determined and designed to be festival hits. Meanwhile, textually Tsai's films display a negotiation between genre subversion, minimalism and camp aesthetics that all the more sustain his presence within this international circuit for its provocative, ambiguous and elusive qualities.

A sense of obscurity largely defines the narrative form of Tsai's films. In my examination, I argue that the films are composed of an episodic structure interrupted with recurrent images of symbols, visual motifs and/or situations that defy ordinary forms of engagement through a persistent use of long take and dead time. Such sequences ultimately delay narrative comprehension and amount to absurd moments that frustrate audience expectations as well as challenge conceptions of temporal economy. As such, while these aesthetic features characterize Tsai's main body of work, a deadpan sense of humour pervades the majority of these representations. I examine these moments of black humour through the lens of the Theatre of the Absurd and discern its influences on Slow Cinema, namely the rejection of the spoken word and reliance on visual storytelling methods. As such, the Absurd offers a newer perspective

on Tsai's work, mainly because its logic depends on the existence of incongruity initiated by the aesthetic properties of the films. Following a brief foray into the theory of humour, I also outline the ways in which Tsai's films reference the cinema of Jacques Tati and examine the logic as well as the formal structure upon which absurd humour operates. The final section in this chapter aims at elaborating on the exchange between Tsai's nostalgic overtones in his films and critical practices of cinephilia, both of which are anxiously concerned with the future of cinema.

### **3.2 – New Taiwan Cinema and the Rise of the “Festival Film”**

This section aims to provide a historical background to the local cinematic traditions from which Tsai Ming-liang emerged. As Tsai is often regarded within part of a belated second wave of art cinema directors emerging from Taiwan, I want to establish the aesthetic, stylistic and thematic norms and features of the New Taiwan Cinema movement. Preceding the movement, cinema in Taiwan was dominated by escapist genre pictures produced under the control of the military dictatorship that ruled the nation between 1949 and 1987. In the 1970s, the state film production company commissioned a series of films that aspired for a realistic portrayal of Taiwanese society, but the films themselves remained ideological vessels of the military dictatorship. New Taiwan Cinema, however, took on this role by recasting realist aesthetics and for a decade stormed international film festivals by its originality and ability to engage with local cultural specificities. By the end of the 1980s, however, the movement lost its popularity with Taiwanese audiences and only a handful of directors continued their work by mainly catering to international film festivals. In many ways Tsai Ming-liang entered the global circuit at this point and as we shall see in the next section, his films became a crucial part of this exchange between Taiwan and international film festivals. As such, the New Taiwan Cinema movement not only provided an aesthetic influence for Tsai, but also provided an institutional background that helped secure his global presence.

State authorities largely governed Taiwan's cinema industry since it was a nation ruled by military dictatorship for decades. Upon Japan's defeat in World War II,

the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) relocated to Taiwan and reclaimed the island as part of Chinese sovereignty. Military rule was established in 1947 and remained in power until late 1980s, in which state exercised complete control over the exhibition aspects of the motion picture industry. Initially, KMT produced and funded projects that supported the Nationalist campaign by exhibiting works depicting anti-Communist/Japanese sentiment and heroic narratives, but over time the party focused on developing the economy and rebuild a national identity.<sup>7</sup> The state film production company Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC) was founded by mergers between state companies and remained the major and most influential film company in Taiwan's film industry.<sup>8</sup> As such, the CMPC not only initiated the New Taiwan Cinema in the early-1980s through omnibus features (films composed of several episodes, each directed by a different filmmaker), but was also responsible for producing Tsai's first films in the early-1990s. Before the New Taiwan Cinema movement broke and during a long period between 1954 and 1969, however, Taiwan's film industry was dominated by escapist genre productions severely controlled by censorship regulations, but nevertheless secured a large amount of export to other East Asian film markets (Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia etc.).<sup>9</sup> Talent from Hong Kong was imported to increase quality of production, which included the renowned martial-arts filmmaker King Hu, who directed a series of influential films. As we shall see later, Hu's work produced a lasting impression on Tsai's cinema and Tsai himself consistently referred back to this "golden-age" of filmmaking throughout his work in nostalgic overtones.

While the late 1960s saw a "golden-age" of cinema, a series of political and diplomatic crises deeply affected Taiwan in the early 1970s. In 1971 the United Nations recognized the People's Republic of China as a legitimate representative of all China, thus invalidating the KMT government's member status as well as territorial claims on the mainland, resulting in the loss of diplomatic relations with numerous states. "Amidst political setbacks and public anxieties," writes Yingjin Zhang, "state studios sought legitimacy and recognition in the fictional world by staging anti-Japanese war films and historical dramas."<sup>10</sup> The Healthy Realism genre, which was introduced in 1963 but intensified later in the 1970s, was an alternative solution to these anxieties. Pursuing a realistic depiction of Taiwanese family structures and a focus on the traditions present

within rural lifestyles, Healthy Realism, according to Zhang, resembled the Soviet socialist realism, emphasizing a certain state-controlled and tailored idealism that perpetrated all manners of representation.<sup>11</sup> As such, despite the similarities to Italian Neorealism in its use of on-location cinematography and non-professional acting, its didactic idealism in narrative focus and the lack of ability in probing social questions largely contradicted its realistic project. Guo-Juin Hong, for example, argues that the rigid styles and conventions of Healthy Realism in pre-1980 Taiwan cinema paradoxically disassociates itself from the social realities of Taiwan, hence leaving a gap in audience engagement as well as a creative and aesthetic opportunity for Taiwan New Cinema filmmakers to emerge and reconnect with certain national and cultural realities. Hong writes: “New Taiwan Cinema since the early 1980s re-politicizes realist aesthetics by a progressive reinvention of film aesthetics inherited from Healthy Realism” and as such these filmmakers were largely “concerned with cinematic time and space related to nation and modernity.”<sup>12</sup> In this respect connecting with the roots of Taiwanese culture through a realistic portrayal of its spatial and temporal structures was the first and foremost objective of the New Taiwan Cinema.

The New Taiwan Cinema movement officially began with consecutive releases of two omnibus films by CMPC: *In Our Time* (1982) and *Sandwich Man* (1983), both of which contained films directed by a younger generation of filmmakers, including the now well-known Edward Yang and Hou Hsiao-hsien. Both films were critically and financially successful for their departure from “the heroic and melodramatic narratives characteristic of their predecessors” and according to Zhang “represent two focal areas of New Taiwan Cinema,” namely the realistic portrayals of village and city life.<sup>13</sup> While the rural lifestyle was depicted as an innocent site where “indigenous cultural practices are increasingly threatened by modernization and urbanization,” Zhang writes, urban centres were “depicted as an alienating place where individuals have gradually drifted away from their childhood dreams and are now desperately searching for their lost identity and a meaning to their life.”<sup>14</sup> Hou Hsiao-hsien’s early films, for example, examined the ways in which modernity as a cultural discourse permeated the rural landscape and altered centuries of traditions.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, New Taiwan Cinema was a collective attempt in exploring Taiwanese history, culture and identity by way of examining contemporary social problems in a manner that was not possible in earlier

cinematic traditions. In terms of film aesthetics, New Taiwan Cinema was in many ways a combination of social realist and modernist tendencies.<sup>16</sup> On the one hand, there was a deliberate attempt in depicting society in its authentic state through careful attention to class, gender, setting and dialect and creation of socially accurate characters with realistic, contemporary problems was paramount for rendering these representations. On the other hand, these portrayals were shaped by modernist devices such as fragmented narratives with various temporal manipulations and open-ended conclusions, a self-reflexive use of film style and attention to the juxtaposition between image and sound. In the next section we will see how Tsai Ming-liang appropriates some of the basic presumptions of New Taiwan Cinema into his own, idiosyncratic style.

Despite critical attention and initial popularity with audiences, the number of New Taiwan Cinema productions decreased and by 1987 the movement had halted mainly because distribution companies did not accept or fund these films. New Taiwan Cinema had become intellectually demanding and alienated the audiences, resulting in a steep decline in box office revenues that pushed some directors to switch careers by working in television and advertising.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, New Taiwan Cinema left behind an important legacy. Guo-Juin Hong suggests that New Taiwan Cinema served four important functions: the films helped “develop and re-examine Taiwan’s culture,” “broke diplomatic barriers and [promoted] Taiwan’s image,” “re-established confidence in its local audiences,” and finally found a “new critic system” that helped create “a distinct cultural identity.”<sup>18</sup> At this stage, Peggy Chiao Hsiung-ping was an instrumental film critic, who created a critical discourse in Taiwan by introducing key terms and concepts such as national cinema, new wave and auterism and henceforth established New Taiwan Cinema and its directors as a legitimate movement in the eyes of local Taiwanese audiences. Moreover, her liaison with other exponents of Chinese-language cinema (such as Chris Berry and Tony Rayns) as well as festival professionals enabled the international distribution of Taiwan New Cinema films.<sup>19</sup> In short, while New Taiwan Cinema began to attract ever fewer cinemagoers, some of its directors slowly gained acknowledgement from international audiences through the establishment of various global networks. Part of this process depended on the lifting of martial law in 1987, which eased censorship regulations and enabled Taiwanese directors to portray

infamous incidents that, over the course of history, obtained taboo status. Hou Hsiao-hsien responded to these policy changes by quickly filming *City of Sadness* (1989), which portrayed the notorious events of February 28, 1947 (also known as the 228 Incident).<sup>20</sup> The film was praised in the Venice Film Festival of that year, earned the Golden Lion award – the first ever for a Taiwanese film – and consolidated Hou’s status as a significant contemporary director as well as raising awareness of other Taiwanese productions for the future.<sup>21</sup> Prior to Venice, Hou was already recognized as an important filmmaker with films widely circulated in European film festivals, but the prestigious win in Venice elevated his status within the pantheon of art cinema directors.

International film festivals played a crucial role in the rise of New Taiwan Cinema and in this respect it shares common ground with Slow Cinema. Many of the initial New Taiwan Cinema films were circulated in various film festivals and helped establish Taiwanese cinema’s long-lasting reputation. As Chia-chi Wu argues the success of New Taiwan Films in international film festivals led to a type of national legitimization in the global stage: while Taiwan’s status as a nation-state was previously hampered in the United Nations, the dissemination of New Taiwan Cinema films through festival programming recuperated its status as “national.”<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the various successes of Taiwanese filmmakers on the international level were “in tune with the economic boom of East Asia in the 1980s, when festivals started to turn to East Asian films as their staple to distinguish their offerings from other festivals” and as such, these mechanisms were largely “responsible for the emergence of Taiwan as a “national” in international film culture.”<sup>23</sup> Hou Hsiao-hsien and Edward Yang became major figures in this process and, as we shall see in later sections, the 1990s gave birth to a younger generation of filmmakers, who were “exclusively oriented to international festival competition and art cinema distribution,” due to the lack of opportunity and Hollywood dominance at the domestic market.<sup>24</sup> As such, by the 1990s, New Taiwan Cinema ceased to be a local or national event, but its legacy was apparent in certain films circulated around the globe.

The success of New Taiwan Cinema at international film festivals coincided with a steady decline in European art cinema throughout the 1980s and in some respects



East Asian films replaced the lack of quality European art films. The years 1983 and 1984 were in particular the turning point for this transformation. During this period and up to the end of the 1980s, European cinema experienced significant losses: the deaths of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, François Truffaut and Andrei Tarkovsky; filmmakers who retired for health and other reasons, such as Ingmar Bergman, Michelangelo Antonioni and Robert Bresson; and those who briefly change course in their careers or lose touch with their earlier work, such as Wim Wenders, Werner Herzog, Federico Fellini, Miklós Jancsó and Bernardo Bertolucci.<sup>25</sup> In other words, the impact of modernist European cinema was slowly fading away and beginning to be marginalized against newer, fresher and popular genres of European cinema. In this transition period, European and international film festivals turned to other exotic geographical areas for groundbreaking art films, most prominently Taiwan, China and later Iran.<sup>26</sup> New Taiwan Cinema took advantage of this situation and Hou's win at Venice was, perhaps, the culmination of the process. Edward Yang was another important figure, whose *The Terrorizers* (1986) and *A Brighter Summer Day* (1991) stormed Locarno and Tokyo International Film Festivals respectively by taking major awards.<sup>27</sup> The Fifth Generation Chinese filmmakers (such as Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige and Tian Zhuangzhuang) also rose to prominence throughout the 1980s.<sup>28</sup> The second leg of this "Asian wave" occurred in the mid-to-late 1990s as younger generation of filmmakers from China, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and Iran followed respectively and closely interacted with Slow Cinema, in which Tsai Ming-liang took an important role (I shall elaborate on this second wave at the end of the next section). In the meantime, however, Chinese Sixth Generation filmmakers such as Jia Zhangke and Wang Xiaoshuai showcased their dissident films in film festivals and their struggles with Chinese censorship regulations popularized their work even further.<sup>29</sup> As such, international film festivals took a major role in the distribution of art cinema and they became the sites in which exchanges between regional traditions and global audiences took place and cultivated newer forms of cinephilia. As this thesis aims to demonstrate, the culmination of this process was the dissemination of the Slow Cinema discourse at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

New Taiwan Cinema films were easily accepted by European and international cinephiles as they often resembled European modernist films in terms of their use of film style and narrative form. Guo-Juin Hong argues that "narrative ellipses and stylistic

ambiguity” are conventions of New Taiwan Cinema during this period and while Hou’s use of the long take functioned as an “intensified cinematic configuration of the temporal-spatial relationship between the characters and their environment,” Yang’s incorporation of a similar aesthetic into the modern urban environment, enhanced by the use of open-ended narrative structure, was often dubbed “European, Western and/or bourgeois” style by several critics.<sup>30</sup> Some of these aesthetic features, most prominently the use of episodic structures in narratives, will be detailed in the later sections and compared to the ways in which Tsai used them. Furthermore, Yang’s films displayed a critical view of consumer society and modernity, or in other words the films often suggested that adoption of Westernized value systems resulted in the loss of traditional cultural values of its characters and led critics to dub Yang as a modernist filmmaker who uses cinema as political critique.<sup>31</sup> As such, in terms of film style and narrative form, New Taiwan Cinema functions as a bridge between 1960s modernist art cinema and contemporary Slow Cinema.

This section aimed at providing a brief historical outlook of New Taiwan Cinema as well as explicating its prominent aesthetic features. New Taiwan Cinema emerged as a strong contrast to the escapist national film industry of Taiwan and acquired significant success within international film festivals throughout the 1980s. Re-appropriating the “Healthy Realist” style inherited from the state-controlled film industry with modernist aesthetics, Taiwanese filmmakers left a cinematic legacy that probed questions of Taiwanese society, culture and history. Paradoxically, such local concerns attracted the attention of Western audiences and enabled the circulation of Taiwanese films on a global scale at a time when the European art cinema was in decline. As such, the New Taiwan Cinema movement provided an aesthetic as well as an institutional background for the rise of Slow Cinema in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The next section focuses on the ways in which Tsai Ming-liang entered the international film festival circuit and maintained a strong presence in the global art cinema stage by adopting and to a certain extent exploiting provocative aesthetic strategies.

### 3.3 – Tsai Ming-liang: Between Camp and Minimalist Aesthetics

After this brief exposition of New Taiwan Cinema, the current section concentrates on the work of Tsai Ming-liang. Tsai is often considered to be a part of the second wave of art cinema directors that emerged following the decline of New Taiwan Cinema in the late 1980s. Born in Malaysia in 1957, Tsai came to Taiwan when he was twenty to study drama at the Chinese Cultural University of Taiwan. Upon his graduation, he spent the 1980s directing and scriptwriting in the television industry as well as producing stage plays.<sup>32</sup> As an artist he was an outsider to Taiwanese culture, but this enabled him to discern certain cultural specificities of the island nation. In this respect, a significant parallel can be drawn between Tsai and Hou Hsiao-hsien, who was born in the mainland China and came to Taiwan at an early age, as well as Edward Yang, who spent years in the United States working as a software engineer.<sup>33</sup> Similar to the New Taiwan Cinema movement, Tsai's cinema, especially his early work, consisted of an inward look at the island's contemporary society. However, with considerable success at international film festivals, Tsai's films took on a different role in global art cinema movements as opposed to other Taiwanese filmmakers. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Tsai primarily catered to international film festival audiences through films that provocatively depicted sexual themes and chiefly relied on ambiguous imagery through an exaggerated application of the long take. As such, this section explores Tsai's filmography through three distinctive phases by focusing on the films' production history, subversion of genre conventions and camp aesthetics.

Tsai's whole filmography is, in essence, a continuous narrative depicting the life, struggles and relationships of a character named Hsiao-kang, who is in effect, a screen alter ego played by Lee Kang-sheng. While cast searching for one of his television films, Tsai coincidentally met Lee in front of a video arcade and convinced him to play the Hsiao-kang role, a collaboration that lasted to this day across several television films, nine features and two shorts. This complicated, albeit continuous filmography can be divided into three broad phases. The first phase consists of the so-called Taipei Trilogy, namely *Rebels of the Neon God* (*Qing shao nian nuo zha*, 1993), *Vive L'Amour* (*Ai qing wan sui*, 1994) and *The River* (*He liu*, 1997), in which Tsai sets the main story arch revolving around Hsiao-kang, a lonely adolescent alienated from

society who wanders often aimlessly across Taipei. The films focus on Hsiao-kang's ambivalent relationship to his family and his accidental affairs with other working class characters scattered around various parts of the city. *Rebels of the Neon God*, for instance, portrays Hsiao-kang as an expelled student, who in his wanderings in the city develops a troubled and bizarre relationship to his family as well as to a rival/idol street thug. Furthermore, *Vive L'Amour* depicts Hsiao-kang finding shelter in an empty apartment, which turns out to be the very place which its real estate agent uses as a sexual retreat with her accidental lover. As such, an absurd menage-a-trois of alienated characters unknowingly share the same apartment building, which results in dead-pan irony: while longing for social contact, all characters are unaware of their proximity to each other. *The River*, on the other hand, portrays Hsiao-kang's dysfunctional family in the midst of their sexual, social and physical depression. The film begins by Hsiao-kang contracting a mysterious disease from a river, which disables his ability to move his neck, while his father is obsessed with rain ruining his apartment. In a visit to a gay sauna in the hope of healing his pain, Hsiao-kang performs fellatio on his father, who secretly frequents the baths. In the meantime, the mother has an incestuous desire towards her son and tries to repress her desires to no avail. As I will discuss later, such sexually provocative plot lines led many critics to claim that Tsai's films were aiming to capture international festival attention.

The Taipei Trilogy films were largely produced by grants from local and national initiatives, but their success at the international film festival stage later enabled Tsai to draw upon alternative resources. For his first features, however, Tsai relied heavily on The Domestic Film Guidance Fund, which was established by Taiwanese authorities in 1989 to revitalize the film industry.<sup>34</sup> Tsai's first four films received NT \$28 million from the fund, but the domestic revenues of these features rarely broke even with their production costs.<sup>35</sup> *Vive L'Amour*, for instance made only NT \$11 million in its Taiwanese release, but after winning the Golden Lion in Venice later that year its exhibition rights were sold to Italy for US \$150,000.<sup>36</sup> *Vive L'Amour's* success at Venice was critical for Tsai's career and, as we shall see in later sections, all of his future films were screened at major festivals, receiving major awards and were in large part co-produced or co-financed by mainly European production and distribution companies. *The River*, for instance, earned a Silver Bear Award at the Berlin Film

Festival and was widely exhibited at other international film festivals. However, there was another Taiwanese resource that Tsai collaborated with. The film critic Peggy Chiao created the production company Arc Light along with the director Xu Xiaoming, which aimed at producing “artful films with both popular appeal and international sales potential.”<sup>37</sup> The company had financial backing from France and included a number of talented technicians scouted from Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China. One of their earliest projects was Tsai’s fourth feature *The Hole* (Dong, 1998), which was part of a series of one-hour films commemorating the 21<sup>st</sup> century commissioned by the French-German television channel ARTE.<sup>38</sup> This collaboration commenced Tsai’s second phase in which his interaction with French production companies and international film festivals intensified.

By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Tsai was making films exclusively for international film festival audiences backed by French production companies. In other words, his methods of filmmaking were significantly altered, but he became one of the major figures of Taiwanese art cinema along with Hou Hsiao-hsien, who at this stage had also began co-productions with France and Edward Yang, who after his enormously successful *Yi Yi* (2000) passed away. Tsai’s second phase of films nevertheless carried on a similar sense of narrative trajectory with its stock characters and thematic obsessions. In fact, all of these films dealt with generic issues such as urban alienation and dysfunctional families at one level of their narrative structures, but on a larger framework, each film was formed of a selection of various themes from a pool of subjects, including homosexuality, death, boredom, depression, everyday rituals, suicide, banal activities, adolescence or environmental catastrophes. Similarly, Tsai’s casting is composed of a limited group of actors and actresses, who continuously play a more or less predefined character, in turn developing specific screen personas throughout the films. As noted earlier, Lee Kang-sheng portrayed the ubiquitous Hsiao-kang across all films, an imaginative screen alter ego as well as a muse to the director. Other recurring characters included Tien Miao, almost exclusively playing a father figure; Lu Hsiao-ling, a mother figure; Yang Kuei-mei, an attractive but lonely woman figure; Chen Shiang-chyi, another female love interest figure; and finally Chen Chao-jung, an alternative male figure. Such a repetition of themes and casting choices strongly supported Tsai’s status as an art cinema director and strengthened the

circulation of his films in international film festivals. For Mark Betz, much of Tsai's aesthetic strategies ("formalist rigor and visual style") as well as the approach to casting and characterization have their roots in European modernist art cinema.<sup>39</sup> As such, at this point Tsai was already associated with Slow Cinema and its critical discourses. As I will elaborate later in this section as well as the next, much of Tsai's visual style, imagery and narrative form became a benchmark amongst festival audiences.

Tsai's second phase also demonstrated the ways in which he manipulated genre conventions, mixing together unusual genres and notions such as the musical, the apocalyptic film, melodrama, science fiction and pornography. *The Hole*, for example, presents a world on the brink of an environmental disaster due to the spread of an unexplained disease, a narrative trope that recurs in various ways in other films. While authorities order Taipei to be evacuated, Hsiao-kang decides to stay home and begins an awkward relationship with his downstairs neighbour through a small hole accidentally drilled on his floor by a plumber. In the meanwhile, the plot is interrupted by musical interludes that humourously represent the characters' developing relationship. *The Wayward Cloud* (*Tian bian yi duo yun*, 2005) also uses musical numbers against a city suffering from water shortage. In the film, Hsiao-kang works as a pornographic actor and suddenly suffers from impotency, until he finds his long lost love Shiang-chyi. Mixing together pornography and the musical, *The Wayward Cloud* emphasizes the union of love between Hsiao-kang and Shiang-chyi, a broken relationship that was introduced earlier in *What Time is it There?* (*Ni na bian ji dian*, 2001), a co-production between the French Arena films and Tsai's own Homegreen Films and shot in both Taipei and Paris. The film portrays Hsiao-kang as a street vendor, who is going through a rough period following the death of his father. While his mother enacts various superstitious activities at home, Hsiao-kang falls in love with Shiang-chyi, who at the time is merely a client buying a watch from him and leaves Taipei for Paris to study. Unable to recover, Hsiao-kang changes all of his clocks to Parisian mean time.<sup>40</sup> As such, the film stands as a parody of melodramatic conventions and some of its humorous strategies will be detailed in later sections.

At this point I want to take a detour from Tsai's filmography and consider some thematic aspects of Tsai's films as well as elaborate on the ways in which he plays with

genre conventions. What is noticeable in this phase of Tsai's filmography is the evolution from a political activism of the Taipei trilogy into aesthetic provocativeness. The rigorous social critique of *Vive L'Amour*, for instance, is repositioned as ambiguous and provocative representations of sexuality in *The River* and *The Wayward Cloud*, which led certain Taiwanese writers to criticize Tsai for portraying taboo subjects to deliberately acquire international fame and attention.<sup>41</sup> At the centre of this transformation, however, is Tsai's self-conscious attempt at genre mixing. *The Wayward Cloud*, for example, uses conventions of musicals and pornography, whereas the mixture emphasizes the protagonist's sexual ambivalence. Typically, the plot in the musical genre is driven by a heterosexual desire aiming towards a mythological reunion between the protagonist and his/her partner. The musical numbers in between either show the obstacles the characters overcome or the situations they encounter. In *The Wayward Cloud*, however, Hsiao-kang's reluctant relationship with Shiang-chyi undermines the whole concept of the heterosexual desire as well as forming an absurd relationship between cinematic genres of the musical and pornography. Vivian Lee argues that the film's "camp sensibility," reinforced by the use of irony and parody, works towards a "queering of space," in which the moral boundaries between homosexual and heterosexual love, as well as high and low art are blurred. In many ways, Tsai provokes and dismantles traditional notions of sexuality within this film by what Lee terms as "the structuring of looks and visual parallels" (referring to sequences in which Tsai employs graphic matches between several scenes at the beginning of the film).<sup>42</sup> Towards the end, the film becomes a string of obscure metaphorical situations stripped away from any direct explanation by way of conventional narrational devices such as dialogue.

As such, *The Wayward Cloud* challenges traditional notions of the musical genre by incorporating aspects of pornography. Hsiao-kang's ambivalence towards sexuality is one that has received much attention. Vivian Lee writes that "Hsiao-kang's queerness and his *enactment* of a heterosexual phallic fantasy as farce goes beyond a mockery of the heterosexual regime toward self-assertion of sexual identity," whereas the sexual ambivalence performed by Hsiao-kang not only blurs the boundaries between being homosexual or heterosexual, but also "redirects our attention to the question of boundary, and of how the very idea of boundary is intricately connected with ingrained

practices of mass mediated culture and cultural performance.”<sup>43</sup> While the film mixes musical melodrama with less appreciated popular forms of entertainment (pornography and camp, more later on the latter), the outcome is one of subversion; a subversion not only of the boundaries of sexuality, but also the subversion of our understanding of genre hybridization. The extreme and provoking conflict between the two genres creates incongruity, which Tsai exploits for reasons of irony and parody. The last scene, for instance, in which Hsiao-kang finally breaks away from his impotency by jumping away from the porn actress and aiming towards Shiang-chyi at the moment of his orgasm, is one scene that the absurdity of the situation undermines the emotional intensity, so much so that it almost becomes a scene of self-parody.

Parodies of emotional and sentimental moments appear throughout Tsai’s films, especially in sequences in which he subverts the conventions of the Confucian family melodrama either by mocking traditional customs or replacing the lack of its existence with the presence of homosexual communities. By Confucian family melodrama, I mean the type of Chinese family drama that “focuses less on the individual in conflict with the family and more on the family as a collectivity in crisis” and whose stories are often influenced by the centuries old Confucian code of ethics that delineates the “reciprocal ethical obligations” between different subjects (such as the obligations of a son toward his father or a brother to a brother, etc.).<sup>44</sup> Tsai not only debunks these traditional Confucian doctrines and ethical values through the use of black humour, but also resolves its conflicts in unusual and completely non-mainstream ways. Referring to Ang Lee’s *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), Yeh and Davis argue that the basic conflicts of the family ethical drama are resolved in much more acceptable ways than in Tsai’s works. In *The Wedding Banquet*, the homosexual relationship of the son is “tacitly accepted” by the father, who compromises the ethics of the family in favour of having a grandchild, while in Tsai’s *The River*, the conflict within the family is resolved by homosexual incest between the father and the son.<sup>45</sup> Fran Martin, on the other hand, associates the absence of family and home in *Vive L’Amour* with the rise of Taiwan’s contemporaneous local gay and lesbian communities, called *tongzhi* (or *tongxinglian*) and argues that “the film’s paralleling of the homosexual theme with its obsessive focus on graphic, architectural, aural and metaphysical emptiness rehearses the familiar cultural logic that makes *tongxinglian* merely the cipher of heterosexual plenitude.”<sup>46</sup>



As such, themes normally associated with the traditional Confucian family melodrama are subverted through provocative depictions of sexuality that oppose other mainstream productions.

The result of subverting genre conventions in such provocative efforts raises the question whether Tsai's films relate to the concept of genre hybridity. Mark Betz, for example, writes "the generic themes of family duty and tradition and the modern conditions of alienation [...] are combined with [...] a modernist visual style so rigorous and ascetic as to hybridize the family melodrama into a new form – the art melodrama."<sup>47</sup> Yet, what exactly does hybridity mean and what are its criteria? On this subject, Janet Staiger advocates an approach that goes back to Mikhail Bakhtin, whose conception of hybridization "stresses the meeting of two different 'styles' or 'languages' derived from different cultures," a process that "permits *dialogue* between the two languages."<sup>48</sup> Betz's initial suggestion, for instance, already establishes the seeds of such a dialogue between the cultural traditions of Taiwanese family drama and modernist visual styles (with the addition of Western genre conventions such as the musical, pornography and the disaster film), all of which take place within a global network of distribution. *The Hole* and *The Wayward Cloud*, however, achieve a comic aspect through mixing these contrasting genres. In this respect, Staiger points out that the hybridized text often presents itself as a parody – most clearly visible in films such as *Back to the Future III* (1990) – and the term itself "ought be reserved for truly cross-cultural encounters."<sup>49</sup> Perhaps this last point provides another reason why Tsai's films are circulated exhaustively in international film festivals, in which such exchanges across cultures take place and are accessible to Western audiences more than to other Taiwanese counterparts.

Yet, Tsai's overall genre-bending strategies, his engagement with completely opposing genres and reformulating their conventions does not qualify him as a genre director in the traditional sense. As such, Tsai's representation of contemporary Taiwanese society through irony and parody has led scholars to indicate his close relationship to camp aesthetics, notwithstanding the visible influence of modernist filmmaking. According to Yeh and Davis, Tsai was often present in the screenings of his early films and routinely protested against local distributors and the industry that

blocked the exhibition and promotion of his films by a sentimental and “performative act,” which the authors delineate as camp sensibility.<sup>50</sup> Tsai’s films, however, are not camp in the traditional sense, exemplified in cinema by Waters and Kuchar brothers by way of “exaggeration, theatricality, parody and bitching.” It is rather a humorous (or absurd, as I will argue later in this chapter) way of depicting the Taiwanese working class behaviour in an urban context and transforming it into queer activity. This camp quality, the authors argue, emerges from Tsai’s “wily gay aesthetic” that manipulates the traditional and typical notions of ordinary peasant lives into “something queer.” Camp sensibility invites a new perspective on Tsai’s cinema, but it also entails problems in terms of redefining the camp aesthetics. Although I will address the humorous aspect of Tsai’s cinema in later sections, I want to briefly explicate the notion of camp in relation to the films of Tsai and Slow Cinema, revisit the conclusions of Yeh and Davis and reconnect these ideas to the circulation of Slow Cinema films within the global festival circuit.

The notion of camp is generally seen as a form of counter-taste that questions the validity of mainstream culture and instead honours those artworks that ostentatiously exhibit vulgarity. According to Susan Sontag, camp is “a mode of aestheticism” that displays a love for artifice, exaggeration, stylization and extravagance and ultimately challenges the preconceptions of serious high art.<sup>51</sup> As such, camp aesthetics self-consciously questions mainstream taste for its approved seriousness and instead celebrates a kitsch sensibility through adopting elements of what initially seems to be “bad art.” “Camp taste,” Sontag writes, “is by its nature possible only in affluent societies, in societies or circles capable of experiencing the psychopathology of affluence.”<sup>52</sup> In other words, camp aesthetics is an acquired taste in the sense that it is fully determined by those esoteric critics who possess the ability and knowledge to recognize its value. Barbara Klinger, for instance, argues that critics such as Susan Sontag and Andrew Ross identify camp as a specialized form of activity in the wake of the mass democratization of culture, as she writes only those “who understand the conventions of good taste well enough to enjoy deposing them, and who have the time to reconstitute themselves and/or objects in extravagant new ways, are liable to pursue the highly self-conscious and omnivorous art of camp.”<sup>53</sup> Klinger furthermore claims that camp enabled a new intellectual class of “minority elite” to emerge, which stood in

between mass culture and high culture, adopting “a dissident set of aesthetics” as marker for their cultural taste.<sup>54</sup>

In this respect, camp is related to Tsai’s works in two aspects. On the one hand, camp is a common aesthetic strategy to provoke and challenge assumptions of gender and sexuality and is as such recurrently employed by gay artists. Klinger writes, for instance, “[g]ays have often used the disaffected qualities of camp to provoke reconsideration of the social distinctions between masculine and feminine.”<sup>55</sup> As I have outlined in the introduction section, much of the scholarly attention to Tsai’s work concentrates on the ways in which he appropriates camp aesthetics in order to reveal localized questions of gender and sexuality. Yeh and Davis, on the other hand, find an odd incongruity in Tsai’s filmmaking practice mainly for its rendering of Taiwanese working class behaviour through an ascetic visual style borrowed from European modernists. As such, while Tsai depicts the lives of ordinary Taiwanese people, his films chiefly address more sophisticated audiences on an international level. In other words, as Yeh and Davis write, Tsai’s films are “at once a cultural transformation [...] and transposition from a sociocultural onto an aesthetic platform,” which I argue is precisely the global exchange located within international film festivals.<sup>56</sup>

Camp aesthetics and Tsai’s presence in international film festivals are even more present in Tsai’s third phase, which is less a historical phase than it is a group of films. First, although all of the films in the third phase portray Hsiao-kang, they are not as connected to each other in terms of narrative progress as in earlier features. Secondly, these films are mostly formed of self-reflexive intentions and as such their beginning is *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (*Bu San*, 2003), a film-within-a-film of sorts lamenting the dramatic changes in film going culture, represented through a story that takes place at a traditional, grand cinema theatre prior to its closure. Hsiao-kang only briefly appears as the projectionist towards the end of the film, emphasizing the shift from an interest in an alter-ego character towards an interest in the film theatre. Later sections will analyse *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* in detail, not only in terms of its use of episodic narrative form, but also through its use of humour and relationship to critical practices such as nostalgia and cinephilia. The third aspect of this phase is Tsai’s increasing and provocative use of ambiguity. *I Don’t Want to Sleep Alone* (*Hei yan quan*, 2006), for example, portrays a

paralyzed Hsiao-kang with Shiang-chyi looking after him and a parallel universe, which possibly is Hsiao-kang's dream world, with obscure encounters that are never made clear. Even less clear is the plot of Tsai's next feature, *Face (Visage)*, (2009), which was funded by French Ministry of Culture. There is no explicit link between the film and Tsai's earliest works and the film works mostly as a free form meditation and reflection on images and image making as well as a sentimental letter to François Truffaut. The latest film by Tsai distributed in international film festivals as well as online networks is the short *Walker* (2012), also distributed part of a portmanteau film *Beautiful 2012* (2012). *Walker* is, in many ways, the ultimate Slow Cinema film. In its span of 27 minutes, the film depicts Lee Kang-sheng in Buddhist clothing, walking extremely, tenaciously and slowly across the Taipei cityscapes, while rest of the urban centre keeps at its usual pace.

Tsai's increasing use of minimalism and Slow Cinema aesthetics has led scholars such as James Udden to locate his work within what he calls "a trendy pan-East Asian minimalism;" a wave of East Asian directors principally composed of Hong Sang-soo, Hirokazu Koreeda and Xu Xiaoming.<sup>57</sup> According to Udden, these filmmakers emerged following Hou Hsiao-hsien's success at Venice in 1989 and largely "imitated" Hou's long take aesthetic coupled with the stationary camera to gain recognition in international film festivals. While there is no doubt that these filmmakers employed an aesthetics of meandering pace, lack of dialogue, static mise-en-scène as well as a thematic focus on the effects of belated modernization and globalization in Asian societies, Udden's insinuating judgement in calling them "Hou imitators" seems slightly derogative for such a view simply overlooks the subtle differences between these directors.<sup>58</sup> Elsewhere, David Bordwell also refers to "an indigenous realist movement" arising throughout Asia in the late 1990s, in which the list of directors expands to include Kim Ki Duk, Lee Chang-dong, Nobuhiro Suwa, Shinji Aoyama, Jia Zhangke and Tian Zhuangzhuang.<sup>59</sup> Clearly the international film festivals play an incredible role in the ways in which these films are distributed across global networks. As such, Tsai's films became part of the "festival film" discourse that adopted minimalist aesthetics accompanied by an extreme use of the long take. Nevertheless, Jean Ma argues the minimalist aesthetics often found in Tsai's films were "contradicted by a sort of maximalism, instantiated in the intertextual proliferation that characterizes"

*What Time is it There?* and *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*. “The positioning of his films simultaneously within these multiple genealogies,” writes Ma, “sets Tsai apart from the filmmakers of the Taiwan New Cinema, who were at pains to distinguish their work from the formulas of popular genre cinema, and reveals the mutations undergone by art cinema in the contemporary era.”<sup>60</sup>

This section provided an overview of Tsai’s films in relation to their production history, thematic structures and visual aesthetics. Tsai’s initial films were largely supported by Taiwanese financial mechanisms, but with early success in European film festivals Tsai was able to draw external funding from transnational production companies. With the Taiwanese domestic film industry in decline, Tsai’s films regularly premiered in international film festivals and the intense circulation of his films resulted in the association of his work to a global wave of minimalism and strategies of genre mixing. Such an incongruity provoked questions of camp aesthetics in which certain critics blamed Tsai for deliberately displaying taboo subjects and sexual ambivalence in order to attain international festival presence.<sup>61</sup> This was in large part connected to the rise of a “pan-East Asian minimalism” that stormed the international film festivals during the 1990s. The next section, consequently, aims to distinguish Tsai’s work further in terms of their narrative structure and use of ambiguous symbols.

### **3.4 – Narrative Form: Episodic Structure and Symbolism**

In this section I turn my focus towards analysing Tsai’s films in terms of their narrative form. Beginning with the idea of an episodic structure, I argue that Tsai’s films are often made up of separate episodes that rarely have a causal connection between each other. While thematically connected, these episodes in themselves feature the basic requirements of narratives, albeit executed through a temporal economy that often defies and consistently delays comprehension. In addition to its stock characters, these films also consistently portray objects, symbols or visual motifs and are in many ways symptomatic of Tsai’s status as an auteur-director and sustain his presence in film festivals. These motifs, however, not only invite auteurist interpretations throughout their deliberate recurrence, but their nature of dualness in fact creates a sense of incongruity

that is best described as absurd humour, which I elaborate in detail in the following section.

One of the narrational devices that Tsai inherits from the New Taiwan Cinema is the use of episodes within the general plot structure. Hou Hsiao-hsien, for example, uses the episodic structure to divide the film into a past and a present, usually resulting in an isolation of historical events and linking their effects to life in contemporary Taiwan. In *The Puppetmaster* (1993), for example, Hou intercuts the fictional recreations of the life and struggles of Li Tianlu, a master puppeteer whose work was banned under Japanese colonization, with contemporary interviews with Li Tianlu himself, who in these instances reminisces about his past experiences. Representing separate episodes through extreme long takes and static camera angles, Hou melds together historical past with contemporary commentary.<sup>62</sup> Edward Yang, on the other hand, uses the episode structure to interrupt the plot progression with instances of flashbacks, which reveals more information and insight about the characters. Yang's first film *That Day, on the Beach* (1983), for example, portrays the meeting of two friends who were apart for years but decided to see each other to recount old memories. Their conversation develops into a complex series of flashbacks and at times flashbacks within flashbacks, some of which are not marked or motivated as such and hence interrupt the plot progression. Nevertheless, the flashback sequences recur as separate episodes that not only re-enact previous events, but also function as a means to investigate the Taiwanese cultural past. Such a historical interest in the Taiwanese past is even more explicitly visible in *A Brighter Summer Day*, which uses the episode structure to chronicle the historical events that a Taiwanese family endures throughout the 1960s.

Tsai, however, uses the episodic narrative structure for different purposes. Despite containing three to four characters in each film, Tsai rarely shows these characters together on screen at the same time. Instead, Tsai tends to portray his characters in their solitude, fulfilling their daily, banal and mundane activities commonly represented through a single long take from a fixed camera position.<sup>63</sup> The episodes in this instance turn into the study of certain characters in their privacy and against public sphere that they occupy, rather than explore the ways in which they interrelate to other characters within a social sphere. Such an aesthetic strategy results in

“the melding of the public and the private,” in the words of Kent Jones, who writes that Tsai’s “camera seems to gaze at every scene from a distance that is by turns [...] discreet, respectful, empathetic and voyeuristic.”<sup>64</sup> In other words, there is at once both an aesthetic distance between the spectator and Tsai’s characters for the manner the action is portrayed, but there is also closeness from the solitary and almost naivety of the ways in which actions unfold within these scenes. Jones suggests that this even applies to Hsiao-kang: despite playing “roughly the same autobiographical character” across these films, Hsiao-kang is at “even distance, [which] Tsai maintains from each of his characters.” This distance between the spectator and the subject operates on two premises. Firstly, by isolating events from context, it reduces narrative intelligibility or delays cause-effect relationships. Secondly, the internal incongruity of such events leads to humorous situations, which I will address in the next section. The opening sequence of *What Time Is It There?*, however, should briefly demonstrate these two points. The father (Tien Miao) prepares lunch, lights up a cigarette and calls for Hsiao-kang to join him, but after minutes of waiting decides to finish his cigarette in a terrace located at the opposite end of the room (See Figure 3.1). The next shot depicts Hsiao-kang sitting at the back of a car carrying an object wrapped in a cloth (Figure 3.2) and utters the words “Dad, we’re going through the tunnel, you have to follow us, OK?” In the next scene a funeral procession takes place (Figure 3.3), implying that the father has passed away and Hsiao-kang was in fact addressing his spirit – at which point we retrospectively realize that the object Hsiao-kang carried in the earlier shot was as an urn. In other words, an ambiguous scene becomes suddenly intelligible through retrospective evaluation, which becomes one of the main strategies in which Tsai constructs his narrative structures.



**Figure 3.1** – *What Time is it There?* (2001)



**Figure 3.2** – cont.



Figure 3.3 – cont.



Figure 3.4 – cont.

The sequence that follows demonstrates how Tsai uses these instances to turn them into humorous situations. Hsiao-kang wakes up in the middle of the night and tries to walk across the lounge, but after traversing it halfway through he runs back to his bedroom. In the next shot, Hsiao-kang gets up from his bed, finds a plastic bag and urinates in it (Figure 3.4). In other words, his fear of running into his father's spirit in the other room results in finding an alternative solution for his sanitary needs, whose comedic effect will be detailed in the later section. In short, the opening sequence of *What Time Is It There?*, consisting of four shots and roughly ten minutes, rests on a temporal economy that challenges the straightforwardness of a mainstream narrative structure. The seemingly detached events do not introduce the main plot strand in the film, nor do they establish any character goals or motivations. They merely present a chain of events that later function as trivial moments of laughter: for example, the fear of running into the spirit is humorously revisited several times later in the film and at the very end we realize the father had in fact moved to Paris. In other words, the causal links between the events are not presented directly to the spectator, but are inferred retrospectively, whereas the inherent slowness and trivialization in each scene makes it all the more difficult to comprehend exactly how that causal relationship unfolds.

The slowing down of narrative action is clearly a common aesthetic strategy amongst Slow Cinema films, but Tsai takes this even further by not only showing monotonous action *slowly*, but also cutting together many of these sequences throughout the film. Many of Tsai's films are essentially strings of episodes portraying individual actions by characters with little interaction among them. These sequences initially appear as separate vignettes and are commonly shot in a single long take, without dialogue or close-ups to direct our attention to narrative detail. As such, the



films unfold meaning completely through their *mise-en-scène* and rely on the spectator to comprehend the causal links between each sequence. What I want to point out here is the fact that even though these films are principally considered as narrative films, their stylistic peculiarities are so much in the forefront that they pressure us towards different forms of engagement as well as produce novel versions of absurd comedy. More important, however, are the ways in which these films exploit several fundamental aspects of narrative systems while radically avoiding others, therefore attaining an unusual balance in terms of a full-fledged narrative. What follows, then, is a comprehensive narrative analysis of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, which demonstrates the ways in which the film blends together extremely simple events by intercutting seemingly unrelated events that undermine cause-effect relationships.

My approach to narrative analysis in this instance is largely informed by the methods Edward Branigan sets out in his *Narrative Comprehension and Film*. For Branigan, narrative is first and foremost “a strategy for making our world of experiences and desires intelligible” and as such “is a fundamental way of organizing data.”<sup>65</sup> In other words, narrative is an organizational system that consists of various units of information, which are arranged in a meaningful order through cause-effect fashion. Narrative schema, on the other hand, refers to the set of preconceptions, knowledge and patterns, which the spectator already holds prior to engaging with narratives – in other words, our expectations and other assumptions.<sup>66</sup> As such, Branigan suggests a system to account for the ways in which such data can be collected in order to inform and better understand narrative schema.<sup>67</sup> Introducing this vocabulary that Branigan proposes will help identify several aspects of the narrative form that Tsai constructs as well as show how certain units of data collection are absent from it. According to this system, “a simple narrative is a series of episodes collected as a focused chain. Not only are the parts themselves in each episode linked by cause and effect, but the continuing centre is allowed to develop, progress and interact from episode to episode.” Episodes in this sense are “*consequences* of a central situation: for example, collecting everything that happens to a particular character in a particular setting.” Therefore, insofar as the spatial and temporal parameters remain linear, segments that follow a certain character in the film constitute episodes. Branigan points out that unlike more rudimentary forms of collecting data (such as *heap* or *catalogue*,

which are randomly associated units of data), an episode shows progression. As such, an episode will have its own internal dynamics and show relationships between other units of data. A focused chain, on the other hand, “is a series of cause and effects with a continuing centre; for example [...] the events surrounding an object or place.” Conversely an unfocused chain is “a series of cause and effects but with no continuing center.” In this case episodes seem to appear randomly without developing a central theme or idea, albeit maintaining the cause-effect relationship.<sup>68</sup>

In Branigan’s system, cause-effect relationships are central to the development of narratives. Slow Cinema in general and Tsai Ming-liang in particular, however, undermine these relationships in various ways. While avoiding schematic expectations such as cause and effect, motivation and goals these films establish almost independent episodes through a temporal economy that eludes meaningful narratives. An extended analysis of Tsai’s *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* will demonstrate the ways in which the film undermines some of the necessary aspects of ordinary data collection. *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* is perhaps an extreme example of Tsai’s minimalist narratives. It takes place in a single setting, the Fu-Ho Grand Theatre in Taipei prior to its final screening of the martial arts epic *Dragon Inn*. Meanwhile, the film is intercut into three distinct character groups; whose goals and motivations are not conveniently established at the outset, but rather are revealed later on as the film progresses. The groups consist of (1) a limping female ticket clerk, who painfully walks around the theatre trying to seek an absent projectionist’s attention; (2) a Japanese tourist, who takes refuge inside the theatre and becomes involved with the audience in the theatre in mostly humorous ways; and (3) two old men, who are present at the theatre during the whole screening, and come together and converse about their past just before the film ends. These groups remain separate throughout the film, or in other words, we never see them together in the same setting (with the exception of a short exchange of looks between the tourist and one of the old men). As such, the film’s plot consists of developing three separate strands and appears to be an unfocused chain.

What follows is a plot segmentation of the film, showing how Tsai cuts between different characters groups and episodes within the same setting. The differentiation between each segment is carried out according to changes in micro-settings (cut from a

bathroom scene to the projection room, for example) or changes in between the focus on characters, where the changes between the ticket clerk and the tourist seem to be most prominent. Notice how several segments are formed of only a single long take, varying from a few seconds to minutes. For the sake of simplicity, I have formed some segments together, mostly scenes in which Tsai intercuts the characters in a relatively rapid manner. This plot segmentation is useful not only in terms of recognizing how Tsai subverts narrative structures, but will also be central to my argument in the next section regarding his use of absurd humour.

- A. Credits: soundtrack of the original *Dragon Inn* in the background, sound bridge to series of shots depicting the auditorium and the screen with audience watching the film.
- B. External establishing shot of Fu-Ho Grand Theatre. The tourist arrives and looks around the foyer, cut to a corridor shot in which the tourist enters the auditorium, while the ticket clerk emerges from the corner, walking back the same path
- C. Series of single shots:
  - i. Tourist finding a seat and watching the film
  - ii. Ticket clerk eating a snack in her office
  - iii. After watching the film briefly, tourist leaves the auditorium
- D. Series of shots of the ticket clerk preparing half of her bun-snack into a bag, walking with it and climbing a couple flights of stairs to arrive at the empty projector room, leaving the bun inside
- E. Tourist back in the auditorium, showing the first old man in the front seat as well as other members of the audience distracting the tourist. Deep focus shot of the second old man entering the auditorium. Series of shots of the screen and the tourist trying to seek attention from the first old man
- F. Ticket clerk is cleaning the bathroom
- G. Single shot of another bathroom with the tourist and other members of the audience
- H. Ticket clerk walking behind the screen, juxtaposed images between herself and the female character on the screen. Followed by the clerk walking towards the projection room again and spying inside the room through a door opening
- I. A sub-segment intercutting:
  - i. Multiple shots of tourist wandering inside the building and looking at other people
  - ii. Ticket clerk inside the projector room, discovers bun is not eaten
  - iii. Tourist meeting with other men cruising somewhere around the building
  - iv. Ticket clerk takes the bun away
  - v. Tourist converses with a man, first dialogue in the film
- J. Series of shots inside the auditorium, between the woman eating peanuts and the tourist
- K. Ticket clerk looking down the corridor

- L. Back to the now empty auditorium. Multiple shots of the two old men exchanging looks
- M. Screening ends, ticket clerk walks inside the auditorium in a painfully slow pace and exits while we watch the empty theatre, all in a single shot
- N. Series of shots of the two old men meeting in the foyer and conversing about their past, revealing that they were the actors in the original *Dragon Inn*
- O. Series of single shots;
  - i. The projectionist's first appearance, smoking and preparing the film rolls
  - ii. Ticket clerk finishes the cleaning in the bathroom
  - iii. Projectionist setting up new buckets for drainage
  - iv. Ticket clerk in her office, dresses up and leaves the building
- P. Series of shots: Projectionist closing the gates, plays a little video game, discovers the half eaten bun and leaves the building with his motorcycle, while the ticket clerk watches him from behind
- Q. Ticket clerk walks through the heavy rain, a nostalgic 1960s song concludes the film bridging the last scene with the end credits

Perhaps the first point to make of this plot segmentation is that there is no direct causal relationship amongst any of the character groups. The tourist's wanderings inside the theatre building have absolutely no effect on any of the actions that the ticket clerk undertakes and they conveniently never encounter each other throughout their mini journeys inside the building. On several occasions, the tourist tries to establish a relationship with other members of the audience, including the unresponsive old man, but to no avail. The film's first line of dialogue ("Do you know this theatre is haunted? Ghosts."), occurring between the tourist and an audience member, gives us no immediate information, only when the two old men meet do we realize that the ghost reference was implied at them as they were the actors from the original *Dragon Inn*. Similarly, we cannot grasp why the ticket clerk is painfully walking all around the building just to drop a bun in the projection room. It all comes together in one of the last moments of the film, when we see the projectionist, following his discovery of the half-eaten bun, decides to leave on his motorbike while the ticket clerk watches him from behind. Only at this point we realize that the ticket woman is seeking attention, very much similar to the manner in which the tourist was seeking attention. There are no explicit indications of the homosexuality of the tourist, despite the fact that the Fu-Ho Theatre was renowned as a site where men went to cruise for gay sex. We may, however, derive this information through the tourist's encounters with other men: in segment E, for example, the tourist reaches another audience member closely as if to kiss him, but upon receiving no attention from the man gets back to his seat. Once

again, the fragmented episodes, lack of exposition and concealing character goals and motivations do not allow to make this connection.

Despite the absence of cause and effect links, the film can still be considered as a focused chain in terms of two unifying elements. Firstly, the physical existence of the theatre functions as a unifying setting as well as a significant clue in identifying the film's overall object of study: the lamentation on the decline of film theatres and days of cinema going. Aspects of this lamentation will be discussed in relation to cinephilia in the later sections. Secondly, there is a thematic pattern that roughly links all of these character groups as all of them engage in actions with a similar goal, albeit one that is not explicitly disclosed. Whether it is a romantic union for the ticket clerk, or a homosexual affair for the tourist, or a slightly metaphorical longing for memorial by the two old men, all characters display desperate acts of fulfilling their desires that were hitherto unsatisfied. Yeh and Davis write, "Tsai's films stage a critique, or at least a mockery, of "bourgeois assimilationism" and middle-class fantasies of belonging."<sup>69</sup> In *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, all characters display a desperate attempt to establish some sort of dialogue with the outside world, to move beyond their solitary comfort zones in achieving a kind of tranquillity that will satisfy their desires. Because the film does not properly establish these goals in its initial stages, these motivations become clearer in retrospect as the film progresses. In fact, many of these goals are made clear right at the end of the film, which at the same time poignantly does not resolve any of the inferred conflicts as all characters leave the theatre after failing to connect with each other or fulfilling their desires.

Throughout the film, Tsai concentrates on the characters' actions rather than on describing or emphasizing their goals and motivations. The repetition of mundane actions creates some sort of internal rhythm between the episodes; at least in the sense that there is a kind of audible interest in the way characters move about within the setting. For example, in segment D, we are shown the limping ticket clerk's painfully long journey carrying the warm bun from her office to the projection room, in the hope that it will somehow impress the projectionist. At the start of the sequence we see the woman preparing the bun, assuming she's carrying it for a reason, but the extraordinarily slow depiction of her movement downplays the significance of such a

prop, and after a while the whole sequence simply becomes a rhythmic representation of her uneven footsteps. As such, the visual image becomes trivial and in service of the sonic qualities of the film, echoing the scene from Béla Tarr's *Werckmeister Harmonies* in which Janos and Mr Eszter walk. At the end of the sequence in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, the prop ceases to be of importance to us and we only recognize its significance in retrospect, which happens in segment I-ii when the ticket clerk realizes that the projectionist did not eat it. Similarly in segment M, depicted through a fixed extreme long shot, Tsai invests a stunning five-minute screen time into showing how the ticket clerk walks up and down the empty theatre, cleaning the leftovers of the audience, dwelling on the actual emptiness of the theatre during the last two minutes of the same shot. Stripped away from any sonic or visual rhythmic patterning, this shot refuses to deliver any narrative information, but rather creates a long stretch of time inviting the audience to question and negotiate its own possible meanings.

The extreme use of duration influences our aesthetic experience in three ways. Firstly, because it establishes incongruity with our expectations as well as within the film, it leads to situations that produce laughter, which will be addressed in the next section. Secondly, duration delays narrative comprehension. In other words, the foregrounding of dead time or other trivial moments in the film delay our understanding of several events. Such delays in narrative comprehension are not entirely specific to Tsai's films. James Udden, for instance finds a similar structure in Hou Hsiao-hsien's films, in which "delayed exposition" functions as a surprise element.<sup>70</sup> In mainstream cinema, and particularly in classical Hollywood, delay of information is crucial for creating a variety of emotional effects, such as suspense or horror. However, mainstream films deploy a temporal economy that sustains the suspense in the foreground or as a major concern for the way in which plot develops. In other words, in classical cinema delaying determines a large part of its plot, whereas in Tsai, as well as Hou, delaying occurs on a rather trivial level. Although we realize that the limping ticket clerk was taking a bun to the projectionist, the realization of this fact does not explain why or what happened earlier in the film. In other words, such a realization remains trivial compared to the ways in which intricate plot strands are illuminated through delayed exposition in mainstream cinema. Thirdly, duration foregrounds mise-en-scène while the lack of action involves the spectator in scanning its features such as

props and settings. By eliminating causality and foregrounding actual duration, Tsai eradicates character psychology and instead dwells on certain objects or visual compositions for an unusual extent of time. According to Mark Betz, this “forthright examination of the workings of narrative [and exposing] the rhetoric of narrative causation” enables symbols like water to intervene the narrative structure by “assuming the role of narrative agent either left vacant or unable to be taken up by characters.”<sup>71</sup> Tsai repeatedly employs several obvious symbols that often drive his narratives whilst conventional devices are withdrawn from the narrative form. In other words, while narrative causality is thwarted and certain actions are left unexplained, the use of symbolism becomes a way in which to tie seemingly unrelated events or make sense of the actual narrative, altogether inviting thematic interpretation and critical viewing. Tsai himself acknowledges these symbols recur in his films: “My films really are about symbols or metaphors, they’re not about reality at all, even though I do film a lot of realistic details, everyday activities.”<sup>72</sup> For the remaining part of this section I want to address the ways in which these symbols function within Tsai’s overall narrative structures.

The various symbols laid out across Tsai’s films not only invite critical, thematic and metaphorical interpretation, but also problematize the whole notion of interpretation as a critical methodology. Rey Chow, for instance, suggests “Tsai’s films are highly metaphorical and, as a result, offer multiple possible points of entry into them, leading to an irresolvable network of connotations.”<sup>73</sup> The second part of this idea is problematic, firstly, because it assumes that any film constructed with matrix of metaphors will inevitably become difficult to comprehend due to its very deliberate fabrication. Secondly, there are many other ways to access and interpret Tsai’s films without resorting to any kind of symbolic analysis, as the films do not require a close examination of these components. In other words, despite the overuse of symbols, these films strictly remain in the domain of narrative cinema, in the sense that they offer stories with recognizable characters and problems. What does it mean, then, for a film to have “multiple points of entry?” If this simply means that Tsai’s films allow for multiple interpretations, how does it differ from any other artwork whose meaning can be altered through different approaches and perspectives? As I have argued earlier, it is the narrative form and stylistic decisions that influence our freedom in interpreting

Tsai's films, in terms of the ambiguities surrounding the plot events as well as the use of duration in allowing us to re-evaluate our conclusions. Furthermore, however, metaphors and symbols laid out in Tsai's work are so generic in their own nature and so varied across different films (and at times between different sequences within the same film) that they defy traditional methods of interpretation.

My aim here is not to interpret these various symbols in relation to social, political or cultural discourses in Taiwan, as various other critics and scholars have attempted to do so, although I will briefly visit two popular analyses.<sup>74</sup> Rather, I seek to outline the basic functions of these symbols and situate them against a narrative structure that exploits their duality as well as openness to interpretation. In fact Rey Chow advocates a methodology that treats Tsai's films more than "just a collection of "meanings" to be interpreted." As such, Chow writes: "what Tsai has undertaken is a production of discursivity, one that [...] operates in the manner of an archaeological excavation." According to the Chow, what is excavated is "remnants of conventional social and kinship relations," which are "displayed as part of a visual assemblage, a repertoire that constitutes a (cinematic) discursivity in production" – in effect, I argue, a methodology that is little different to various modes of critical interpretation carried out by other scholars.<sup>75</sup> For my purposes here, Tsai's rendering of these familiar objects and situations into different, unusual, strange and odd things is more important. To sum up in the words of Yeh and Davis, "Tsai defamiliarizes – or better, *deforms* – the familiar and the everyday."<sup>76</sup> In other words, the symbols that Tsai picks complicate the notion of a symbol in itself – they are not symbols in the traditional sense, in that they do not represent a one-and-only idea, but are rather open to interpretation due to their dualities in terms of their possible meanings and appearances. Moreover, the context in which the object is depicted provides a more fruitful background for interpreting these symbols and not solely the characteristic qualities of the symbol itself.

According to Yeh and Davis, the ubiquitous rice cooker is one of the recurring objects throughout Tsai's films. Its representation reiterated to such an extent that it eventually becomes unfamiliar. The authors trace the depiction of this ordinary household object, noting that it represents the warmth and familiarity of home as well as stands for a transformation of something simple into something extraordinary. The



Taiwanese equivalent of the microwave sits in the background during Tsai's earlier films, providing the backdrop for Tsai's representations of the family life and its modern discontents. The immediate meanings of the object are warmth, homeliness and familiarity emphasizing how simple it is for a family to gather and eat together; but never in a Tsai film do we see the family eating together. Much later, the object signifies a rather opposite feeling, as in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, it represents the way in which the ticket clerk's fails to attract the projectionist's attention. In these films the rice cooker is individuated, as opposed to signifying a collective experience. At the end of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, the projectionist finally discovers the bun by recognizing the rice cooker through the window – at which point it is too late. The ticket clerk has already left the building and the possibility of eating together is gone. While connoting a homely feeling the object also epitomizes the kind of loneliness and unfamiliarity that is present in Tsai's films.<sup>77</sup>

Another function of recurrent symbols is the ways in which they signal auteurist impulses in their creation and reinforce such readings in their reception. What I mean by this is the way in which repetitions of objects, themes, characters, ideas or visual motifs lend themselves to auteurist interpretation by audiences on the basis that they are deliberately, intentionally and knowingly used by the director *for* their own indulgent interpretative tendencies. Considering Tsai's successes with film festivals, these recurring symbols take on a humorous as well as cinephiliac function: festival-goers regularly watch Tsai films knowing what to expect as well as taking pleasure (often in the form of laughter) from encountering and satisfying such expectations. Tiago de Luca, for instance, writes the "arbitrary repetition [of symbols, themes and visual motifs] from film to film authoritatively reinforce the director's signature [...] producing a pervasive and permanent sense of déjà vu." The ways in which such recurrences influence humour and cinephilia will be the subject of the upcoming chapters, but let us now briefly consider the way such symbols and themes accommodate a range of interpretations and meanings. Considering how narrative forms are constructed out of rudimentary blocks of action without particular cause-effect links, these symbols acquire important roles in our engagement and understanding of Tsai's films. Tsai's use of water is exemplary in this case and a reference to this recurring visual motif appears exhaustively across various cinephile publications and reviews.

In general, everyday objects, familiar situations and things that are present in our daily lives have a dual nature in Tsai's films. Water is an obvious metaphor in this aspect, showing us how Tsai exploits the dual nature of such a figure. Water is present more than plenty: in most films it occupies the background in the form of a heavy rainfall, or is abundantly consumed through plastic bottles by the young Hsiao-kang. In *The River*, the dirty fresh water is arguably the cause of Hsiao-kang's mysterious neck illness and in *The Wayward Cloud* it is contaminated due to an environmental catastrophe as well as being the source of a deadly virus in *The Hole*. Naturally we understand water as a fundamental necessity for life, but Tsai delivers how it can be dangerous and unwelcome when it is in abundance. In many films, a common incident is water dripping from a broken pipe, or a leaking ceiling, decorated with plastic buckets on the floor by the characters to stop its flow. At the beginning of *Face*, Tsai makes a joke out of this common representation in his films by showing Hsiao-kang attempting to fix a water leak in a kitchen. After numerous strategies involving various pans, buckets and other material, he slips and falls, while the scene turns into some sort of absurd comedy. Furthermore, water is also consumed in abundance by Tsai's characters. In *Vive L'Amour*, Hsiao-kang enters the empty apartment bedroom and drinks a whole bottle of water in one go. As such, water as an everyday object is recurrently displayed in all manners of existence throughout Tsai's films.

The intricate blending of opposing and contrasting meanings is a general tendency in Tsai's cinema. Yeh and Davis for example suggest that Tsai's films are "fractured by duality: between reality and fantasy, social norms and psychosexual fancy; between hetero- and homosexuality; between camp and the classics."<sup>78</sup> This cinema of duality displays a careful mixture of opposite meanings represented one against another, creating layers of tensions in the audience. The earlier section, for example, demonstrated the ways in which Tsai mixes contrasting genres such as musical and pornography as well as conflicting aesthetics such as camp and minimalism. Furthermore, Tsai creates a novel version of absurd comedy by meshing together tragedy and comedy as well as blending a deep sense of alienation with bittersweet optimism. Moreover, the tension between stillness and movement is ever present in Tsai's cinema. These films clearly depart from artificial means of portraying action and depict events in their actual duration by adopting realistic techniques such as

long take and deep focus cinematography. Chris Berry, for instance, finds Tsai's "hyperbolic realist" style paradoxical in terms of its representation of loneliness. Tsai shows his characters in their private moments, executing their private activities, but they are not really alone, as Berry points out that we, the spectators, are watching them and gradually become aware of our presence of watching them, creating a sense of paradoxical realism. These paradoxes, however, do not alienate the spectator, but rather produce "a consoling effect of indulgence in the audience's relationship to [the characters]." <sup>79</sup> In other words, Yeh, Davis and Berry argue that there is some sort of duality and tension coming from Tsai's peculiar style as well as the kinds of things he represents. The duality and tension, however, do not resolve into a synthesis but are rather suspended on a "delicate coexistence." Tsai exploits the duality in life and transforms it into absurd and incongruous situations, reminiscent of a "Sisyphean equilibrium constantly resumed in a kind of perpetual loop," marked by a sense of black humour. <sup>80</sup>

Tsai's use of the episodic structure plays a significant role in achieving these situations. This section has demonstrated the ways in which episodic structure undermines certain aspects of narrative construction, such as causality and characterization. Most importantly, the episodic structure and single long takes in Tsai's films delay narrative comprehension by slowing down narrative progress. As such, because the narrative action is enacted in an extremely slow and monotonous manner, the spectators become less interested in forming causal connections. At the same time, however, the lack of causality in these films is recuperated by the foregrounding of various symbols and visual motifs that function as an important way for the spectators to engage with the film. Recurring symbols, in this respect, enable the viewers to immediately recognize an authorial presence and contextualize its use within an auteurist framework. While extremely trivial and monotonous in their nature, the recognition of these symbols function as instances of humour and pleasure for festival audiences for they are repeated across an entire oeuvre already enjoyed by many cinephiles. The next section specifically aims to explore the humorous aspect of Tsai's cinema by revisiting the absurd as a conceptual and comical category.

### 3.5 – Theatre of the Absurd, Silent Comedy and a Theory of Humour

In this section, I propose to contextualize Tsai's films as descendents of the Theatre of the Absurd movement. Scholars routinely refer to the influence of dramatists such as Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco while analysing Tsai's films; however, none has fully investigated this complex relationship as most comments remain in passing. Rey Chow, for instance, proposes that in the works of Beckett, Pinter and Ionesco, "the breakdown of human communication is often signified by the banality and nonsense of speech and by the absence of any intricately plotted turn of events or absorbing storytelling" and briefly finds these notions present in Tsai's films.<sup>81</sup> This section aims to explore this parallelism through an exposition of what absurd meant for the Theatre of the Absurd and an explication of its aesthetic mission. In addition to similar thematic concerns in both the Theatre of the Absurd and Slow Cinema, the former's distrust of spoken language and thus visual approach to storytelling through imagery and staging largely verifies their artistic relationship. After providing several examples from Slow Cinema, I move on to other forms of cinematic absurdity that aesthetically inform Tsai's work, namely the silent comedy and films of Jacques Tati. I conclude this section by examining the nature of humour present across all these films by referring to the incongruity theory and "the logic of the absurd," which I argue, are in many ways the secondary function of the long take in Slow Cinema.

One of the ways in which Tsai creates tragicomic and absurd situations is isolating certain actions in their entirety by showing them in their full, actual length. By repeating similarly mundane actions, Tsai is able to defamiliarize them while creating strong incongruities between the characters and their environment. Especially when confronted with a minor problem, which at times may be obstacles of folk religious rituals, Tsai's characters find unusual ways to overcome various situations. These scenes are "darkly comic" in the sense that they are excessively exaggerated, contorted to such a degree that they "are reminiscent of a Chaplinesque parody of mechanization."<sup>82</sup> Through an exaggerated use of duration and performance, Tsai transforms these vignettes into gags that are parallel to silent film as well as theatre in their manner.

The word absurd plays a key role in the type of humour Tsai employs throughout his films and as such there are significant parallels between Tsai's sense of black humour and other works of absurd art, such as the Theatre of the Absurd. Within the context of modern day parlance, however, absurd commonly means "ridiculous and silly," whereas its dictionary definitions range from "out of harmony" to "incongruous, unreasonable, illogical."<sup>83</sup> We find things absurd when they are out of place and they surprise us, because we cannot rationally explain, although we suspect that they are plausible to some extent. For Albert Camus, however, the absurd in the sense of "illogical incongruity" largely informs his philosophical argument in his seminal text *The Myth of Sisyphus*. According to Camus, the absurd defines a fundamental condition of modernity, in which the search for truth is pointless because there is no such truth; hence there is no inherent purpose in life.<sup>84</sup> Preceding Camus's theory of the absurd in the late 1940s, the absurd as a mode of existence is largely present in modernist literature, ranging from the works of Franz Kafka to Flann O'Brien.<sup>85</sup> The depiction of modern life as an absurd situation is, however, even more prevalent in 20<sup>th</sup> century drama.

The major theme in the Theatre of the Absurd (a term Martin Esslin borrowed from existentialist terminology and applied to early 20<sup>th</sup> century theatre) is the despair stemming from the absurdity of human condition, but the Theatre of the Absurd may as well be defined by its irrational approach towards depicting such absurdity and suffering.<sup>86</sup> The Theatre of the Absurd is part of the broader anti-literary modernist movements, where words become irrelevant as several events or actions may transcend or contradict what has been spoken.<sup>87</sup> As such, the legitimacy of spoken language and dialogue is severely threatened by other modes of representation. Through a "radical devaluation of language," the Theatre of the Absurd is less concerned with conveying information or narrating the fate of its characters and instead is preoccupied with a stark representation of various situations through other theatrical means, such as imagery, staging and performance.<sup>88</sup> The Theatre of the Absurd is less a theoretical or philosophical framework for the absurd, as witnessed in the works of Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, but more an artistic approach in which visual methods of representation are exercised to "present [the absurdity of the human condition] in terms of concrete stage images."<sup>89</sup>

There is an immediate parallel between the aesthetic concerns of the Theatre of the Absurd and Tsai Ming-liang as well as other directors of Slow Cinema. As established in Chapter 1, the lack of dialogue and distrust in the spoken word are some of the defining features of Slow Cinema. Although the use of dialogue across Slow Cinema films displays considerable variety, generally it does not carry the same function as it does within mainstream cinema, in the sense that it is rarely used as a means to convey contextual information or character traits. On one side of the spectrum, there are films that are completely devoid of dialogue or any other form of spoken word (such as films of Lisandro Alonso, James Benning and Peter Hutton). At the other end of the spectrum, the spoken word is used either in short and obscure exchanges of dialogue (Carlos Reygadas, Andrei Zvyagintsev and Tsai Ming-liang, which I will elaborate on later) or with rarer interludes of longer exchanges (for example, the lengthy philosophical discussions in Lav Diaz's *Death in the Land of Encantos* [2007] that appear several times across the nine-hour film). In the case of Béla Tarr, for example, the dialogue often carries three functions. In his early features, dialogue is largely an important device to raise social issues and is a major device for the spectator to understand the diegetic situation. Following *Damnation* (1988), however, there is a significant decrease in Tarr's use of dialogue. The use of the spoken word is at times deeply emotional and philosophically intriguing (for example, Janos's opening monologue in *Werckmeister Harmonies* [2000]) or completely unintelligible (the monologue in *The Turin Horse* [2011]). In other instances, for example, dialogue defies communication between characters (for example, the varying dialects in Jia Zhangke's *Still Life* [2004]) or carries a sense of humour in the form of verbal jokes (Ceylan's films, see next chapter).

There are even further ways in which the Theatre of the Absurd serves as an important artistic resource for contemporary Slow Cinema, in terms of staging images of desperation, lack of communication and alienation in humorous ways. Despite their links to serious modernist films of the 1960s, some Slow Cinema films are, in fact, serious comedies and use slow pace, stillness and long takes to elicit an absurd sense of humour. Before returning to Tsai, I want to briefly demonstrate these claims with several examples from other Slow Cinema films. A scene from Albert Serra's *Birdsong* (2008), for instance, illustrates this point. The film essentially retells the biblical story

of the Three Magi via Slow Cinema aesthetics; in other words, through long takes of the Magi walking in a desolate landscape accompanied by obscured dialogue and black-and-white photography. In one particular scene, the Magi traverse a sand hill and walk over the top, disappearing into the horizon. Moments later, however, the Magi reappear trudging back the same pathway, while the camera captures the action without a cut. This scene is in fact what Jonathan Romney describes as the defining moment of “slow, ruminative cinema” in the very article where he coins the term Slow Cinema.<sup>90</sup> “The film’s humour,” Romney writes, “is arguably all the more tart because it’s so exceptionally muted – to the point of enervation –” and as such the film constitutes “a comedy, albeit in a somewhat nebulous vein.” Forms of absurd humour are also present in the work of Roy Andersson, whose *Songs From the Second Floor* (2000) and *You, The Living* (2007), for example, display a range of unconnected characters yearning for a meaning in life. Andersson’s films similarly feature a lack of intelligible dialogue and focus on depicting action through careful staging and visual imagery (See Figure 3.5). The Portuguese director João César Monteiro, on the other hand, not only relies on *mise-en-scène*, but also employs the long take to create scenes of absurdity. In *God’s Comedy* (1995), for instance, the main character played by Monteiro himself conducts an obscure choreography of a young woman lying on top of a table and moving as if swimming through the air, with Richard Wagner’s operatic music playing in the background (Figure 3.8). Whether this scene can be considered as humorous as others, however, is arguable since it takes roughly six minutes and completely lacks dialogue as well as narrative motivation. In fact, moments of absurdity often appear across Slow Cinema minus its humorous aspect: the ways in which mere presence of the stuffed whale leads Janos to question the meaning of life in Tarr’s *Werckmeister Harmonies* and Doctor Cemal’s philosophical ruminations of life and death in Ceylan’s *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (2011) all emphasize the absurd as an existential condition (See Figures 3.6 and 3.7).



**Figure 3.5** – *Songs from the Second Floor*  
(2000)



**Figure 3.6** – *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*  
(2011)



**Figure 3.7** – *Werckmeister Harmonies*  
(2000)



**Figure 3.8** – *God's Comedy* (1995)

Tsai Ming-liang's films, on the other hand, are absurd in the ways in which they do not rely on dialogue or the spoken word altogether. Admittedly this is largely because two characters rarely appear in the same scene at the same time, as exemplified in the earlier section for Tsai's use of episodic narration. However, in many cases the use of dialogue is completely abandoned and much of the spoken words in these films consist of monologues or short sentences. Furthermore, some of the contextual narrative information is delivered through off-screen sounds, usually sourced from TV or radio news broadcast. In *The Hole* and *The Wayward Cloud*, for example, the off-screen news anchormen give us information about the environmental catastrophes the city is facing, while the characters continue their everyday actions without speaking to each other. The remaining dialogue, however rarely used, is obscure and discontinuous. In *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, there are only two scenes with dialogue. The first one is the aforementioned dialogue between the tourist and another man in the theatre, whereas the second one is a short conversation between the two old men (of which more later). Both scenes refer to the fact that the theatre has become a forgotten place and is very



much the central idea in the film, but the amount of information derived from the dialogue scenes is still marginal compared to a conventional art film.

The silence and lack of dialogues in Tsai's films represent his characters meaningless and purposeless existence. Jean-Pierre Rehm, for instance, argues that while some other directors have used silence as the means to express their characters' emotions indicating "plenitude" through images, "Tsai Ming-liang [on the other hand] pays no homage to the beauty of silence, no words are ever sacrificed on the altar of the meticulously prepared 'shots', because the painful succession of his shots is only organized by dreary triviality."<sup>91</sup> In other words, the silence in Tsai's films is not only a compositional decision to portray a daily triviality, but also the lack of dialogue conceals the characters' emotional depth. Esslin similarly writes, "[l]anguage in Beckett's plays serves to express the breakdown, the disintegration of language. Where there is no certainty, there can be no definite meanings – and the impossibility of ever attaining certainty is one of the main themes of Beckett's plays."<sup>92</sup> In other words, Tsai's characters are silent because rarely there is anything for them to say to each other and much of this strategy was evident in Tsai's background in theatre. Tsai's familiarity with experimental theatre was apparent in the first three plays he directed after he had graduated from the dramatic arts college: *Instant Bean Sauce Noodles (Sushi zajiang mian, 1982)*, *A Sealed Door in the Dark (Heian li dabukai de yi shan meng, 1983)* and *The Closet in the Room (Fangjian li de yigui, 1984)*. In these early works, Tsai "already embraced a vanguard, minimalist style along with a wry undertone," exploring "issues of gay love, sadomasochistic power relations, spatial confinement, affection for the closet, passing, double identity, the loneliness of writing and the writer's block, and queer identity."<sup>93</sup> Clearly the minimalist style adopted in these theatrical plays is apparent in Tsai's cinema, with its downplay of language and a foregrounding of the visual aspects of the medium.

Esslin writes that the visual aspects of theatre represent the Theatre of the Absurd's "anti-literary attitude" and throughout many of the plays there is an attempt to "return to earlier non-verbal forms of theatre."<sup>94</sup> In many ways, the subordination of the spoken word against stage performance in the Theatre of the Absurd is a direct influence from the early forms of theatre; such as the clowns in the Middle Ages and

*commedia dell'arte*, as well as their 19<sup>th</sup> century equivalents of the music halls and vaudevilles.<sup>95</sup> Likewise, in Tsai's films the characters are portrayed in committing to their everyday rituals: how they eat, walk, sit and watch and most importantly how they carry out time-filling activities with no immediate purpose. At times, Hsiao-kang performs acrobatic tasks that emphasize his bodily movement, such as climbing walls in *The Wayward Cloud* or his various actions in the empty flat in *Vive L'Amour*. In the former film, following a failed sexual encounter, Hsiao-kang and Shiang-chyi walk on top of the skywalk hugging each other, while Hsiao-kang carries the girl on his feet, as if the two bodies have become one. The unusual staging and performance during this single shot portrays the ambivalent relationship between the two. Furthermore, there are many scenes in these films where Hsiao-kang plays or watches people playing video games in arcades, whereas Tsai depicts the stillness of the world and his characters while things are rapidly changing.<sup>96</sup>

Staging scenes that are based on the versatile body of the actor are largely drawn from silent comedies. While tracing the Theatre of the Absurd's genealogy, Esslin stresses that the most significant 20<sup>th</sup> century influence on the Theatre of the Absurd is the silent film comedy, represented by Buster Keaton, Charles Chaplin, artists who provided the missing link between vaudeville and the Theatre of the Absurd.<sup>97</sup> The silent film comedy created scenes where comedy was attained through wordless means, depicting constant and purposeless movement against a highly mechanized world. Even after the invention of sound, the comedy of W. C. Fields and Marx Brothers proved to be a decisive influence on the works of Ionesco and others. The "wild Surrealism of their dialogue," as well as the use of frenzied performance, repetition and proliferation of objects created a world very much similar to the Theatre of the Absurd.<sup>98</sup> If silent comedies provide a link between the 19<sup>th</sup> century theatre and the Theatre of the Absurd, then the work of Jacques Tati provides a link between the Theatre of the Absurd and Tsai Ming-liang as well as contemporary Slow Cinema that features similar notions of humour. In many ways Tati appropriated silent comedy aesthetics into his own, although according to Esslin Tati "lacks some of the glorious naiveté and vulgarity of his predecessors." However, the character Monsieur Hulot is a figure caught up in the deeply industrialized and mechanized world of our time, whereas his struggle to communicate meaning with others (including us, the audience) is reflected in his

“deflation of language,” most typically in his use of dialogue almost as if it is background noise.<sup>99</sup> As such, Tsai’s films and his sense of humour have been routinely attributed influence from Jacques Tati.<sup>100</sup> Although Tati did not make many films, his creation of the fictitious character Monsieur Hulot has been one of the most iconic comedy characters in cinema, which he establishes concretely in *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* (1953). Visibly influenced by the similar non-verbal and performance-based forms of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century theatre, Tati nevertheless delivers a profoundly cinematic display of The Absurd and its relationship to modern life. Although the signature behaviour of Monsieur Hulot is his strange clumsiness, Tati stresses the character’s incongruous relationship to the surrounding environment established through elaborate set designs as well as a post-synchronised soundtrack.

Tati’s comedy is a comedy of the strangeness of our daily lives. Most of his gags are juxtaposed against trivial aspects of routine activities. Kristin Thompson, for instance, claims that while most comedians try to eradicate “traces of automatized everyday reality from their films,” Tati conversely incorporates such moments within his scenes. “In the process,” writes Thompson, “he paradoxically manages to focus our attention on everyday, trivial events to the extent that he succeeds in defamiliarizing them, primarily through his parallel defamiliarization of traditional gag structures.”<sup>101</sup> There is already a parallel between Tati and Tsai in their manner of deforming everyday triviality into an unfamiliar, odd and strange entity, thus creating an absurd situation. According to Thompson, Tati’s main formal principle is an overlap accompanied by the use of deep staging and deep focus cinematography. All scenes are “dependent on an interaction between two initially separate actions and spaces,” at least one of which “involves a trivial event or even a “dead” moment with nothing going on. Thus,” writes Thompson, “a residue of boredom affects the style of the humour; Tati often uses incomplete, subtle, or downright weird jokes.”<sup>102</sup> As such, staging and editing appear to be key in Tati’s aesthetic strategy. Composed mostly of medium to long shots, Tati prepares every scene with meticulous inspection, in which each new shot introduces a new background from a different angle within the scene and in each new case the new background reveals a trivial action that forms the next gag. Editing forms an important aspect of the construction of these gags as Tati consistently employs 90 or 180 degree cuts to establish new camera positions – these cuts are at times disorienting but usually

there is some sort of figure movement or spatial cue that helps the viewer to realise the spatial arrangement of the events. These cuts necessarily “shift attention to different areas of action around the main area, emphasizing the overlap among these actions.”<sup>103</sup> In other words, Tati weaves the spatial action in a scene by intercutting between several medium shots, whereas the deep focus cinematography helps us identify areas of the frame that will be emphasised in the next or earlier cut. The overlapping action in between the cuts creates an organic gag structure that modifies the traditional silent comedy into a more comprehensive form.

In contrast, while Tsai also employs deep focus and staging frequently, the formal principle that dominantly elicits humour is shot duration. A major reason for this is the way in which scenes involving comedy develop as opposed to the ones in Tati. The source of Tati’s humour is the incongruous interaction between his characters and the spatial environment, while in Tsai the stillness of the characters or the situation engages the audience in laughter. Moreover, Tati prepares the audience for his gags through editing, while Tsai radically eliminates editing from his films and accentuates the duration of the long take. Therefore most of the jokes present in Tsai’s films are driven by their temporality and stasis; we as the audience expect progression and change in several scenes, but our expectation is in conflict with our recognition of the deliberate inactivity on the screen, a tension that is eventually resolved by laughter. Two examples should help illustrate this point. In *The River*, Tien Miao, once again playing the father character, is depicted with an odd personality. Tsai shows us his daily activities; obsessed with the leaking water from the ceiling, the character consistently rearranges the plastic buckets to keep his place dry. In one scene, we see the father with his back turned against us, depicted through a long shot framed by the toilet door opening. The character urinates for an extraordinary one minute, the soundtrack reaffirming this with subtle volume changes. This is funny because our expectations from such a character creates an incongruity with the representation of this particular action in such an unusual extent of time. We do not expect anyone to urinate for a full minute (at least on the cinema screen), but we do not find this unrealistic, disgusting or alienating because Tsai already establishes the character with his weird and eccentric behaviour. As such, the logic behind such humorous scenes relies on a clash of our expectations, upon which I will elaborate further below.

The second example, also a bathroom scene, is one from *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*. It demonstrates even more clearly how shot duration achieves a humorous effect. Here the sound design is stripped away from any particular effect and the humour of the scene completely relies on its shot duration as well as its unique staging. The scene takes place at the male bathroom in the Fu-Ho Grand Theatre, shot from a corner end. The use of wide-angle lens exaggerates the depth cues of the scene with the empty line of urinals forming a long diagonal at the right hand side, also highlighting a cigarette pack and a yellow lighter sitting on the shelf. The Japanese tourist and male #1 are urinating, side-by-side, at the near corner of the room (Figure 3.9). After about fifteen seconds, male #2 enters the room and continues the action right next to the tourist, sandwiching him between two strangers (Figure 3.10). A third man leaves the cubicles behind them and walks towards to sink to wash his hands never endingly, while male #1 takes a deep breath from his cigarette, at this point suggesting that he owns the cigarette pack (Figure 3.11). We realize that there is a fourth man, who pulls the same cubicle door in and locks it, distracting the tourist. Just as we might assume that the scene would not get even more bizarre, a fifth man enters the room, walks towards the tourist and stretches his arm to reach the cigarette pack and then exits the scene with his property (Figure 3.12). The scene continues for another thirty seconds, without any movement or change other than the familiar background noise of any public bathroom.

How does such a trivial, uneventful and seemingly mundane portrayal of stillness achieve humour? Firstly, there is an overt strangeness that dominates the scene from beginning to end, because normally nobody acts so slowly in a public bathroom, unless motivated for narrative purposes. However, the film in fact provides this narrative context by staging the scene in a space (the men's room) and a place (this particular theatre) that are both famous for gay cruising, perhaps giving reason to the deliberate, unhurried pace in which the characters are behaving. Although the film envisions this familiar location as a zone ripe with homosexual desire, there is nevertheless a sense of uneasiness arising from our conventional perception of public bathrooms.<sup>104</sup> Because we tend to view public bathrooms as spaces to rush through, the film creates a disorienting incongruity between our conventional expectations and its elaborate audio-visual representation. Furthermore, the film exaggerates these notions of familiarity and strangeness while meshing them side-by-side within the same shot, at

the same time challenging our conventional expectations of shot durations attaining a further level of incongruity. The sense of humour in this scene is perhaps analogous to Tati's in terms of its transformation of the familiar into the strange. Although Tsai also utilizes deep focus, the soundtrack as well as staging and performance, the dominant factors in achieving humour are the length and slowness of his long takes.



**Figure 3.9** – *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003)



**Figure 3.10** – cont.



**Figure 3.11** – cont.



**Figure 3.12** – cont.

I have suggested earlier that the nature of absurd humour as witnessed in the above examples arises from a deflation of our expectations and assumptions regarding the narrative situation. Therefore, these analyses adopt the incongruity theory in understanding the nature of humour, whether it is in the form of visual (such as gags) or verbal humour (such as jokes). Detailing the nature of humour and its subsequent theories is clearly beyond the scope of this thesis, but let us briefly examine why the incongruity theory in itself informs what I mean by the absurd humour inherent to Tsai's work (and ultimately to Slow Cinema). In extremely simple terms, incongruity theory proposes that our amusement with humour arises from the incongruity between what we typically expect and what we actually perceive.<sup>105</sup> As such, an element of surprise is fundamental to humour, or in other words, we find things funny when we

least expect them.<sup>106</sup> Torben Grodal writes, “the comic reaction is connected to a basic narrative feature, for instance the existence of a sudden change or reversal (often called ‘*peripeteia*’), as in the punch line.”<sup>107</sup> The classical notion of *peripeteia* is central to Jerry Palmer’s novel version of the incongruity theory because it demonstrates the ways in which the humorous text constructs a surprise or shock element in the story.<sup>108</sup> As such, Palmer offers an elaborate reworking of the incongruity theory by analysing humour as a formal structure in what he calls “the logic of the absurd,” in which the *peripeteia* in gags or jokes creates “a pair of syllogisms [that cause] contradictory conclusions,” namely a plausible and an implausible explanation of a particular situation.<sup>109</sup> Palmer argues that the likelihood of the plausible explanation is commonly less than its implausibility, therefore attains an incongruous, illogical conclusion that sparks laughter and humour. “The logic of the absurd,” then is in essence a careful balance between the implausibility and plausibility of an event where the later is ever so slightly dominated by the former.<sup>110</sup> In other words, while we perceive the end result of the comic situation as implausible, we nonetheless suspect the tiny possibility of plausibility in its likelihood, which in turn prevents the likelihood of negative mental reactions such as anxiety or fear.

The incongruity theory and the “logic of the absurd” are useful and valid paradigms for understanding the type of humour I addressed earlier in this section. Torben Grodal, for instance, reaffirms Palmer’s suggestion in a cognitive framework: “If the brain is confronted with a problem which has two or more equally probably but different solutions, [...] Laughter may function as an escape-button in relation to paradoxes, ambiguities, equally probable alternatives.”<sup>111</sup> Martin Esslin, on the other hand, claims that laughter induced in the Theatre of the Absurd occurs through proliferation and repetition. In the plays of Ionesco, the accumulation and repetition of nonsense dialogues, objects and situations create a psychological tension in the audience, which at once function as a metaphor for a kind of ridiculous existence while the tension is relieved by laughter.<sup>112</sup> Notice how a large portion of the examples I have set out earlier are gags and as such their humour is based on visual aspects of their medium, such as staging and *mise-en-scène*. Noël Carroll calls this phenomenon “sight gag,” which is essentially “a form of visual humor in which amusement is generated by the play of alternative interpretations projected by the image.”<sup>113</sup> In other words,

Carroll's notion of the sight gag completely relies on the incongruity theory as a broader conceptual framework. Building on the "sight gag," Marijke de Valck proposes the "sound gag" to characterize the type of sonic comedy inherent in the films of Jacques Tati. For de Valck, "the lack of fidelity" in the sound source and the sound perceived "create comic effect[s]," and as such the incongruity theory is also applicable to forms of humour attained through the manipulation of sound.<sup>114</sup>

None of these approaches, however, take into consideration the fact that humour takes place within a temporal domain. Needless to say the issue of timing is a significant and crucial element of humour. The specific timing a joke or gag can exaggerate its effect and increase its impact. As such, the *peripeteia*, or the formal element that induces incongruity in Slow Cinema humour is the exaggerated shot duration that establishes a glacial tempo. In other words, the long take functions in a similar way to the punch line in a verbal joke. In the examples illustrated above, incongruity arises from a clash of our expectations regarding shot duration with our perception of extreme and minimalist long takes. We think it is implausible that these situations occur in such a long stretch of time and believe that the slowness of the action in general is illogical, ridiculous or simply absurd. In many ways the humour elicited in Tsai's films as well as other Slow Cinema films is not only characterized by its bleakness and/or absurdity, but it is more of a humour that moves at a snail's pace. However, Tsai's realistic depiction of these situations and our familiarity with the settings provide a sense of plausibility that alters our perception of these scenes into incongruous circumstances. We laugh because we find this incompatible mixture of familiarity and strangeness amusing, but most importantly we laugh because the incongruity within the action is sustained even further through stasis.

In the earlier chapter I have argued that the long take (and hence the exaggerated shot duration) is the main aesthetic device, or the "dominant" formal principle in Slow Cinema. In Tsai's films this carries two functions and the first one, delaying narrative comprehension, was addressed in the earlier section. This section explores the ways in which the long take achieves an absurd sense of humour by challenging the spectator's expectations of shot duration. I have argued that this aesthetic strategy operates within the "logic of the absurd," in which expectations and perceptions contradict. Moreover,



such a sense of humour is rooted in the conventions of the Theatre of the Absurd, which aim to portray the modern condition as absurd through visual means. There are strong parallels between the Theatre of the Absurd and Slow Cinema, mainly in terms of their distrust in spoken language and emphasis on visual storytelling. Much of Tsai's films demonstrate these parallels in novel ways, but there are other intertextual moments throughout Tsai films and I shall elaborate on these in the next section.

### **3.6 – Nostalgia and Cinephilia in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn***

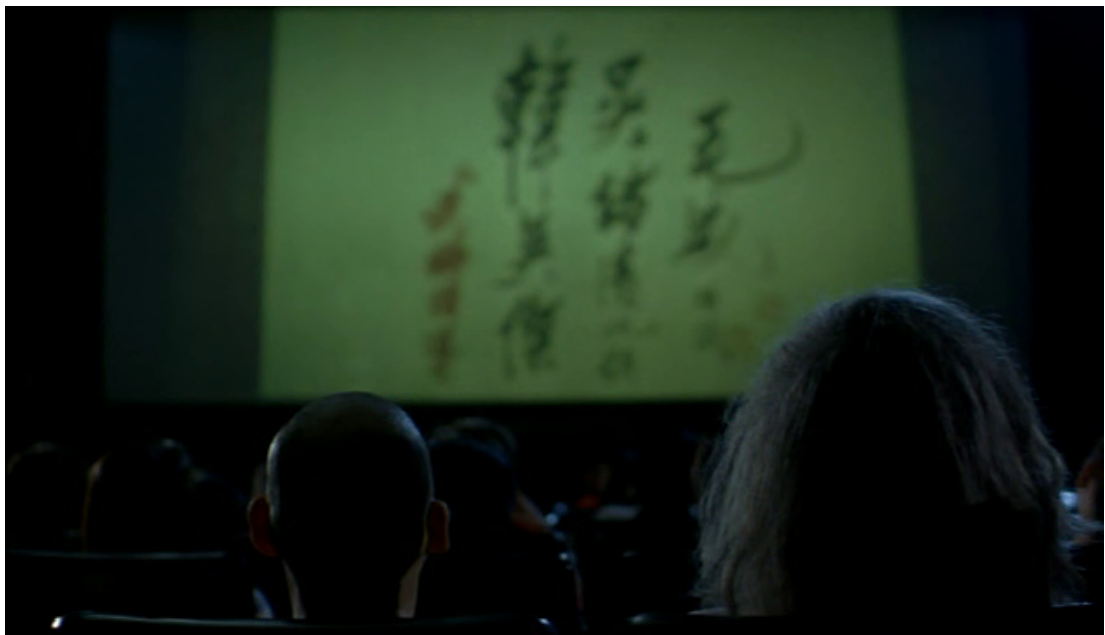
This section will focus solely on Tsai's *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* and explore the ways in which discourses of nostalgia are related to the film's narrative and stylistic concerns. I have previously addressed the concept of nostalgia in the earlier chapter (Section 2.6) and argued that Slow Cinema represents a nostalgic rebirth of modernist cinema. This section revisits the concept of deliberate archaism as well as Svetlana Boym's distinctions between restorative and reflective nostalgia. On the one hand, *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* reveals aspects of restorative nostalgia, not least through an emulation of modernist techniques but also through Tsai's future gallery work that attempts at a physical reconstruction of a bygone cinema theatre. However, I argue they do not constitute an aggressive attempt in restoration, but merely anxious acts of reflection in order to precipitate discourses of cinephilia against the rise of digital technologies and the demise of film theatres. I also argue that Slow Cinema in general is composed of a reflective attitude by virtue of its contemplative and ruminative mode of spectatorship, which I shall be elaborating further in the next chapter by closely examining the concept of boredom.

The earlier chapter detailed the concept of nostalgia and argued that Slow Cinema films represent a nostalgic revisioning of modernist art films. Likewise, Tsai's films are nostalgic for several reasons. Firstly, his earlier features display nostalgia for a lost, mythical family. As I have argued in earlier sections, Tsai subverts notions of Confucian Family Melodrama in a provocative manner, but in many ways his characters remain yearning for a traditional form of family. Secondly, however, Tsai's films display nostalgia for a bygone era in cinema culture. *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, for

example, takes its nostalgic object as cinema itself. As I have argued earlier, while the film undoubtedly contains three episodes that constitute its plot, its narrative structure and temporal style severely undermine its causal connections. Conversely, much of the film insists on exploring cinema as an institution, as a place for social gathering, as an individual experience and as a form of art. The film depicts the last day of a run-down film theatre during its very last screening of the Taiwanese martial arts classic *The Dragon Inn* (King Hu, 1967), while lamenting on the decline of cinema going. During the film, all characters seek social contact in various ways, but ironically fail within a setting that is supposed to be embracing in the first place. While the film on the screen slowly comes to an end, Tsai directs our attention away from conventional narrative structure and highlights the phenomenal experience of spectatorship by a series of shots depicting various spaces within the theatre: velvet curtains, the giant screen, smoky foyers, half-lit toilets, the empty theatre seats accompanied by audience members loudly snacking on watermelon seeds. As such, the film presents itself through a nostalgic tone and years for the bygone days of cinema going, which occupied a significant part of daily life, fulfilling multiple social and individual needs such as entertainment, social gathering and intellectual engagement. As the characters fail to connect, the film also becomes the very lamentation for the death of the medium, perhaps of an art form on the verge of failing to impress us any longer. The characters' social failure on the narrative level is exacerbated by the loss of cinema.

But *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* is no ordinary nostalgia film. It begins with the screening of *Dragon Inn* that characteristically belongs to the historical period in question. As a traditional *wuxia* film (Chinese martial arts action/drama), *Dragon Inn* was one of the biggest hits in Taiwanese film history and its director King Hu was renowned for his perfectionist attitude towards film production. Originally hailing from Hong Kong, King Hu moved to Taiwan in pursuit of artistic freedom and quality in production following his successful *Come Drink With Me* (1966). His following films were relatively expensive in budget and displayed elaborate set designs with accurate historical focus as well as complex choreographies of sword fighting.<sup>115</sup> As such, upon initial inspection it appears odd and confusing for a Slow Cinema film to intertextually refer back to a martial arts action film as a “golden age,” since their conventions seem contradictory. However, despite belonging to the action genre, *Dragon Inn* greatly

favours minimalist aesthetics and does not entirely rely on rapid cutting as contemporary action films do as well as exhibiting spectacular staging of choreography and camera movements.<sup>116</sup> What is more important is the ways in which Tsai references *Dragon Inn* through a complex structure of mise-en-abyme, especially at the beginning where the credits cross over the films and blur their distinctions.<sup>117</sup> Following the credits, the film then depicts the audience watching *Dragon Inn*, doubling this viewing activity (See Figure 3.13). Later on in the film, however, the focus slightly changes towards the cinema theatre itself, achieving a nostalgic tone eulogizing its future destruction.



**Figure 3.13** – *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003)

*Goodbye, Dragon Inn* achieves a sense of nostalgia partly through its use of surface realism, especially in terms of setting, music and period casting. The iconography typically evokes the golden age of Taiwanese melodramas in the 1960s through its expressive use of colour grading and costume. In terms of setting, the Fu Ho Theatre's grandness in its own right is a reference to old times, in which, preceding the proliferation of small to medium scale theatres in the form of multiplexes, cinemas used to be huge enough to attract audiences by the thousands. Although the film does not feature any non-diegetic music, towards the end, Tsai inserts a popular Grace Chang song and achieves yet another powerful nostalgic reference to the 1960s. Furthermore,

the aforementioned two old men in the film, played by Tien Miao and Chun Shih respectively, were in fact stars in the original *Dragon Inn*. As such, their conversation towards the end of the film explicitly refers to cinema going as a forgotten tradition as well as their own situation as fading icons, so much so that the director suggests that they are ghosts wandering within the theatre by showing them dissolving into the foyer.

In addition to aspects of surface realism, the film's laconic style is itself nostalgic. Even for Tsai's standards, *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* appears to be an exaggerated version of the director's stylistic trademarks. Shot in fixed, long takes capturing the slow movement of figures within confined spaces the film is also particular in its lack of dialogue with only two scenes containing dialogue between characters. Totally at odds against mainstream editing patterns, the film allows large gaps of silence and dead time in between the events, which at times leads to humorous situations. The combination of the long take and dead time as stylistic strategies has its origins in the modernist and minimalist filmmaking during the 1960s, movements which Tsai openly acknowledges their influence on his understanding of cinema. In this respect, the increasing use of long take and dead time can be determined as "deliberate archaism" as I have explored in the earlier chapter. Both formal strategies perform a deliberate resemblance towards the look and shape of modernist art films of the 1960s, resulting in ceaseless comparisons of Tsai to directors as varying as Fassbinder, Ozu, Antonioni and Tati, all of which have engaged in utilizing the long take and dead time one way or another throughout their careers. However, I have argued throughout this chapter that Tsai's use of the long take, deep focus cinematography and dead time is aimed at creating a completely different effect on the spectator; or in other words, as opposed to an aesthetic of reality, Tsai achieves nostalgia and absurd humour.<sup>118</sup>



**Figure 3.14** – *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003)

Two examples best illustrate these claims in which the suspension of temporal duration achieves a nostalgic effect. First example is the concluding shot in segment J of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, in which the Japanese tourist is disturbed by a woman, played by Yang Kuei-mei, loudly eating peanuts. The volume level of the cracking peanuts is exaggerated to such an extent that they constitute a good example of what I referred earlier as the “sound gag.” The end of this segment is shot from the top of the auditorium, looking towards the woman with her back turned against us, down on the rest of the space with the distant screen barely visible (Figure 3.14). While the soundtrack is designed with off-screen sounds of the film-within-the-film, at this moment the only audible sound comes from the peanut eating woman’s cracking noise, which continues despite the termination of the film screening. We also cannot recognize any motion on the distant screen, contrary to the director’s previous emphases. As such, the scene depicts a suspended moment in which diegetic time is stalled and plot progression, or what is left of it, is deliberately paused.



**Figure 3.15** – *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003)

The second example I want to address is even more radical in the ways in which descriptive pause is exerted. It is formed of a single long take and constitutes segment M, which shows the empty auditorium after the end of the screening by a long shot from its frontal position, outlining its rows of empty seats (See Figure 3.15). After the fluorescent lights turn on, the ticket clerk enters the scenes and walks across limping, collecting items of trash left behind by the audience. She begins climbing the stairs and repeats the action from another row of seats while her limping sound becomes a kind of sonic rhythm – once again, another instance of the “sound gag,” this time frustratingly echoing earlier rhythmic patterns. The ticket woman exits the scene, but her off-screen limping sounds continue for a while until they disappear, but Tsai persists in showing us the empty theatre for a stunning five-minute sequence in which, literally, nothing happens.

Both scenes testify to the long take’s ability to evoke a nostalgic feeling. Especially the second scene, the extreme long shot of the movie theatre is prolonged to such an extent that it becomes a provoking patience test on the spectator. More so, however, the shot’s emptiness in all aspects allows the spectator to negotiate its possible meanings or feelings that it is supposed to evoke and engages the spectator in a quietly critical, albeit subjective, dynamic and active contemplation. While silently delivering a

eulogy for cinema culture and its glorious past through its calm and still emptiness, the shot also appropriates the very formal device that stands for its archaism. But what form of nostalgia does Tsai deliberate in these sequences, in other words, is Tsai reflecting on cinema's glorious past through intertextual references and an aesthetic style that evokes such a past, or does Tsai simply attempt at recreating, rebuilding, recycling and thus aggressively restoring this past? On the one hand, both of the scenes allow for reflective nostalgia as their emptiness and stillness simultaneously allow them to contemplate through what seems to be a productive instance of boredom (an aspect of the long take that I will address in the next chapter). On the other hand, however, Tsai's nostalgia film is at the same time attempting to restore the memory of the Grand Fu Ho Theatre. Following the theatre's destruction, Tsai bought thirty of its seats and conceived a short film about another film theatre that was soon to be demolished in Malaysia. The outcome was *It's a Dream* (2007), a gallery installation, which involved watching the short film from those seats and the installation toured various international film festivals before resting at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum's permanent collection.<sup>119</sup> As such, Tsai's filmmaking practices strictly involved restorative functions of nostalgia as well. For Kenneth Chan, however, debating whether Tsai's nostalgia is reflective or restorative overlooks its political functions. In light of the emerging popular interest in the Chinese martial arts films (as witnessed in the global successes of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* [2002] and *Hero* [2002]), Chan argues "Tsai engages a localized politics of *place* to disrupt the seamless co-optation of nostalgia into the transnational capitalist structures and networks of cultural consumption," through what he calls "a cinematic aesthetic of lingering."<sup>120</sup> As such, Chan refrains from idolizing Tsai as an art cinema filmmaker who opposes capitalist systems by evoking nostalgia and on the contrary, as I have demonstrated in earlier sections, locates him at the centre of such exchanges. What Tsai does poignantly, however, is his manner of triggering the critical assumptions of cinephilia by *deliberately* forcing his audiences to fixate on an empty theatre and evoke nostalgic feelings about *cinema*.

There are fundamental parallels between cinephilia and nostalgia. Cinephilia is more than a love of cinema and in this case it is also a way of making cinema. According to the French writer Antoine de Baecque, it is an attitude to life, and "a way of watching films, speaking about them and then diffusing this discourse."<sup>121</sup> With the

advent of newer technologies of exhibition and distribution as well as the changes in consumption patterns, critics now turn back towards the history of film culture and lament what has been lost, an attitude towards cinephilia perhaps best exemplified in Susan Sontag's much cited "Decay of Cinema" article.<sup>122</sup> This resurgent interest in cinephilia as a field of study focus on its own changing face, while constantly looking back on its past to examine how changes in digital technology have shaped the consumption and distribution of films. As such, these studies inevitably execute a form of nostalgia. Changes in technologies have, without a doubt, significantly altered our engagement with the artistic medium, but the very same changes have also brought forward new dynamics of film consumption as well as forms of cinephilia.

Slow Cinema emerges at a critical point in which discourses of cinephilia evolved from a lamentation of the past into a celebration of what future offered. As digital technologies flourished, traditional structures of distribution and exhibition gave way to alternative avenues to access independent art cinema. The main venues that comprised the celebration of cinephilia, namely the repertory cinema, for instance, slowly gives way to online communities, as Ben Slater writes "repertory cinema has relocated into cyberspace."<sup>123</sup> As such, the plethora of online communities, ranging from blogs, mailing lists, reviews sites, forums and discussion boards to open-access archives, elitist torrent sites, private or public hosting databases and paid streaming services create opportunities for active debates as well as an alternative space for exhibition and distribution, all of which convene the essential purposes of cinephilia. Jonathan Rosenbaum, for example, is one of the first film critics to embrace these aspects of digital technologies against those that bemoan the death of cinema.<sup>124</sup> The works of Slow Cinema directors are often positioned within debates of cinephilia: due to their difficult and uncompromising aesthetics, Slow Cinema films fail to attract ordinary audiences accustomed to mainstream cinema practices. As such, Slow Cinema is often designated as a tradition of art cinema catered for stereotypical personalities that are at best characterized as an adventurous cinephile, or at worst, as a cultural snob. As I have hinted towards in section 3.3, this tendency is also evident in camp aesthetics where matters of taste become involved in questions of legitimacy in evaluation and socio-cultural hierarchy. In this respect the criticism against Slow Cinema often takes a



mode of “aspirational viewing,” which, in the words of Dan Kois, is an opinionated form of viewing art films simply because one ought for they are culturally enriching.<sup>125</sup>

Tsai Ming-liang’s films intervene into this debate by re-salvaging what seems to be a forgotten piece of cinematic work and as such constitute a practice of cinephilia. Despite his attempt in preserving the aura of the Grand Fu Ho Theatre through a gallery installation, I believe Tsai’s intentions as well as Slow Cinema’s aesthetic mission, remain on the reflective tendency of nostalgia as opposed to restorative. While Slow Cinema models its aesthetic structures by emulating modernist art films, it nevertheless produces a unique aesthetic experience that mourns the demise of its predecessors. “Reflective nostalgia has elements of both mourning and melancholia,” writes Svetlana Boym, therefore it “is a form of deep mourning that performs a labor of grief both through pondering pain and through play that points to the future.”<sup>126</sup> In other words, while some of these self-reflexive films function as cinephiliac exercises that eulogize the long lost art cinema of the 1960s, they also turn towards the future of cinema by triggering the imagination of its spectators.

This section has outlined the ways in which nostalgia is related to Tsai’s *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*. I have argued that while the film laments the bygone days of cinema, it nevertheless constitutes a reflective tendency of nostalgia. Nostalgia in itself bears resemblance to contemporary studies of cinephilia, in which the glorious past of art cinema is often mourned and bemoaned against the current dominance of mainstream film. However, I have suggested that developments in distribution and exhibition technology have generated newer avenues for “cinephiliac moments,” where discussion and dissemination of films are regularly practiced. On the other hand, the intense circulation of Slow Cinema films throughout international film festivals reaffirm that cinephilia and art cinema are indeed “alive” and kicking.

### **3.7 – Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the ways in which films of Tsai Ming-liang displayed exemplary features of the contemporary festival film. As I have emphasized throughout this chapter, Tsai’s films regularly feature in international film festivals and as such

signify a Western demand for films that explore exotic East Asian cultures through familiar art cinema aesthetics. This process began with the rise of New Taiwan Cinema, a movement that attempted to unveil historical and cultural specificities of Taiwan, while incorporating a modernist European film style. Tsai's films, on the other hand, recapitulated this aesthetic by subverting genre conventions and positioned his work oscillating between minimalist and camp aesthetics. While the modernist framework in itself is not entirely sufficient to account for the subtle interactions between style and narrative form, I have nevertheless tried to describe the incongruities found in Tsai's style of filmmaking through Western conceptions of narrative and style. As such, I have argued that the narrative form in Tsai's films challenges our basic presumptions of narrative cinema and instead focus on symbols and situations that create incongruity. Such formal strategies display an understated sense of black humour, whose artistic ambitions closely resemble the Theatre of the Absurd. The Absurd constitutes a thematic resource for Slow Cinema in general, but its distrust of the spoken word and language also largely identifies a visual aesthetic that favours imagery and staging over dialogue, perhaps best exemplified in Tsai's films. I return to the concept of incongruity, which by and large informs the form of humour frequently present across Slow Cinema, Tsai Ming-liang and Jacques Tati and have analyzed several examples.

The relationship between local cinematic traditions and a global demand for art cinema aesthetics will become an important part of my argument in the next chapter, where I turn my focus to the films of Nuri Bilge Ceylan. Ceylan's films, I argue, similarly re-appropriate the local and the global, but do so in much more complex ways by adopting an aesthetic element crucial to understanding Slow Cinema: boredom.

## CHAPTER 4

### Contemplative Boredom: The Films of Nuri Bilge Ceylan

In this chapter I turn my focus to Nuri Bilge Ceylan, a prominent Turkish director whose films in the 21<sup>st</sup> century garnered much international critical attention, often in relation to the rise of Slow Cinema. I argue that Ceylan performs a unique intervention into Turkish film history by adapting certain European aesthetic sensibilities into a Turkish context, along which certain local filmmaking practices are combined with stylistic features of Slow Cinema. Thus, the films of Ceylan represent a compelling case study for Slow Cinema directors who work on two fronts: on the one hand, cultivating local traditions and conventions by investigating a national culture and on the other, disseminating this discourse to an international audience through global networks of exhibition. In this respect, my investigation of Ceylan's films is a logical continuation of Chapter 3, in which I examined the ways in which Tsai Ming-liang negotiated between traditions of Taiwanese cinema and institutional forces of the film festivals. Likewise, I examine this complex interaction in the domain of Turkish cinema in two parts: firstly, I provide a brief account of popular Turkish cinema history, its institutional parameters and aesthetic features and discuss the ways in which Ceylan negotiates these traditions throughout his filmography, especially in relation to the emergence of New Turkish Cinema in the mid-1990s. I argue that Ceylan's chief aesthetic contribution to this discourse is his creative use of boredom, at once a polar opposite of Turkish cinematic conventions and a state of mind often attributed to the Slow Cinema discourse, but not examined in detail in relation to cinematic spectatorship. As such, in the second part of this chapter, following a concise history and theory of boredom, I discern this elusive feeling as an aesthetic virtue that produces insightful, participatory spectatorship and consider its functions in various incarnations of Slow Cinema. I then conclude the chapter by offering an in-depth analysis of Ceylan's latest feature, *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (2011).

#### 4.1 – Introduction

Of all the directors associated with Slow Cinema, Nuri Bilge Ceylan remains one of the most cited and well known, but also one of the least investigated in Anglophone film criticism. Perhaps part of the reason for this is the cultural context in which Ceylan's films are produced and marketed. Turkey does not seem to be as familiar a terrain to Western cultures as, for instance, Tarr's Hungary, nor as exotic as Tsai's Taiwan. In this respect, Turkish cinema represents a unique cultural mixture in the eyes of Western audiences, which, on the one hand, embodies an intriguing portrayal of its distinctive cultural characteristics, and on the other, offers very little context and a faint difficulty in approaching its underlying historical circumstances. In fact, such "in-betweenness" has always been a significant part of the cultural discourses surrounding Turkey in the twentieth century: it is a country that is not only geographically, but also culturally, socially, politically and economically torn between Europe and Asia, West and East, modernity and tradition. Given this complicated socio-cultural background, it is no wonder how perplexing it must be to see any of Ceylan's films, which arguably display the most honest, powerful, poignant and accurate portrayal of contemporary Turkish society on screen for decades. While holding a mirror to Turkish society, Ceylan's films are often seen as a significant part of contemporary European art cinema and regularly feature in international film festivals and prestigious competitions. As such, what initially seems to be an investigation of local cultures suddenly becomes a major part of global networks of distribution, exhibition and reception – a fundamental attribute of Slow Cinema. In this respect, Ceylan's films constitute a negotiation between, on the one hand, a complex relationship with national culture and filmmaking traditions and, on the other, a cultural interaction with European aesthetic and stylistic sensibilities. Just as in the cases of both Béla Tarr and Tsai Ming-liang, Ceylan's films represent a complicated history of film and culture, in which complex debates between the local and the global are deeply and intricately rooted.

Therefore, I begin this chapter by providing a brief account of the history of Turkish cinema, focusing mainly on the conventions of *Yeşilçam*, its so-called golden age roughly between the years 1950 and 1980, during which domestic film production and consumption rocketed and dominated the country's film market. *Yeşilçam* cinema

was essentially seen as a primitive version of classical Hollywood: it was composed of mainly escapist films with recognizable stars and extraordinary plots, attracting working-class audiences. Noticeable characteristics of the films were their heavy-handed use of oral storytelling techniques, most notably the relentless post-synchronized dubbing; the practice of recycling other Western films, either in the form of cinematic plagiarism (the so-called Turkish rip-offs) or re-adapting well-known narratives into a completely Turkish context and finally its apparent promotion of lower cultural and aesthetic values through relatively cheap production quality and rudimentary narratives. Ceylan's films, however, represent a complete reversal of these *Yeşilçam* values and conventions. Ordinary lives of ordinary people, who are played by non-professional actors, are the focus of his films and are often depicted in stillness through a contemplation of their everyday situations and empty moments. In short, Ceylan's films display a great lack of narrative action and an abundance of dead time. Profoundly influenced by modernist art cinema, Ceylan's films nevertheless manifest an exhilarating visual imagery, sustained through prolonged sequences of slowness. As such, while I explore the evolution of *Yeşilçam* cinema into the emerging New Turkish Cinema movement during the 1990s, of which Ceylan is considered a forerunner, I also offer an account of the filmmaking career of the director himself, along with providing the production and exhibition history of his films. In addition to various stylistic features, Ceylan's use of autobiography as a method of production characterizes his initial intervention into this film history. The national critical reception at the time demonstrates the ways in which Ceylan is diverging away from his native cinematic conventions, while the international reception praises Ceylan as an original discovery, in essence creating a cultural dialogue between Turkey and the West.

In the second part of this chapter, I argue that Ceylan's principal aesthetic strategy is his productive use of boredom. Although historically regarded as a negative emotion, especially within the escapist structures of *Yeşilçam* cinema, boredom frequently surfaces in criticisms both for and against Slow Cinema. Boredom was so unwelcome in Turkish film criticism and culture that at one point Ceylan playfully and ironically admitted that he would keep making boring films.<sup>1</sup> As such, by citing interviews with Ceylan, this chapter will reconfigure boredom and slowness as a receptive state of mind, rather than one that simply reflects emptiness devoid of

meaning. In this respect, I argue that Slow Cinema transforms boredom into an aesthetically rewarding experience and to establish this argument provide a brief history and theory of boredom through works of literary scholars, philosophers and psychologists. I conclude that boredom can be considered as an aesthetic virtue, or in other words, in certain contexts boredom creates an opportunity for the human mind to exercise creative inspiration, artistic insight and effective problem solving. Creating such a state of mind in cinema depends on the various aesthetic strategies that the filmmakers employ, namely stylistic and formal devices emphasizing stillness, idleness and inactivity. I refer back to the concept of descriptive pause, which was previously explored in Chapter 2 in relation to modernist and avant-garde cinema, and claim that it provides the basis for such an aesthetic strategy. I apply this theoretical framework to Ceylan's *Distant* (2002) and *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*, both of which represent different aspects of the descriptive pause. The analysis considers the ways in which pausing story progression throughout the film not only obscures our understanding of its plot details, but through a specific use of mise-en-scène and camerawork reveals deeper insights about Turkish society and culture. In this respect, boredom achieves a revelatory function and encourages contemplation on part of the spectator, characterizing the foundation of Slow Cinema's mode of spectatorship.

#### **4.2 – Historical Background: *Yeşilçam* and the New Turkish Cinema**

Providing a detailed historical outline of Turkish cinema is certainly beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, in this section I want to set up the historical circumstances in which Turkish filmmakers worked, describe the types of films they produced and then conclude with the contrasting New Turkish Cinema movement that found its voice in the mid-to-late 1990s as well as outline the development of national film culture. As we will see, the traditional Turkish cinema was fundamentally escapist in nature and a dead contrast to Slow Cinema aesthetics. Mainly composed of conventional genre productions, it lacked a sense of artistic ambition that was to be recuperated by emerging contemporary directors that followed art cinema aesthetics. Ceylan was an important forerunner of this group of filmmakers, loosely termed as the New Turkish Cinema, which flourished in the 1990s and opposed traditional conventions in a number

of ways, although the focus remained aesthetic and political. While certain practical features and production methods of traditional Turkish cinema overlapped with Ceylan's work, it was largely the ways in which his films were marketed and distributed that set them apart from its mainstream counterparts. Similar to other Slow Cinema directors, Ceylan developed a filmmaking style that was first and foremost an opposition to the native and national cultural context.

Although enjoying a recent and brief interest, the study of Turkish cinema history has only been addressed in piecemeal fashion. Much of the work published in English centres around matters of identity, gender and national culture without a detailed interest in the historical evolution of cinema in Turkey.<sup>2</sup> Three major figures, however, are today considered to be indispensable resources, albeit mostly written in Turkish: Nijat Özön, the first film critic and theorist to actually undertake research into the history of Turkish cinema, also published the first serious film journal as well as a critical dictionary; Giovanni Scognamillo, a Levantine-Turkish film historian and author of Italian descent, whose two volume history of Turkish cinema revisits and to a certain extent revises Özön's research; and finally Rekin Teksoy, a renowned translator and cultural programmer, whose recently translated book is the first historical study of Turkish cinema published in English.<sup>3</sup> A much more accessible and recent book is Savaş Arslan's *Cinema in Turkey*, which not only collates important research from all preceding sources, but also offers a fresh perspective in each and every period of Turkish cinema history and currently stands as a unique resource for Anglophone scholars.<sup>4</sup> In the rest of this section I will navigate through important developments of Turkish cinema industry and illuminate the ways in which customs and conventions of national cinemas can cause auteur-directors to align their films with foreign traditions. Although Ceylan's work is largely consumed on an international level, his films nevertheless intervene into a particular cultural history: on the one hand opposing certain aesthetic traditions and on the other hand embracing some practical aspects of filmmaking. As in other Slow Cinema directors, Ceylan continues to hold a dialectic relationship to his national culture: while his films barely attract audiences in the local cinemas, abroad his films are revered for their honest and sweeping portrayal of contemporary Turkish life. Furthermore, the discourses and problems that are commonly seen in Turkish cinema are still part of Ceylan's cinema today and as such a

brief historical account can only help us better understand the cultural and historical significance of his films.

Cinema entered Turkey during the last days of the Ottoman Empire, at a time when the clashes between the modern and the traditional were at their highest peak.<sup>5</sup> Films were mainly exhibited in theatres, beer halls and coffee shops located in cosmopolitan districts, much of them owned by foreigners living in İstanbul. Although exhibition continued, film production did not commence until the mid-1910s.<sup>6</sup> The First World War and the subsequent Turkish War of Independence hindered any possibility of development of the cinema industry. Following 1923, the newly found Turkish Republic sought to modernize the traditional art forms such as literature, music and theatre, but was disinterested in reforming the cinema industry, and hence there was no state intervention in film production apart from usual regulations such as censorship. As a result, individual and private investment stimulated some, but in fact very little development in cinema. Artists such as Muhsin Ertuğrul, who was then an established theatre director, dominated the film industry for decades. Many of these productions established basic genres and audience patterns, seldom aiming for artistic innovation.<sup>7</sup> The end of the Second World War, however, brought an influx of foreign imports – mainly popular Egyptian films or classical Hollywood movies – that established an enormous popularity amongst the inexperienced Turkish audiences.<sup>8</sup> As a result, along with the economic expansion and the relatively liberal politics of the 1950s, there was, suddenly, an exponential increase in domestic film production.

In the early 1950s, Turkish cinema boomed and developed its own domestic production outlet, commonly referred to as *Yeşilçam* (literally, green pine). Named after a street in which most production companies were located, *Yeşilçam* roughly refers to the historical period between the years 1950-1980, which in its so-called golden-age domestic film production created an output of approximately two hundred films in 1966 and around three hundred in 1971, “while remaining around two hundred until the 1980 military intervention prevented the continuation of almost all independent cultural activity.”<sup>9</sup> Naturally, such a high production volume brought forward its own internal dynamics. For instance, Savaş Arslan notes that the technical incompetence and chronic low-budgets were very much the defining characteristics of *Yeşilçam* films, as well as



their extremely simple narratives that ubiquitously depict the clash between good and evil.<sup>10</sup> As such, *Yeşilçam* continually produced escapist productions for an uneducated, middle-to-lower class film audience, refusing to renew itself for decades, neither improving technical quality nor aesthetic value (although with honourable exceptions). Furthermore, Arslan views *Yeşilçam* as not a term given to identify a particular national film industry, but an umbrella term to identify itself as a “hub of cinema having a specific set of distinctive characteristics in terms of production, distribution, and exhibition network, and a specific filmic discourse and language developed by bringing together different films under one umbrella.”<sup>11</sup> This last comment is crucial, as it differentiates *Yeşilçam* from connotations to a large industrial institution such as Hollywood, as well as national and cultural movements such as the French New Wave. Instead, *Yeşilçam* in its everyday use delineates a nostalgic term that refers to a type of cinema no longer exists, but is conventionally based on certain cultural sensibilities, such as trite and banal dialogue or absurd chance encounters, and lowbrow aesthetic values.<sup>12</sup>

Despite these associations, *Yeşilçam* cinema maintained its popularity with working class audiences and accordingly its scope consisted of a wide range of genre films. These included family melodramas, action-adventures, comedies, “kebab” Westerns and soft-core sex films, or in other words, *Yeşilçam* catered to any demographical appetite. The variety of films, however, was offset by a perceived technical and aesthetic ineptitude, resulting in extremely low production values. However, according to Arslan, “the poor quality of shooting and editing did not present a problem on the part of spectators.” In fact, these features led to a unique form of narration that was inherently Turkish, drawing certain elements from traditional performing arts in which an extra-diegetic narrator would explain the situation and give away plot details at the outset of the play. “Similarly,” writes Arslan, “*Yeşilçam*’s presentation of its stories was based on oral cues rather than visual narration. It was the story that was of interest and therefore the deficiencies of visual narration were eliminated through oral narration.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, *Yeşilçam* cinema greatly favoured an extensive use of dialogue and plot, both of which became the primary way in which audiences engaged with movies. Therefore, the *Yeşilçam* aesthetic represents the complete opposite of Slow Cinema. There was little use of the long take or deep focus

cinematography while atmospheric sound design was almost non-existent and filmmakers were not interested in creating a distinctively visual mood. Ceylan retains an ambivalent relationship to this aesthetic history, which often resulted in the director attempting to please different audiences or work in two different markets. As we shall see later, because Ceylan's films are closer to a foreign (i.e. European) aesthetic, they were initially unsuccessful (at least in the financial sense) with Turkish audiences, who did not relate to Ceylan's use of dead time, boredom and slow pace.

This is not to say, however, that *Yeşilçam* did not produce any films with aesthetic ambitions, or, in other words, art films. As early as 1961, several individual directors were slowly gaining recognition by international film festivals, although such works remained extremely marginalized due to their box office failures in the domestic market as well as political issues that prevented these auteur-directors from working freely. The first Turkish film to achieve considerable success and receive proper recognition in Europe was *Dry Summer* (*Susuz Yaz*, Metin Erksan, 1964), which won the Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival in the same year.<sup>14</sup> The film depicted the plight of Turkish peasants in the under-developed rural areas of Anatolia, inaugurating the much discussed Turkish village films, which I will elaborate further later on in this chapter in relation to Ceylan's and other auteurs' films. *Dry Summer* was a breaking point in which the cultural exchange between Turkey and Western Europe intensified and with the introduction of actor and self-trained director Yılmaz Güney this relationship became much more visible. Notable directors followed this course in the 1970s and well into the 1980s with films shown at festivals; nevertheless Turkish cinema in this period failed to achieve enough sales and distribution to make any impact. Once again Yılmaz Güney was an exceptional figure in this period, whose political allegiance, individual charisma and artistic direction deeply attracted Western audiences.<sup>15</sup> As we shall see later, the next generation of filmmakers in the 1990s changed this course, as there was a visible increase in quality art-house filmmaking as seen in the works of Ceylan and others.

Although composed of many genres, *Yeşilçam* can still be considered as a coherent and unified discourse with its own particularities, and as such its overarching features are closely related to contemporary Turkish cinema, including Ceylan's films.

Savaş Arslan theorizes the cinema in Turkey through four distinctive notions: *hayal* (literally imagination or spectre), melodramatic modality, Turkification, and *özenti* (literally imitation or pretension), the latter two of which are significantly related to the ways in which Ceylan emerged as a unique filmmaker through the post-*Yeşilçam* environment. According to Arslan, Turkification refers to the nation-building objectives of the film industry: post-synchronized dubbing, the modification and remakes (or rip-offs) of Western films within a Turkish context. Turkification also significantly defines the concept of *özenti*: a desire to be like the other (the West, or Hollywood), through various practices of transformation. “In this movement from self to other,” Arslan notes, “a return to the original self is impossible,” and “Yeşilçam maintained a double existence, not being one nor being the other but in continual movement between the two.”<sup>16</sup> More specifically, I see Turkification and *özenti* as two important, often complementary concepts, that not only illuminate the discourses in *Yeşilçam* cinema but furthermore reflect the broader political, social and cultural movements that take place within modern Turkey. While *özenti* represents the aspirations of a cultural elite that wants to become Westernized, Turkification, or in other words the republican project of reforming, adapting and integrating Western values into a traditional Turkish context, indicates one particular method for achieving this dialectic between the traditional and the modern (or Western). We shall see later how Ceylan appropriates this dialectic, on the one hand by working in two completely different markets (the local and the global or literally the Turkish and the Western) and on the other hand the ways in which his films attest to these notions. The contradictions between the traditional and the modern are ever-present in Turkey, not least for its geographical location literally in-between Europe and Asia, but largely in part for its socio-political history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As in Europe, the formation of film culture in Turkey largely testifies to these developments.

A genuine film culture did not flourish in Turkey until the late-1960s, due to the lack of investment either from state or private initiatives. Arslan writes: “The state was not interested in opening film schools, film libraries, or cinematheques. The only existing places that might have served such functions were the screening theaters established by the RPP [Republican People’s Party] at the People’s Houses, which were closed under the DP [Democratic Party] government [throughout the 1950s]. This

situation continued until the mid-1960s, when the first cinemathèque and film archive were established. The first film school opened in the mid-1970s.”<sup>17</sup> The Turkish Cinemathèque (originally, *Türk Sinematek Derneği*, and literally *The Turkish Cinemathèque Association*) was found in August 25, 1965 by Onat Kutlar, at the time an author and cinephile who studied philosophy in Paris during the early 1960s and was a regular visitor of the *Cinémathèque Française*. The cinemathèque was by no means an organized institution such as the *Cinémathèque Française* that paid attention to the preservation of cinematic works, but functioned as a social club and a network for intellectuals, scholars and artists who were interested in the history of cinema and wanted to engage with contemporary art cinema. The screenings were usually held in the cosmopolitan Beyoğlu district of İstanbul and the events were completely funded by its members based in İstanbul and Ankara. The journal *Yeni Sinema* [New Cinema] was published by the association between 1966 and 1970, and some minor (and irregular) publications continued in the following years. After 1975, however, the association lost its impact, but continued screenings until its closure in 1980.<sup>18</sup> The members in İstanbul and Ankara were divided into two different branches in the aftermath of 1980, which resulted in local initiatives that eventually evolved into respective film festivals and other clubs.<sup>19</sup> Although the cinemathèque itself did not support Ceylan directly, we will see later how its future legacy, in other words the urban film festivals, become an important site of exhibition and recognition for Ceylan as well as the New Turkish Cinema group.

The cinemathèque was instrumental in developing an awareness of Western cinematic movements, especially the European art-house waves, and instigated a unique turn within national film culture and film criticism. Left-wing film critics began to see *Yeşilçam* as backward and proposed its termination to make way for a cinematic movement modelled on Italian Neorealism and other New Waves, without any consideration for Third World cinemas – a view completely endorsed by republican models of Westernization from above.<sup>20</sup> In response, the *Yeşilçam* industry and filmmakers voiced two solutions: *milli* cinema, an Islamic outlook that promoted the Ottoman identity and culture through a bonding with a non-secular imperial past, represented by directors Yücel Çakmaklı and Mesut Uçakan; and *ulusal* cinema, a nationalist outlook combining elements of Republicanism and Turkishness, commonly

associated with the works of Metin Erksan, Halit Refiğ and partly Lütfi Akad.<sup>21</sup> As such, the dialectics of modernity and tradition continued to dominate the cultural discourses surrounding Turkey and the clash between the *ulusal* and *milli* cinemas was simply another manifestation of this anxiety that defined the period of late-1970s.<sup>22</sup>

The year 1980 is in many ways a turning point for Turkey, not only for the cinema industry, but more intensely so for the socio-cultural and political future of the general public. The coalition government's failure to resolve the violent clashes between armed political groups and its inability to eradicate anarchy in urban centres culminated in a military *coup d'état*, which in turn brought social and cultural life to a three year halt. The military junta gathered intellectuals in prisons and banned all political activity, eventually creating a completely new constitution in 1982, which, although brought a new government into action, did not deliver a democratic climate. The ban on political parties was finally lifted in 1987, after years of interrogation and persecution of leftist writers, critics, scholars and intellectuals. With leftist political parties out of the way, conservative parties regained control over the parliament and introduced economic policies strongly in favour of the free market neo-liberal policies and integrated the Turkish economic market with the global network, at times with severe consequences. In short, over 1980s and early 1990s, Turkish social life underwent rapid and drastic changes: devaluation of currency, massive immigration to urban centres and unemployment, economic instability, asymmetric distribution of wealth, internal political threats (for example, the rise Islamic fundamentalism and the armed Kurdish rebellions) became part of everyday life.<sup>23</sup> The cultural outlook of the country changed so rapidly that the naivety and blind optimism of *Yeşilçam* failed to capture the imagination of Turkish audiences.

The 1980s, therefore, saw a steady decline of *Yeşilçam* cinema. Although the number of productions maintained a decent value, cinema attendance, ticket sales and number of theatres plummeted to all-time low figures.<sup>24</sup> Those theatres that remained open in urban centres insisted on showing foreign imports, namely Hollywood blockbusters, which posed serious competition to *Yeşilçam* films and reduced revenues. Increasing costs of film production due to inflation, the video boom of the 1980s and finally the privatisation of the broadcasting industry in Turkey, and hence television

replacing the cinema theatre, also contributed significantly to *Yeşilçam*'s demise.<sup>25</sup> As a result, while the popular cinema came to an end, the 1980s also saw a number of socially conscious films with ambivalent political messages, many of which were later criticized in the national scene for being too difficult. For example, Yılmaz Güney's *The Road (Yol, 1982)*, perhaps the most well-known Turkish film until recently, follows the stories of five prisoners travelling to a distinctive part of Anatolia upon their leave from prison. In many ways, Güney constructed the story in a way to evoke an allegory of the military intervention in Turkey in 1980 as the prisoners slowly realize that their lives outside of the prison is no less different or oppressive than the one in prison. As Asuman Suner writes, "using prison as a metaphor for the state of Turkish society under military rule, the film raises a radical critique not only of the oppressive Turkish state, but also of feudal traditions prevailing in rural Turkey."<sup>26</sup> Other notable auteur-directors, such as Atif Yılmaz, Ali Özgentürk, Erden Kıral and Ömer Kavur, continued to work throughout 1980s, producing politically and socially conscious films, but remained unable to attain neither a wider audience nor a significant impact and were similarly frequently confronted by state censorship.<sup>27</sup>

While the Hollywood dominance of the Turkish market lasted until mid-2000s, the mid-1990s saw a renewal of Turkish cinema. Many critics concur in the association of this resurrection to the release of Yavuz Turgul's *The Bandit (Eşkiya, 1996)*, which became one of the biggest box-office successes in Turkey. *The Bandit* directly inherited aspects of narrative, characterization and themes from *Yeşilçam*, although part of its success in fact relied on its technical competence. It was the first Turkish film to use synchronous sound recording as well as utilizing sophisticated editing techniques, both of which were unseen in Turkish cinema apart from foreign imports.<sup>28</sup> Such an increase in production values was largely caused by the expansion of the commercial advertising and television sectors, both of which increased the quality of filmmaking by offering professional technicians, studios and equipment for use.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the economic success of the film demonstrated optimism for other directors and in many ways triggered a wave of films. Suddenly, the so-called New Turkish Cinema discourse arose, indicating a resurgence and/or renewal of Turkish national cinema.<sup>30</sup> Although not overtly, Asuman Suner demonstrates that the phrase New Turkish Cinema should be understood in two distinctive fronts, at least within the context of the 1990s.<sup>31</sup> On the

one hand, *The Bandit* epitomized a more popular form of cinema, represented by directors such as Yavuz Turgul, Mustafa Altıoklar, Sinan Çetin and Yılmaz Erdoğan, whose financial resources were not only composed of the derelict film industry, but also drew from related industries such as television, advertising and entertainment. These films gradually replaced the Hollywood dominance of the domestic market by successfully revising *Yeşilçam* values and themes, often in an ironic, humorous or nostalgic manner and establishing a firm audience base in Turkey as well as abroad by aiming at the Turkish diasporas in Western countries. On the other hand, the same year brought Derviş Zaim's *Somersault in a Coffin* (*Tabutta Rövaşata*, 1996), which inaugurated the “new wave art cinema” in Turkey along with Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *The Small Town* (*Kasaba*, 1997) and Zeki Demirkubuz's *Innocence* (*Masumiyet*, 1997). Despite their critical acclaim, these films only attracted a niche audience at the beginning and never found their way into the mainstream media well into the 2000s.

The phrase New Turkish Cinema was assigned to a group of films because of their break away from aesthetic features closely associated with *Yeşilçam*. Many of these films were shot with synchronized sound and hence relied on naturalistic use of dialogue that included different accents from various parts of Turkey; for instance the use of swear words in Serdar Akar's *On Board* (*Gemide*, 1998) accompanied by a particularly accurate working-class accent was previously unseen, or at least not common, in Turkish cinema. Furthermore, many directors based their films on particular themes and established themselves as auteur-directors: Derviş Zaim and Yeşim Ustaoğlu revealed the changing forces in Turkish society by implicitly referring to recent events in the political history of Turkey, while Nuri Bilge Ceylan studied the alienation of the individual artist by drawing from his personal memories. On the other hand, Western literary and philosophical influences were made explicit in much of these films, for instance Demirkubuz adapting works of Fyodor Dostoyevsky (*Waiting Room*, 2004) and Albert Camus (*Fate*, 2001), and Ceylan dedicating his films to Anton Chekhov. More generally, however, these films collectively share a common trait, which Fırat Yücel describes as “the pursuit of vocalizing and visualizing the unspoken, especially those feelings that the commotion or monotony of everyday life make difficult or impossible to articulate.”<sup>32</sup> While absence of speech in many of these films reflects the inability of their characters' expression, in some works “the unspoken

referred more to sociopolitical issues like cultural amnesia, hidden violence, discrimination, prejudice, and crises of identity.”<sup>33</sup> Such a downplay of the spoken word and importance of language opposes the ways in which *Yeşilçam* cinema communicated with its audiences and demonstrates a clear cut transition from an oral and aural based narration system to one that fosters visual representation. In other words, the legacy of European art cinema was finally beginning to take place in Turkey with filmmakers such as Ceylan consciously experimenting with the formal and visual aspects of the medium. While slowly becoming culturally and politically conscious, Turkish art cinema adapted well-known aesthetic features of Slow Cinema.

In addition to these aesthetic differences, New Turkish Cinema differentiates itself from its predecessors in its modes of production, sources of funding, distribution and sites of exhibition. As discussed earlier, developments in tangential sectors enabled filmmakers to increase the production quality of their films. However, many of these art films were still individually funded and the directors worked with extremely low budgets, a practice that was dubbed as “guerrilla filmmaking” by Derviş Zaim. Working with low budgets was common in *Yeşilçam* and although certain popular films of the 1990s tended to be relatively expensive, New Turkish Cinema directors took the low budget notion to an austere level. Austerity and minimalism were other ways of resisting and confronting mainstream culture as well as the traditions of *Yeşilçam* cinema. For example, drawing from Ceylan’s early interviews, Asuman Suner writes, “[w]orking on a low budget is not only a matter of necessity, but a preference for Ceylan, who perceives ‘minimalism’ as his resistance to the culture of excess and the consumption craze characterizing the contemporary world.”<sup>34</sup> As such, minimalism and the low budget production carried an aesthetic as well as an ideological function for New Turkish Cinema directors, as much as it did for the Slow Cinema directors across the globe. Ceylan’s reference to “the culture of excess and the consumption craze” was in many ways the outcome of the period following the 1980s, which saw a radical liberalization of Turkey’s economy and rapidly changed its socio-cultural milieu. Although the economy was highly unstable, modernization, industrialization and liberal politics intensified well into the 1990s, especially noticeable in the urban centres where the New Turkish Cinema directors emerged. With no funds available from the state or the private sector, these filmmakers mostly relied on personal savings to finance their



work and Ceylan was no exception. Details of Ceylan's sparse approach to production as well as his minimalist aesthetics will be elaborated further in the following sections.

Upon the critical success of their early works New Turkish Cinema directors were able to attain alternative sources of funding, many of which parallel the emerging Slow Cinema directors of the 2000s. Derviş Zaim, for instance, argues that the main sources of funding for both independent and mainstream Turkish cinema are composed of Eurimages and television channels (both domestic and international).<sup>35</sup> Zaim continues: "Although the state provided increasingly more support to filmmakers during this time, this support never transformed into a continuous, systematic and multi-dimensional cultural policy."<sup>36</sup> A notable exception is the Committee for Supporting Cinema, a funding body setup by the Ministry of Culture in 2005, which has since supported a large amount of debut features of young directors with sums ranging from €100,000 to €125,000.<sup>37</sup> According to Zaim, a final source of funding for these filmmakers are the independent funds closely associated with international film festivals (such as Hubert Bals in Rotterdam and the World Cinema Fund in Berlin), which "due to their prestige and their ability to carry chosen projects to other platforms, festivals and networks of contact [have] the potential to produce extremely valuable and effective outcomes."<sup>38</sup> Films that receive funding from these organizations "automatically earn the right, even before the filming begins, to be screened at an important festival." For example Yeşim Ustaoglu's *Waiting for the Clouds* (*Bulutları Beklerken*, 2003) received scriptwriting support from Germany and received much critical attention in Berlinale's Panorama.<sup>39</sup> As such, competing at international film festivals as well as pursuing third party funding were vital for New Turkish Cinema directors and Ceylan's successful track record in Cannes was a clear demonstration of this strategy. In this respect, international film festivals were significant for enabling the New Turkish Cinema directors to acquire funding as well as improve their distribution networks.

National film festivals, on the other hand, also played an important role for the development of New Turkish Cinema. Firstly, they generated thriving local film cultures, especially in the urban centres and were instrumental in the distribution of international art films. Secondly, the New Turkish Cinema directors were able to premiere their works nationally and were recognized by the film critics, other

professionals as well as their targeted niche audience. The first film festival in Turkey began its competition in 1964 in Antalya, a coastal city based along the Mediterranean shore.<sup>40</sup> Since its inception, The Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival was dedicated to the celebration and promotion of Turkish cinema. Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, the festival was in many ways a platform for all Turkish filmmakers and was, until recently, associated with the nostalgic past of *Yeşilçam*, although the festival jury did recognize many of the New Turkish Cinema films. Furthermore, Gönül Dönmez-Colin notes that the festival regularly featured a range of scandals, “from jury irregularities to fame- and fortune-hunting starlets,” but most importantly those that regarded political censorship. Many important Turkish films from late 1970s and early 1980s were initially refused entry at the competition in Antalya because the censorship committees found them inappropriate for various reasons.<sup>41</sup> Other notable film festivals, most importantly the International İstanbul Film Festival and International Ankara Film Festival began programming in 1982 and 1988 respectively, with the help of ex-cinematheque members. Both of these festivals were modest in their beginnings, which included series of screenings of certain European films of the year. However, with the support of public funds and individual initiatives, they managed to become important cultural events in both urban centres and soon began their own competition sections. The International İstanbul Film Festival’s goal, for instance, was to “introduce quality films of the world to İstanbul audiences and to showcase quality Turkish films,” in the hope for a dialogue between Turkish art films and audiences.<sup>42</sup> Therefore the festival attained a triple focus: retrospectives (to date, including figures such as Robert Bresson, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Bernardo Bertolucci.), contemporary art films and competition films.<sup>43</sup> The International İstanbul Film Festival was single-handedly responsible for screening a great number of Slow Cinema films especially throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, introducing directors such as Béla Tarr, Tsai Ming-liang and Darezhan Omirbayev to cinephile circles in İstanbul. The festival also promoted minimalist cinema by awarding its Golden Tulip to films such as *Goodbye Dragon Inn* (2003), *Café Lumière* (2003) and *Egg* (2007), well-known films of the Slow Cinema cycle. Furthermore, both festivals pay an increasing attention to the promotion and production of contemporary Turkish films, not least through national awards and competitions, but also through setting up international co-production markets, networks and production

funds. Meetings on the Bridge, a tangential platform part of the International İstanbul Film Festival, for instance, was begun in 2006 and consists of a series of workshops and competitions that reward applications either in the scriptwriting, production or post-production stages.<sup>44</sup>

In many ways, New Turkish Cinema was an early collective sign of these cultural developments. Along with these institutional establishments, the critical success of the first wave of filmmakers in late-1990s eventually paved the way for a younger generation of filmmakers, most of which saw figures like Ceylan as their influences. Apart from several individual figures, *Yeşilçam*'s influence was disregarded and its failure to adjust its conventions to a more demanding, mature and complex audience resulted in its aesthetic termination.<sup>45</sup> Against this backdrop of cultural transformation, Ceylan began his filmmaking career by breaking away from traditions and incorporating autobiographical aspects into his oeuvre. As we shall see later in the next sections, adopting art cinema conventions such as minimalism, long takes and dead time – in other words aesthetic features specifically associated with Slow Cinema – were also part of Ceylan's intervention into Turkish cinema culture. Although Ceylan is often noted as a forerunner in Turkish art cinema, other New Turkish Cinema directors such as Yeşim Ustaoglu, Zeki Demirkubuz, Semih Kaplanoğlu and Reha Erdem also adopted aspects of Slow Cinema aesthetics. In other words, New Turkish Cinema as a movement was in many ways a localised version of the Slow Cinema movement within a national context.

In sum, *Yeşilçam* cinema consisted of aesthetic features in total opposition to Slow Cinema, but its historical development is exemplary in the ways in which national art cinema movements emerge and differentiate themselves from a traditional past. While *Yeşilçam* aspired to be like Hollywood, it developed its own cultural, aesthetic and political conventions before completely disbanding in the late 1980s. There is a remarkable similarity to the ways in which Taiwan cinema developed, as outlined in the second section of Chapter 3. While both domestic markets flourished and developed their native traditions in the face of economic, social or political crises, film production and consumption suddenly plummeted. The revival of certain art cinema movements, however, relied not only on domestic incentives, but also happened through negotiating

either aesthetic or political issues with transnational or global networks. Thus, these films elevated to the international scene by catering to international audiences.<sup>46</sup> As such, the emergence of New Turkish Cinema and Ceylan's role in it represent a typical, albeit often neglected, historical trajectory of art cinema. Following this historical background, the next section examines Ceylan's filmography and the ways in which his films are situated against *Yeşilçam* conventions, particularly in terms of their production and exhibition histories.

### **4.3 –Evolution from an Artisanal Mode of Production**

This section examines the production and exhibition history of Ceylan's films in chronological order. Ceylan's filmography represents a strong case study for Slow Cinema, because it embodies the very typical avenues that art cinema directors go through. Beginning with modest productions with a practical approach to filmmaking influenced by *Yeşilçam* conventions, Ceylan gradually took part in the international art cinema circuit by securing film festival funding. Despite adopting certain local practices, Ceylan's cinema was nevertheless an unusual one for Turkish audiences. His films were largely seen as influenced by European art cinema giants and his idiosyncratic style gradually became a staple in contemporary art cinema. Following his third feature, Ceylan's films regularly premiered at the Cannes Film Festival; in other words, by adopting aesthetic features of minimalist art cinema, his portrayal of Turkish society and culture suddenly attracted international cinephile circles. The main purpose of this section is, however, to demonstrate Ceylan's evolution from an artisanal mode of production into an organized and international one, weaving together the clashes between the local and global, national and international traditions. The ways in which Ceylan negotiates these aesthetic and cultural debates will be the focus of the following section.

As a director belonging to the Slow Cinema tradition, Ceylan challenged the major preconceptions of *Yeşilçam* cinema. No other Turkish filmmaker before, perhaps with the exception of Yılmaz Güney, treated autobiography as a significant element within various methods of artistic creation. Auteurs in the traditional sense existed in

*Yeşilçam* cinema, but Ceylan was in many ways the first to honestly represent and refer to his own life, memories, environment and ideas on screen. Although born in İstanbul in 1959 to an educated, civil servant middle-class family, Ceylan soon moved to Yenice, a peripheral town of Çanakkale, which is a Thracian city bordering Anatolia and Europe.<sup>47</sup> Much of Ceylan's childhood was spent in this rural setting, but he eventually moved back to İstanbul along with his mother and older sister, visiting Yenice mostly during the summer vacations. Ceylan's early films were in fact set and shot within this environment, based on his recollections as well as short stories written by his older sister. Before pursuing a career in filmmaking, Ceylan studied electrical engineering at Boğaziçi University in İstanbul and completed his degree in 1985. During this period Ceylan deeply engaged with Western culture, especially through the resources the university provided in the form of classical music, photography and cinema.<sup>48</sup> Young intellectuals forcing themselves to withdraw from political ambitions and instead engaging with the arts, more specifically Western Art, due to the political ambivalence during the violent confrontations between right wing and left-wing groups and especially following the *coup d'état* of 1980 was a common tendency found amongst some of the most successful artists emerging in Turkey in the 1990s.<sup>49</sup> Boğaziçi University was an ideal place for this development at this time, due to its historical connections with the American cultural and educational institutions and its rich variety of student clubs that deeply interested Ceylan.<sup>50</sup> During his studies, Ceylan took an interest in photography and was already taking passport style photos to earn pocket money. On the other hand, although lacking a film or moving image related department, Boğaziçi University reportedly offered its students elective courses in cinema, which enabled Ceylan to engage with the modern masters of European art-house cinema, more specifically auteurs such as Michelangelo Antonioni, Ingmar Bergman, Robert Bresson and most importantly, Andrei Tarkovsky.<sup>51</sup>

In this respect, Europe and Western culture formed an intellectual and creative inspiration for Ceylan, but at the same time he also showed a sentimental interest in Eastern culture as well as certain national traditions. This duality was already present in the period immediately preceding his filmmaking career. Upon graduating, Ceylan worked as a commercial photographer and travelled across Europe and Asia, in his own words "searching for the meaning of life." However, he finally decided to come back to

Turkey to complete his compulsory military service and within the 18 months he spent in Ankara for his national duty, he faced “a rich mosaic of Turkish culture,” represented by a variety of people belonging to Turkish society, which he isolated himself during most of the 1980s. After such a revelation, Ceylan decided to become a filmmaker.<sup>52</sup> He spent some time in London looking for film schools and visiting its cinematheques, such as The Scala in Kings Cross and the National Film Theatre in Southbank.<sup>53</sup> During the late 1980s, he enrolled in Mimar Sinan University, known for its fine art faculty as well as its extensive archive of Turkish cinema.<sup>54</sup> While achieving a good reputation in commercial photography, by early 1990s he abandoned both the profession and the filmmaking course after two years and started working on his film career.

Ceylan’s first film was an experimental short titled *Cocoon (Koza, 1995)*. It was shot over a year with a single assistant, and film stock past its expiry date acquired from the Turkish state broadcasting company, or in other words with an almost zero budget.<sup>55</sup> The film explores the cycles of rural life through images of Ceylan’s parents placed against visual patterns in nature and borders the non-narrative form for its frequent use of associational montage as well as its lack of characterization and causality. It begins by juxtaposing photographs of Ceylan’s parents and their current situation; the father carries out his duties within the rural setting while the mother seems to be travelling through an urban area. The first indication of a rudimentary plot comes when we see Ceylan’s mother reuniting with the father, following a presumably lengthy trip to the city. However, after this encounter the film thwarts narrative causality in favour of an impeccable mood and atmosphere. While the obscure imagery captures moments of natural life, the sound design contains a mixture of classical music, ambient noises and the howling wind. Shot on 16mm, *Koza* was the first Turkish short film ever to compete for a Golden Palm in the Cannes Short Film Competition and in many ways created a pathway for Ceylan in the international film festival market. Although much more experimental than his features, the film nevertheless shares many aspects of his future films.

Ceylan’s debut feature was *The Small Town (Kasaba, 1997)*, which was partly funded by the Turkish Ministry of Culture. Commonly seen as the beginnings of the burgeoning New Turkish Cinema, the film was produced with a crew of two: Ceylan

himself and his assistant Sadık İncesu, who handled various production responsibilities. According to Ceylan the budget of the film was only US \$50,000 most of which was spent on the post-production facilities in Hungary. The film was based on a short story by Ceylan's older sister Emine Ceylan and included various quotes from and allusions to Chekhov.<sup>56</sup> Returning to the familiar setting from his childhood, Ceylan once again captures the rhythms and cycles in a provincial town, this time with the aid of several characters, played by his family members and siblings, most of whom will feature similar roles in Ceylan's next feature. While irreducible to a plot summary, the film takes on three generations of a large family and establishes a series of tensions, disagreements and irregularities between them. Adapting the Chekhovian short story form, the film received, as we will see later, positive critical reception, but virtually failed at its box office. However, it received a decent exposure in many international film festivals, including notable national and international awards such as the Jury Prize in Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival (1997), Yılmaz Güney Special Prize in Adana Golden Boll Film Festival (1997), Calgary Prize in Berlin Film Festival (1998), Special Jury Prize in Nantes Film Festival (1998) and a FIPRESCI Prize in İstanbul Film Festival (1998), for which Ceylan was awarded US \$30,000.<sup>57</sup>

His next feature was *Clouds of May* (*Mayıs Sıkıntısı*, 1999), a thematic continuation of his earlier feature. The film depicts the emerging independent filmmaker Muzaffer, played by Ceylan's friend Muzaffer Özdemir, visiting his family in his provincial hometown near Çanakkale in pursuit of location scouting and casting research. During his visit, Muzaffer persuades his cousin Saffet, played by Ceylan's real-life cousin Mehmet Emin Toprak, into joining the film crew, following the latter's failure in the university entrance exams and his subsequent ill-fated job at the local factory. In the meanwhile, Muzaffer's father, Emin (Emin Ceylan), is preoccupied with the forest he has been cultivating in the last two decades and ignores Muzaffer's plea into acting for his film. The film's title literally translates as "The Boredom of May," and along with *The Small Town*, both films were considered as an examination of a unique sense of temporality within the Turkish provincial setting. I will be addressing this aspect of his filmography later on, especially in relation to boredom as an aesthetic strategy in his films. Both thematically and stylistically, however, *Clouds of May* initiated a set of films Ceylan made one after another that strongly displayed various

aspects of the Slow Cinema aesthetics: its deliberate use of slow pacing through long takes, employment of dead time, dedramatized narrative structures, fixed-position cameras, attentiveness to landscape, still images lacking movement and expressive colour photography.

In many ways, *Clouds of May* is the film that introduced Ceylan to a larger number of Turkish cinephiles, who started to recognize Ceylan's potential as an important filmmaker. This was largely due to Ceylan's overwhelming success at three major Turkish film festivals as the film received the Best Film Award in Ankara, İstanbul and Antalya. Therefore, *Clouds of May* enjoyed some journalistic attention in popular film and cultural magazines as well as newspaper coverage.<sup>58</sup> However, the attendance figures for such independent films were still too low to produce any kind of cultural or economic impact. On the international level, the film competed for the Golden Bear in Berlin Film Festival and received a total of sixteen awards from international film festivals, which include Angers European First Film Festival, Buenos Aires International Festival of Independent Cinema and Singapore International Film Festival. As such, *Clouds of May* became one of the most awarded Turkish films, at least until Ceylan's next feature was released.

Although *Clouds of May* received a decent distribution and number of awards, Ceylan's international breakthrough was *Distant (Uzak, 2002)*, which thematically picked up where his previous films left off. Saffet's dreams of leaving the town for a more sophisticated and prosperous life in the city are represented in *Distant* in guise of a new character Yusuf, played by the same enigmatic and naturally gifted Mehmet Emin Toprak. On the other hand, Muzaffer Özdemir reprised his earlier role in *Clouds of May*'s Muzaffer as Mahmut, a commercial photographer who had left the provincial lifestyle behind and had already set up a life for himself (and himself only) in İstanbul. The film portrays this strange relationship of two men, who are in many ways diametrically opposite to each other in terms of their social and cultural status. They are unable to communicate with each other, let alone with the opposite sex and fail to resolve their predicaments while wandering aimlessly against the background of a snow-covered and visually stunning İstanbul. As such, the film provides a miniature portrait of contemporary Turkey and holds a mirror to its age-old cultural problems,



such as the conflicts between urban-rural, intellectual-uneducated and modern-traditional.

*Distant* was produced in different circumstances than Ceylan's earlier features. The production crew included five people, including Ceylan who also acted as cinematographer. The rest of the team took on specific responsibilities, such as production design, sound, lighting and camera assistant, however many aspects of the production were reportedly handled through a communal spirit: including little or no pre-production or rehearsing and filming in Ceylan's own flat, which in the film appeared as Mahmut's house.<sup>59</sup> The film marked the first time in which Ceylan received substantial funding from an independent, third party institution, which was the Hubert Bals Fund scheme managed by the International Film Festival Rotterdam.<sup>60</sup> In effect, this marked a long-lasting relationship between Ceylan and the various art cinema institutions based in Europe, a relationship that very quickly culminated in the film's premiere at the 2003 Cannes Film Festival. As the favourite of the majority of press members at the festival, *Distant* went on to win the Grand Jury Prize and was subsequently an immense international art-house hit. The festival jury also shared the Best Actor Prize between Muzaffer Özdemir and Mehmet Emin Toprak, the latter of who tragically died in a road accident upon his return from the film's release at the Ankara Film Festival. Although I will address its national and international critical reception later on, it should be noted here that the film not only went on to tour various film festivals and entered commercial distribution networks, but it also continued to receive numerous awards at other prestigious film festivals.<sup>61</sup>

With the international success of *Distant*, Ceylan's career entered a new phase in which his collaboration and interaction with European cinematic institutions intensified. Although his future productions were shot in Turkey and were concerned with Turkish themes, all of them premiered at the Cannes Film Festival, receiving major awards and gaining popularity amongst international art cinema circles. Likewise, the films maintained their critical success within Turkish publications, but their box office numbers were still modest. In other words, Ceylan became a typical global art cinema director; although critically praised at home, the main audience for his films were international cinephiles, critics and festival viewers. His next film *Climates* (*İklimler*,

2006) inaugurated this complex relationship, which received the FIPRESCI prize at Cannes, where it premiered, and involved several other developments in Ceylan's filmmaking career. For example, Ceylan began working with the producer Zeynep Özbatur, whose previous work included Turkish art films such as *Lola + Bilidikid* (Kutluğ Ataman, 1999) and *Hiçbir yerde* (Tayfun Pirselimoglu, 2002).<sup>62</sup> Secondly, *Climates* received €200,000 from Eurimages towards its production as well as financial support from the Turkish Ministry of Culture, and was co-produced with the French-based Pyramide Productions in association with the Turkish company İmaj.<sup>63</sup> Much of the funding was once again spent on the post-production stage, namely the editing and sound design processes, and took place in France, where Ceylan admittedly wanted to benefit from the production company's technical know-how. Moreover, Gökhan Tiryaki, by then a director of photography at İmaj Film with previous experience in the state broadcast company, was recruited for the cinematographer role, increasing the shooting crew to fourteen. Switching to high-definition video for practical reasons, the Ceylan-Tiryaki collaboration still persists today as a fruitful relationship.<sup>64</sup> In other words, Ceylan consolidated his individual role as a director by acquiring professional and technical assistance for his film productions. His mode of production slowly evolved from a handful of assistants into a regular-sized, albeit minimalist crew.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the film was, however, Ceylan's role in front of the camera. Ceylan decided to try out his acting skills in the film, which depicts the disintegrating relationship between İsa (Nuri Bilge Ceylan) and Bahar (Ebru Ceylan). Following their unsuccessful trip to a Turkish coastal town in the Southwest, the couple decide to break up. Having secondary thoughts, İsa purposelessly drifts around İstanbul and is sneering at by his colleagues for his inability to complete his work on architecture. One evening, he accidentally bumps into his ex-girlfriend Serap and stalks her to her apartment, culminating in an erotic meet-up later in the night. İsa finds out that Bahar relocated to the city of Ağrı in Eastern Turkey for a TV shoot. Weary of his solitude in İstanbul, İsa then takes off to Ağrı to find Bahar in the hope of reunification. However, Bahar rejects him and even though they get together for a brief moment, İsa departs the city, leaving Bahar in tears. Themes of alienation, disquietude, disconnection and a hopeless incapability of communication as well as ethically vague or outright immoral characters also find their way in Ceylan's fifth feature, *Three*

*Monkeys* (*Üç Maymun*, 2008). In this crime drama with neo-noir overtones, Ceylan depicts the lives and ethical struggles of a working-class family in what seems to be gloomier than ordinary İstanbul. The plot follows a father Eyüp (Yavuz Bingöl), who decides to take the fall for his petty politician boss Servet (Ercan Kesal) following the latter's accidental murder in a car crash. Servet promises Eyüp a large sum in compensation for taking the blame and while Eyüp is in prison, his son İsmail (Ahmet Rıfat Sungar) convinces his mother Hacer (Hatice Aslan) to request this money in advance from Servet to establish a business. An obsessive sexual relationship develops between Hacer and Servet, but ends once Eyüp is out of prison. Suspicious of his wife, Eyüp becomes endlessly haunted by mysterious incidents in his past, while İsmail decides to kill Servet for interrupting family matters. To avoid his son's prison sentence, Eyüp convinces a homeless man just the same way he had previously done for his now deceased boss.

*Three Monkeys* was an even larger co-production with several companies involved. Basically, the film was an outcome of a co-production between two domestic companies, Ceylan's own NBC Film and producer Zeynep Özbatur's Zeyno Film, and two European production companies, Pyramide Productions from France as well as Bim Distribuzione from Italy, with the participation of İmaj, a Turkish post-production company. Both European companies also distributed the film in their respective countries. Likewise, Eurimages, Turkish Ministry of Culture and French National Cinema Centre made financial contributions to the production of the film. It was widely distributed, and Ceylan received the Best Director Prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 2009 – a first ever for any Turkish director. Similarly, *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (*Bir Zamanlar Anadolu'da*, 2011) was an outcome of a European co-production, although in this instance one between Turkey and Bosnia Herzegovina. In addition to many smaller, national production and post-production companies, Eurimages partly funded the film. It premiered at the Cannes Film Festival and shared the Grand Prize of the Jury with the Dardennes' *The Kid with a Bike* (2011). Although released in 2011, the film went on to travel to various film festivals and acquire theatrical releases across North America and Europe, achieving Ceylan's largest box-office success as well as unanimous critical acclaim.<sup>65</sup> The worldwide success of the film accelerated the

production of Ceylan's latest film, tentatively titled *Winter Sleep*, whose shooting began in early February 2013 securing a record financial support from Eurimages.<sup>66</sup>

In many ways *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* marks a new high point for Ceylan's career. Whilst popular with some mainstream audiences, the film also powerfully displays fundamental aesthetic features of Slow Cinema, often with precision and virtuosity. Contrary to other Slow Cinema films, however, its dramatic and thematic complexity was frequently praised. The film follows a group of government officials searching for a body buried somewhere on the Anatolian steppes. The police inquiry, which takes place across a whole night, is composed of a company of three cars that includes police officers (the chief, his assistants and his driver), provincial civil servants (the doctor, the prosecutor and his assistants), two suspects and military personal assisting with the investigation. As such, the film represents a miniature portrait of the Turkish bureaucratic and political networks, specifically exploring its way of existence across a provincial terrain. While the mundane police inquiry proceeds monotonously by traversing along settings seemingly identical to each other, its recurrent dialogue, both witty and banal at the same time, reveals the cruel and bitter relationship between different groups of provincial identities and social classes. Balancing dramatic ambiguity with deadpan humour, the film also exhibits gorgeous nocturnal photography of the Anatolian landscape, which delivers a number of memorable moments: an apple falling down a hill followed by an uninterrupted tracking camera movement, long shots of the landscape illuminated with car lights and shaped by strong winds, a dinner break at a village moments before concluding the investigation. Towards the end of the film, the doctor emerges as the dominant character and performs an autopsy on the victim's body, but our expectations for clear-cut answers remain thwarted. In this respect, the film represents a careful mixture of Slow Cinema aesthetics and certain conventions of crime drama accompanied with authentic characters, brilliantly acted by actors familiar to the Turkish public. Most importantly, for my purposes at least, the film engages with boredom as an experience in creative ways and a lengthy analysis of the film's mode of address will be detailed in the sections to come.

This section examined the ways in which Ceylan's film career followed a typical and traditional trajectory of a Slow Cinema director. Beginning with early features with modest ambitions, Ceylan portrayed local peculiarities and initiated national recognition along with additional sources of funding. As soon as foreign investment became available (the Hubert Bals fund for *Distant*), Ceylan achieved international success and preserved a global presence with the support of film festivals and crucial financial support from Eurimages. In other words, his career took on a movement from the local and the national towards one that is global and international; and although his films still deal with local and national issues and are produced domestically, its main audience lies in various global networks of exhibition, which makes Ceylan's films all the more accessible and powerful. This situation is clearly parallel to other Slow Cinema directors, not least other case studies such as Béla Tarr and Tsai Ming-liang, but even more so for other directors who are even lesser known amongst their local audiences and/or international art cinema audiences. Furthermore, Ceylan's filmmaking procedures demonstrate a specific evolution from an artisanal mode of production to a much more organized, strictly professional activity, one in which Ceylan diversifies many of his responsibilities in the set onto others (including cinematography, production, editing, etc.) and one that includes co-productions with other companies and nations as well as post-production facilities. This movement from the artisanal to the industrial is also significantly reflected in the ways in which Ceylan's narrative themes develop. His early works, for example, are largely dramatized out of autobiographical memories and situations, while later works (which, incidentally, are co-scripted by Ceylan's wife Ebru Ceylan and his long-time friend Ercan Kesal) are concerned with universal emotions and themes, nevertheless preserving a sense of authenticity due to the fact that they are based on real life impressions. This change, in other words becoming international, largely defines the changes within the national and international reception of his films. The next section further elaborates the ways in which Ceylan intervenes into and challenges certain aspects of Turkish cinema conventions.

#### 4.4 – Intervention into *Yeşilçam* and Turkish Film History

This section aims to briefly illustrate the ways in which Ceylan performs an intervention into Turkish film history and criticism. The main area of research in this section consists of a symptomatic reading of the national and international critical reception of Ceylan's films. In the first instance, we find that Ceylan's films are considered part of a growing movement loosely labelled New Turkish Cinema and its national reception is mainly based on establishing what is new and what is old. I briefly discuss the use of post-synchronised dubbing in *Yeşilçam* cinema and how that relates to Ceylan's work, also noting issues of realism and the village film that are inherently related to Ceylan's connection with the *Yeşilçam* past. By the release of *Distant*, however, the critical attention briefly switches to a lament of art films being unsuccessful in the domestic market, while enjoying extremely positive critical appraisal in international film festivals. As such, the release of *Distant* represents an immediate change in Ceylan's reception, as much as it did a change in his mode of production. Suddenly, Ceylan's minimalist aesthetics is beginning to be compared to other European auteurs and international currents, such as Slow Cinema. I then conclude by arguing that the most significant change that Ceylan brought to Turkish cinema was his adaptation of European art cinema aesthetics, namely long takes, deep focus cinematography, non-professional acting and use of dead time, in one word, foregrounding film style over plot. The main opposition between Ceylan's cinema and *Yeşilçam* is, therefore, the notion of boredom, both as an experience of the spectator and as an aesthetic strategy defining the stylistic conventions in his films, which I elaborate further in the following section.

The reception of *The Small Town* was very much in line with the raising awareness of New Turkish Cinema, a critical discourse that originated around this time with the subsequent releases of films such as *Somersault in the Coffin* and *Innocence*. As such, two Turkish newspaper critics introduced Ceylan as a new and unique director and placed him in opposition to the mainstream popular cinema, while foregrounding the film's original style, photographic qualities as well as its incorporation of autobiographical features.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the majority of the reviews stressed the film's ability to render an authentic portrayal of rural life in a barely unknown Turkish village

community. There was, however, one negative criticism against the film and Ceylan's stylistic choices. Tuna Erdem wrote an almost scathing newspaper review of *The Small Town*, arguing that its aesthetic features were at complete odds with those found in Italian neorealist films. Erdem suggested that although *The Small Town* carries elements of the neorealist aesthetic, such as location shooting and the use of non-professional actors, much of these elements remain on the surface because the film does not achieve a sense of *visual* narration or aesthetic normally present in neorealist films. Therefore, Erdem argues, the film's pursuit of realism in the form of episodic narration, location shooting and natural acting is fundamentally inconsistent with its frequent and lengthy use of heavy-handed monologues that neither advance the plot nor reveal any deeper insight regarding the rural lifestyle that it strives to explore. Especially referring to the second part of the film where all family members reminisce their individual experiences, Erdem notes that the post-synchronised dubbing creates an overt artificiality, which further devalues the film's realist ambitions.<sup>68</sup> Two lines of inquiries emerge from Erdem's short, albeit extremely valuable criticism: on the one hand, Ceylan's cinema, consciously belonging to a "new wave," claims to have certain realistic ambitions and/or regards cinematic realism as a basis for its aesthetic integrity. On the other hand, a critical refusal of the ubiquitous practice of sound dubbing, overtly used in previous forms of Turkish cinema, emphasizes its changing status across Turkish filmmaking practices.

As mentioned in the earlier sections, *Yeşilçam* cinema was an escapist industry that frequently used post-synchronised dubbing, mainly because it was practical and economically viable in turning around a rapid output of film production. Many of its revered actors and actresses never spoke their own lines; instead, experienced theatre actors with correct diction and tone recorded spoken lines in dubbing studios. As such, additional sounds such as sound effects and ambient sounds were also often overlooked or hastily reproduced from stock sounds in studios.<sup>69</sup> This meant that all films were shot silent and there was no sound recording on the stage, with a prompter uttering the lines of dialogue for the actors, a practice employed in the production of Ceylan's *The Small Town* and fictionally re-created within the world of *Clouds of May*. The result, coupled with incompetent, low-budget productions outlined in the earlier sections, was a mode of narration highly artificial and non-illusionistic, yet it was remarkably welcome by

spectators for its cultural links to ancient Turkish dramatic conventions. Arslan, for example, argues that the lack of authenticity in dubbing did not create a problem for spectators and as such did not threaten the star image. “Turkish spectators watch films with their ears,” said scriptwriter Bülent Oran, emphasizing the ways in which the discontinuities and deficiencies in the visual image were largely resolved by the descriptive use of verbal language and dialogue.<sup>70</sup> As such, concepts such as “credibility, naturalness and sincerity” were largely ignored in *Yeşilçam* cinema, but according to Nezih Erdoğan they became defining characteristics of the newly emerging New Turkish Cinema. In pursuit of creating “genuine characters,” the New Turkish Cinema “yielded an altogether different mode of representation,” in which the shift from post-dubbing to shooting with sound specified its pioneering technical transformation.<sup>71</sup>

The release of Ceylan’s first features were directly involved with this phase, in which filmmakers were slowly adopting contemporary technologies in film production as well as spending considerable amount of resources in creating a newer art cinema movement. In this respect, *The Small Town* represented both the old and the new in Turkish cinema: on the one hand, aspects of its mode of production, such as low-budget production, lack of detailed mise-en-scène and use of dubbing, were in large part influenced by methods originated from the *Yeşilçam* tradition. On the other hand, however, the film demonstrated an unusual aesthetic vision and better yet seeds of a newer cinematic experience for Turkish audiences and critics. Its lack of plot and reliance on dedramatized sequences were closely indebted to European art cinema traditions, minimalism and the growing Slow Cinema movement of the mid-to-late 1990s. In other words, *The Small Town* in its own was a mixture of localised filmmaking practices and global aesthetic sensibilities. However, Ceylan’s other films carried this relationship in complex ways. The legacy of post-synchronised dubbing and use of dialogue were minutely evident in Ceylan’s future works; for instance, the lack of lip-synching in *Distant* and the banal macho monologue by İsa towards the end of *Climates*. The ways in which dialogue exchange between characters were carried out in *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* further demonstrated that although films were shot with sound, certain modifications still took place through dubbing in the studio. Despite these examples Ceylan was, without a doubt, a master of sound design. The use of



classical music in *Clouds of May* was at once alienating and deeply expressive; while the musical pieces of Johann Sebastian Bach, George Frideric Handel and Franz Schubert did not entirely belong to Turkish provincial culture (and never before used in *Yeşilçam*), they functioned brilliantly in conveying the melancholy of his characters. Following *Distant*, Ceylan took an incredible attention to sound design, largely modifying sounds for disorienting effects, such as the blurring between diegetic and non-diegetic sound at the beginning of *Climates* and the drone music in the prologue of *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*. Experimenting with sound in such a way was one of the defining characteristics of Slow Cinema, but was unimaginable within the context of *Yeşilçam*. Yet, narrative themes such as guilt, vengeance and family ethics in *Three Monkeys* and its focus on traditional Turkish working class lifestyles were largely drawn from *Yeşilçam* films, albeit narrated in completely different stylistic conventions. As we will see in detail in the last section of this chapter, a philosophical investigation of Turkish provincial life was in many ways the dominant narrative strand in *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*. As such, Ceylan broke away from *Yeşilçam* stylistic traditions fairly quickly, but there was still a sense of continuation in terms of themes and settings.

*The Small Town* and *Clouds of May* were often considered part of the village film tradition in Turkish cinema, mainly due to their portrayal of provincial life. The period of high *Yeşilçam* also included village films that depicted the traditional rural life, usually emphasizing the ever-present feudal structures either in an ironic or in a socially realistic way. The most realistic of these were usually cut by censors, to which the film critic and historian Nijat Özön responded as labelling them as “pink realism.” On the other hand, films such as *Revenge of the Snakes* (*Yılanların Öcü*, 1962) and *Hope* (*Umut*, 1970) were considered by Özön as departures away from the pink realism of the period towards a more objective documentation of rural life, echoing the Italian Neorealist aesthetic.<sup>72</sup> Yılmaz Güney’s *Hope* was in many ways a turning point for the village films, although not entirely in stylistic or aesthetic terms. For example, aspects of the Neorealist aesthetic, such as on-location shooting and use of non-professional actors were already present in *Yeşilçam* for economic and practical purposes; hence Güney’s use of such devices did not constitute any form of artistic innovation. “What makes the Turkification of Neorealism in *Umut* or Neorealist films different,” writes Savaş Arslan, “was its filmic narrative: it represents social life through the medium of

cinema in a particular way and replaces the tough guy Güney with a poor and helpless carriage-driver.”<sup>73</sup> This meant that *Hope* and other realist village films, were realist because of their narrative focus, or in Arslan’s words, because they framed certain “social ills as products of the capitalist system.” In this respect, Arslan argues, “Yeşilçam’s realism was of a different mold, one that is of the natural more than the real and one that is direct.”<sup>74</sup> In other words, there was no aesthetic ambition in creating a visual style reminiscent of European modernist waves, but there was an implicit purpose in creating narratives in the form of stories, myths and folktales. Many of these films later evolved into the popular nostalgia films in the 1990s, which Asuman Suner characterizes by their “emphasis not so much on the past, but on the remembrance of the past from today’s perspective.”<sup>75</sup> Although addressing certain historical and political incidents in the recent Turkish past, these films also never achieved a major social impact, nor received any international attention. According to Suner, the “popular nostalgia films” portrayed the provincial life through a utopian and sentimental perspective, mainly through “aestheticized images of the rural landscape,” but also through attributing “a sense of innocence to traditional community relations,” which at the end is “irrecoverably lost de to the intervention of an external force,” such the government or any other political entity.<sup>76</sup> In this respect, Suner also notes the ways in which Ceylan’s films differ to these popular nostalgia films, as she writes: “Rather than being an imaginary site of innocence and purity, the province in Ceylan’s cinema is an ambivalent space where we can observe paradoxes of belonging in contemporary Turkish society.”<sup>77</sup> As such, instead of depicting a utopian vision of rural life, which is at the end impaired by external forces, Ceylan’s provincial films portray the internal conflicts of his characters and their relationship to their environment. Although a similar imagery of rural life and narrative themes occur throughout popular nostalgia films and Ceylan’s provincial trilogy (namely *The Small Town*, *Clouds of May* and *Distant*) there are significant differences in terms of narrative structure and film style, which ultimately represent an unusual and unique portrayal of contemporary Turkish life for its critics and audiences.

Despite the critical acclaim, Ceylan remained an obscure name with Turkish audiences until international critics recognized *Distant* as a profound masterpiece of international art-house cinema following its success at the Cannes Film Festival in

2003. For instance, Jonathan Romney hailed *Distant* as “one of the most vital discoveries of European cinema” in the wake of its theatrical release in the United Kingdom, while *Guardian*’s Peter Bradshaw commented that “[i]t is one of the best movies of the year, perhaps of many years - the work of a brilliant film-maker.”<sup>78</sup> Romney also provided a longer piece for *Sight and Sound* in the next month, including an interview with Ceylan as well as an overview of his previous films.<sup>79</sup> Suddenly, Ceylan received an even larger attention in British cinephile circles, culminating in a season of Ceylan’s films at the British Film Institute. Tony Rayns, on the other hand, was already comparing his work to filmmakers like Tarkovsky, Ozu and Bresson, recalling the term “transcendental style” originally suggested by Paul Schrader, a term that has a close affinity to Slow Cinema.<sup>80</sup> Ironically, the film’s theatrical release in Turkey preceded its win at Cannes and attracted only meagre attendance. With only five print copies distributed in major cities, the film yielded approximately 20,000 spectators, an extremely low number compared to popular Turkish films, let alone mainstream Hollywood productions. However, it was quickly re-released after Cannes and the audience numbers more than doubled to approximately 45,000. Even more ironic was the film’s release in France, which reportedly attracted about 100,000 audiences following a successful marketing campaign.<sup>81</sup> As disappointing as it was, this situation was rather expected for Turkish filmmakers. In fact, Ceylan had already realized his target audience was extremely niche and deliberately chose five copies to be distributed against the suggestions made by distribution companies to achieve an optimum exposure and profit.<sup>82</sup>

In this respect *Distant* epitomizes the tensions between national cinema and art cinema, hence illuminating some of the varying discussions regarding Slow Cinema. Whilst praised for its ability to represent Turkish culture on screen, the film did not receive any attention whatsoever in Turkey until it was awarded at Cannes. Following the headlines, the film was re-released in the country for those who were curious enough to find out what kind of film represented Turkey on such a culturally high international stage and significantly increased its modest box-office numbers. This is in many ways common ground for the dissemination of Slow Cinema films as they attracted attention not within the context of national cinemas, but more so through exhibitions and awards at international film festivals. However, this incident not only

shows the typical trajectory of art films worldwide, but also reveals an important element of Turkish spectatorship. A cultural artefact becomes recognizable and important when it receives a positive critical attention from the West – a tendency that can be observed in other art forms in Turkey, for example Elif Şafak’s book *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2007), a novel that provocatively explored the highly sensitive and controversial issue of the so-called Armenian Genocide in 1915. While the book was praised in the international circuit as well as garnering a wide readership in Turkey, Şafak was condemned by the right-wing Turkish press and was tried at court for “insulting Turkishness.”<sup>83</sup> The case against criticism of Turkish politics was eventually dropped, but many Turkish writers are known to have gone through the same procedure, including the Nobel Prize winning author Orhan Pamuk.

Although Ceylan’s work has never been overtly political, these events illuminate the highly disparate and sensitive values of Turkish spectatorship. In many ways the reaction against socially realist Turkish films in the Yeşilçam era followed a similar pattern. While films such as *Revenge of the Snakes*, *The Road* and *Bitmeyen Yol* (1967) projected the grim realities of Turkish society, on the national level these films were criticized for their openness and were considered anti-Turkish by the government and the right-wing press, many of them eventually censored or banned until recently. Ceylan’s films, on the other hand, failed at the box office not because of their political stance, but rather for their unusual style, niche audience as well as poor distribution networks. As mentioned earlier, aspects of national distribution, namely the general leaning towards Hollywood blockbusters and a much smaller interest in the circulation of independent films also exacerbated the exposure of Ceylan’s films. These patterns, however, strongly recall the previously discussed notions of *özenti* and Turkification proposed by Savaş Arslan. On the one hand, Ceylan’s work represents a rising art-cinema sensibility within Turkish cinephile circles, which was left in an inactive vacuum since the early 1980s. Furthermore, this new art cinema wave modelled itself after the preceding European waves: they were all auteur-based productions, marketed as well as received with the director’s own personal vision driving the film and although they achieved critical and international attention, in reality they remained very marginal when compared to the mainstream popular cinema. Making personal films and adopting minimalism altogether evoke influences of European art cinema and contemporary

Slow Cinema respectively. As such, Ceylan's reworking of European art cinema aesthetics into a Turkish context has fundamental parallels to the ways in which *Yeşilçam* defined itself by way of Hollywood conventions, in effect rendering concepts of *özenti* and Turkification all the more present in contemporary Turkish art cinema.<sup>84</sup>

Following *Distant*, and certainly after *Climates*, many international critics hailed Ceylan as a staple of contemporary European art-house cinema, a critical opinion that reached its peak in the release of *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*. For instance, while claiming the film as Ceylan's "finest work to date," Philip French declared the director as "one of the most significant moviemakers to have emerged this century, an original figure in his own right and a major force in reviving a belief in the kind of serious, ambitious, morally concerned European art-house cinema."<sup>85</sup> Similarly, Manohla Dargis viewed Ceylan as "one of the consistently most exciting directors on the international scene," and the film as a "visually stunning meditation on what it is to be human."<sup>86</sup> The film regularly featured in the top-ten lists of credible publications such as *Film Comment* and *Sight & Sound* and some critics went as far as claiming that it should have grabbed the top prize at Cannes.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* marked Ceylan's largest box-office success in Turkey. A total of 160,468 spectators saw the film in Turkey, a number previously unimaginable by auteur-directors, although previously *Three Monkeys* had surpassed expectations by attaining 127,668 spectators.<sup>88</sup> As such, following ten years success in the international festival scene, Nuri Bilge Ceylan enjoys a prestigious international reputation, which no other Turkish filmmaker had previously achieved and is considered by many a principal example of contemporary Slow Cinema.

Following this historical background, I now turn my focus to the formal aspects and the stylistic configurations of the films. An understanding of *Yeşilçam* conventions and the ways in which Ceylan positions himself in regard to this tradition is crucial, because his work begins as a mixture of both worlds, in terms of production practices and stylistic features, but eventually becomes involved in the much more complex network of global cultural production. The past sections aimed at establishing *Yeşilçam* cinema fundamentally as an entertainment industry with no regard for aesthetic or intellectual elation. The cultural taste of its spectators was commonly deemed as

“primitive;” as director Şadan Kamil observes: “People used to go to see a film as if they were going to coffee houses or night clubs. They listened to music and watched famous singers and dancers,” the spectators “enjoyed looking at a star player, listening to a couple songs, or crying at a few touching scenes” and the producers “marvelled at how these spectators never tired of watching the same subjects time and time again.”<sup>89</sup> As such, cinema was a popular form of pastime; its purpose was to entertain, not contemplate. Ceylan, however, completely turned this around by adopting minimalist aesthetics and stylistic features of Slow Cinema predecessors (Bergman, Tarkovsky, Antonioni) and transformed Turkish art cinema by emphasizing boredom as a receptive, creative and insightful experience. The next section, therefore, investigates the ways in which boredom occupies a central role in Ceylan’s filmography and in effect as a central aesthetic strategy in Slow Cinema.

#### **4.5 – Boredom: a State of Mind and an Aesthetic Virtue**

From this section onwards, I focus on the relationship between boredom and cinema, essentially arguing that Slow Cinema transforms boredom as a simple, everyday state of mind into an aesthetically rewarding experience. Whether boredom is an actively engaging or lulling phenomenal experience marked a great part of the Slow Cinema debate as I have outlined in the very introduction to this thesis. Yet, boredom as a psychological state of mind has never been explored in any of these writings, let alone in a scholarly context in relation to cinema. What exactly do we mean by boredom? Is it a similar notion when we ascribe this emotion to an artwork? How can boredom benefit us? Are there different types of boredom? These are some of the questions this section initially pursues. Although we traditionally view boredom as a negative, unwanted and undesirable condition, I claim later in this section that it bears some aesthetic virtues. I refer to literary scholars and artists who find creative inspiration in boredom as well as recent research in psychology, which empirically suggests that boredom in its simplest form may improve problem solving abilities and generate creative insight. Following these arguments, in the next section I explore how boredom is used as an aesthetic strategy in Ceylan’s *Distant* and *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*. Boredom as a narrative subject as well as an aesthetic style inhabits a significant feature of the 1960s avant-

garde and art film, which accentuates the influence of modernist traditions visible in the works of Slow Cinema directors, as my earlier case studies attempted to show.

The concept of boredom is related to Ceylan's films in many levels. Firstly, Ceylan portrays characters that are bored with their environment. In many ways their desire for change as well as their inability to make change is rooted in their boredom. Secondly, Ceylan insistently portrays these characters in their very moment of boredom. Many scenes involve the inactivity of characters or their idleness. Thirdly, Ceylan strongly suggests that boredom is a feeling intrinsic to Turkish provincial lifestyle. In the earlier films such as *Small Town* and *Clouds of May*, for instance, Saffet consistently shows his dissatisfaction with provincial life, emphasizing its tediousness and entrapment, and explicitly indicates his willingness to leave the small town for a much more attractive lifestyle in a larger city. Furthermore, *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* also acknowledges this aspect with the endless repetitions of the police inquiry and the mundane dialogues the doctor faces with his colleagues. Finally, the feeling of boredom is further projected onto the spectators as Ceylan doubles the boredom experienced by the characters, at times creating humorous situations.

First, however, I should note why boredom is in fact an interesting subject in a general sense and briefly set out its relevance to cultural productions. Boredom is a largely pervasive experience and occupies all areas of human interaction. In other words it is universal, ever-present and used in diverse contexts for varied meanings, although often for negative and undesirable conditions. Boredom may constitute a strong emotion, a temporary feeling, a general sense of mood or a form of depression. When ascribed to cultural productions it is often meant in a degrading way, yet it has been the main subject for countless artworks, as we shall see later. However, the relationship between boredom as an everyday experience and cinema has only recently begun to attract rigorous scholarly examination, which I will briefly refer to throughout this section. "We live in a culture of boredom," writes Lars Svendsen and "[t]o investigate the problem of boredom is to attempt to understand who we are and how we fit into the world at this particular point in time."<sup>90</sup> The study of boredom is significant, according to Patricia Meyer Spacks, because boredom "as a historically locatable manifestation of trivialization, [it] provides a paradigm of the ordinary and, examined, helps elucidate

the gradual construction of ordinariness.”<sup>91</sup> As a crucial element of our everyday lives, the study of boredom reveals much about our engagement with Slow Cinema, which aims to capture and reflect on this everyday experience. Although still a burgeoning field within film studies, boredom has received much philosophical, scholarly and artistic interest for centuries, some of which I will summarize below.<sup>92</sup>

Before turning to its history and typologies, let us briefly examine its etymological origins. Boredom becomes an even more interesting concept for its etymological origins and its ambivalent use in everyday culture. Spacks charts the use of the verb “to bore” and the noun “boredom” in the history of the English dictionary and discovers that their earliest appearances were in 1750 and 1884 respectively. While these relatively new words in the English language were preceded by *ennui* in French, she suggests that boredom may in fact be an emotion specific to modernity – in other words, the emotion developed through time and formed an important part of everyday life only in the early stages of modernity.<sup>93</sup> According to this view, civilizations preceding the modern age did not feel bored, or at least, when they felt it, they weren’t aware of what exactly they were feeling. In response to Spack’s claim, Peter Toohey argues that the lack of a specific term does not entail a whole emotion to be absent in earlier parts of history, and offers a variety of words and expressions that are essentially synonymous with the feeling of boredom.<sup>94</sup> Toohey writes “Patricia Meyer Spacks, Elizabeth Goodstein and Yasmine Musharbash, to cite but three of the most interesting writers on boredom, all take a more or less constructionist position on the matter. They present the view that boredom was *invented* and that it derives from the Enlightenment, at its most sophisticated and convincing.” The author disagrees with this by referring to ancient artefacts in archaic Beneventum and Pompeii, both of which prove the existence of boredom long before the Enlightenment.<sup>95</sup> According to Toohey, the underlying problem for this disagreement is merely the confusion between different forms of boredom.

Despite minor disagreements, the major agreement amongst various scholars in approaching boredom as a state of mind is its theorization within two distinctive forms. As such, a sweeping number of literary theorists separate boredom into: (1) simple boredom, a fleeting, temporary and time-bound condition arising from either the lack of



stimuli in an environment, an inability of attention, impatience or other external circumstances such as confinement; and (2) existential boredom, which, similar to depression or *ennui*, is characterized by a realisation of futility in life and runs deeper and longer within the human psyche, more often than not labelled as a maladic or pathological condition.<sup>96</sup> The terminology used here as well as the description of either term is remarkably consistent amongst different writers, even though their focus of attention varies between the two forms. Reinhard Kuhn, for example, argues that simple boredom is “hardly worth serious study” because “it is a temporary state dependent almost entirely on external circumstances. When the conditions that makes for this frame of mind cease, as they always do, the forced inactivity of the mind comes to an end as well.”<sup>97</sup> Kuhn exclusively explores the notion of *ennui* in his work, of which I shall elaborate more below. Peter Toohey, on the other hand, defends simple boredom by claiming the significance of “its own tradition [that is] more fundamentally rooted in human psychology than existential boredom because it is an emotion that has been felt in all periods of history.”<sup>98</sup> Clearly, however, there is a certain amount of overlap between these forms of boredom as simple boredom often can influence existential boredom, or vice-versa. Lars Svendsen explicates other typologies of boredom in his work and although some of them are more detailed and specific, there is still a great amount of overlap.<sup>99</sup>

Theorizing boredom is precisely difficult for this reason. Its various forms and types seem to be overlapping with each other, basically because some types refer to an emotion, while others refer to a mood. Generally speaking, emotions are specific and are directed towards other entities. Just as when we are scared, we are scared *of something*, similarly, when we are bored, we are usually bored *of something*. Mood, on the other hand, is more general, objectless and extends over a longer period of time. In other words, it characterizes our general attitude to the world outside.<sup>100</sup> In this respect, boredom can accommodate both options with its various forms. Toohey, for example, argues that since existential boredom is a more permanent and a longer lasting condition, it can best be characterized as a mood, rather than an emotion. In contrast, simple boredom depends on external circumstances and can be rapidly altered by changing the source of boredom (confinement, repetition, etc.) and as such is more suitable to be labelled as an emotion.<sup>101</sup> Until now, I have been using the word boredom

in its widest sense, generally referring to a psychological state of mind and encompassing notions of an emotion and mood. Strictly speaking, both notions of the term are relevant to my argument. Many of the films that I explore in this thesis and their narrative themes are characterized by boredom as a mood. Boredom as emotion, however, characterizes the aesthetic experience felt by the individual spectator, albeit not in a negative sense. As I shall detail later, Slow Cinema has a special relationship with boredom. While in mainstream cinema, boredom is an undesired condition, Slow Cinema, and Ceylan's work in particular, uses boredom as an aesthetic strategy, which Julian Hanich describes as the formal operation that "aims at producing the emotion: it takes place on the filmic level and can therefore be *objectively described* and analyzed stylistically as part of the filmic object. Since these aesthetic strategies exist only in order to affect us," Hanich writes, "their implicit goal is to evoke *subjective experienced* (cinematic) emotions of the exact same name."<sup>102</sup> As such, the way I approach boredom in cinema in this section is not merely an emotion felt in the cinema theatre, but also formal aspects of narrative structure and film style that bear some resemblance to its basic psychological features.

The origins of delineating boredom as an aesthetic strategy are found in Reinhard Kuhn's work. As a synonym for existential boredom, Kuhn accounts for ennui in its dual meanings: on the one hand a kind of profound sorrow, and on the other a sense of irritation. Within the context of Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913-1927), for example, Kuhn argues that ennui is irreducible to a narrative theme or subject, but is "also a part of [the novel's] temporal fabric and spatial structure." "Hence," writes Kuhn, "ennui through its inevitable deformation of time determines the very rhythm of Proust's style, the mode of his thought, and the structure of his work."<sup>103</sup> In other words, Kuhn considers ennui an aesthetic device, which, far beyond its function as an extrinsic state of mind, shapes and manipulates the artwork in certain aspects. I shall argue that similarly in Slow Cinema, boredom functions as an aesthetic strategy, not least for taking an interest in boredom as a narrative subject, but more importantly for employing particular stylistic features that substantiate this very mood, such as idleness, monotony and stillness. Such a mood structured across the whole film, in turn, creates a revelatory, meditative and contemplative experience by the spectator through their viewing of the film based on the aforementioned aesthetic strategies. As such,

boredom as a subjective and critical evaluation (such as “This film is boring.”) is outside my focus and completely irrelevant to my argument. The experience of boredom, or rather the emotion of experiencing boredom, as I shall suggest towards the end of this section, can be characterized as the paradox of aversive emotions. But before that, let us see how ennui as an aesthetic strategy can be employed to cinema in the ways in which Kuhn suggests its development across the artwork.

Kuhn illustrates the concept of ennui in three stages. Firstly, “it is a state that affects both the soul and the body,” for instance in Sartre’s *Nausea*, the symptom is not only a metaphor for “a sort of spiritual revulsion but the same physical disgust that leads to vomiting.” Secondly, it is “entirely independent of any external circumstances,” although it is nor dependent on our own free will, as no external factors can direct us towards ennui. We cannot want to be in the state of ennui, nor our will to be out of it would lead to succession. Thirdly, ennui “is usually characterized by the phenomenon of estrangement,” in other words, for the victim “the world is emptied of its significance.”<sup>104</sup> It would be too far-fetched to suggest that ennui is related to cinema spectatorship, but in itself, ennui has been one of the fundamental obsessions of modern art cinema and has enjoyed an extensive treatment as a favourite narrative subject in a variety of examples. As such, a great number of scholarly works examine the works of filmmakers such as Roberto Rossellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Jean-Luc Godard that exclusively deal with modern alienation, in many ways a similar conception of ennui.<sup>105</sup> In such films, the protagonists are often estranged and alienated from society and find themselves aimlessly wandering and drifting across desolate spaces within the film. In fact, the portrayal of depression, boredom, anxiety and the individual’s alienation from society against the background of modern capitalism were so frequently ascribed to Antonioni’s work that the American critic Andrew Sarris coined the term “Antoniennui.”<sup>106</sup> Origins of this obsession with boredom and manifestations of ennui as a narrative subject are largely rooted in the modern, specifically European, literary fiction. Saul Bellow, for example, suggests that boredom as an aesthetic mode found its voice, above all, in late 19<sup>th</sup> century French literature.<sup>107</sup> Later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, boredom occupies a central and fundamental aspect in the French Existentialist novels, such as *Nausea* (Jean-Paul Sartre, 1938) and *The Outsider* (Albert Camus, 1942). From Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* (1915) to

Fernando Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet* (1982), from Alberto Moravia's *Boredom* (1960) to the plays of Samuel Beckett, Anton Chekhov and Henrik Ibsen, numerous authors and dramatists, most of whom adopt a modernist aesthetic, explore boredom as a state of mind in the wake of modernity.<sup>108</sup>

In this respect, boredom has a peculiar connection to modernity and modernist forms of art. Similar to the flâneur's alienated gaze and slow drifting against the ever-accelerating world outside, boredom in its simplest manifestation represents a resistance to modernity because it is in essence a refusal of attention; its stillness and affective lethargy contradicts the progressiveness and efficiency of modernity. In one of his Weimar period essays, Siegfried Kracauer writes that if "one has the patience, the sort of patience specific to legitimate boredom, then one experiences a kind of bliss that is almost unearthly."<sup>109</sup> This type of revelatory boredom, however, appears to be in opposition to Kracauer's conception of distraction, which, through the highly adorned architecture of Berlin's gigantic picture houses, "rivet[s] the viewer's attention to the peripheral" and as the "simulations of the senses succeed one another," it leaves no room "for even the slightest contemplation."<sup>110</sup> Nonetheless, according to Patrice Petro boredom and distraction are "complementary rather than opposing terms," whose relationship she defines in the following manner: "reception in a state of distraction reveals cultural disorder and increasing abstraction; the cultivation of boredom, however, discloses the logic of distraction, in which newness becomes a fetish, and shock itself a manifestation of the commodity form."<sup>111</sup> For Petro, because the 20<sup>th</sup> century theorists situate boredom within "the realm of the everyday," boredom "shares important affinities with traditions of the avant-garde, particularly those that come after political modernism and refuse its aesthetics of distraction, sensory stimulation, and shock." As such, referring specifically to Andy Warhol films and Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975, both of which I have examined briefly in Chapter 2) Petro finds "an aesthetics of boredom [that] retains the modernist impulse of provocation and calculated assault. (How long must one watch and wait until something actually happens? How much tedium can one possibly stand?)" In this respect, the experience of boredom in avant-garde and modernist cinema facilitates "an awareness of looking as a temporal process – bound not to particular object but to ways of seeing."<sup>112</sup>

Slow Cinema borrows a great deal from these traditions of avant-garde and modernist cinema, as past case studies attempted to show. As such boredom itself features routinely across the works of directors discussed in this thesis. In the films of Béla Tarr, for example, the camera ostensibly follows its drifting characters, creating an active form of dialectical engagement with the spectator, while the state of mind of its protagonists in the films of Tsai Ming-liang can at best be characterized by alienation, depression, emptiness of life, or in short, ennui. The result is, as is well-known, difficult films outside commercial circuits for their unusual and deliberate pacing. In other words, these films displayed a specific stylization of cinematic temporality that was often regarded as boring by mainstream spectators. Similar tendencies are clearly paralleled in Ceylan's case as much of his protagonists embody the notion of ennui throughout the various crises they are going through. *Distant*'s Mahmut, for example, goes through an emotional and intellectual crisis. Although nothing is made certain, the film implies that since his divorce Mahmut was not able to attach himself emotionally to a female other, while at the same time his faith in photography as an art form has severely diminished. The key scene involves a round table discussion between Yusuf, Mahmut and his colleagues. Yusuf is unable to participate in this highbrow discussion, while Mahmut, to his friends' surprise, bemoans the end of photography as an art form. The parallels of emotional and intellectual crisis is even more evident in *Climates*, in which İsa not only is drifting between his ex-girlfriend and Bahar intermittently, but is also inexplicably unable to complete his doctoral thesis on architecture. In *Three Monkeys*, the ethical dilemmas faced by the characters create an enormous emotional gap between the father and mother, eventually causing the collapse of the traditional family structure. Similarly, the struggles within the family under impoverished circumstances take the form of a generational clash in *Clouds of May*, in which the disagreements between the father, Muzaffer and Saffet lead to the failure of their main objectives (the father loses his cultivated land, Muzaffer fails to complete his film and Saffet does not even attempt to escape the town that he claims to be bored with). All of these examples emphasize the ways in which ennui, or rather the existential type of boredom has affected the main characters. In these films, the sense of existential boredom is manifested not only through characterization, dialogue and mise-en-scène, but more importantly, through a specific use of duration, long takes and repetitive

action, all of which are important factors in creating a sense of simple boredom on the spectators, yet in a productive way, as I shall detail below.

Boredom in its simplest, time-bound form can tell us a great deal about the nature of spectatorship in Slow Cinema, because in many ways the dominant criticism against this type of cinema emphasizes its idleness, inactivity and banality. The lack of variety in action and representation of the mundane, monotonous and everyday life are defining tropes of Slow Cinema – but do such aesthetic strategies cause boredom in the negative sense? The polarizing opinions within the Slow Cinema Debate addressed this question, as outlined in the introduction chapter. On the one hand, some critics blamed Slow Cinema for being boring and monotonous, while on the other, some critics praised it for being hypnotic, contemplative and meditative. Although these opinions are seemingly opposite of each other, this section claims that the experience of boredom and those such as contemplation and meditation share a fundamental affinity as both experiences are based on an aesthetic of slowness and similar notions of idleness. The type of boredom experienced by the spectator in the cinema theatre is the simple type of boredom; it is a temporary emotion that inevitably resolves following the change or termination of external circumstances, in this case referring to the end of the actual screening. As such, external circumstances such as entrapment and confinement also lead to endless repetition, thus boredom. In this respect the cinema theatre in itself is a space of confinement, in which the spectator experiences boredom, if faced with films emphasizing monotony. However, there is also an act of subjective introspection and creativity involved in simple boredom based on external circumstances, notwithstanding its nature of idleness, emptiness and negativity. Lars Svendsen, for example, emphasizes the productivity inherent in boredom: “Boredom pulls things out of their usual contexts. It can open ways up for a new configuration of things, and therefore also for a new meaning, by virtue of the fact that it has already deprived things of meaning.”<sup>113</sup> In other words, because boredom empties life out of meaning, it can lead to a state of “receptiveness” – a state crucial for understanding Ceylan’s intentions of making films, as we shall see below. As such, boredom in itself reveals important questions regarding the aesthetic and cultural value of Slow Cinema.

Traditionally speaking, however, as a leisure activity with pretence to entertainment or artistic stimulation, cinema is the antithesis of boredom. Few, if any, spectators afford the cinema in order to be bored. On the contrary, cinema suspends the desire to fill time with offering the perfect escape and it is a cure for those who are too idle.<sup>114</sup> It is able to transform empty lives by providing a variety of emotions. Cinema is a powerful device because it is accurate and persuasive in its depiction of reality. In other words it is realistic, but it isn't real; it absorbs us in the theatre, but may remain forgotten once the lights turn on. Slow Cinema synthesizes boredom and cinema and it does so by going back to basics. It is a reaction to the exponential increase of pace in contemporary life, as other counter-culture movements such as Slow Food, Slow Science and Slow Media. "They're pausing not in any naïve effort to "go back," [...] but to slow down," Pamela Lee writes: "For it is in slowness and the capacity to parse one's own present that one gains ground on what's coming up next, perhaps restores to the every day some degree of agency, perhaps some degree of resistance."<sup>115</sup> In the current digital age, however, our experience of the world is dictated by the speed of technology insofar as to claim time as the most valuable commodity, therefore the arising needs to spend it sparingly. The increasing pace also regulates the entertainment we engage with: rapid cutting, quick dialogue exchanges, the MTV aesthetic and an increasing reliance on movement and action for the intensification of sensation and stimulation nowadays more or less define mainstream cinema.<sup>116</sup> Such a culture and society of speed, as outlined in the introduction chapter, deliberately avoids cultural productions that emphasize slowness, because slowness is completely at odds with the expectations of mainstream society. Unless in epic proportions and filled with breathtaking action, durationally long films do not interest people because it appears to be a waste of time.

Within this context slowness has become a global reaction and most importantly a marker of higher cultural taste. Ceylan is one of the figures to explicitly address the increasing pace of contemporary everyday life and defend "slowing down" as a more profound way of experiencing reality. While editing *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*, Ceylan kept a diary in which he wrote:

This afternoon, as if weighed down by the accumulation of fatigue from all these years, I lay down on the bed and fell asleep, fully clothed, for several hours. When I opened my eyes, I had the impression of waking up with a new form of perception. In the silence, before my eyes, in a fluid fashion, the immobile objects in my room surrounded me with infinite affection, as if the doors of a different level of perception had just opened. I stayed lying there with my eyes open for over an hour. My senses felt completely alert. This state allowed me to take enormous pleasure in life. I understood that I don't truly feel the emotions of everything I live, because we live at such a frenetic rhythm. It's obvious that we should slow down the rhythm of our lives so that our senses are sharpened. Here resides my reason for liking films that are slow in pace – and my desire to make this kind of film. This state of mind that I felt on waking today can only appear through a slow and languorous rhythm.<sup>117</sup>

In short, Ceylan feels that “a slow and languorous rhythm” yields a heightened sensitivity, or a kind of perceived evocativeness, in which inactivity and idleness paradoxically create a fascination with the simplicity of the world outside. This is perhaps a reference to those moments in life, such as *déjà vu*, in which we, consciously or not, perceive things as out of the ordinary, or the feeling that there is an underlying structure mysteriously exists for no special reason whatsoever. This evocation, according to Ceylan, can only be attained through a state of mind that closely resembles boredom for its defining features are also idleness and inactivity. To put it simply, Ceylan uses boredom as an aesthetic strategy and deliberately employs stylistic features bearing an affinity to boredom for foregrounding the very same emotion on the spectators. At the same time, Ceylan considers boredom as an aesthetic virtue as he strives to make it a significant part of his work. As I shall elaborate shortly, the idleness and loss of meaning within boredom is for many a significant artistic inspiration and as a form of creative insight, it can be valuable in our engagement with Slow Cinema.

Other artists and scholars also support the view that boredom is an aesthetic virtue. Reinhard Kuhn points out the ways in which boredom and idleness can be beneficial to the artist. Firstly, boredom “forces [the artist] to distract himself through creation. Boredom, according to Goethe, and not necessity, is the mother of all invention.”<sup>118</sup> In a letter Schiller, Goethe explains how the monotony of travelling and the lack of any external impulse “makes it possible to turn inward, to gather one's thoughts.” Kuhn



continues; “Boredom does more than provide the leisure and tranquillity indispensable for the state of concentration required by artistic endeavour. As a source of sensual joy, it is also a source of creation.” Joseph Brodsky writes in an essay titled “In Praise of Boredom;”

When hit by boredom, [...] let yourself be crushed by it; submerge, hit bottom. In general, with things unpleasant, the rule is, the sooner you hit bottom, the faster you surface. The idea here [...] is to exact full look at the worst. The reason boredom deserves such scrutiny is that it represents pure, undiluted time in all its repetitive, redundant, monotonous splendor.<sup>119</sup>

In reference to this quote, Peter Toohey emphasizes boredom’s ability to let us be ourselves: “Boredom intensifies self-perception. In fact boredom offers an unusual and rare enforced opportunity to see yourself as another.”<sup>120</sup> In other words, such idleness of the mind in temporally restricted situations can be productive by providing one the ability create space for reflection and contemplation, leading towards a more profound understanding of the reality that surrounds us, such as our experience in Slow Cinema. There is, then, a meditative quality in boredom that is both time-bound and lasting deeper in ourselves, in many ways a mixture between the simple and existential forms of boredom mentioned at the outset of this section.

Boredom as a suitable emotion that fosters artistic creativity, productivity and inspiration is further evidenced in psychological research. A phenomenon called mind wandering, which is characterized by “a shift of attention away from a primary task toward internal information,” is largely responsible for this cognitive processing.<sup>121</sup> Mind wandering occurs frequently when we engage in an undemanding, monotonous or simple task that does not require our full attention or faculties of reasoning. As such, our mind shifts attention inward, exploring personal issues that might or might not directly relate to the sensory information in front of us. An important characteristic of mind wandering is that the subject is often unintentional in initiating mind wandering and is unaware that the process has started taking place. Smallwood and School write, for instance, mind wandering “can be viewed as a state of decoupled attention, because instead of monitoring online sensory information, attention shifts inward and focuses on one’s thoughts and feelings.”<sup>122</sup> The subject often performs this inward movement

without intention and is not aware of doing so. An important function of mind wandering in our everyday life is that it increases our efficiency in problem solving by shifting attention to personal goals. Whether it fuels artistic creativity, however, remains an experimental question, although current evidence shows that it may very well be possible.<sup>123</sup> One study, for example, concludes that “taking a break involving an undemanding task improved performance on a classical creativity task (the UUT) far more than did taking a break involving a demanding task, resting, or taking no break.”<sup>124</sup> In other words, undemanding, monotonous tasks facilitate mind wandering that empirically demonstrates an increase of creativity and use of insight in problem solving. The same study also considers the possibility “that mind wandering enhances creativity by increasing unconscious associate processing” and as such mind wandering may “serve as a foundation for creative inspiration.”<sup>125</sup> Examples of such revelations, discoveries and creative inspirations are varied, but evident, across history. But how does mind wandering relate to our experience in the cinema? How does notions of creativity, insight and productivity help us understand our engagement with Slow Cinema?

Slow Cinema performs these productive functions of boredom in a variety of ways. Firstly, the abandonment of traditional narrative structures and conventions serve as an undemanding task for the spectator. As such the lack of plot events, character motivations and cause-effect links draw attention to other aesthetic features of the films, such as music, photography or camerawork, sound design and choreography in staging, all of which are stylized and often abstracted with idleness, slowness and/or stillness. In other words, film style, through its manipulation of temporality, conveys a suspended aesthetic experience devoid of narrative meaning and as such creates a type of boredom that bears aspects of both simple and existential boredom. “Faced with duration not distraction,” writes Manohla Dargis, “your mind may wander,” but in “wandering there can be revelation as you meditate, trance out, bliss out, luxuriate in your thoughts, think.”<sup>126</sup> Similarly, Karl Schoonover writes that art cinema “turns boredom into a kind of special work, one in which empty one screen time is repurposed, renovated, rehabilitated.”<sup>127</sup> In this respect, through its long and complex history, art cinema has attained an interestingly rich relationship to boredom, one that remains to be scrutinized in detail. This section has thus explored boredom as a state of mind and examined its

implications as a mood as well as an emotion. Despite its negative connotations, I have attempted to recover boredom as a productive emotion, which fosters creativity, generates insight and amplifies receptiveness. In this respect, Slow Cinema uses boredom as an aesthetic strategy and permits mind wandering, transforming boredom into an aesthetically rewarding experience. The resolute application of the long take aesthetic and the use of dead time are central to this transformation. But what exactly are these aspects of style that produce boredom on the spectators? How do they relate to narrative and how do they function? The next section will answer these questions by demonstrating several examples from Ceylan's *Distant* and an in-depth analysis of *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*.

#### **4.6 – Aesthetics of Boredom in *Distant* and *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia***

This section aims to substantiate the arguments presented above by focusing strictly on the formal aspects of the aforementioned films, with an emphasis on framing, duration, lighting and depth of focus. The overarching purpose in exercising this close analysis is to establish boredom as a valid aesthetic strategy, which Ceylan as well as other Slow Cinema directors frequently implement in order to stimulate a mode of spectatorship based on contemplation, insight, revelation and creative interpretation. As the concept of dead time is fundamental to my argument, I will begin by revisiting the notion of descriptive pause, which was introduced in detail in Chapter 2. I suggest here that the descriptive pause and the long take are the main components for activating boredom as a receptive state of mind, largely because both devices allow for mind wandering through establishing idleness. In this respect, the examples in this section, initially drawn from *Distant* and then through a more sustained attention to *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*, are instances of descriptive pause, namely scenes in which story action is abandoned despite the continuity in narration. I argue in this analysis that through an overt foregrounding of film style and duration that temporarily pauses plot progression, Ceylan distracts his viewers from the habitual concerns of the narrative as a whole, but rather invites a closer inspection of its formal parameters (the décor, the setting, edges of the frame), which eventually unveil hidden and deeper truths regarding the story world or the nature of storytelling in general. This argument, then, harkens back to my

preliminary observations regarding Slow Cinema; in other words that it is a mode of narration based on an intensified application of film style, favouring mood and atmosphere over plot. In addition to an examination of stylistic features, I will also investigate the narrative form and thematic structures of the films in order to demonstrate the various incarnations of the distinctive types of boredom.

As I have argued in earlier sections, Ceylan's films were initially unsuccessful in their national reception because they employed unusual narrative structures and stylistic decisions. His films were a clear break from Turkish popular cinema in terms of the de-dramatization of the plot as a major force within the narrative. Profoundly influenced by Anton Chekhov, Ceylan's stories revolve around situations, moods and mental states while the progression of events and the cause-effect links in between them are largely neglected from the foreground, if not wholly abandoned. Weaving together ordinary and everyday situations, Ceylan projects a sense of contemporary Turkishness, but does so through establishing long sequences of silence enhanced by the use of elliptical editing, subtle sound designs, fixed camera angles, still frames and dead time. These sequences, some of which involve slow movement and are open to interpretation, do not advance the plot and hence function in similar ways to the descriptive pause, which I have outlined in Chapter 2. To recall, descriptive pause is a category of narrative tense and describes moments in the film where the story action stops, narration continues. In other words, despite the pause in story events and plot progression, the act of storytelling proceeds, chiefly through its narrative discourse. The definitive examples I ascribed to the descriptive pause are largely from Béla Tarr films, in which action is *literally* paused despite slow camera movements and droning sound effects. However, in Ceylan's films the descriptive pause functions *figuratively* (as I have suggested earlier), in the sense that despite the continuation of physical action (for example, characters walking or standing), these instances do not relate to the story structure or advance any plot progression. Routinely appearing in between two significant plot points, such dead moments are immaculately shot, composed, staged and more than often accompanied by a soundtrack that either contains an extremely banal dialogue (or conversely shot in total silence) or an ambient mixture of sound effects. These empty moments slow down and pause plot developments and are instead preoccupied with projecting the mental states of the characters by throwing the audience into a suspended feeling of time. In

other words, they embody typical features of the Slow Cinema tradition: through stillness or monotonous movement, pointless dialogue or absolute silence, atmosphere instead of event and most importantly, a systematic and careful application of the long take in purpose of reducing narrative pace. With the use of deep-focus cinematography, these sequences use composition to obfuscate the actions and spatial orientation of characters. In some scenes various objects occupy the foreground of the image, eclipsing characters or important moments in the background. In many ways such an austere representation of action tests narrative intelligibility and in Ceylan's case, the inactivity of the characters becomes revelatory in the sense that the spectators begin to build, develop or imagine several character traits and question whether there is another meaning beyond what we see in the image.

Let us begin with several examples from Ceylan's *Distant*. The first example takes place during the scene where the heavy snowfall is introduced. Yusuf has finally managed to enter Mahmut's apartment and talks about his intentions of finding work on international trading ships. He tells Mahmut that he will go out the next day for the docks and talk to the officials to get more information. In the next day, Istanbul is covered with snow and our perspective slightly changes to Yusuf and along with him we experience the city through various images and sounds. This remains one of the most memorable sequences in the film, both visually and sonically, and shows the ways in which Ceylan plays around visually stunning images edited together with ambient sounds. The emotional tone of the film suddenly expresses an eerie quality with a particular emphasis on sounds coming from the ships passing through the Bosphorus, whose tonal qualities are modified to such a degree insofar as they become some sort of ambient music – as we have seen earlier, aspects of sound editing and design that were completely ignored in previous forms of Turkish cinema.



**Figure 4.1** – *Distant* (2002)



**Figure 4.2** – cont.

As soon as the snow is introduced as part of the setting, a loosely connected series of images in and around the city dominate the film narrative structure. In these sequences the progression of plot slows down, until Yusuf enters the dock and begins enquiring about jobs at the port (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2). The film temporarily abandons plot progression in this sequence to capture the urban rhythms through unusual images such as the bent ship that dominates most of the screen. In a city known for its chaotic pace, the sudden snow abruptly interrupts the very essence of the city itself and introduces a calm and idyllic nature. Later on, Ceylan insistently portrays his characters gazing to each other as well as to the city out of a window with no complementary dialogue or plot element. These ephemeral depictions also slow down the plot time as well as the spectator's experience of the film, allowing for contemplation instead of building causal links between each moment.



**Figure 4.3** – *Distant* (2002)



**Figure 4.4** – cont.



**Figure 4.5 – cont.**



**Figure 4.6 – cont.**

Another example of Ceylan resisting conventional forms of narrative is the scene in which Yusuf and Ebru wait for the janitor to pick up a package for Mahmut. The uncomfortable waiting within the apartment building here occurs through an initial establishing shot; the janitor goes downstairs to pick the package and Yusuf is left alone with Ebru. They are conveniently framed against each other and Yusuf tries to pose himself to attract some kind of attention. Moments later, the uncomfortable silence between the two is further exaggerated with the lights going off – a very typical, albeit somewhat old-fashioned situation in İstanbul where all apartment lights switch off automatically (Figures 4.3-4.6). What is striking in this scene is Ceylan’s blend of an extremely familiar and banal situation with one that is also extremely uncomfortable.

A secondary function of the lights going off is to attain a stylized *tableaux vivant* in silhouette. Ceylan was previously praised for his immaculate photography and his grounding in composition as well as still life is evidently revealed in these sequences. The situation is followed with a close up of Yusuf looking at Ebru, and then Ebru looking outside, towards the light. The empty moment of waiting is emphasized further with these close ups and in many ways their gazes remain elusive and inconclusive. The scene finally comes to an end with the janitor, putting an end to the uncomfortable situation by turning on the lights and returning the parcel, but the whole scene emphasizes moments of still life, inactivity and dead time. The effect of such a use of duration is the emergence of what Mieke Bal calls “sticky images: images that hold the viewer, enforcing an experience of temporal variation. They enforce a slowing down as well as an intensification of the experience of time.”<sup>128</sup> The bulk of the examples Bal cites as sticky images are contemporary sculptures and installations, which foreground an awareness of temporality and render the act of looking palpable

through emphasizing the ephemerality of the artwork itself, essentially by using transient materials or composition.<sup>129</sup> For painting, however, Bal turns to Caravaggio, who “allegedly destroyed painting by disrupting narrative,” namely by pausing the narrative action in favour of contrast, texture and colour, and whose “narrative dimension derives from its appeal to an interaction with the viewer; to its own processing in time.”<sup>130</sup> In other words, pausing narrative progress envelops the viewer in a different state of perception, one that enables the viewer to participate in the construction of meaning as well as negotiate the role and function of visual style.

While these scenes demonstrate the ways in which Ceylan uses the descriptive pause to attain an aesthetic experience based on boredom, it also highlights how these sequences establish borderline cases between narrative and non-narrative forms. By eliminating causality, progression and development, these sequences move towards a different engagement with the spectator: not only the exact feelings of the characters are clouded by the film’s deliberate concealment but also the sequences try to project the exact idleness of the characters’ mental states. In other words, these sequences duplicate the feeling of boredom by the characters onto the spectator by depicting the very moments of boredom. But how is this experience of boredom creative, insightful or productive? The remainder of this section I will demonstrate this aspect of the descriptive pause fully by arguing for Slow Cinema’s ability to transform boredom (resulting from slowness, idleness or lack of engagement) into a heightened sense of perceptivity in which natural occurrences and rudimentary compositions elicit mind wandering. As such, boredom, while traditionally understood as a negative emotion and time wasting activity, can be a productive and revelatory emotion in the context of Slow Cinema.

The curious connection between boredom and creativity takes a different shape in *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*. Boredom is a useful concept in relation to the film because it is, similar to Ceylan’s other films, manifested in various levels along with its both types. On the narrative level, for instance, the film puts considerable amount of emphasis to moments of simple boredom faced by the principle characters. The prosecutor Nusret and Doctor Cemal are disaffected by the mundane tasks of police inquiry and are expressively fed-up with drifting from one location to another in search



of the dead body. Furthermore, both characters embody conventional notions of existential boredom similar to Ceylan's other films. The prosecutor Nusret is torn by the recent death of his wife, where the circumstances and causes of the passing have remained mysterious. He refuses to admit responsibility, not least for his anonymous retelling of the story to Doctor Cemal, but also for dismissing Cemal's rational explanation of the mystery, which essentially suggests that the wife could have committed suicide to punish her husband. Later in the film, Nusret finds Cemal's alternative scenario plausible, but this does not function as a coming to terms with reality, on the contrary, he becomes further disturbed and filled with remorse.

However, there seems to be considerable amount of overlap between the simple and existential forms of boredom, which is best exemplified in the characterization of Doctor Cemal. Cemal represents a different case because his situation involves both types of boredom with overlapping varieties. In other words, it is difficult to determine whether he is primarily troubled with the simple or the existential form, simply because he seems to be embodying both at all times. His presumably unhappy emotional past is represented through a series of black and white photographs, which imply that he might have been involved with an unsuccessful relationship.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, since the beginning of the film, Cemal is portrayed as an outsider, firstly because of his refusal to get involved with the crime scene interrogations, but also through the way in which he expresses himself to others. In many ways he is depicted as an urbanite, or at least educated in an urban centre, and is most likely held up in the provinces against his will, fulfilling his national duty.<sup>132</sup> In this respect, his moral and intellectual struggles as an educated urbanite in the provincial setting are a recurring plot trope in the film. However, his boredom is not only related to the time-bound simple boredom commonly associated with the stasis of provincial life. Rather, he seems to be disaffected with a kind of boredom that runs deeper, independent of time and space, perhaps due to incidents happening in his past. More importantly, however, his boredom is related with his inability to practice his free will against his entrapment in a provincial setting. The lack of free will in this case seems to be the crucial point, in which a simple form of boredom evolves into its existential variety. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that both forms of boredom exist in an overlapping manner throughout the film to establish character psychology.

Far beyond its function within the narrative level, boredom should also be seen as an aesthetic element that entails a similar effect on the spectator. *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* achieves this effect through a blend of repetition within its narrative structure as well as its long takes designed as frame-within-frames. For example, the first half of the film portrays the investigation in its various stages, but there is little difference amongst the sequences and an even slower plot progression. In these scenes, the long takes depict more or less the same action in different circumstances and locations, relegating the truth quest of the characters to a banal and repetitive activity. Although we learn something new about all characters in each new scene, the film insistently extends the investigation and the actual search. Visually, for instance, Ceylan consistently shows the car lights illuminating the dark, which happens exclusively in all scenes with careful attention, as if they are a significant part of the plot. Many of the on-location investigation scenes are also connected by sequences that take place within the car, particularly the one with the suspect, Dr. Cemal and The Commissar in it. These scenes also interrupt and suspend plot progression, mostly by creating deadpan humour through a use of mundane dialogue. In many ways these interludes and deviations from the plot indicate that the film is interested in things other than the truth regarding the dead body the characters are searching for, presumably because the film imposes a narration that seeks a kind of truth beyond everyday realities. In this respect, the film tells us that there is a poetic truth that lies beneath the surface of the reality, one that can be observed through a narration that echoes boredom, which prompts the gaze by slowing down in repetitive observations.

The film's national and international critical reception confirms these claims about the film's narration. J. Hoberman, for instance, describes the film as "an epistemological murder mystery," which "invites the viewer to meditate on the nature of truth or basis of knowledge."<sup>133</sup> Similarly, Senem Aytaç argues that the corpse that the characters pursue throughout the film functions as a Hitchcockian Macguffin; in other words a bogus object that obscures the actual truth quest of the film. Aytaç claims that the film in fact is not concerned with illuminating the murder or the murderer's identity, but instead aims at revealing the power struggle and social hierarchy that deeply embodies Turkish provincial life.<sup>134</sup> The role of the police procedure is central to this argument. "As the rambling, shambling, for some time seemingly futile investigation

proceeds, Ceylan uses it as the framework for a richly quizzical meditation on a range of themes,” writes Geoff Andrew and claims that the film explores humanistic questions such as “the mores and manners of provincial life, the way we’re shaped by where we live; the balancing of ethics and pragmatism; our responsibilities to our loved ones; and our need to hold on to the banalities of life when faced with misfortune, absurdity and death.”<sup>135</sup> As such, the film constructs its plot in such a way that its subtle revelations appear to possess a close affinity to boredom as an aesthetic experience. In other words the film creates an atmosphere of boredom in order to emphasize “a slow and languorous rhythm,” as Ceylan calls it, just so the realities of the everyday may remain as fleeting as they are in real life. “A police investigation is a sound movement, [...] a dialectic: the quest for truth in a concrete and common expression, where it is innocently at work,” said the French director Bruno Dumont, another important but often overlooked figure of Slow Cinema. Dumont continues: “The discovery doesn’t really matter. What counts is the movement: looking.”<sup>136</sup> In the remainder of this section I examine sequences in *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* that embody this notion of looking, mainly through shots that emphasize looking as a voyeuristic activity. I argue that there is a systematic use of the frame-within-the frame across the film, altogether shot in a style reminiscent of the descriptive pause and therefore represent boredom as an aesthetic strategy. Secondly, these images represent a window through which the spectators are offered a deeper truth within the film, in other words something ephemeral and fleeting, or other than its main plot. The police inquiry represents a crucial aspect of this looking and movement from the banal into the sublime truth, but as we will see its plot details are persistently clouded by the film’s frequent use of ambiguity in narrative causality. Below, however, I attempt at unravelling these sequences and trying to make sense of what sorts of revelations, insights and creative interpretations these sequences might be offering.



**Figure 4.7** – *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (2011)

Boredom as a state of mind is visually embodied in the film, especially through its visual narration. There are three specific moments in the film where the cinematic frame precisely corresponds to another frame within the film's narrative world. Ceylan uses the cinema-window analogy here to emphasize the instances and the processes of looking, as well as emphasizing our inability to grasp what lies beneath by holding some of its shots for minutes without any change. All of these scenes contain very little action and there is no dialogue or any other direct connection to plot events, hence they pause plot progression to allow temporal space for contemplation only through the use of *mise-en-scène* and cinematography. In the opening scene, for example, the camera closes down to a hazy window, rendering objects on the other side of the glass out of focus and extremely blurry (See Figure 4.7). Moments later, the focal depth slowly adjusts to the space inside the room and only through a sharp image we realize that the two suspects and the future victim are having a small party. Is this a metaphor for the viewer's involvement with the film? No. As a matter of fact, the narration achieves *exactly* what the viewer is going through. The focal depth is not a metaphor; it is exactly the same procedure that our eyes go through, adjusting a lens to render further objects visible. Although the image sharpens at the end of the scene and renders the *mise-en-scène* visible, hence provides more information for us, we keep asking questions regarding the film's plot. The same play of focal depth is repeated across the film in two significant moments and signify the way in which the spectator is unable to arrive at a

truthful conclusion regarding how the events have unfolded, emphasizing our inability to fully access the information regarding to the murder and the investigation.



**Figure 4.8** – *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (2011)

This is perhaps best exemplified in the scene prior to the location in which the characters finally find the burial ground. Preceding this discovery is a long take where the camera is placed just behind the wheel of the car, doubling the cinematic frame with the front window of the car (See Figure 4.8). It is difficult to tell whether this is a point of view shot, but judging from the central location of the camera it most likely is not. The shot is held for a couple minutes on the landscape in front, accompanied by traditional Turkish folk music playing from the radio.<sup>137</sup> It is finally dawn and the rain has arrived on the scene. Although the focal depth is arranged in a way to illuminate the other side of the window the constant raindrops temporarily blur the image we see, at least in the moments where the window is not swiped clean. In short, the whole camera setup is designed in a way to evoke a partial understand of whatever unfolds right in front of us. As soon as we are able to notice a clear image, the raindrops immediately obscure the image further. As such, similar to the example earlier, the frame-within-the-frame literally represents our relationship to the film and its plot events. Although we receive information, we never quite grasp the reality and as such the information flow remains fleeting, temporary, perhaps causing frustration on the part of the spectator.

It is significant that Ceylan decided to insert this imagery right before the officials finally find the piece of evidence they have been looking for, because within

the scene, the style foregrounds some of the plot points that will occur later. There are two important questions regarding the plot in the film, both of which remain unanswered, at least explicitly. The first one is the question whether the suspects have really committed murder. The policemen find Kenan's confession satisfying, but the younger brother's culpable emotional breakdown at the scene implies otherwise and the film does not revisit this question. Secondly, during the autopsy scene, Dr. Cemal's assistant finds sand in the victim's lungs, suggesting that the victim was most likely buried alive. Cemal, however, inexplicably refuses this conclusion and excludes it from the final report, without showing any obvious rationale. This later point is surprising, because earlier in the film Cemal was portrayed as someone dedicated to an objective truth, not least because he is practicing medicine, but also for his conversations with the policemen. In these dialogues Cemal disapproves the superstitious remarks made by the policemen, defending the position that only an autopsy could determine the causes of death in mysterious circumstances, or emphasizing the necessity for a medical diagnosis against such rumours. Initially portrayed as a diligent doctor, Cemal's final concealment is all the more surprising to the spectator: not only we do not get a definitive answer as to who has really committed the murder, but we are also not given any clue to why the doctor does not fully report the apparent truth.



**Figure 4.9** – *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (2011)

The film ends with an image that fully realizes this situation, once again through a frame-within-the-frame composition that reflects a clouded gaze towards the world outside. In this image, however, the window is shot sideways from a diagonal angle

rather than from a perpendicular one as in the earlier examples (in this respect, it is at once both a frame-within-the-frame and not so due to the change in the camera angle). Moreover, our inability to see outside the window is caused by an oversaturated light rather than an incongruity in the focal depth (See Figure 4.9). The overexposed image literally disables our ability to see the landscape outside. The narration is effectively implying that the viewer is unable to arrive at a truthful conclusion in spite of the various pieces of information and actions laid out earlier in the film. The film ends literally the way it started, with a look through a window, perhaps emphasizing its parenthetical examination of Anatolian culture. Observing exactly the same visual pattern in the film's Cannes press release, Vecdi Sayar describes the film's formal structure as portraiture instead of the traditionally plot-driven narrative film (echoing the Chekhovian influences) and establishes its distant kinship to Turkish literary works such as Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu's *The Stranger* (*Yaban*, 1932).<sup>138</sup> The novel portrays the story of a stereotypical Republican subject, an enlightened individual (a lawyer, doctor, teacher, or engineer), who travels to a remote Anatolian village with the purpose of educating its dwellers, but instead faces a compulsive backward environment totally indifferent to the Republican project of social edification.<sup>139</sup> Another visual and formal method that the film utilizes in creating such a portrait of Anatolia is its lingering use of extreme close-ups on the faces of its characters, which in the words of Firat Yücel brings an "Antonioniesque touch to a Spaghetti Western convention," hence the title of the film's homage to Sergio Leone's signature films *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968) and *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984), both of which similarly explore a deeper cultural reality while the main plotlines masquerade criminal procedures. For Yücel, the sustained gaze at these "rigid faces" at the same time reveals "a hidden fragility and disgrace" of a previously unseen Anatolian masculinity.<sup>140</sup>

These examples also emphasize our status as viewers, not least through frame compositions that illustrate the conditions of looking, but also through its unique narration. The narration focuses on moments dominated by dead time and repetitive long takes, both of which distract the viewer from the actual plot and conceal story information in ways that contradict the pleasures of cinema. These factors create suspense and at times create a kind of patience test on the spectator and, more importantly, they establish a state of mind that can best be characterized as boredom.

Instead of showing important moments overtly, the narration system in the film concentrates on the dead moments by evoking the story through a particular use of imagery. Even the last clue given to us right at the end of the film does not reveal or accentuate the questions that troubled us throughout the film, and the film closes in a similar manner by withholding evidence from the spectator, which in itself highlights the way in which the spectator, as well as Dr. Cemal, are nothing but outsiders.

This brings us back to the issue where representation of the everyday and boredom as a state of mind are essentially paradoxical aesthetic strategies. While *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* celebrates moments of boredom through elements of style that directly inherit specific aspects of the same feeling, boredom in itself becomes the very fabric of its mode of narration. In other words, the film's portrayals of ceaseless interrogations, repetitive imagery and banal dialogue do not entail a sense of boredom on the spectator that is negative, distractive or off-putting; on the contrary, the film presents itself through a mode of narration that encourages the same idleness as a method that allows a closer engagement with the film and its particular themes. Nothing really happens in the scenes mentioned before, at least in the traditional sense, and that is exactly why such an undemanding presence of mise-en-scène and plot should create mind wandering. The elusive use of camerawork and the mise-en-scène, therefore, invites the viewer to question and imagine what might have been happening beyond the surface of the image, while the descriptive pause fosters creative insight in attaining such thinking.

I conclude this section by once again referring to an early interview by Ceylan. When asked whether his ordinary characters and everyday situations might displace, alienate or bore his spectators, he answers:

In cinema, being boring, boring the spectator or not are not important. One can reach a deep and profound understanding through the experience of boredom. Films that have influenced me most are those I was bored most while watching them. But their affection, their influence emerges two or three days, even years after watching them.<sup>141</sup>

Here Ceylan refers to those films by Ozu, Bresson, Tarkovsky and Antonioni, whose films were often criticized by the mainstream media for their pretentious attitude or



boringness.<sup>142</sup> Yet, while the works of these elusive directors often baffled critics and spectators alike, many of these works are now regarded as classics of modernist art cinema within contemporary film studies. In other words, the cultural value of such art films that used boredom as an aesthetic strategy have, over the course of history, matured into inflicting a more profound sense of aesthetic experience and artistic inspiration. There is, however, another critical attention attributed to these films by art-cinema friendly critics, who describe the cinematic experience as contemplative, meditative, hypnotic and/or mesmerizing, feelings that I think, share a fundamental affinity with boredom as a state of mind, simply because they stress a suspended sense of idleness.<sup>143</sup> Boredom is not only present in the narrative level of the films, in the sense that the characters are affected by this particular emotion, but the filmmakers use boredom as an aesthetic strategy to create a very different kind of engagement. In this sense, boredom is not merely a negative emotion and it may attain several positive functions. Peter Toohey, for example, finds boredom “an adaptive emotion in the Darwinian sense,” while other critics draw attention to the curious relationship between boredom and artistic creativity.<sup>144</sup> While it may still remain as an undesirable condition, boredom is in many ways as an aesthetically rewarding experience, mainly because its idle nature allows an opportunity for mind wandering that might lead to creative insight. In this respect, boredom achieves a similar function to other aversive emotions, such as horror and disgust, and its application in Slow Cinema offers a radical, and at times, paradoxical reconsideration of our emotional attachment to moving images. If, across centuries, tragedy as a type of dramatic art based on human suffering has captivated audiences, then perhaps viewing artworks that elicit boredom can also arouse forms of aesthetic pleasure.

#### **4.7 – Conclusion**

This chapter argued Slow Cinema directors establish an international presence by negotiating local traditions with an aesthetic sensibility largely drawn from European art cinemas. Ceylan’s films cogently demonstrate this aspect of Slow Cinema, because they represent a composite of *Yeşilçam* and art cinema traditions. On the one hand, *Yeşilçam* cinema is largely characterized by its low-budget production mechanisms that depict

familiar narratives in an easily recognizable manner. While Ceylan's films display certain filmmaking practices (artisanal mode of production) and narrative themes (clashes between different generations of a family or the urban and the provincial) originating from the *Yeşilçam* tradition, in a strictly aesthetic sense their deployment of the long take aesthetic and foregrounding of boredom are largely in defiance of established local cinematic conventions. Ceylan's most successful films, *Distant* and *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*, as I have demonstrated, are powerful examples of this adaptation of European art cinema aesthetics into a Turkish context. I have argued that the use of boredom as an aesthetic strategy is the main element of this negotiation and hence provided a theory of boredom that emphasizes its idleness as a basis that fosters inspiration, insight and revelation through the psychological phenomenon known as mind wandering. As such, boredom is not a state of mind in which meaning is lost, but a stream of consciousness encouraged by the apparent idleness or lack of activity in the film and establishes an imaginative and ruminative mode of spectatorship. Yet, I believe boredom accommodates a function larger than a capacity for contemplation and, despite its undesirable condition, I argue that it should be considered alongside significant and cinematic aversive emotions, such as horror and disgust, as well as generic dramatic forms such as tragedy.

In the next chapter, I will summarize the conclusions of previous case studies along with recapitulating and developing my arguments in approaching Slow Cinema through concepts of nostalgia, absurd humour and boredom. I will also offer a broader conception of Slow Cinema via a reference to the *optique*, which, as proposed by Dudley Andrew, describes a set of stylistic devices at a given moment in time as well as their function for a demanding audience. Furthermore, I will offer a broader look at the historical evolution of Slow Cinema by noting its changes within the past four decades.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusion

My objective in this thesis has been to scrutinize Slow Cinema in terms of its diverse aesthetic features and its concomitant institutional background. I have argued that nostalgia, absurd humour and boredom are fundamental concepts in attaining a comprehensive account of Slow Cinema, especially one that is specifically concerned with its aesthetic, historical and critical discourses. Before concluding this thesis and summarizing my case studies, however, I want to briefly set out some broad parameters to evaluate the Slow Cinema discourse in relation to contemporary art cinema currents. In other words, while the earlier chapters of this thesis offered an in-depth examination of three distinctive directors, I want to understand whether Slow Cinema in general qualifies as an art cinema movement and if so, under what aesthetic, economic or cultural criteria should this assessment take place. Tiago de Luca and Matthew Flanagan, in their respective doctoral theses, have briefly posed the same question and concurred in defining Slow Cinema not so much as “a structured film movement” or “the divergent aesthetic concerns of individual artists and collectives,” but more an emerging and varied aesthetic sensibility in the wake of digital technologies (for de Luca) and experimental practices (for Flanagan).<sup>1</sup> While I am in agreement with both scholars, I also want to explore these ideas regarding the nature of Slow Cinema’s contemporary existence further and at the same time suggest future areas of research.

Slow Cinema is a complex phenomenon. Although it is a form of resistance, its aesthetic and political effects cannot simply be reduced to a response towards dominant aesthetic modes. On the other hand, despite embracing an anti-mainstream rhetoric, not all of its exemplary features are politically, culturally or aesthetically subversive. Throughout this thesis I have emphasized that Slow Cinema exists within a global framework, in which local articulations of culture are traded and consumed by an international and culturally sophisticated elite. Whilst the slowness of Slow Cinema is typically seen as a romantic reaction against acceleration, globalization and digitalization, it simultaneously embraces these developments through various means.

Digital technologies not only enable the production of these films, but also inform newer distribution and exhibition practices. Because none of these films are readily available in local multiplexes, technological advancements in exhibition (such as official streaming services, Internet piracy, home video and high-definition systems, and so on) increase their visibility and hasten their accessibility. Likewise, while some films exclusively deal with localized issues, such as adaptations of national folk tales or allegorical narratives of national histories, they nevertheless circulate globally and often reach audiences with no immediate concern for such indigenous specificities. In other words, Slow Cinema is composed of many paradoxes: as much as the films are elusive, opaque and difficult to grasp, the discursive and theoretical framework in which they operate similarly eludes comprehension.

In the midst of all this debate is the international film festival as a powerful and vital institution. As I have now emphasized numerous times, Slow Cinema functions at a transnational paradigm. Nevertheless, even the broadest conceptual frameworks of transnational cinemas are unable to accommodate Slow Cinema within its typologies. Mette Hjort's taxonomy of "cinematic transnationalisms," for example, proposes various categories of transnational activities, in which Slow Cinema resides in between two particular types. On the one hand, as most Slow Cinema films are auteur-based productions, some filmmakers belong to "auterist transnationalism" and transcend the boundaries of national productions through transnational collaborations, specifically with international film festivals, distribution companies and other networks. On the other hand, however, filmmakers like Jia Zhangke and Tsai Ming-liang should be placed within a "modernizing transnationalism" for these filmmakers "cannot be neatly contained within their own national cinemas."<sup>2</sup> For Hjort, modernizing transnationalism arises in particularly East Asian cinemas when "a significantly transnationalized film culture becomes a means of fuelling, but also signifying, the mechanisms of modernization within a given society."<sup>3</sup> In other words, the debate circles back to a negotiation in which the director, as an individual, cultivates a national film culture and, concurrently, subscribes to the demands of a global audience.

Perhaps the alternative route to take in understanding Slow Cinema is turning to its distinctive audience profiles. What kinds of audiences go to film festivals and see

these films? How do issues of gender, race, nationality or social class play a role in this negotiation? How do DVD sales or Internet downloads affect the circulation of Slow Cinema films? These are some of the questions I have largely escaped throughout this thesis. However, an examination of audience profiles may give us a better sense of how and why these films are frenetically consumed across international film festivals and virtual environments. So far, I have approached these issues via tangential questions, such as investigating the types of film critics and distinguishing the nature of publications in which these critics write. In this regard, cinephilia, or a generalized love and passion for the art of cinema, has largely been at the centre of the debate. In many ways this harkens back to my emphasis on the ways in which Slow Cinema receives institutional support, not only from cinephile publications, but also from individual critics and official institutions (cinematheques, archives, education facilities, funding bodies, etc.). Yet, what does Slow Cinema actually mean for its audiences?

To understand Slow Cinema's relationship to its audiences, I want to turn to the neologism *optique*, proposed by Dudley Andrew in his authoritative study of 1930s French poetic realism. Motivated by the structuralist term *écriture*, which "designate[s] the limited plurality of literary options available in any epoch," *optique* similarly represents a plethora of cinematic devices available at a given historical period and the ways in which such devices are related to the "specification of audience expectations, needs, and uses."<sup>4</sup> As such, *optique* not only refers to a diverse regiment of aesthetic sensibilities and stylistic devices, but also, more importantly, designates the historical and cultural circumstances behind the creation of these cultural productions as well as the "specific type of experience offered by a set of films to the public."<sup>5</sup> In this respect, *optique* "encompasses more than a style or a genre" and constitutes "a sensibility, a function, and a mode of address."<sup>6</sup> For Andrew, the French poetic realism of the 1930s can be seen as an *optique* not only in terms of the various directors and the conditions of the film industry at that time, but is furthermore "characterized by the particular rapport the cinema developed with renegade literary, music, and artistic figures during the heady days of the Popular Front."<sup>7</sup> Such a wide-ranging capacity of *optique* as a classification system enables a broader, yet historically productive conception of Slow Cinema, as I have attempted throughout this thesis, not only as a stylistic tendency in

contemporary art cinema, but also an aesthetic sensibility drawn from the technological, institutional and cultural circumstances at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Fifteen years after its original publication, Andrew revisits *optique* to categorize the varied existence of contemporary cinema: “national folk films,” “global entertainment movies” and “international art cinema.”<sup>8</sup> Whilst for Andrew, *optique* in this instance entitles international art cinema as a broader category, I believe that it can be further extrapolated within the complex terrain of art cinema and equally describe what is meant by Slow Cinema, especially in regard to my objectives in this thesis. In this respect, I wonder if Slow Cinema could also constitute a form of *optique* – perhaps in a similar vein to the ways in which French poetic realism did. Throughout three distinctive case studies, I have mapped the diverse array of stylistic elements that contribute to an aesthetic sensibility based on the expansion, elongation and exaggeration of cinematic temporality and the valorization of ambiguity. In order to better understand the functions of this aesthetic sensibility, I have turned to concepts of nostalgia, absurd humour and boredom, all of which, by virtue of their historical relationship to art cinema movements, have revealed a striking inclination towards modernism. Consequently, I have argued that this disposition towards modernism and the films’ prominent aesthetic sensibilities function for spectators simultaneously as a nostalgic reflection and sheer contemplation, an absurd impression and melancholic revelation, meditative boredom and aesthetic elation – in other words, I have largely established Slow Cinema as an aesthetic discourse with its distinctive set of characteristics that radically alters the perception of temporality and the foundations of cinematic spectatorship.

This thesis, furthermore, examined the Slow Cinema phenomenon in another crucial and remarkable aspect. I want to stress once again that Slow Cinema is also a historical and critical discourse; in essence a continuation of the modernist project, intensified in its minimalistic design, but relocated to the realm of international film festivals in the wake of the diminishing number of art-house theatres. In other words, Slow Cinema, via its unique modes of production, distribution and reception, represents a nostalgic rebirth of the modernist art cinema movements. Varying from the artisanal to the transnational, these productions are on the one hand distributed across film

festivals and, on the other, through new media channels. Likewise, the critical receptions of the films take place in film festivals as well as online discussion boards, forums, blogs and cinephile publications. Supported by the very same institutional context that attended modernist film, Slow Cinema operates at a critical intersection, negotiating and questioning the relationship between the polar extremes of the local and the global.

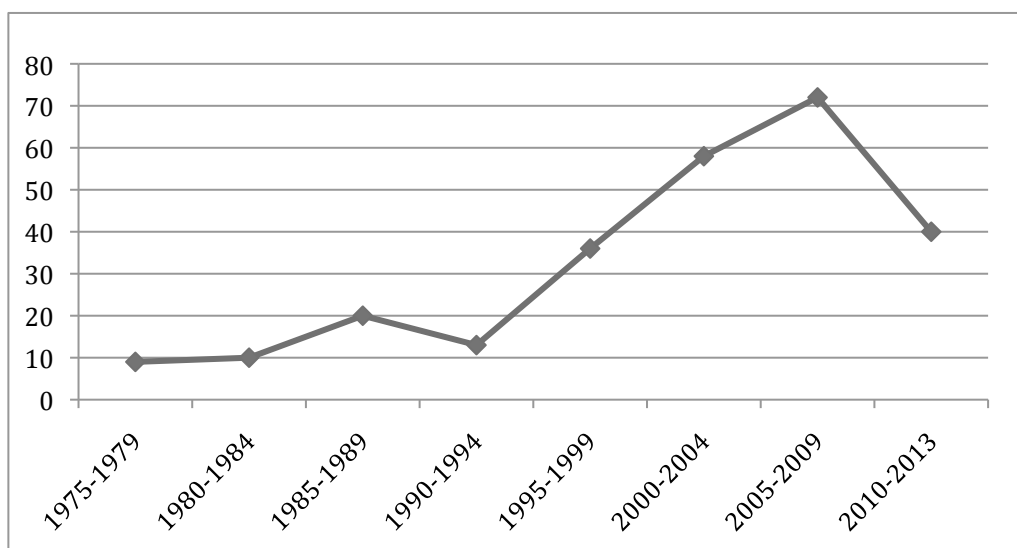
The theoretical framework, which this thesis has approached Slow Cinema's pronounced aesthetic experience, its critical and aesthetic history, is determined by three pivotal concepts: nostalgia, absurd humour and boredom. These concepts pertain to both the formal aspects of the films and their historical conjuncture. Slow Cinema films are nostalgic, because they appear outmoded and retro-stylish against the ever-accelerating world and technological progression faced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Likewise, Slow Cinema is nostalgic for its evocation of modernist art cinema's institutional parameters and its critical reception frequently elicits nostalgic references to this historical genealogy. The films are absurdly humorous for their depiction of humanity in a condition that escapes logical interpretation and, similarly, the paradoxes of its conceptual framework refuse rational explanations. While certain critics lampoon Slow Cinema for its portrayal of boredom, monotony and idleness, through subtle structures of repetition and atmospheric pondering, the films elevate boredom into an aesthetic mode of experience. In sum, Slow Cinema, as perhaps the most exciting contemporary counter-culture current offers a radical and often paradoxical reconsideration of our emotional attachment and intellectual engagement with moving images. For the purpose of concluding this study, then, I will now offer brief summaries of my case studies and point towards future areas of research.

Chapter 1 has offered a detailed outline of Slow Cinema's current status by firstly addressing the Slow Cinema debate that originated in the pages of *Sight and Sound*. Following Nick James's provocative editorial, many film critics and serious bloggers joined in the debate by addressing the question whether Slow Cinema represented an active form of rebellion against the blockbuster dominance in mainstream cinema. The debate itself reveal factions amongst cinephiles, scholars and critics; on the one hand, those that defended Slow Cinema by virtue of its artistic

capabilities, and on the other, those that demanded a comprehensive account of how such aesthetic features were distinguished from earlier forms of art cinema movements. Because the debate was a contemporary issue, until recently, much of its facets were not accommodated in scholarly literature. The introduction chapter then has outlined the critical literature, which ranges from recent PhD theses to journal articles as well as other resources that briefly allude to the debate without a direct engagement with the term Slow Cinema. In light of this lack, I have attempted to understand Slow Cinema through a historical survey of what art cinema meant for audiences and how Slow Cinema should be approached through a comprehensive account of art cinema's distinctive attributes.

An examination of the history of art cinema thus revealed the ways in which discourses of slowness, contemplation and radical aesthetics were as ancient as cinema itself. In this respect, I have argued that Slow Cinema is simply a moment of transition within the evolution of art cinema, perhaps a moment in which a collective obsession in temporality intensified and an exponential increase in the number of productions followed at the turn of the century. Clearly, however, there are other technological, economic and cultural factors behind this increase, all of which constitute future areas of research. To exhibit this exponential increase, I have generated a graphic depiction of the number of Slow Cinema features released in the last four decades (See Figure 5.1). Although Slow Cinema's stylistic precedents are easily located in earlier films, such as Warhol's *Empire* (1964), Dreyer's *Ordet* (1955) and even Visconti's *La Terra Trema* (1948), the film entries in this chart start at the year 1975 with Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman*, perhaps a symbolic inauguration for Slow Cinema. Following nearly two decades of fluctuating numbers, 1994 marks another critical year after which productions escalate from 13 feature films (1990-1994) to 36 (1995-1999), 58 (2000-2004) and finally reaching the peak at 72 (2005-2009), before descending to 40 (2010-2013). The complete list of film entries can be consulted in the *Appendix*, which also serves as an overview of Slow Cinema filmography.





**Figure 5.1** – Line chart illustrating the exponential increase in the number of Slow Cinema films

I should note that, however, this filmography does not represent an exhaustive or authoritative list and demonstrates a crude, yet approximate measure of the proliferation of Slow Cinema films throughout the mid-to-late 1990s. The potential problems and inaccuracies of this filmography are, firstly, due to the fact that some of the films are nearly impossible to see. In this respect, some films are added purely because they are the work of a critically established Slow Cinema director (such as the cases with Fred Kelemen and Lav Diaz). Secondly, some unknown films are added because they regularly feature either in cinephile publications, scholarly studies or online discussions concerned with Slow Cinema. Thirdly, and finally, the year 2013 contains several entries, which at the time of writing, are about to be released or have already premiered in film festivals. In this respect the steep decrease in the period 2010-2013 can be explained by not only the lack of an additional year (as all other periods include a total of five consecutive years), but also because the potential candidates within this period are, at the moment, not released theatrically. Moreover, the filmography contains a diverse range of films, ranging from observational documentaries to minimalist art cinema films or experimental features, but on the whole such a list should simply offer a starting point towards a more comprehensive, detailed and precise account in the future.

The year 1994 saw another symbolic inauguration of Slow Cinema, namely Béla Tarr's *Sátántangó*. Chapter 2 has explored the work of Béla Tarr, perhaps the

quintessential Slow Cinema director, whose films are not only equipped with its defining stylistic features, but also project a distinctive atmospheric quality largely inherent to regional artistic practices. This chapter constituted a historical objective and argued that Tarr's films represent a hyperbolic extension of a variety of modernist techniques, such as the long take, dead time and claustrophobic framing. I offered a historical overview of the evolution of the long take, in which I not only ascribed several functions to it from the perspective of the filmmaker and the spectator, but also examined its treatment by film theorists such as André Bazin and Gilles Deleuze. While for Bazin, the long take is an instrument that liberates the spectator from the impositions of montage and the henceforth "plastics" of the image, I have argued that Slow Cinema in many ways extends this towards a sheer contemplation of reality, however distorted, subjective and mannerist, and furthermore divests its spectator of narrative causality. This motivated my investigation of dedramatization techniques in art cinema, which, following a brief sketch of its various types, I have explored through Gerard Genette's taxonomy of narrative tense. Because Slow Cinema films often elongate temporality insofar as to pause and stall plot progress, I have argued that the descriptive pause may function as a fitting container to understand these pacing strategies. Through a series of examples, then, I examined Tarr's films in relation to the descriptive pause and analyzed the role of camera movements and their shifting relationship to the actors. The contemplative and ruminative mode of narration emerging from this triangular relationship was then explained via the *flâneur*, which functioned as an apt metaphor in delineating the correlations between movement and observation.

There were other formal elements that supported my claims. For instance, I offered comparisons between Tarr and Michelangelo Antonioni and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, in terms of their framing strategies. While Tarr's claustrophobic staging practices encouraged a more meticulous scanning of the image, I have referred to the "cinephiliac moment" and "panoramic perception" as viewing postures that benefited from a contemplative mode of spectatorship. Because much of this aesthetic discourse harkened back to the modernist cinema of the 1960s, I revisited the concept of nostalgia in light of Slow Cinema's citation of previous art cinema directors and examined Tarr's use of black-and-white cinematography as an example of these nostalgic attitudes. Because this chapter in general lacked a contextual overview of Tarr's relationship to

contemporary Hungarian and/or European cinema, I concluded the chapter with brief references to the works of directors as varying as Sokurov, Bartas, German and Kanevsky, all of which similarly experimented with monochrome imagery and also shared a mutual interest with Tarr in terms of their geopolitical circumstances.

Chapter 3 focused on Tsai Ming-liang from a similar geopolitical point of view. While Tsai's films constituted a second leg of New Taiwan Cinema, which began in the early 1980s and achieved international distribution through the support of international film festivals, Tsai similarly sustained a global presence through a complex interaction between these networks and specificities of Taiwanese culture. In this respect, I have argued that Tsai's films represented a case in which many incongruous stylistic features were appropriated, for example, on the one hand his adoption of modernist and minimalist aesthetics often clashed with his genre-bending films that combined conventions of pornography, musical and melodrama. Following an explication of the New Taiwan Cinema and the mechanisms behind their circulation in international film festivals, I provided a detailed account of Tsai's films, which, at once borrowed from this preceding historical legacy as well as subverted some of its traditions. In terms of narrative form, Tsai's films displayed a use of episodic structure that delayed narrative causality and intelligibility. Instead, these films offered situations in which spectators were confronted with unexplainable circumstances: stillness, monotony and inconsequential daily rituals. I have examined the sense of deadpan humour arising from these situations through another modernist phenomenon, namely the Theatre of the Absurd and claimed that absurd humour as another defining quality of Slow Cinema. Drawing parallels between silent comedies and the films of Jacques Tati, I concluded this chapter with an in-depth examination of Tsai's *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003), a film-within-a-film that nostalgically bemoaned the passage of grand cinema theatres and the glorious past of cinema-going. Referring back to discourses of reflective nostalgia, I argued that such films also functioned as a cinephiliac practice, aspects that are common alongside other Slow Cinema films.

Nuri Bilge Ceylan's films, which I concentrated in Chapter 4, represented an even more compelling case study because of their ambivalent relationship to domestic filmmaking practices and the ways in which they presented these cultural specificities

on the global stage. Following a historical examination of *Yeşilçam* cinema, Turkey's domestic film industry that proliferated roughly between 1960 and 1980, I situated Ceylan's alongside the rising New Turkish Cinema movement. While *Yeşilçam* emphasized ubiquitous narratives and disregarded artistic innovation, Ceylan's films reversed these formal conventions by incorporating autobiographical features and an aesthetic sensibility largely influenced by European art cinema. However, in terms of cinematic practices, Ceylan also adopted a minimalist, low budget and guerrilla form of filmmaking that often took place throughout the course of *Yeşilçam*'s history. In this respect, I have examined Ceylan's filmography in a chronological order, which unveils the various institutional and critical supports his films received from European funding mechanisms and cinephile publications, enabling them an international outlook that subtly combines aspects of localized conventions and European traditions. The central element of Ceylan's intervention into Turkish film history was, however, the foregrounding of boredom as an aesthetic virtue. In this respect, I explored boredom as a state of mind through a sustained attention to literary scholars, philosophers and psychologists and argued that boredom, in its simplest manifestations, could achieve a productive effect on the spectators. In other words, I have argued that Slow Cinema transformed boredom into an aesthetically rewarding experience by emphasizing its idle nature, allowing for a meditative and contemplative mode of spectatorship. I have then demonstrated these claims in relation to Ceylan's *Distant* (2002) and *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (2011), which revealed formal and stylistic elements that encouraged mind wandering and offered the spectator insightful, creative and revelatory instances in the face of evocative sequences.

Boredom as an elusive, fleeting and difficult to pinpoint emotion characterizes a central aspect of my argument in this thesis. The reason why I include boredom in the title, despite the consideration of two other concepts, is because I believe boredom in itself astutely informs the aesthetic modes of nostalgia and absurd humour. In spite of its habitual undesirability, I have attempted to rescue boredom from its negative implications and emphasized its profoundly meditative qualities – through which, Slow Cinema plays an overwhelming role.

## APPENDIX

### Slow Cinema Filmography (1975-2013)

Film titles are listed chronologically with appropriate English titles (unless otherwise known). Nationality refers to the director's birthplace; the runtimes are given in minutes and are taken from the International Movie Database (IMDB).

	<b>Title (English)</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Director</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Runtime</b>
1	<i>Jeanne Dielman</i>	1975	Chantal Akerman	Belgium	201
2	<i>Mirror</i>	1975	Andrei Tarkovsky	Russia	108
3	<i>The Passenger</i>	1975	Michelangelo Antonioni	Italy	126
4	<i>The Travelling Players</i>	1975	Theo Angelopoulos	Greece	230
5	<i>11x14</i>	1977	James Benning	USA	81
6	<i>One Way Boogie Woogie</i>	1977	James Benning	USA	60
7	<i>The Devil, Probably</i>	1977	Robert Bresson	France	95
8	<i>The Hunters</i>	1977	Theo Angelopoulos	Greece	168
9	<i>Stalker</i>	1979	Andrei Tarkovsky	Russia	163
10	<i>Permanent Vacation</i>	1980	Jim Jarmusch	USA	75
11	<i>Alexander the Great</i>	1980	Theo Angelopoulos	Greece	235
12	<i>Blue Planet</i>	1981	Franco Piavoli	Italy	83
13	<i>Koyanisqatsi</i>	1982	Godfrey Reggio	USA	86
14	<i>Nostalgia</i>	1983	Andrei Tarkovsky	Russia	125
15	<i>That Day on the Beach</i>	1983	Edward Yang	China	166
16	<i>L'Argent</i>	1983	Robert Bresson	France	85
17	<i>Stranger Than Paradise</i>	1984	Jim Jarmusch	USA	89
18	<i>Almanac of Fall</i>	1984	Béla Tarr	Hungary	119
19	<i>Voyage to Cythera</i>	1984	Theo Angelopoulos	Greece	120

20	<i>Taipei Story</i>	1985	Edward Yang	China	110
21	<i>A Time to Live, a Time to Die</i>	1985	Hsiao-hsien Hou	China	138
22	<i>Therese</i>	1986	Alain Cavalier	France	94
23	<i>Down By Law</i>	1986	Jim Jarmusch	USA	107
24	<i>My Friend Ivan Lapshin</i>	1986	Aleksei German	Russia	100
25	<i>The Sacrifice</i>	1986	Andrei Tarkovsky	Russia	142
26	<i>The Terrorizers</i>	1986	Edward Yang	China	109
27	<i>The Beekeeper</i>	1986	Theo Angelopoulos	Greece	140
28	<i>Daughter of the Nile</i>	1987	Hsiao-hsien Hou	China	91
29	<i>Dust in the Wind</i>	1987	Hsiao-hsien Hou	China	109
30	<i>Landscape Suicide</i>	1987	James Benning	USA	95
31	<i>Damnation</i>	1988	Béla Tarr	Hungary	120
32	<i>Powaqqatsi</i>	1988	Godfrey Reggio	USA	99
33	<i>The Hole</i>	1988	Ming-liang Tsai	Malaysia	95
34	<i>Landscape in the Midst</i>	1988	Theo Angelopoulos	Greece	127
35	<i>A City of Sadness</i>	1989	Hsiao-hsien Hou	China	157
36	<i>Mystery Train</i>	1989	Jim Jarmusch	USA	110
37	<i>Recollections of the Yellow House</i>	1989	João César Monteiro	Portugal	122
38	<i>O'Sangue</i>	1989	Pedro Costa	Portugal	95
39	<i>Why Has Boddhi Dharma Left for the East</i>	1989	Yong-Kyun Bae	South Korea	137
40	<i>Twilight</i>	1990	György Fehér	Hungary	105
41	<i>A Brighter Summer Day</i>	1991	Edward Yang	China	237
42	<i>The Suspended Step of the Stork</i>	1991	Theo Angelopoulos	Greece	143
43	<i>Night on Earth</i>	1991	Jim Jarmusch	USA	129
44	<i>Rebels of the Neon God</i>	1992	Ming-liang Tsai	Malaysia	106

45	<i>Three Days</i>	1992	Šarūnas Bartas	Lithuania	75
46	<i>Libera Me</i>	1993	Alain Cavalier	France	75
47	<i>D'Est</i>	1993	Chantal Akerman	Belgium	107
48	<i>The Puppetmaster</i>	1993	Hsiao-hsien Hou	China	142
49	<i>Satantango</i>	1994	Béla Tarr	Hungary	450
50	<i>Fate</i>	1994	Fred Kelemen	Germany	80
51	<i>Vive L'Amour</i>	1994	Ming-liang Tsai	Malaysia	118
52	<i>Casa de Lava</i>	1994	Pedro Costa	Portugal	110
53	<i>Kardiogramma</i>	1995	Darezhan Omirbayev	Kazakhstan	75
54	<i>Maborosi</i>	1995	Hirokazu Koreeda	Japan	110
55	<i>Dead Man</i>	1995	Jim Jarmusch	USA	121
56	<i>Good Men, Good Women</i>	1995	Hsiao-hsien Hou	China	108
57	<i>Gods Comedy</i>	1995	João Cesar Monteiro	Portugal	170
58	<i>The Corridor</i>	1995	Šarūnas Bartas	Lithuania	85
59	<i>Ulysses' Gaze</i>	1995	Theo Angelopoulos	Greece	176
60	<i>La Rencontre</i>	1996	Alain Cavalier	France	75
61	<i>The Promise</i>	1996	Dardenne Brothers	France	94
62	<i>Chronicle of a Disappearance</i>	1996	Elia Suleiman	Israel	88
63	<i>Voices Through Time</i>	1996	Franco Piavoli	Italy	86
64	<i>Goodbye, South, Goodbye</i>	1996	Hsiao-hsien Hou	China	124
65	<i>Few of Us</i>	1996	Šarūnas Bartas	Lithuania	105
66	<i>Taste of Cherry</i>	1997	Abbas Kiarostami	Iran	95
67	<i>Mother and Son</i>	1997	Aleksandr Sokurov	Russia	73
68	<i>The Life of Jesus</i>	1997	Bruno Dumont	France	96
69	<i>Frost</i>	1997	Fred Kelemen	Germany	270
70	<i>The River</i>	1997	Ming-liang Tsai	Malaysia	115
71	<i>Moe No Suzaku</i>	1997	Naomi Kawase	Japan	95

72	<i>The Town</i>	1997	Nuri Bilge Ceylan	Turkey	85
73	<i>Ossos</i>	1997	Pedro Costa	Portugal	94
74	<i>The House</i>	1997	Šarūnas Bartas	Lithuania	120
75	<i>Krustalyov, My Car!</i>	1998	Aleksei German	Russia	150
76	<i>Passion</i>	1998	György Fehér	Hungary	155
77	<i>Flowers of Shanghai</i>	1998	Hsiao-hsien Hou	China	130
78	<i>Eternity and a Day</i>	1998	Theo Angelopoulos	Greece	137
79	<i>The Wind Will Carry Us</i>	1999	Abbas Kiarostami	Iran	118
80	<i>Molokh</i>	1999	Aleksandr Sokurov	Russia	108
81	<i>Humanite</i>	1999	Bruno Dumont	France	148
82	<i>Le Beau Travail</i>	1999	Claire Denis	France	93
83	<i>Rosetta</i>	1999	Dardenne Brothers	France	95
84	<i>Nightfall</i>	1999	Fred Kelemen	Germany	146
85	<i>As Bodas de Deus</i>	1999	João César Monteiro	Portugal	150
86	<i>Naked under the Moon</i>	1999	Lav Diaz	Phillipines	110
87	<i>M/Other</i>	1999	Nobuhiro Suwa	Japan	147
88	<i>Clouds of May</i>	1999	Nuri Bilge Ceylan	Turkey	130
89	<i>Mysterious Object at Noon</i>	2000	Apichatpong Weerasethakul	Thailand	83
90	<i>Werckmeister Harmonies</i>	2000	Béla Tarr	Hungary	145
91	<i>The Captive</i>	2000	Chantal Akerman	Belgium	118
92	<i>A One and a Two (Yi-Yi)</i>	2000	Edward Yang	China	173
93	<i>Platform</i>	2000	Jia Zhangke	China	154
94	<i>Songs from the Second Floor</i>	2000	Roy Andersson	Sweden	98
95	<i>Freedom</i>	2000	Šarūnas Bartas	Lithuania	96
96	<i>Eureka</i>	2000	Shinji Aoyama	Japan	217
97	<i>Taurus</i>	2001	Aleksandr Sokurov	Russia	104
98	<i>Millennium Mambo</i>	2001	Hsiao-hsien Hou	China	119



99	<i>Los</i>	2001	James Benning	USA	90
100	<i>Batang West Side</i>	2001	Lav Diaz	Phillipines	315
101	<i>Freedom</i>	2001	Lisandro Alonso	Argentina	73
102	<i>La Cienaga</i>	2001	Lucrecia Martel	Argentina	103
103	<i>What Time is it Over There?</i>	2001	Ming-liang Tsai	Malaysia	116
104	<i>H Story</i>	2001	Nobuhiro Suwa	Japan	111
105	<i>Desert Moon</i>	2001	Shinji Aoyama	Japan	131
106	<i>Fate</i>	2001	Zeki Demirkubuz	Turkey	119
107	<i>Ten</i>	2002	Abbas Kiarostami	Iran	92
108	<i>Waiting for Happiness</i>	2002	Abderrahmane Sissako	Mauritania	96
109	<i>Rene</i>	2002	Alain Cavalier	France	85
110	<i>Russian Ark</i>	2002	Aleksandr Sokurov	Russia	99
111	<i>Blissfully Yours</i>	2002	Apichatpong Weerasethakul	Thailand	125
112	<i>Japan</i>	2002	Carlos Reygadas	Mexico	133
113	<i>The Son</i>	2002	Dardenne Brothers	France	103
114	<i>At the First Breath of a Film</i>	2002	Franco Piavoli	Italy	83
115	<i>Naqoyqatsi</i>	2002	Godfrey Reggio	USA	89
116	<i>Gerry</i>	2002	Gus van Sant	USA	103
117	<i>Hukkle</i>	2002	György Pálfi	Hungary	78
118	<i>Hesus the Revolutionary</i>	2002	Lav Diaz	Phillipines	112
119	<i>Distant</i>	2002	Nuri Bilge Ceylan	Turkey	110
120	<i>The Confession</i>	2002	Zeki Demirkubuz	Turkey	100
121	<i>Five Dedicated to Ozu</i>	2003	Abbas Kiarostami	Iran	74
122	<i>Father and Son</i>	2003	Aleksandr Sokurov	Russia	97
123	<i>The Return</i>	2003	Andrei Zvyagintsev	Russia	105
124	<i>Twentynine Palms</i>	2003	Bruno Dumont	France	119
125	<i>The Adventures of Iron</i>	2003	Apichatpong Weerasethakul	Thailand	90

	<i>Pussy</i>				
126	<i>Elephant</i>	2003	Gus van Sant	USA	81
127	<i>Café Lumiere</i>	2003	Hsiao-hsien Hou	China	103
128	<i>The Hours of the Day</i>	2003	Jaime Rosales	Spain	103
129	<i>Come and Go</i>	2003	João César Monteiro	Portugal	179
130	<i>Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter, ... and Spring</i>	2003	Ki-duk Kim	South Korea	103
131	<i>Good Bye, Dragon Inn</i>	2003	Ming-liang Tsai	Malaysia	82
132	<i>Shara</i>	2003	Naomi Kawase	Japan	100
133	<i>Tie Xi Qu: West of the Tracks</i>	2003	Wang Bing	China	551
134	<i>Tropical Malady</i>	2004	Apichatpong Weerasethakul	Thailand	118
135	<i>Bombon: El Perro</i>	2004	Carlos Sorín	Argentina	97
136	<i>The Intruder</i>	2004	Claire Denis	France	130
137	<i>Nobody Knows</i>	2004	Hirokazu Koreeda	Japan	141
138	<i>13 Lakes</i>	2004	James Benning	USA	135
139	<i>Ten Skies</i>	2004	James Benning	USA	101
140	<i>Hotel</i>	2004	Jessica Hausner	Austria	76
141	<i>The World</i>	2004	Jia Zhangke	China	143
142	<i>Evolution of a Filipino Family</i>	2004	Lav Diaz	Phillipines	540
143	<i>Los Muertos</i>	2004	Lisandro Alonso	Argentina	78
144	<i>The Holy Girl</i>	2004	Lucrecia Martel	Argentina	106
145	<i>The Weeping Meadow</i>	2004	Theo Angelopoulos	Greece	185
146	<i>Waiting Room</i>	2004	Zeki Demirkubuz	Turkey	94
147	<i>The Sun</i>	2005	Aleksandr Sokurov	Russia	110
148	<i>Sangre</i>	2005	Amat Escalante	Spain	90
149	<i>Battle in Heaven</i>	2005	Carlos Reygadas	Mexico	98
150	<i>The Death of Mr Lazarescu</i>	2005	Cristi Puiu	Romania	150

151	<i>The Child</i>	2005	Dardenne Brothers	France	100
152	<i>Broken Flowers</i>	2005	Jim Jarmusch	USA	106
153	<i>Drifting States</i>	2005	Denis Côté	Canada	91
154	<i>Krisana</i>	2005	Fred Kelemen	Germany	90
155	<i>Last Days</i>	2005	Gus van Sant	USA	97
156	<i>Three Times</i>	2005	Hsiao-hsien Hou	China	135
157	<i>Drawing Restraint 9</i>	2005	Matthew Barney	USA	135
158	<i>The Wayward Cloud</i>	2005	Ming-liang Tsai	Malaysia	114
159	<i>Our Daily Bread</i>	2005	Nikolaus Geyrhalt	Austria	92
160	<i>Seven Invisible Men</i>	2005	Šarūnas Bartas	Lithuania	119
161	<i>Honour of the Knights</i>	2006	Albert Serra	Spain	95
162	<i>Syndromes and a Century</i>	2006	Apichatpong Weerasethakul	Thailand	105
163	<i>Flanders</i>	2006	Bruno Dumont	France	91
164	<i>12:08 East of Bucharest</i>	2006	Corneliu Porumboiu	Romania	89
165	<i>Still Life</i>	2006	Jia Zhangke	China	111
166	<i>Old Joy</i>	2006	Kelly Reichardt	USA	73
167	<i>Heremias, Book one: the Legend of the Lizard Princess</i>	2006	Lav Diaz	Phillipines	540
168	<i>Fantasma</i>	2006	Lisandro Alonso	Argentina	63
169	<i>I Don't Want to Sleep Alone</i>	2006	Ming-liang Tsai	Malaysia	115
170	<i>Climates</i>	2006	Nuri Bilge Ceylan	Turkey	101
171	<i>Paraguay Hammock</i>	2006	Paz Encina	Paraguay	78
172	<i>Colossal Youth</i>	2006	Pedro Costa	Portugal	155
173	<i>Destiny</i>	2006	Zeki Demirkubuz	Turkey	103
174	<i>Aleksandra</i>	2007	Aleksandr Sokurov	Russia	95
175	<i>The Banishment</i>	2007	Andrei Zvyagintsev	Russia	157
176	<i>The Man from London</i>	2007	Béla Tarr	Hungary	139

177	<i>Silent Light</i>	2007	Carlos Reygadas	Mexico	145
178	<i>4 months, 3 weeks, 2 days</i>	2007	Christian Mungiu	Romania	113
179	<i>Our Private Lives</i>	2007	Denis Côté	Canada	82
180	<i>Flight of the Red Balloon</i>	2007	Hsiao-hsien Hou	China	115
181	<i>Solitary Fragments</i>	2007	Jaime Rosales	Spain	135
182	<i>RR</i>	2007	James Benning	USA	111
183	<i>In the City of Sylvia</i>	2007	José Luis Guerín	Spain	84
184	<i>Death in the Land of Encantos</i>	2007	Lav Diaz	Phillipines	540
185	<i>Mogari No Mori</i>	2007	Naomi Kawase	Japan	97
186	<i>At Sea</i>	2007	Peter Hutton	USA	60
187	<i>You, the Living</i>	2007	Roy Andersson	Sweden	95
188	<i>Egg</i>	2007	Semih Kaplanoğlu	Turkey	97
189	<i>Shirin</i>	2008	Abbas Kiarostami	Iran	92
190	<i>Birdsong</i>	2008	Albert Serra	Spain	98
191	<i>Los Bastardos</i>	2008	Amat Escalante	Spain	90
192	<i>35 Shots of Rum</i>	2008	Claire Denis	France	100
193	<i>The Silence of Lorna</i>	2008	Dardenne Brothers	France	105
194	<i>All That She Wants</i>	2008	Denis Côté	Canada	105
195	<i>Still Walking</i>	2008	Hirokazu Koreeda	Japan	115
196	<i>Bullet in the Head</i>	2008	Jaime Rosales	Spain	85
197	<i>24 City</i>	2008	Jia Zhangke	China	112
198	<i>Wendy and Lucy</i>	2008	Kelly Reichardt	USA	80
199	<i>Melancholia</i>	2008	Lav Diaz	Phillipines	450
200	<i>Liverpool</i>	2008	Lisandro Alonso	Argentina	84
201	<i>The Headless Woman</i>	2008	Lucrecia Martel	Argentina	87
202	<i>Three Monkeys</i>	2008	Nuri Bilge Ceylan	Turkey	109
203	<i>Milk</i>	2008	Semih Kaplanoğlu	Turkey	102

204	<i>Lunch Break</i>	2008	Sharon Lockhart	USA	83
205	<i>The Dust of Time</i>	2008	Theo Angelopoulos	Greece	125
206	<i>Crude Oil</i>	2008	Wang Bing	China	840
207	<i>Giant</i>	2009	Adrian Biniez	Uruguay	84
208	<i>Hadewijch</i>	2009	Bruno Dumont	France	105
209	<i>Police, Adjective</i>	2009	Corneliu Porumboiu	Romania	115
210	<i>Dogtooth</i>	2009	Giorgos Lanthimos	Greece	94
211	<i>Ruhr</i>	2009	James Benning	USA	120
212	<i>Limits of Control</i>	2009	Jim Jarmusch	USA	116
213	<i>Lourdes</i>	2009	Jessica Hausner	Austria	96
214	<i>Oxhide II</i>	2009	Jiayin Liu	China	132
215	<i>White Ribbon</i>	2009	Michael Haneke	Germany	144
216	<i>Face</i>	2009	Ming-liang Tsai	Malaysia	138
217	<i>Yuki &amp; Nina</i>	2009	Nobuhiro Suwa	Japan	92
218	<i>Independencia</i>	2009	Raya Martin	Phillippines	77
219	<i>How I Ended This Summer</i>	2010	Aleksey Popogrebskiy	Russia	130
220	<i>Uncle Boonmee who can Recall his Past Lives</i>	2010	Apichatpong Weerasethakul	Thailand	114
221	<i>The Ditch</i>	2010	Bing Wang	China	112
222	<i>Aurora</i>	2010	Cristi Puiu	Romania	184
223	<i>Curling</i>	2010	Denis Côté	Canada	96
224	<i>Meek's Cutoff</i>	2010	Kelly Reichardt	USA	104
225	<i>Le Quattro Volte</i>	2010	Michelangelo Frammartino	Italy	88
226	<i>The Hunter</i>	2010	Rafi Pitts	Iran	90
227	<i>Eastern Drift</i>	2010	Šarūnas Bartas	Lithuania	111
228	<i>Honey</i>	2010	Semih Kaplanoğlu	Turkey	103
229	<i>My Joy</i>	2010	Sergei Loznitsa	Belarus	127
230	<i>Double Tide</i>	2010	Sharon Lockhart	USA	99

231	<i>Porfirio</i>	2011	Alejandro Landes	Brazil	101
232	<i>Elena</i>	2011	Andrei Zvyagintsev	Russia	109
233	<i>The Turin Horse</i>	2011	Béla Tarr	Hungary	146
234	<i>Two Years at Sea</i>	2011	Ben Rivers	UK	88
235	<i>Outside Satan</i>	2011	Bruno Dumont	France	110
236	<i>The Kid with a Bike</i>	2011	Dardenne Brothers	France	87
237	<i>Alps</i>	2011	Giorgos Lanthimos	Greece	93
238	<i>Century of Birthing</i>	2011	Lav Diaz	Phillipines	360
239	<i>Elegy to the Visitor from the Revolution</i>	2011	Lav Diaz	Phillipines	80
240	<i>Woman of the Wind</i>	2011	Lav Diaz	Phillipines	120
241	<i>Michael</i>	2011	Markus Schleiner	Austria	96
242	<i>Hanezu</i>	2011	Naomi Kawase	Japan	91
243	<i>Once Upon a Time in Anatolia</i>	2011	Nuri Bilge Ceylan	Turkey	150
244	<i>Las Acacias</i>	2011	Pablo Giorgelli	Argentina	82
245	<i>Just the Wind</i>	2012	Benedek Fliegauf	Hungary	86
246	<i>Post Tenebras Lux</i>	2012	Carlos Reygadas	Mexico	115
247	<i>Beyond the Hills</i>	2012	Christian Mungiu	Romania	150
248	<i>Dream and Silence</i>	2012	Jaime Rosales	Spain	120
249	<i>Florentina Hubaldo, CTE</i>	2012	Lav Diaz	Phillipines	360
250	<i>In the Fog</i>	2012	Sergei Loznitsa	Belarus	127
251	<i>Heli</i>	2013	Amat Escalante	Spain	105
252	<i>Camille Claudel 1915</i>	2013	Bruno Dumont	France	95
253	<i>Vic+Flo Saw a Bear</i>	2013	Denis Côté	Canada	95
254	<i>Like Father, Like Son</i>	2013	Hirokazu Koreeda	Japan	120
255	<i>Night Moves</i>	2013	Kelly Reichardt	USA	112
256	<i>Norte, the End of History</i>	2013	Lav Diaz	Phillipines	250
257	<i>Stray Dogs</i>	2013	Ming-liang Tsai	Malaysia	138

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*Touch of Sin*

2013

Zhangke Jia

China

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## NOTES

### 1. Introduction

<sup>1</sup> Nick James, "Passive Aggressive," *Sight and Sound* 20.4 (2010): 5.

<sup>2</sup> Harry Tuttle, "Slow films, easy life (Sight&Sound)," *Unspoken Cinema*, May 12, 2010, accessed August 20, 2012, <http://unspokencinema.blogspot.co.uk/2010/05/slow-films-easy-life-sight.html>.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Steven Shaviro, "Slow Cinema Vs Fast Films," *The Pinocchio Theory*, May 12, 2010, accessed June 26, 2013, <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=891>.

<sup>5</sup> Vadim Rizov, "Slow Cinema Backlash," *IFC.com*, May 12, 2010, accessed June 26, 2013, <http://www.ifc.com/fix/2010/05/slow-cinema-backlash>.

<sup>6</sup> For example, see Danny Leigh, "The View: Is it OK to be a Film Philistine?," *Guardian Film Blog*, May 21, 2010, accessed June 26, 2013,

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/filmblog/2010/may/21/film-philistine>; Dan Fox, "Slow, Fast and Inbetween," *Frieze Blog*, May 23, 2010, accessed June 26, 2013,

[http://blog.frieze.com/slow\\_fast\\_and\\_inbetween/](http://blog.frieze.com/slow_fast_and_inbetween/); Glenn Kenny, "About Nothing, Or, New Fast," *Some Came Running Blog*, May 13, 2013, accessed June 26, 2013,

[http://somecamerunning.typepad.com/some\\_came\\_running/2010/05/new-fast.html](http://somecamerunning.typepad.com/some_came_running/2010/05/new-fast.html).

<sup>7</sup> Nick James, "Being Boring" *Sight and Sound* 20.7 (2010): 5.

<sup>8</sup> For *Sight and Sound* readers' letters, see: Garan Holcombe, "Time To Get Faster," *Sight and Sound* 20.5 (2010): 104; Erwin Houtenbrink, "Declaration of Bore," *Sight and Sound* 20.8 (2010): 96; Tom Eysers, "Slowly Does It," *Sight and Sound* 20.9 (2010): 94.

<sup>9</sup> Dan Kois, "Eating Your Cultural Vegetables," *New York Times*, April 29, 2011, accessed June 26, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/01/magazine/mag-01Riff-t.html?pagewanted=all>.

<sup>10</sup> Manohla Dargis and A. O. Scott, "In Defense of the Slow and the Boring," *New York Times*, June 3, 2011, accessed June 27, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/05/movies/films-in-defense-of-slow-and-boring.html>;

Kent Jones, "That was So Then, This is Totally Now," *Film Comment* 47.5 (2011): 56-58 and 61; Andrew O'Hehir, "In Praise of Boredom, at the Movies and in Life," *Salon.com*, June 8, 2011, accessed June 27, 2013,

[http://www.salon.com/2011/06/08/in\\_praise\\_of\\_boredom/](http://www.salon.com/2011/06/08/in_praise_of_boredom/).

<sup>11</sup> For reviews of the AV Festival, see Henry Miller, "Doing Time: 'Slow Cinema' at the AV Festival," *Sight and Sound News and Reviews* (2012), accessed June 29, 2013,

<http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/newsandviews/festivals/av-festival-2012.php> and Sukhdev Sandhu, "'Slow Cinema' Fights Back Against Bourne's Supremacy," *The Guardian*, March 9, 2012, accessed June 29, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2012/mar/09/slow-cinema-fights-bournes-supremacy>.

<sup>12</sup> Marijke de Valck, "Festival Programming in Historical Perspective," in *Coming Soon to a Festival Near You: Programming Film Festivals*, ed. Jeffrey Ruoff (St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2012), 26.

<sup>13</sup> For a similar exposition regarding the scholarly value of the Slow Cinema Debate, see Elena Gorfinkel "Global Art Networks: the Case of "Slow" Cinema," *Global Currents* 8.1 (2012): 6-

7.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Romney, "In Search of Lost Time," *Sight and Sound* 20.2 (2010): 43-44.



- <sup>15</sup> James Quandt, "The Sandwich Process: Simon Field Talks About Polemics and Poetry at Film Festivals," in *Dekalog 3: On Film Festivals*, ed. Richard Porton (London: Wallflower Press, 2009), 76-77.
- <sup>16</sup> Matthew Flanagan, "Towards an Aesthetic of Slow in Contemporary Cinema," *16:9* 6.29 (2008), accessed August 20, 2012, [http://www.16-9.dk/2008-11/side11\\_inenglish.htm](http://www.16-9.dk/2008-11/side11_inenglish.htm).
- <sup>17</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> Matthew Flanagan, "'Slow Cinema': Temporality and Style in Contemporary Art and Experimental Film" (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2012).
- <sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>20</sup> Harry Tuttle, "Slower or Contemplative?," *Unspoken Cinema*, March 17, 2010, accessed August 20, 2012, <http://unspokencinema.blogspot.co.uk/2010/03/slower-or-contemplative.html>.
- <sup>21</sup> Examples are abundant and admittedly appear significantly more in online blogs and discussion boards. However, here's a selection: Kieron Corless, "The Turin Horse," *Sight and Sound* 22.6 (2012): 78-79; Paul Arthur, "Habeus Corpus: A Meditation on 'The Death of Mr. Lazarescu' and Corporeal Cinema," *Film Comment* 42.3 (2006): 44-46, 48-49; Philip French, "Meek's Cutoff," *Guardian*, April 17, 2011, accessed July 3, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2011/apr/17/meeks-cutoff-review>; and Peter Bradshaw, "The Man from London," *Guardian*, December 12, 2008, accessed July 3, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2008/dec/12/the-man-from-london-review>.
- <sup>22</sup> Mark Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 4.
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 5-6.
- <sup>25</sup> James Agee, "Day of Wrath," in *American Movie Critics: An Anthology From the Silents Until Now*, exp. ed., ed. Philip Lopate (New York: The Library of America, 2008), 164-165.
- <sup>26</sup> Henry Miller, "1922 Fast, Too Continuous: Fast/Slow Cinema and Modernism" (paper presented at the Fast/Slow Symposium, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, April 4-5, 2013).
- <sup>27</sup> Pamela Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), xii.
- <sup>28</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 4.
- <sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 11.
- <sup>30</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006).
- <sup>31</sup> Robert Koehler, "Twilight Zone: Shadows and Fog in the In-between World of Théo Court's *Ocaso*," *Museum of Moving Image Website*, January 11, 2012, accessed July 1, 2013, <http://www.movingimagesource.us/articles/twilight-zone-20120111>.
- <sup>32</sup> For more information concerning the Slow Food Movement, see Geoff Andrews, *The Slow Food Story: Politics and Pleasure* (London: Pluto Press, 2008) and Carlo Petrini, *Slow Food: The Case for Taste* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), both of which include an extract of the Slow Food Manifesto. Informal information about the organization and the manifesto itself can be found at their website: <http://www.slowfood.com/>.
- <sup>33</sup> "Read This Slowly," *New York Times*, September 28, 2002, accessed July 3, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/28/opinion/read-this-slowly.html>.
- <sup>34</sup> *The Slow Science Manifesto*, accessed July 1, 2013, <http://www.slow-science.org/>.
- <sup>35</sup> Tiago de Luca, "Realism of the Senses: A Tendency in Contemporary World Cinema," in *Theorizing World Cinema*, ed. Lucia Nagib, Chris Perriam and Rajinder Dudrah (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 183.
- <sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, 193.

- <sup>37</sup> Karl Schoonover, "Wastrels of Time: Slow Cinema's Laboring Body, the Political Spectator, and the Queer," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 53.1 (2013): 67 and 68.
- <sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, 68.
- <sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, 70.
- <sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, 70-71.
- <sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, 71.
- <sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, 72.
- <sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, 74.
- <sup>44</sup> David Bordwell, "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice," *Film Criticism* 4.1 (1979): 56-64 and Steve Neale, "Art Cinema as Institution," *Screen* 22.1 (1981): 11-40.
- <sup>45</sup> Bordwell, "The Art Cinema," 57.
- <sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, 59.
- <sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, 59.
- <sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, 60.
- <sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, 61.
- <sup>50</sup> André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. 1*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (1967, repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) and *What is Cinema? Vol. 2*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (1971, repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005)
- <sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, 60.
- <sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, 61.
- <sup>53</sup> Neale, "Art Cinema as Institution," 13.
- <sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, 15.
- <sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, 27.
- <sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, 30-31.
- <sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, 27.
- <sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, 35.
- <sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, 29.
- <sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, 37.
- <sup>61</sup> Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, "Introduction: The Impurity of Art Cinema," in *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6.
- <sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, 6.
- <sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, 7.
- <sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, 8.
- <sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, 8-9.
- <sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, 8.
- <sup>67</sup> Robert Koehler, for instance, claims that "without Rotterdam's Hubert Bals Fund and its mission to fund and support film artists in the 'Third' and developing worlds, a significant number in the global 'margins' would have been unable to make films at all." See Robert Koehler, "Cinephilia and Film Festivals," in *Dekalog 3: On Film Festivals*, ed. Richard Porton (London: Wallflower Press, 2009), 94-95. The most comprehensive account of the "big three" festivals, namely Cannes, Berlin and Venice, is written by Marijke de Valck. See her *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).
- <sup>68</sup> Nick James, "Any Size That Fits," *Sight and Sound* 23.7 (2013): 5.
- <sup>69</sup> For an overview of textual analysis as a structuralist methodology, see Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, Post-Structuralism and Beyond* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 48-57. For an overview of film theory influenced by structuralism, Marxism and psychoanalysis, see Robert Lapsley and

Michael Westlake, *Film Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

<sup>70</sup> David Bordwell, "Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory," in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>71</sup> For well known individual examples, see Stephen Heath, "Films and System: Terms of Analysis," *Screen* 16.1 (1975): 91-113; Raymond Bellour, "The Obvious and the Code," *Screen* 15.4 (1974): 7-17; Peter Wollen, "North by Northwest: a Morphological Analysis," *Film Form* 1.1 (1976): 20-34; and finally Thierry Kuntzel, "The Film-Work, 2," *Camera Obscura* 5 (1980): 6-69.

<sup>72</sup> See Heath, "Films and System," and Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).

<sup>73</sup> For notable criticisms of the "Grand Theory," see Noël Carroll, *Mystifying Movies: Fads & Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) and the anthology of essays by David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, eds., *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

<sup>74</sup> Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1993), 106.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, 106.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, 107.

<sup>77</sup> David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 9th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 58 and David Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 23.

<sup>78</sup> For the earliest examples of this approach, see David Bordwell, *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer* (Berkeley: University of California press, 1981) and Kristin Thompson, *Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible: A Neoformalist Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

<sup>79</sup> Kristin Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 7-10.

<sup>80</sup> quoted in Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 10.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*, 11.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, 15.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, 16.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, 19.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>86</sup> Bordwell addresses these and other theoretical implications of the fabula-syuzhet distinction in his well-read blog. See his entry in May 2011, "Common Sense + Film Theory = Common-Sense Film Theory?," *Observations on Film Art*, May 2011, accessed January 29, 2013, <http://www.davidbordwell.net/essays/commonsense.php>.

<sup>87</sup> Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 41.

<sup>88</sup> David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985; repr., Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 53. Emphasis removed.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, 150.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*, 274.

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*, 275. Emphasis in original.

<sup>92</sup> I should note here that I am not alone in making this claim. Scholars currently working on contemporary art cinema and Slow Cinema have made similar statements, although such claims are yet to be published in a scholarly context. See Flanagan, "'Slow Cinema,'" 133-135.

<sup>93</sup> Bordwell notes that the term "parameters" originates from Noël Burch's suggestion in his *Theory of Film Practice* (New York: Praeger, 1973). See Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 278-279 for a lengthy explanation of what counts as parameters.

<sup>94</sup> 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), 39.

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, 40. Emphasis in original. Betz also notes that the work of Janet Harbord and John Orr takes a similar approach to his understanding of modernist aesthetics and geopolitics. See Janet Harbord, *Film Cultures* (London: Sage, 2002), 38-58 and John Orr, "New Directions in European Cinema," in *European Cinema*, ed. Elizabeth Ezra (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 299-317.

<sup>96</sup> Betz, "Beyond Europe," 41.

<sup>97</sup> Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), 67.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, 73-74.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, 76 and 79. As a side note, Allen and Gomery refer to Bordwell and Thompson here, suggesting that their Neoformalist method in formal analysis goes hand-in-hand with their understanding of the aesthetic film history.

<sup>100</sup> Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*, especially 23-29.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, 86.

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*, 90.

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 69.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, 70.

<sup>106</sup> See Marc Ferro, *Cinema and History*, trans. Naomi Greene (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1988), 12.

## 2. Nostalgia for Modernism: Béla Tarr and the Long Take

<sup>1</sup> See Jonathan Rosenbaum, "A Place in the Pantheon," *Chicago Reader*, May 9, 1996, accessed September 12, 2013, <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/a-place-in-the-pantheon/Content?oid=890479>.

<sup>2</sup> I should also note here that Tarr's intense collaborations with Krasznahorkai and Hranitzky (with the addition of Mihály Vig, who also stars in *Sátántangó*) in many ways challenges the romantic European notion of the cinematic auteur. While much of the films' critical reception focus on Tarr, following from *Damnation* the films are frequently signed as if co-directed by his collaborators, which reflects the collective effort that goes in to the production of these features.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Rosenbaum, "A Bluffer's Guide to Béla Tarr," in *Placing Movies: The Practice of Film Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 55.

<sup>4</sup> For journalistic sources, see Jonathan Romney, "Outside the Whale," *Sight and Sound* 13.4 (2003): 32-33 and "End of the Road," *Film Comment* 37.5 (2001): 55-56, 59, 61-62; John Orr, "Circling the Whale," *Sight and Sound* 11.4 (2001): 22-24. For notable interviews, see Eric Schlosser, "Interview with Béla Tarr," *Bright Lights Film Journal* 30 (2000), accessed September 12, 2013, <http://brightlightsfilm.com/30/belatarr1.php>; and Fergus Daly and Maximilian Le Cain, "Waiting for the Prince: An Interview with Béla Tarr," *Senses of Cinema* 12 (2001), accessed August 25, 2013, <http://sensesofcinema.com/2001/feature-articles/tarr-2/>. For sources that offer in-depth studies of Tarr's films in relation to Hungarian history and culture, see, in particular, John Hodgkins, "Not Fade Away: Adapting History and Trauma in László Krasznahorkai's *The Melancholy of Resistance* and Béla Tarr's *Werckmeister Harmonies*," *Adaptation* 2.1 (2009): 49-64.

- <sup>5</sup> András Bálint Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr: The Circle Closes* (London: Wallflower Press, 2013). See also Kovács's earlier piece "Sátántangó," in *The Cinema of Central Europe*, ed. Peter Hames (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 237-243.
- <sup>6</sup> David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 9th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 213.
- <sup>7</sup> Ed Gallafent, "The Dandy and the Magdalen: Interpreting the Long Take in Hitchcock's *Under Capricorn* (1949)," in *Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film*, ed. John Gibbs and Douglas Pye (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 68.
- <sup>8</sup> For an examination of the ways in which long take scenes relate to the rest of the film in terms of editing practices, see Brian Henderson, "The Long Take," in *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 314-324.
- <sup>9</sup> Barry Salt, *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis*, 2nd ed. (London: Starword, 1992), 146. Salt avoids the use of feet of film simply because the differences in projection speeds would certainly attain very different results.
- <sup>10</sup> For a comparison between different sources, see Donato Totaro, "Time and the Long Take in *The Magnificent Ambersons*, *Ugetsu*, and *Stalker*," (PhD. diss., University of Warwick, 2001), 4-7.
- <sup>11</sup> Salt, *Film Style and Technology*, 231.
- <sup>12</sup> While a group of Cinemascope films had an ASL of 13 seconds, other random pictures in the same period consisted of an ASL of 11 seconds. *ibid.*, 246.
- <sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, 265-266. Salt's examples are Godard's *Breathless* (1960), ASL: 15.0 seconds and Losey's *The Servant* (1963), ASL: 20 seconds.
- <sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, 249, 283 and 296.
- <sup>15</sup> David Bordwell, "Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in Contemporary American Film," *Film Quarterly* 55.3 (2002): 16. See also David Bordwell, "Intensified Continuity Revisited," *Observations on Film Art*, May 27, 2007, accessed August 13, 2013, <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2007/05/27/intensified-continuity-revisited/>.
- <sup>16</sup> Bordwell, "Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in Contemporary American Film," 21-22. Other stylistic tactics include "bipolar extremes of lens lengths," "more close framings in dialogue scenes" and "a free ranging camera."
- <sup>17</sup> These ASLs are taken from the website *Cinematics*, which is a database for collecting various ASLs from various films. See [www.cinematics.lv](http://www.cinematics.lv).
- <sup>18</sup> See John Belton, "New Technologies" in *Oxford History of World Cinema*, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 488.
- <sup>19</sup> Kristin Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 43. See also 89-95 for a broader discussion of the dominant.
- <sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, 92.
- <sup>21</sup> Carl Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 74.
- <sup>22</sup> André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume 2*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (1971; repr., Berkeley: California University Press, 2005), 28.
- <sup>23</sup> André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume 1*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (1967; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 30.
- <sup>24</sup> André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume 2*, 28.
- <sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, 28.
- <sup>26</sup> André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume 1*, 13.
- <sup>27</sup> In fact, demystifying Bazin's arguments were so much in fashion during the 1970s and 1980s that Philip Rosen coined the term "Bazin-bashing." See Rosen's commentary on Bazin's aesthetic of reality in Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 3-41. For notable texts that contradict,

refuse or scrutinize Bazin's realism, see Peter Wollen, "Ontology and Materialism in Film," *Screen* 17.1 (1976): 7-23; Colin MacCabe, "Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure," *Screen* 17.3 (1976): 7-28; Noël Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) and *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>28</sup> See also, David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 46-82.

<sup>29</sup> Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume 1*, 24.

<sup>30</sup> For Bazin, the visual composition found in the silent cinema directors reveal reality, in the sense that they add "nothing to the reality, [they] do not deform it, [they force] it to reveal its structural depth, to bring out the pre-existing relations which become constitutive of the drama." See *ibid.*, 27.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, 37. As such, Bazin finds two realistic tendencies in 1940s cinema that seemingly contradict each other, but in effect argues that both tendencies in fact constitute two different approaches to exhibiting cinema's privileged connection to reality. For Bazin, "Rossellini and Welles have, to all intents and purposes, the same basic aesthetic objective, the same aesthetic concept of realism." See Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume 2*, 39. According to Bazin, both tendencies also appropriate the narrative techniques of the modern American novel (specifically the works of William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos) by translating fragmented narratives and the literal focus towards the factual quotidian lives of everyday people into cinema.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, 58.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, 60.

<sup>34</sup> Tiago de Luca, "Realism of the Senses: A Tendency in Contemporary World Cinema," in *Theorizing World Cinema*, ed. Lúcia Nagib, Chris Perriam and Rajinder Dudrah (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 192.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, 193.

<sup>36</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Athlone Press, 1989), 3.

<sup>37</sup> For the "action-image" or more commonly the "movement-image," see Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Athlone Press, 1986).

<sup>38</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 3 and xi.

<sup>39</sup> While Deleuze himself does not offer a direct description of the numerous signs and images he suggests, I have found the following resource helpful in understanding their relevance, see Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2003). For resources that investigate Deleuze's theory of cinema and Tarr's films, see: Elzbieta Buslowska, "Cinema as Art and Philosophy in Béla Tarr's Creative Exploration of Reality," *Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies* 1 (2009): 107-116, accessed September 11, 2013, <http://193.16.218.141/acta-film/C1/film1-8.pdf>; Jana Dudková, "An Image of Recurrent Time: Notes on Cinematic Image and the Gaze in Béla Tarr's Sátántangó," *Human Affairs* 23.1 (2013): 21-31.

<sup>40</sup> Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume 2*, 81.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, 81.

<sup>42</sup> Karl Schoonover, "Wastrels of Time: Slow Cinema's Laboring Body, the Political Spectator, and the Queer," *Framework* 53.1 (2012): 70.

<sup>43</sup> David Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 152.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, 153.

<sup>45</sup> Ivone Marguiles, *Nothing Happens: Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 7.



<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, 69.

<sup>47</sup> Cesare Zavattini, "A Thesis on Neo-Realism," in *Springtime in Italy*, ed. and trans. David Overbey (London: Talisman Books, 1978), 70.

<sup>48</sup> Marguiles, *Nothing Happens*, 36-37. In these pages, Marguiles argues that the neorealist view of cinema is not applicable to the films of Andy Warhol and Chantal Akerman, because both filmmakers "choose the literal approach rather than the "iterative" representation (deduction of a recurrent series through the presentation of a single event)." As such, the crucial difference between the minimal hyperrealism of Warhol and Akerman and the neorealist narrative, according to Marguiles, is the latter's ability to signify larger social issues through the perspective of one character. This statement, however, appears counter-intuitive, not only because it slightly contradicts Marguiles's ensuing analyses, but simply for the fact that Jeanne Dielman is often seen as a metaphorical narrative largely related to discourses of feminism.

<sup>49</sup> Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light*, 153.

<sup>50</sup> Ben Singer, "Jeanne Dielman: Cinematic Interrogation and 'Amplification'," *Millennium Film Journal* 22 (1989): 59.

<sup>51</sup> Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 29. Genette acknowledges that much of this categorisation is influenced by the work of Tzvetan Todorov. For brief, individual definitions of order, duration and frequency, see *ibid.*, 35 and subsequent chapters that deal exhaustively with these aspects. The distinctions between *discours* and *histoire* have an uncanny resemblance to the Neoformalist concepts *syuzhet* and *fabula*, although they are not entirely the same, as explained in the introduction section of this thesis.

<sup>52</sup> David Bordwell makes good use of issues of order and frequency in analyzing classical Hollywood films, particularly the detective film, which manipulates temporality insofar as to surprise and entice its spectator. See David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985; repr., Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 64-70 and 77-88. For an explication of both terms in contemporary cinema, see Allan Cameron, "Contingency, Order, and the Modular Narrative: *21 Grams* and *Irreversible*," *Velvet Light Trap* 58 (2006): 65-78 and Cornelia Klecker, "Chronology, Causality ... Confusion: When Avant-garde Goes Classic," *Journal of Film and Video* 63.2 (2011): 11-27.

<sup>53</sup> Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 86-89. There are obvious difficulties in applying this notion to literature, such as determining the duration for narrating, which can vary within different reading speeds. However, Genette addresses this problem and arrives at a conventionally accepted definition – the number of pages to frame a story action. For our purposes here, the duration of the act of narrating (the discourse) is simply the running time of a film. For different types of duration, see pages 94-95. What follows is in fact me paraphrasing this passage and giving concrete examples for each type.

<sup>54</sup> This table is adapted from Monika Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 34. Fludernik uses the term speed-up instead of summary, but I have retained the original translation for Genette's terminology here.

<sup>55</sup> For a definition of slow-down, see Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 104-106.

<sup>56</sup> Brian Henderson, "Tense, Mood and Voice in Film (Notes after Genette)," *Film Quarterly* 36.4 (1983): 10.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, Post-Structuralism and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 1996), 95-96. This resource also provides a useful commentary on Genette's work.

<sup>58</sup> P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943-1978*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 370. Sitney's definition of the structural film is "a

cinema of structure in which the shape of the whole film is predetermined and simplified, and it is that shape which is the primal impression of the film,” *ibid.*, 369.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, 370.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, 373.

<sup>61</sup> Sitney writes that “*The Flicker* uses the aggressive speed of the flicker effect to suggest a revelatory stasis or very gradual change.” *ibid.*, 387.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, 371.

<sup>63</sup> Stephen Koch, *Stargazer: The Life, World and Films of Andy Warhol* (1975; repr., London: Marion Boyars, 2002), 39.

<sup>64</sup> Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 374.

<sup>65</sup> Lee, *Chronophobia*, 284-287. Emphasis original.

<sup>66</sup> For a brilliant discussion of the ways in which Slow Cinema borrows certain conventions of visual composition from the structural and experimental film, including lengthy analyses of Warhol’s *Empire* and James Benning’s *Ruhr* (2009) as examples of Slow Cinema, see Matthew Flanagan, “‘Slow Cinema’: Temporality and Style in Contemporary Art and Experimental Film,” (PhD. diss., University of Exeter, 2012), 41-62.

<sup>67</sup> Much of cognitive film theory ascribes to the claim that narrative is not simply a separate outside phenomenon, but more a way of organizing information about our perceptions of the world. See, perhaps one of the first proponents of this idea, Edward Branigan, *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (New York: Routledge, 1992). For a brief discussion of this aspect of film theory and its relevance to Tarr and other “difficult filmmakers,” see Manohla Dargis, “What You See is What You Get,” *New York Times*, July 8, 2011, accessed September 11, 2013, [www.nytimes.com/2011/07/10/movies/why-difficult-movies-are-more-um-difficult.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/10/movies/why-difficult-movies-are-more-um-difficult.html).

<sup>68</sup> See, for instance, David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 280-281.

<sup>69</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 117. For an examination of rhythm in cinema, see Yvette Biro, *Turbulence and Flow in Film: The Rhythmic Design*, trans. Paul Salamon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

<sup>70</sup> As a historical figure, Andreas Werckmeister and his theory of musical temperament invite a particularly interesting thematic reading of *Werckmeister Harmonies* as well as of Tarr’s (and Krasznahorkai’s) world-view, both of which, unfortunately, remain outside my focus. Musical temperament refers to the tuning of musical instruments, which in essence is a compromise between different tones and intervals in order to achieve full harmony across the whole scale. Werckmeister himself defended a tuning system that emphasized certain harmonies, but completely disregarded others. See further in Stuart Isacoff, *Temperament: How Music Became the Battleground for the Great Minds of Western Civilization* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2002) and a critique in Ross W. Duffin, *How Equal Temperament Ruined Harmony (and Why You Should Care)* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007).

<sup>71</sup> Daly and Le Cain, “Waiting for the Prince.”

<sup>72</sup> Rob Shields, “Fancy Footwork: Benjamin’s Notes on *Flânerie*,” in *The Flâneur*, ed. Keith Tester (London: Routledge, 1994), 65.

<sup>73</sup> Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life,” in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 2010), 9. For a succinct elucidation of the flâneur figure and its function in the modern city, see Keith Tester, “Introduction,” in *The Flâneur*, ed. Keith Tester (London: Routledge, 1994), 1-21.

<sup>74</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, “The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering,” *New German Critique* 39 (1986): 103. For an examination of Benjamin’s writings on flânerie and the flâneur, see Rob Shields, “Fancy Footwork,” and David Frisby “The Flâneur in Social Theory,” in *The Flâneur*, ed. Keith Tester (London: Routledge, 1994), 81-110.



- <sup>75</sup> On the relationship between flânerie, cinema and modernity, see, in particular, Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1993), Giuliana Bruno, *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); and finally Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002).
- <sup>76</sup> Mark Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 132.
- <sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, 132.
- <sup>78</sup> Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. II*, 55.
- <sup>79</sup> Schoonover, "Wastrels of Time," 69.
- <sup>80</sup> Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle*, 95.
- <sup>81</sup> quoted in Frisby, "The Flâneur in Social Theory," 95.
- <sup>82</sup> For instance: *Die Siebtelbauern (The Inheritors)*, 1998), *Die Unberührbare (No Place to Go)*, 1999), *Der Krieger und die Kaiserin (The Princess and the Warrior)*, 2000). See Mattias Frey, "No(ir) Place to Go: Spatial Anxiety and Sartorial Intertextuality in *Die Unberührbare*," *Cinema Journal* 45.4 (2006): 79n35.
- <sup>83</sup> Daly and Le Cain, "Waiting for the Prince."
- <sup>84</sup> See Peter Hames, "The Melancholy of Resistance: The Films of Bela Tarr," *Kinoeye* 1.1 (2001), accessed August 25, 2013, <http://www.kinoeye.org/01/01/hames01.php>; Richard Williams, "Deep Waters," *The Guardian*, April 19, 2003, accessed August 25, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2003/apr/19/artsfeatures>; Romney, "End of the Road," 61 and Romney, "Outside the Whale," 33.
- <sup>85</sup> László Krasznahorkai, *The Melancholy of Resistance*, trans. George Szirtes (New York: New Directions, 1989), 40.
- <sup>86</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Ardent (London: Pimlico, 1999), 222.
- <sup>87</sup> J. Paul Narkunas argues for a similar stylistic tendency in Tran Anh Hung's *Cyclo* (1995), in which he writes: "the moving camera emulates a free-floating flâneur, consuming disjointed fragments of experience which fall within its view as it explores space. Shots change rapidly, seem disconnected, and limited in perspective, as if the camera occupies points of view of several observers simultaneously." While the comparison between two aesthetic strategies could be the subject of a longer analysis, Tarr's long take aesthetic clearly differs from Hung's in its uninterrupted movement across space. See J. Paul Narkunas, "Streetwalking in the Cinema of the City: Capital Flows Through Saigon," in *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, ed. Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 155.
- <sup>88</sup> Rosenbaum, "A Bluffer's Guide to Béla Tarr," 57.
- <sup>89</sup> Dudley Andrew, *Film in the Aura of Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 176.
- <sup>90</sup> Erika Balsom, "Saving the Image: Scale and Duration in Contemporary Art Cinema," *Cineaction* 72 (2007): 28.
- <sup>91</sup> David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, "Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu," *Screen* 17.2 (1976): 41-73.
- <sup>92</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 130. In this instance, Bordwell examines the long take within the context of Miklós Jancsó's *The Confrontation* (1969), which offers an informative comparison to Tarr's handling of space and cinematography.
- <sup>93</sup> Chatman, *Antonioni: Or, the Surface of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 90. According to Trevor Whittock, the objective correlative "is too wide and too unspecific," yet Whittock nevertheless examines it as a type of metaphor that is specifically "associated with a particular character, or with some event or situation pertaining to that

character.” See Trevor Whittock, *Metaphor and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 14 and 62.

<sup>94</sup> Chatman, *Antonioni*, 102-103.

<sup>95</sup> Daly and Le Cain, “Waiting for the Prince.”

<sup>96</sup> András Bálint Kovács, “The World According to Béla Tarr,” special issue, *KinoKultura*, 7 (2008), accessed September 11, 2013, <http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/7/kovacs.shtml>.

<sup>97</sup> For brief examples of the walk-and-talk sequence in classical Hollywood, see Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light*, 29. The walk-and-talk sequence is evidently a favourite storytelling device for the television producer Thomas Schlamme and screenwriter Aaron Sorkin, perhaps best evident in their collaborations in the television serial *The West Wing* (1999-2006), but in effect it is widely present across many other serials that can be described as occupational dramas.

<sup>98</sup> Steven Marchant, “Nothing Counts: Shot and Event in *Werckmeister Harmonies*,” *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* 7.2 (2009): 143.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, 151.

<sup>100</sup> Paul Willeman, “Through the Glass Darkly: Cinephilia Reconsidered,” in *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 232.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, 235.

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*, 236.

<sup>103</sup> Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History, or the Wind in the Trees* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 32.

<sup>104</sup> For the “obtuse meaning,” see Roland Barthes, “The Third Meaning: Research Notes on some Eisenstein Stills,” in *Image Music Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 52-68 and for his similar notion of the “punctum,” see his *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 55. For a consideration of both concepts in relation to cinematic experience, see Roger Cardinal, “Pausing over Peripheral Detail,” *Framework* 30/31 (1986): 112-130. For the stylistic excess, see Kristin Thompson, *Eisenstein’s Ivan the Terrible: A Neoformalist Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 287-295 and “The Concept of Cinematic Excess,” in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 130-142. Christian Keathley summarizes these arguments in *Cinephilia and History*, 30-36. For a brief explication of these concepts in relation to Slow Cinema, see Flanagan, “‘Slow Cinema’,” 38-40, 169 and 198.

<sup>105</sup> Keathley, *Cinephilia and History*, 41.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*, 44. Keathley takes the term from Wolfgang Schivelbusch’s study on the ways in which railway journeys have affected our perception of modernity. See, Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

<sup>107</sup> Willeman, “Through the Glass Darkly,” 243.

<sup>108</sup> Christine Sprengler, *Screening Nostalgia: Populuxe Props and Technicolor Aesthetics in Contemporary American Film* (New York: Berghahn, 2009), 29. Combined of two Greek words *nostos* (to return home) and *algos* (painful condition or longing), nostalgia was first coined by the Swiss doctor Johannas Hofer in 1688. Hofer conceived nostalgia as a pathological condition of homesickness for Swiss soldiers fighting in foreign lands. Shifting technologies in medicine, however, altered the role of nostalgia, thus in late 18<sup>th</sup> century nostalgia was less a medical condition than it was a socio-political phenomenon. The development of industrial capitalism and urbanization further altered the conceptualization of time in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, as progress became palpable, nostalgia also become more noticeable amongst the urban population who experienced a spatial as well as temporal change. By 1930s, nostalgia was frequently used in cultural criticism (in the form of literary, theatre and film reviews) as a descriptive term to

render the experiences of fictional characters most typically associated with homesickness. See *ibid.*, 11-34 for a detailed history of the term.

<sup>109</sup> Christine Sprengler, for instance, distinguishes between the 1950s, an actual period in American history and “the Fifties,” the persistent representation of this historical period as an idealized, prosperous and mythological past to the American public. “Throughout the 1950s,” Sprengler writes, “mass media representations of everyday life were part of a remarkably intensive and astute self-mythologizing effort that continues to hold sway, even today, over impressions of the decade. As such the Fifties were in part created during – and are thus contemporaneous with – the 1950s.” See *ibid.*, 39.

<sup>110</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 19.

<sup>111</sup> *ibid.*, 21.

<sup>112</sup> For a counter argument, see Linda Hutcheon, *Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2002), 109. Hutcheon essentially argues that there is no real, directly accessible history for us today.

<sup>113</sup> Grainge, *Monochrome Memories* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 11 and 21.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*, 11 and 35.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*, 6. See also 35-39.

<sup>116</sup> See Vera Dika, *Recycled Culture in Contemporary Art and Film: The Uses of Nostalgia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), especially pages 89-155. Dika, however, argues that “surface realism” alone is sufficient for a film to be deemed nostalgic, which nearly conflates the nostalgia film with historical film.

<sup>117</sup> Sprengler, *Screening Nostalgia*, 136.

<sup>118</sup> See, in particular, Nick James “Passive Aggressive,” *Sight and Sound* 20.4 (2010): 5; and Steven Shaviro, “Slow Cinema Vs Fast Films,” *The Pinocchio Theory*, May 12, 2010, accessed June 26, 2013. <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=891>.

<sup>119</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41.

<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*, 49.

<sup>121</sup> Marc Le Sueur, “Theory Number Five: Anatomy of Nostalgia Films: Heritage and Methods,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 6.2 (1977): 192-193.

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*, 193-194.

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*, 194-195.

<sup>124</sup> Sprengler, *Screening Nostalgia*, 86. Sprengler furthermore writes, “We should consider subtle allusions to past media aesthetics as accomplished by *Starship Troopers*’ [1997] visual nod to early 1960s science fiction film or *Schindler’s List*’s [1993] black-and-white aesthetic that seems to borrow from both 1940s documentary and fiction.”

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*, 140.

<sup>126</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 274. See further in *Section 1.4* within this thesis.

<sup>127</sup> Grainge, *Monochrome Memories*, 89.

<sup>128</sup> *ibid.*, 161-162.

<sup>129</sup> Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), 93. On this issue see also McKibbin, “Cinema of Damnation: Negative Capabilities in Contemporary Central and Eastern European Film,” *Senses of Cinema* 34 (2005), accessed September 11, 2013, [http://sensesofcinema.com/2005/feature-articles/cinema\\_of\\_damnation/](http://sensesofcinema.com/2005/feature-articles/cinema_of_damnation/).

### 3. Less is Absurd: Humour in the Films of Tsai Ming-liang

<sup>1</sup> Chris Berry, "Transnational Chinese Cinema Studies," in *The Chinese Cinema Book*, ed. Song Hwee Lim and Julian Ward (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 9-16. For the origins of the concept, see Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, ed. *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> For example; Richard Read, "Alienation, Aesthetic Distance and Absorption in Tsai Ming-liang's *Vive L'Amour*," *New Formations* 40 (2000): 102-112; Chuck Stephens, "Intersection: Tsai Ming-liang's Yearning Bike Boys and Heartsick Heroines," *Film Comment* 32.5 (1996): 20-23; Tony Rayns, "Confrontations," *Sight and Sound* 7.3 (1997): 14-18; Jasmine Nauda Trice, "Diseased Bodies and Domestic Space: Transmodern Space in Tsai Ming-liang's *The Hole*," *Asian Cinema* 16.2 (2005): 255-267; I-Fen Wu, "Flowing Desire, Floating Souls: Modern Cultural Landscape in Tsai Ming-liang's Taipei Trilogy," *Cineaction* 58 (2002): 58-64; and Jen-yi Hsu, "Re-enchanting the Everyday Banal in the Age of Globalization: Alienation, Desire, and Critique of Capitalist Temporality in Tsai Ming-liang's *The Hole* and *What Time Is It There?*," *NTU Studies in Language and Literature* 17 (2007): 133-158.

<sup>3</sup> For example; Fran Martin "Vive L'Amour: Eloquent Emptiness," in *Chinese Films in Focus: 25 New Takes*, ed. Chris Berry (London: BFI, 2003), 175-182; Chris Berry, "Where is the Love? Hyperbolic Realism and Indulgence in *Vive L'Amour*," in *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and after*, ed. Chris Berry and Feii Lu (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 89-100; Gina Marchetti, "On Tsai Ming-liang's *The River*," in *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After*, ed. Chris Berry and Feii Lu (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 113-126; Kai-man Chang, "Drifting Bodies and Flooded Spaces: Visualizing the Invisibility of Heteronormativity in Tsai Ming-liang's *The River*," *Post Script* 28.1 (2008): 45-62.

<sup>4</sup> Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh and Darrell William Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 220.

<sup>5</sup> Jean Ma, "Tsai Ming-liang's Haunted Movie Theater," in *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 339.

<sup>6</sup> On this subject, the very few exceptions are: Giuliana Bruno, "Architects of Time: Reel Images from Warhol to Tsai Ming-liang," *Log 2* (2004): 81-94; Erika Balsom, "Saving the Image: Scale and Duration in Contemporary Art Cinema," *Cineaction* 72 (2007): 23-31; Marc Saint-Cyr, "Slow Fuse: The Cinematic Strategies of Tsai Ming-liang," *Cineaction* 85 (2011): 9-14; Tiago de Luca, *Realism of the Senses: A Tendency in Contemporary World Cinema* (PhD diss. University of Leeds, 2011), 117-203. Although all of these texts emphasize the function of duration in Tsai's films, none of them explicitly relate his work to Slow Cinema, with the exception of de Luca's PhD thesis.

<sup>7</sup> Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2004), 113-114.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, 124.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, 128-131. In this period, the main competition in film production was between Taiwanese dialect films and Mandarin dialect films, both of which were exported to the region. The golden-age period was 1964-1969, through which Taiwanese dialect films flourished. During this stage, both production companies and number of theatres increased and the increase of movie attendance formed a significant part of Taiwan's economic success. However, Mandarin films took over following 1969 largely by their technological advancements (colour photography and wide-screen) as well as transferring well-known cast members. See *ibid.*, 135-137.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, 142.

- <sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 133. For a critical evaluation of Healthy Realism genre, see Mengsin C. Horng, “Domestic Dislocations: Healthy Realism, Stardom, and the Cinematic Projection of Home in Postwar Taiwan,” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 4.1 (2010): 27-43.
- <sup>12</sup> Guo-Juin Hong, *Taiwan Cinema: A Contested Nation on Screen* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 86.
- <sup>13</sup> Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 244.
- <sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, 244.
- <sup>15</sup> See Tonglin Lu, *Confronting Modernity in the Cinemas of Taiwan and Mainland China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 95-115. Lu also suggests that because further economic developments in Taiwan depended on Western investments, “the cultural hierarchy between the East and West” was reinforced by the “modernization of national economy.” The growing acceptance of Western cultural values, in turn resulted in a “crisis caused cultural and axiological clashes,” which was “one of the favourite topics for Taiwan New Cinema directors.” *ibid.*, 3. See also William Tay, “The Ideology of Initiation: The Films of Hou Hsiao-hsien,” in *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics*, ed. Nick Browne et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 151-159.
- <sup>16</sup> See Douglas Kellner, “New Taiwan Cinema in the 80s,” *Jump Cut* 42 (1998): 101-115. The article serves as an introduction to the ways in which New Taiwan Cinema represents this investigation through the dialectics of tradition and modernity.
- <sup>17</sup> Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 249.
- <sup>18</sup> Hong, *Taiwan Cinema*, 110.
- <sup>19</sup> Chia Chi Wu, “Festivals, Criticism and the International Reputation of Taiwan New Cinema,” in *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity and State of the Arts*, ed. Darrell William Davids and Ru-Shou Shen (New York: Routledge, 2007), 77-78.
- <sup>20</sup> The 228 Incident was a social uprising, which KMT officials brutally suppressed by killing thousands of civilians overnight. See James Udden, *No Man an Island* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 90-95 for details of the incident and Hou’s portrayal of the incident.
- <sup>21</sup> Yingjin Zhang writes: “While most [Taiwanese critics] applauded Hou’s courage in addressing the taboo subject, some were not pleased with his insistence on detached personal observation as opposed to direct political confrontation.” See his *Chinese National Cinema*, 247.
- <sup>22</sup> Wu, “Festivals, Criticism and the International Reputation of Taiwan New Cinema,” 75.
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, 80.
- <sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 86. Wu also lists other newcomers such as Lin Cheng-sheng, Chen Kuo-fu and Chang Tso-chi in this group of filmmakers.
- <sup>25</sup> Clearly there are exceptions to this and many European filmmakers did continue their work throughout the 1980s, such as Jacques Rivette, Theo Angelopoulos, Agnès Varda, Maurice Pialat, Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, Werner Schroeter and Eric Rohmer. However, their work remained mainly marginal and in no way compared to the work of those mentioned in the earlier sentence. Conversely, following the East Asian waves, the late 1980s also saw the emergence of new European talent such as Michael Haneke, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Béla Tarr and Pedro Almodóvar.
- <sup>26</sup> For an examination of these geopolitical developments in world cinema, see Dudley Andrew, “Time Zones and Jetlag: The Flows and Phases of World Cinema,” in *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, ed. Nataša Durovicová and Kathleen Newman (New York: Routledge, 2010), 59-89.
- <sup>27</sup> Wu, “Festivals, Criticism and the International Reputation of Taiwan New Cinema,” 85.
- <sup>28</sup> Some of these films were called “ethnographic films” and received favourable reviews at international film festivals, which facilitated their production even further. See Yingjin Zhang,

- “Chinese Cinema and Transnational Cultural Politics: Reflections on Film Festivals, Film Productions, and Film Studies,” *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese* 2.1 (1998): 105-132.
- <sup>29</sup> See, for instance, Sheldon H. Lu, “Emerging from Underground and the Periphery: Chinese Independent Cinema at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century,” in *Cinema at the Periphery*, ed. Dina Iordanova, David Martin-Jones and Belén Vidal (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 2010), 104-118 and Ma Ran, “Rethinking Festival Film: Urban Generation Chinese Cinema on the Film Festival Circuit,” in *Film Festival Yearbook 1: The Festival Circuit*, ed. Dina Iordanova and Ragan Rhyne (St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2009), 116-135.
- <sup>30</sup> Hong, *Taiwan Cinema*, 126-127.
- <sup>31</sup> Lu, *Confronting Modernity*, 116-154. See also Fredric Jameson, “Remapping Taipei,” in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 114-157.
- <sup>32</sup> Chris Berry and Feii Lu, ed. *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 164-165.
- <sup>33</sup> Jonathan Rosenbaum, “Exiles in Modernity,” *Chicago Reader*, November 7, 1997, accessed August 1, 2013, <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/exiles-in-modernity/Content?oid=894839>.
- <sup>34</sup> Daw-Ming Lee, *Historical Dictionary of Taiwan Cinema* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 148-150.
- <sup>35</sup> Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 307f12.
- <sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, 278.
- <sup>37</sup> Darrell William Davis, “Trendy in Taiwan: Problems of Popularity in the Island’s Cinema,” in *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity and State of the Arts*, ed. Darrell William Davis and Ru-Shou Chen (New York: Routledge, 2007), 149-150.
- <sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, 149-150. On the ARTE series and an analysis of *The Hole* in relation to Fredric Jameson’s concept of the “geopolitical aesthetic,” see Rosalind Galt, *The New European Cinema: Redrawing the Map* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 234-237.
- <sup>39</sup> Mark Betz, “The Cinema of Tsai Ming-liang: A Modernist Genealogy,” in *Reading Chinese Transnationalisms: Society, Literature, Film*, ed. Maria N. Ng and Philip Holden (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 2006), 162.
- <sup>40</sup> The short film *The Skywalk is Gone* (*Tian qiao bu jian le*, 2002) functions as a narrative bridge between *What Time is it There?* and *The Wayward Cloud* by showing how Hsiao-kang ended up as a pornographic actor following the destruction of the skywalk, on which he used to sell watches.
- <sup>41</sup> See, for example, Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 279.
- <sup>42</sup> Lee, “Tsai Ming-liang’s *The Wayward Cloud*,” 117-122.
- <sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, 135.
- <sup>44</sup> Chris Berry, “*Wedding Banquet*: A Family (Melodrama) Affair,” in *Chinese Films in Focus: 25 New Takes*, ed. Chris Berry (London: BFI, 2003), 183-185.
- <sup>45</sup> Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*, 240-241.
- <sup>46</sup> Martin, “*Vive L’Amour*,” 180.
- <sup>47</sup> Betz, “The Cinema of Tsai Ming-liang,” 167.
- <sup>48</sup> Janet Staiger, “Hybrid or Inbred: The Purity Hypothesis and Hollywood Genre History,” *Film Criticism* 22.1 (1997): 15.
- <sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, 15-16.
- <sup>50</sup> Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*, 219. Following quotes from same source, same page.
- <sup>51</sup> Susan Sontag, “Notes on Camp,” in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 275-277.
- <sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, 289.



- <sup>53</sup> Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 135. See also Andrew Ross, "Uses of Camp," in *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*, ed. David Bergman (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 54-77.
- <sup>54</sup> Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning*, 136.
- <sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, 135.
- <sup>56</sup> Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*, 248.
- <sup>57</sup> James Udden, "This Time He Moves! The Deeper Significance of Hou Hsiao-hsien's Radical Break in *Good Men, Good Women*," in *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity and State of the Arts*, ed. Darrell William Davis and Ru-Shou Chen (New York: Routledge, 2007), 193-194.
- <sup>58</sup> For instance, Udden characterizes Tsai as a "Hou literalist," see *ibid.*, 197. Very similar arguments in evaluating these "minimalist directors" as imitators of Hou are also present in James Udden, "On the Shoulders of Giants: Tsai Ming-liang, Jia Zhangke, Fruit Chan and the Struggles of Second Generation Auteurs," in *The Chinese Cinema Book*, ed. Song Hwee Lim and Julian Ward (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 158-166.
- <sup>59</sup> David Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 161. Elsewhere, while addressing Hou's work, Bordwell writes that the long take "became virtually a national brand" for the New Taiwan Cinema in the 1990s and subsequently the "Asian minimalism [turned it into] something of a festival cliché by the end of the 1990s." See David Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 230-231.
- <sup>60</sup> Ma, "Tsai Ming-liang's Haunted Movie Theater," 342.
- <sup>61</sup> Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 279.
- <sup>62</sup> For an extended analysis, see James Udden, *No Man an Island*, 119-123 and 130, in which Udden likens the film to another Slow Cinema precedent, *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* (1968) by Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet.
- <sup>63</sup> According to Matthew Flanagan, such a use of the episodic structure recalls "a distended form of what Bordwell refers to as the 'network narrative'" and henceforth examines Tsai's films in light of these interludes. Flanagan also suggests that some Slow Cinema films, such as Tarr's *Sátántangó* (1994), van Sant's *Elephant* (2003) and Diaz's *Evolution of a Filipino Family* (1994-2004), are "key contemporary equivalents" of the network narrative. See Matthew Flanagan, "'Slow Cinema': Temporality and Style in Contemporary Art and Experimental Film," (PhD. diss., University of Exeter, 2012), 109-111. For the network narrative, see Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*, 189-250.
- <sup>64</sup> Kent Jones, "Here and There: The Films of Tsai Ming-liang" in *Movie Mutations: The Changing Face of World Cinephilia*, ed. Jonathan Rosenbaum and Adrian Martin (London: British Film Institute, 2003), 47.
- <sup>65</sup> Edward Branigan, *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 1.
- <sup>66</sup> See *ibid.*, 13-20.
- <sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, 19-20. Following quotes from these pages.
- <sup>68</sup> On a macro level, Branigan suggests films such as Luis Buñuel's *The Phantom of Liberty* (1974) and Jim Jarmusch's *Mystery Train* (1989) constitute unfocused chains. On a micro level, however, he suggests certain unmotivated camera movements by filmmakers, such as Welles, Mizoguchi and Jancsó.
- <sup>69</sup> Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*, 221.
- <sup>70</sup> Udden, *No Man an Island*, 73.
- <sup>71</sup> Betz, "The Cinema of Tsai Ming-liang," 164.
- <sup>72</sup> Jared Rapfogel, "Taiwan's Poet of Solitude: An Interview with Tsai Ming-liang," *Cinéaste* 29.4 (2004): 29.

- <sup>73</sup> Rey Chow, *Sentimental Fabulations, Contemporary Chinese Films: Attachment in the age of Global Visibility* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 185.
- <sup>74</sup> For a selection of these interpretations, see *ibid.*, 246f12.
- <sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, 187.
- <sup>76</sup> Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*, 227.
- <sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, 227.
- <sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, 238.
- <sup>79</sup> Berry, “Where is the Love?,” 90.
- <sup>80</sup> Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*, 238-239.
- <sup>81</sup> Chow, *Sentimental Fabulations*, 183.
- <sup>82</sup> Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*, 234.
- <sup>83</sup> Neil Cornwell, *The Absurd in Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 3.
- <sup>84</sup> Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O’Brien (1955; repr., London: Penguin Books, 2000), 33.
- <sup>85</sup> See Cornwell, *The Absurd in Literature*.
- <sup>86</sup> Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 3rd ed. (1961; repr., London: Methuen, 2001), 23.
- <sup>87</sup> Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 26.
- <sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, 26, 403 and 406.
- <sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, 25.
- <sup>90</sup> Jonathan Romney, “In Search of Lost Time,” *Sight and Sound* 20.2 (2010): 43.
- <sup>91</sup> Jean-Pierre Rehm, Olivier Joyard and Daniele Rivière, *Tsai Ming-liang* (Paris: Dis Voir, 1999), 30-34.
- <sup>92</sup> Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 86.
- <sup>93</sup> Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*, 244.
- <sup>94</sup> Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 328-329.
- <sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, 335.
- <sup>96</sup> For an interesting anecdote that displays the relationship between Tsai’s direction and Lee’s acting, see Rapfogel, “Taiwan’s Poet of Solitude,” 29. Apparently Tsai was initially surprised at Lee’s slow movements in the scenes they were shooting, but later on realized that the slowness was natural and decided to appropriate this aspect into his films. Such acting practices were, however, local to some of Taiwan’s avant-garde theatre groups. See Weihong Bao, “Biomechanics of Love: Reinventing the Avant-garde with Tsai Ming-liang’s Wayward ‘Pornography Musical’,” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 1.2 (2007): 139-160.
- <sup>97</sup> Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 335.
- <sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, 335-336.
- <sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, 337.
- <sup>100</sup> For example, Bao, “Biomechanics of Love,” 141; and Bert Cardullo, “The Space of Time, the Sound of Silence,” *Hudson Review* 55.3 (2002): 477.
- <sup>101</sup> Kristin Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 96-97.
- <sup>102</sup> *ibid.*, 97.
- <sup>103</sup> *ibid.*, 100.
- <sup>104</sup> I would like to thank Karl Schoonover for making these suggestions and refining my understanding of this particular scene.
- <sup>105</sup> According to Jerrold Levinson, the major proponents of the incongruity theory are Francis Hutcheson, William Hazlitt, Søren Kierkegaard, Arthur Schopenhauer, D. H. Monroe, Arthur Koestler, Michael Clark, John Morreall and Immanuel Kant. See Jerrold Levinson, “The Concept of Humor,” in *Contemplating Art: Essays in Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 389-399. This essay also provides an overview of other theories of humour and their shortcomings.



<sup>106</sup> Clearly the element of surprise and incongruity are not sufficient to fully comprehend the nature of humour because such strategies may also elicit emotions other than amusement (such as anxiety, curiosity, etc.). Nevertheless, in many cases incongruity appears to be necessary in order to attain humour in many cases. See the preceding note for theories of humour that review these concepts.

<sup>107</sup> Torben Grodal, *Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings and Cognition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 189.

<sup>108</sup> Jerry Palmer, *The Logic of the Absurd: On Film and Television Comedy* (London: BFI, 1987), 39-40.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, 42-43.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*, 148-150.

<sup>111</sup> Grodal, *Moving Pictures*, 192. Grodal later on claims that the “logic of the absurd” is not a sufficient framework, because firstly it presumes humour as a formal structure (whereas Grodal sees it as “a mental reaction”) and secondly “many phenomena that provoke laughter [...] do not fit particularly well into the syllogistic form.” See *ibid.*, 197.

<sup>112</sup> Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 191-192.

<sup>113</sup> Noël Carroll, “Notes on the Sight Gag,” in *Comedy/Cinema/Theory*, ed. Andrew S. Horton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 26.

<sup>114</sup> Marijke de Valck, “The Sound Gag: The Use of Sound for Comic Effect in the Films of Jacques Tati,” *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 3.2 (2005): 228.

<sup>115</sup> See Héctor Rodríguez, “Questions of Chinese Aesthetics: Film Form and Narrative Space in the Cinema of King Hu,” *Cinema Journal* 38.1 (1998): 73-97 and Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*, 413-430.

<sup>116</sup> In fact, some scholars contend that King Hu should be re-evaluated as an experimental/avant-garde filmmaker whose careful attention to the planning of movement, rhythm and editing in his action sequences were unsurpassed and as such his work should be placed alongside 1960s art cinema masters, such as Tarkovsky, Godard and Jancsó. See Peter Rist, “King Hu: Experimental, Narrative Filmmaker,” in *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity and State of the Arts*, ed. Darrell William Davis and Ru-Shou Chen (New York: Routledge, 2007), 161-171.

<sup>117</sup> For an extended “semiotic” analysis of the opening sequence, see Yung Hao Liu, trans. Ming-yu Lee, “I Thought of the Times We Were in Front of the Flowers: Analyzing the Opening Credits of *Goodbye Dragon Inn*,” in *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity, and State of the Arts*, ed. Darrell William Davis and Ru-Shou Chen (New York: Routledge, 2007), 172-182. For another in depth analysis of the film, see Joshua Willey, *Cinematic Absence: An Analysis of Tsai Ming-liang’s “Goodbye, Dragon Inn”* (Saarbücken: VDM Verlag, 2009). Unfortunately, neither sources are as elegantly written as one would expect.

<sup>118</sup> On the subject of realism and the ways in which Tsai contradicts this aesthetic, see Chris Wood, “Realism, Intertextuality, Humour in Tsai Ming-liang’s *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*,” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 1.2 (2007): 105-116.

<sup>119</sup> de Luca, *Realism of the Senses*, 122-123.

<sup>120</sup> Kenneth Chan, “*Goodbye, Dragon Inn*: Tsai Ming-liang’s Political Aesthetics of Nostalgia, Place, and Lingering,” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 2.1 (2007): 90.

<sup>121</sup> quoted in Thomas Elsaesser, “Cinephilia or the Uses of Disenchantment,” in *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*, ed. Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 28.

<sup>122</sup> Susan Sontag, “The Decay of Cinema,” *New York Times Magazine*, February 25, 1996, 60-61.

<sup>123</sup> Ben Slater, “The New Cinephiles,” *Screen International* 30 (2007): 26-27.

<sup>124</sup> See, for example, Jonathan Rosenbaum, “Is the Cinema Really Dead?,” in *Movie Wars: How Hollywood and the Media Limit What Movies We Can See* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002),

19-38 and *Goodbye Cinema, Hello Cinephilia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), ix-xvi.

<sup>125</sup> Dan Kois, "Eating Your Cultural Vegetables," *New York Times*, April 29, 2011, accessed August 5, 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/01/magazine/mag-01Riff-t.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/01/magazine/mag-01Riff-t.html?_r=0). See also Nico Baumbach, "All That Heaven Allows: What is, or What was Cinephilia? An Inquiry into the Love that Dare not Speak its Name, Except When it Does," *Film Comment* 48.2 (2012): 47-53.

<sup>126</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 55.

#### 4. Contemplating Boredom: The Films of Nuri Bilge Ceylan

<sup>1</sup> Nuri Bilge Ceylan, ed., *Kasaba* (İstanbul: Norgunk, 2007), 99.

<sup>2</sup> For example: Eylem Atakav, *Women in Turkish Cinema: Gender Politics, Cultural Identity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 2013); Gönül Dönmez-Colin, "Women in Turkish Cinema: Their Presence and Absence as Images and as Image-Makers," *Third Text* 24.1 (2010): 91-105; Kevin Robins and Asu Aksoy, "Deep Nation: The National Question and Turkish Cinema Culture," in *Cinema & Nation*, ed. Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (London: Routledge, 2000), 203-221; Asuman Suner, *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity and Memory* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010); Cüneyt Çakırlar and Özlem Güçlü, "Gender, Family and Home(land) in Contemporary Turkish Cinema: A Comparative [*sic*] Analysis of Films by Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Reha Erdem and Ümit Ünal," in *Resistance in Contemporary Middle Eastern Cultures: Literature, Cinema and Music*, ed. Karima Laachir and Saeed Talajooy (New York: Routledge, 2013), 167-183; and Neziğ Erdoğan, "Narratives of Resistance: National Identity and Ambivalence in the Turkish Melodrama Between 1965 and 1975," *Screen* 39.3 (1998): 259-271.

<sup>3</sup> See Nijat Özön, *Türk Sineması Tarihi (1896-1960)* [History of Turkish Cinema] (1960; repr., İstanbul: Doruk Yayınları, 2010); Giovanni Scognamiglio, *Türk Sineması Tarihi* [Turkish Cinema History] (İstanbul: Kabcacı Yayınevi, 2003); and Rekin Teksoy, *Turkish Cinema*, trans. Martin Thomen and Özde Çeliktemel (İstanbul: Oğlak Yayıncılık, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Savaş Arslan, *Cinema in Turkey: A New Critical History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Preceding Arslan's study, another valuable resource written in English is Gönül Dönmez-Colin, *Turkish Cinema: Identity, Distance and Belonging* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), which, although lacking the historical rigour so crucially performed in other texts, nevertheless offers a rich examination of the socio-cultural forces at play within Turkish cinema. A historical overview is found in pages 22-56. Another informative, yet extremely brief overview of Turkish cinema from a national and transnational perspective can be found in Neziğ Erdoğan and Deniz Göktürk, "Turkish Cinema," in *Companion Encyclopaedia of Middle Eastern and North African Film*, ed. Oliver Leaman, (London: Routledge, 2001), 532-573.

<sup>5</sup> The Ottoman Empire officially existed between 1299-1923. However, discourses of modernity and Westernization were already part of Turkish culture beginning in early 19<sup>th</sup> century and intensified in the period following 1876 until the dissolution of the empire in 1918-1923. See Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993), 11-94.

<sup>6</sup> See Arslan, *Cinema in Turkey*, 23-61.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, 15.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> The nostalgic overtone of the term is also crucial, as *Yeşilçam* distinguishes as a temporal entity as well. In many ways it is difficult to talk about *Yeşilçam* following the 1980s, during which the social and cultural outlook of the whole state underwent a rapid change. However, Arslan still views the 1980s as a Late *Yeşilçam* period, while the 1990s produce in his words the post-*Yeşilçam*. See his *Cinema in Turkey*, 201-236.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, 17. Similar arguments are posed in Nezi̇h Erdođan, “Mute Bodies, Disembodied Voices: Notes on Sound in Turkish Popular Cinema,” *Screen* 43.4 (2002): 233-249.

<sup>14</sup> Although *Dry Summer* is often seen as a crucial and inaugural success, Derviş Zaim argues the first Turkish film to be acknowledged by a European Film Festival occurred in 1934 in the Venice Film Festival, where the jury awarded an Honorary Diploma to the film *Chickpea Seller (Leblebici Horhor Ađa, Muhsin Ertuđrul, 1934)*. See Derviş Zaim, “Your Focus is Your Truth: Turkish Cinema, “Alluvionic” Filmmakers and International Acceptance,” in *Shifting Landscapes: Film and Media in European Context*, ed. Miyase Christensen and Nezi̇h Erdođan (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 89.

<sup>15</sup> As other notable Turkish directors of the period, Yılmaz GÜney is embarrassingly under-researched in Anglophone film criticism. For a brief and informal introduction to his work, see Bilge Ebiri “Yılmaz GÜney,” *Senses of Cinema* 37 (2005), accessed May 23, 2013, <http://sensesofcinema.com/2005/great-directors/guney/>. Gönül Dönmez-Colin dedicates a chapter to the director in her *Turkish Cinema*, 116-141 and finally Savaş Arslan writes about some of GÜney’s films in relation to *Yeşilçam* cinema in his *Cinema in Turkey*, 180-187.

<sup>16</sup> Arslan, *Cinema in Turkey*, 18-19.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, 74.

<sup>18</sup> The only English resource available regarding the history of the *Türk Sinematek Derneđi* is in fact an MA dissertation by Hakkı Bařgüney, completed in 2007 at Bođaziçi University, which was later published as a book in Turkish as *Türk Sinematek Derneđi - Türkiye’de Sinema ve Politik Tartıřma* [Turkish Cinematheque Association – Cinematic and Political Debates in Turkey] (İstanbul: Libra, 2009). Furthermore, certain essays by the association’s influential founder, Onat Kutlar, were published in an anthology: See Onat Kutlar, *Sinema Bir Őenliktir* [Cinema is Festivity] (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2010), especially pages 11-28.

<sup>19</sup> The members of the club based in Ankara revived the association in 2000 under leadership of Yücel Ünlü, then a young Turkish director. However, the current activities of the Sinematek are rather focused on practical aspects of filmmaking and the association is mostly composed of workshops aimed at developing screenplays and aspects of production. See their website, which includes a brief history of the original Sinematek: <http://www.sinematek.org/> (in Turkish)

<sup>20</sup> Arslan, *Cinema in Turkey*, 154.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, 154 and also Gönül Dönmez-Colin, *Turkish Cinema*, 39-40.

<sup>22</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the clash between modernity and tradition in Turkey, See Reřat Kasaba, “Kemalist Certainties and Modern Ambiguities,” in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, ed. Sibel Bozdođan and Reřat Kasaba (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 15-36.

<sup>23</sup> See Erik Zürcher, *Turkey*, 276-277 and 292-315; Savaş Arslan, *Cinema in Turkey*, 201-203.

<sup>24</sup> Savaş Arslan, for example, notes that the number of film theatres decreased from approximately 2,500 in 1970 to 938 in 1980, and then to approximately 300 in 1990. See Arslan, *Cinema in Turkey*, 207.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, 203-4.

<sup>26</sup> Asuman Suner, *New Turkish Cinema*, 5-6. The film’s political allegory and frankness in depicting the aftermath of the 1980 coup was rewarded with the *Palme d’Or* in the Cannes Film Festival in 1983, but due to the political overtones of GÜney’s later films much of them were banned under the military dictatorship. Following his exile to Paris, GÜney went on to make his

last film *The Wall* (*Duvar*, 1983) with French financial support and died of cancer shortly after the release of the film

<sup>27</sup> Nezih Erdoğan, “Narratives of Resistance,” 263 and Gönül Dönmez-Colin, “Film Festivals in Turkey: Promoting National Cinema While Nourishing Film Culture,” in *Coming Soon to a Festival Near You: Programming Film Festivals*, ed. Jeffrey Ruoff (St Andrews, St Andrews Film Studies, 2013), 107.

<sup>28</sup> Catherine Simpson, “Turkish Cinema’s Resurgence: The ‘Deep Nation’ Unravels,” *Senses of Cinema* 39 (2006), accessed February 26, 2013, [http://sensesofcinema.com/2006/feature-articles/turkish\\_cinema/](http://sensesofcinema.com/2006/feature-articles/turkish_cinema/).

<sup>29</sup> Enis Köstepen, “Beyond the Great Divide of Art-house versus Popular?: Emergent Forms of Filmmaking in Turkey,” in *Young Turkish Cinema*, ed. Senem Aytaç and Gözde Onaran (İstanbul: Şan Ofset, 2009), 7-8. (Festival booklet for the Young Turkish Cinema Program of International Film Festival Rotterdam 2009 and Crossing Europe Film Festival Linz 2009).

<sup>30</sup> For one of the earliest accounts of New Turkish Cinema written in English, see Gönül Dönmez-Colin, “New Turkish Cinema – Individual Tales of Common Concerns,” *Asian Cinema* 14.1 (2003): 138-145.

<sup>31</sup> Suner, *New Turkish Cinema*, 13-15.

<sup>32</sup> Fırat Yücel, “Opening the Path: Times and Winds of the ‘90s,” in *Young Turkish Cinema*, ed. Senem Aytaç and Gözde Onaran (İstanbul: Şan Ofset, 2009), 12.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, 12. In this passage Yücel specifically refers to the films of Derviş Zaim, Yeşim Ustaoglu, Tayfun Pirselimoglu and Ümit Ünal. A similar tendency in Turkish cinema re-appeared in the mid-2000s, for example, the films of Kazım Öz, Özcan Alper and Seyfi Teoman, all of which are also in focus within the same festival booklet.

<sup>34</sup> Suner, *New Turkish Cinema*, 78.

<sup>35</sup> Zaim, “Your Focus is Your Truth,” 88.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, 90.

<sup>37</sup> Enis Köstepen, “Beyond the Great Divide of Art-house versus Popular?,” 6-7. It has to be noted that 2005 marked a year in which the Committee was officially setup and began its allocations. However, as early as 1999, the Ministry of Culture did support some films, including early features of Ceylan. By 2011, the Committee evolved into *Sinema Genel Müdürlüğü*, literally the General Directory of Cinema, a much more centralized institute still tied to the Ministry of Culture, whose mission involves developing the cinema industry in Turkey by adopting wide-ranging policies, including creating distribution networks, supporting production and post-production either through funds, grants or incentives, promoting Turkish cinema abroad and finally publishing various reports and journals. See their website:

<http://www.sinema.gov.tr/>

<sup>38</sup> Zaim, “Your Focus is Your Truth,” 94.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, 94-95.

<sup>40</sup> Dönmez-Colin, “Film Festivals in Turkey,” 106.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, 106-107.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, 102.

<sup>43</sup> The sources here are my own experiences as well as the festival catalogues I have retained over the years. For an overview of the festival’s historical evolution in the form of personal memoirs by its founder and director for nearly 25 years, see Hülya Uçansu, *Bir Uzun Mesafe Festivalcisinin Anıları: Sinema Günleri’nden İstanbul Film Festivali’ne* [Memoirs of a Long Distance Festivaler: From Cinema days to İstanbul Film Festival] (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2012).

<sup>44</sup> See their website for more information: <http://film.iksv.org/en/meetingsonthebridge>

<sup>45</sup> Although the majority of scholars argue that Yeşilçam cinema was officially terminated, Engin Ayça argued in 1994 that “Yeşilçam is not over but has changed its medium,” suggesting

that the very same aesthetic sensibility that defined Yeşilçam is now present in Turkish television serials. See Arslan, *Cinema in Turkey*, 247.

<sup>46</sup> There is a huge argument regarding the ways in which certain Turkish New Wave directors, such as Yeşim Ustaoglu, achieved European funding and distribution by focusing on politically sensitive issues. European policies supported these projects mainly for political reasons and in certain respects the decisions were based on policies for enabling Turkey's ascension into the European Union. I should note here that Ceylan's work represents a strong counter-argument to these claims. See Zaim "Your Focus is Your Truth," 102.

<sup>47</sup> Although brief biography in English can be found at the director's official website ([www.nbcfilm.com](http://www.nbcfilm.com)), much of the information provided in this section has been collated from Ceylan's early interviews conducted in Turkish. Conducted by various critics and writers, these interviews are collected and reprinted in Ceylan, ed., *Kasaba*, 87-106. Also, Ceylan's friend Mehmet Eryılmaz has selected and edited many of Ceylan's interviews and has reprinted them as a valuable resource in *Nuri Bilge Ceylan: Söyleşiler* [Interviews] (İstanbul: Norgunk, 2012).

<sup>48</sup> Ceylan, *Kasaba*, 89.

<sup>49</sup> Orhan Pamuk, for example, talks about his similar experiences in his Nobel Prize winning book *İstanbul: Memoirs of a City*, trans. Maureen Freely (London: Faber and Faber, 2005).

<sup>50</sup> Boğaziçi University was converted from Robert College, an American cultural and educational institution, evidently the "first American institution of higher education abroad." See Keith M. Greenwood, *Robert College: The American Founders* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi University Press, 2003), xi. The student clubs that Ceylan showed an interest in were as varied as mountaineering, chess, photography and cinema.

<sup>51</sup> Many of the elective courses offered at this university eventually evolved into the Mithat Alam Film Centre, founded in 2000, an extremely influential institute for filmmakers and cinephiles alike, which is not only the closest thing to a Cinematheque in İstanbul, but also is an environment that fosters a rich film culture through its publication organ *Altyazı* (literally, Subtitle) and the more recently founded production company *Bulut Film* (literally Cloud Films). Ceylan acknowledges the Film Centre as well as *Altyazı* in "Boğaziçili Yönetmenler: Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Derviş Zaim, Halit Refiğ," *Altyazı* 22 (2003): 56-58.

<sup>52</sup> Ceylan, *Kasaba*, 89-91

<sup>53</sup> Matt Bochenski, "Interview: Nuri Bilge Ceylan," *Little White Lies*, February 16, 2009, accessed April 19, 2013, <http://www.littlewhitelies.co.uk/features/interviews/nuri-bilge-ceylan-3333>.

<sup>54</sup> Ceylan, *Kasaba*, 92.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, 92-93.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, 93, 95 and 107.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, 107; Deborah Young, "The Town (Kasaba)," *Variety* 371.10 (1998): 48.

<sup>58</sup> Much of these reviews remain in print, but they can be accessed from Ceylan's website: [www.nbcfilm.com/mayis/press.php](http://www.nbcfilm.com/mayis/press.php).

<sup>59</sup> Yamaç Okur and Fırat Yücel, "Nuri Bilge Ceylan'ın İstanbul'u," *Altyazı* 13 (2002): 46-49.

<sup>60</sup> In early interviews, Ceylan claims that he was able to continue filmmaking by revenues acquired from his prior production. In this respect, and contrary to popular belief, his early films did make profit, mostly through international and television sales. As mentioned earlier, Ministry of Culture made a small contribution to the production of *Small Town*, and the Turkish beer company Efes Pilsen was involved in the production of *Clouds of May* as a private sponsor. Obtaining The Hubert Bals Fund marks an important moment in which Ceylan began to receive foreign funding for all of his future features. See his *Uzak* (İstanbul: Norgunk, 2004), 224-226 and Ayşe Teker "Nuri Bilge Ceylan ile Söyleşi," [Interview with Nuri Bilge Ceylan], *Mega Movie Dergisi* [Mega Movie Magazine] (December, 2002), accessed March 1, 2013, [http://www.nbcfilm.com/uzak/press\\_ozeninterview.php](http://www.nbcfilm.com/uzak/press_ozeninterview.php).



- <sup>61</sup> A list of these festival awards can be found in Ceylan, *Uzak*, 265-267 and Ceylan's official website.
- <sup>62</sup> Senem Aytaç and Fırat Yücel, "iklimler," *Altyazı* 55 (2006): 20.
- <sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, 20 and "Nuri Bilge Ceylan yeni filmine hazırlanıyor," *Altyazı* 34 (2004): 5.
- <sup>64</sup> Aytaç and Yücel, "iklimler," 21.
- <sup>65</sup> According to the IMDB, the film's USA Gross is \$138,730 by June 3, 2012, an amount that significantly surpasses earlier features (for example: *Distant*, \$96,293; *Climates*, \$119,458 and *Three Monkeys*, \$41,343). The film's UK release was one of the top-ten foreign language films in 2012, achieving £277,447. See Charles Gant, "The Numbers: 2012 In Review," *Sight and Sound* 23.2 (2013): 19.
- <sup>66</sup> The film received €450,000 towards its production, marking the highest-ever Eurimages support for any Turkish film. See Birka Yıldız, "Nuri Bilge Ceylan'a Rekor Destek," *Radikal*, March 25, 2013, accessed July 5, 2013, [http://www.radikal.com.tr/hayat/nuri\\_bilge\\_ceylana\\_rekor\\_destek-1126574](http://www.radikal.com.tr/hayat/nuri_bilge_ceylana_rekor_destek-1126574).
- <sup>67</sup> Tunca Arslan, "Kasaba: Puslu Manzaralar," *Radikal*, December 2, 1997, and Sungu Çapan, "Hayat Üstüne Farklı Bir Film," *Cumhuriyet*, December 5, 1997, both of which are reprinted in Ceylan, *Kasaba*, 71-76.
- <sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, 78.
- <sup>69</sup> For detailed accounts of dubbing practices in *Yeşilçam*, see Nezih Erdoğan, "Mute Bodies, Disembodied Voices," 236-241 and Arslan, *Cinema in Turkey*, 116-124.
- <sup>70</sup> quoted in Arslan, *Cinema in Turkey*, 121.
- <sup>71</sup> Erdoğan, "Mute Bodies, Disembodied Voices," 234.
- <sup>72</sup> Arslan, *Cinema in Turkey*, 226.
- <sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, 182.
- <sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, 234.
- <sup>75</sup> Suner, *New Turkish Cinema*, 26.
- <sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, 37.
- <sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, 188.
- <sup>78</sup> Jonathan Romney, "No Effects, No Happy Ending, No Problem," *Independent on Sunday*, May 30, 2004, 20-21 and Peter Bradshaw "Review: *Uzak* (Distant)," *Guardian*, May 28, 2004, accessed March 27, 2013, [http://film.guardian.co.uk/News\\_Story/Critic\\_Review/Guardian\\_Film\\_of\\_the\\_week/0,4267,1226133,00.html](http://film.guardian.co.uk/News_Story/Critic_Review/Guardian_Film_of_the_week/0,4267,1226133,00.html).
- <sup>79</sup> Jonathan Romney, "A Silky Sadness," *Sight and Sound* 14.6 (2004): 20-23.
- <sup>80</sup> Tony Rayns, "Review: *Uzak*," *Sight and Sound* 14.6 (2004): 72, for transcendental style in film, see Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).
- <sup>81</sup> İbrahim Türk, "Uzak DVD'sinin başarısı," *Altyazı* 39 (2005): 9. The same article argues that the DVD of *Distant* was a major success in the Turkish market, achieving about six thousand sales. The following box-office numbers should make more explicit the disappointing amount of audiences that went to the theatres to see *Distant* in its first release: *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002), 105 copies, approx. 323,000 spectators in first week; *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002), 110 copies, approx. 823,000 spectators after four weeks; *Irreversible* (2002), 14 copies and approx. 98,000 spectators after four weeks. Numbers taken from "Box Office," *Altyazı* 14 (2003): 96.
- <sup>82</sup> At this stage Ceylan was producing his own films and the producer was required to finance the duplication of the distribution copies. Realistically, the audience numbers would not increase dramatically if there were more copies. Five was really a magic number to cover enough screens in major urban centres such as İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir, at least within the first weeks of release, and then the copies could slowly be distributed to smaller towns and

cities. See Enis Köstepen, Yamaç Okur and İbrahim Türk, "Nuri Bilge Ceylan: Sinema Pratiğini Fotoğrafa Benzetmeye Çalışıyorum," *Altyazı* 15 (2003): 43.

<sup>83</sup> Richard Lea, "In Istanbul, a writer awaits her day in court," *Guardian*, 24 July, 2006, accessed August 10, 2012,

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2006/jul/24/fiction.voicesofprotest>.

<sup>84</sup> I should note here that for Turkish speakers the term *özenti* might evoke a negative, perhaps offensive and demeaning characterization of Ceylan's (or perhaps any other director's) films. I certainly do not claim Ceylan's films as *özenti* nor want to characterize the New Turkish Cinema movement as such. Rather, I claim that *özenti*, as a defining aspect of *Yeşilçam* cinema, similarly informs the ways in which contemporary Turkish art cinema relates to Western culture, in the sense that there is, implicitly, a "desire" to be like the other. In this respect, there is no doubt that Ceylan's films are truly original and cannot be relegated into imitative works, but they nevertheless exhibit certain aspects and influences of art cinema conventions.

<sup>85</sup> Philip French, "Once Upon a Time in Anatolia – Review," *Guardian*, March 18, 2012, accessed March 27, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2012/mar/18/once-upon-time-in-anatolia-review>.

<sup>86</sup> Manohla Dargis, "One Search for a Body, Another for Meaning," *New York Times*, January 3, 2012, accessed March 27, 2013, <http://movies.nytimes.com/2012/01/04/movies/once-upon-a-time-in-anatolia-directed-by-nuri-bilge-ceylan-review.html>.

<sup>87</sup> Since the film was released in 2011 but also ran in theatres in 2012, it actually featured both in the 2011 and 2012 lists. See *Sight and Sound* 22.1 (2012): 16-26 and 23.1 (2013): 50-60.

<sup>88</sup> Numbers sourced from <http://www.boxofficeturkiye.com/>, accessed March 18, 2013, a website that collates Turkish box office statistics. Unfortunately these records begin in 2006, so earlier numbers were approximated from journalistic sources.

<sup>89</sup> quoted in Arslan, *Cinema in Turkey*, 77-78.

<sup>90</sup> Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, trans. John Irons (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 7.

<sup>91</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 27.

<sup>92</sup> Although many of the scholarly books I will be citing throughout this section contain historical approaches to boredom, I found the following one in particular concise and comprehensive: Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 49-106.

<sup>93</sup> Spacks, *Boredom*, 27-28. For an anthology that pursues the connection between boredom and modernity, see Barbara Dalle Pezze and Carlo Salzani, ed., *Essays on Boredom and Modernity* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009).

<sup>94</sup> Peter Toohey, *Boredom: A Lively History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 152-155. Toohey refers to the word "defeat" which did not appear in English dictionaries in any form until late 15<sup>th</sup> century, but argues that surely the English had known what exactly the feeling meant much earlier.

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, 149.

<sup>96</sup> Here I am specifically referring to the works of Patricia Meyer Spacks, Peter Toohey and Reinhard Kuhn.

<sup>97</sup> Reinhard Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 6-7.

<sup>98</sup> Toohey, *Boredom*, 142.

<sup>99</sup> Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 41-45. The typology he favours most is Martin Doehle's, which states four types: situative boredom (very simple boredom, based on external circumstances), boredom of satiety (arising from monotony), existential boredom (self-explanatory) and creative boredom ("one that is forced to do something new."). For various reasons, this typology does not seem to be sufficient for my purposes here, although the last

type (“creative boredom”) is similar to a mode that I will investigate in detail later in this chapter.

<sup>100</sup> Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 110. For a broader discussion of emotion and its relation to film, See Carl Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator’s Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 53-64.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>102</sup> Julian Hanich, *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers: The Aesthetic Paradox of Pleasurable Fear* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 23.

<sup>103</sup> Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide*, 4-5.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*, 12.

<sup>105</sup> For example, see Rob Burns, “Fassbinder’s *Angst Essen Seele Auf*: A Mellow Brechtian Drama,” *German Life and Letters* 48.1 (1995): 56-74; Seymour Chatman, *Antonioni: Or, the Surface of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 51-82; James S. Williams, “The Rhythms of Life: An Appreciation of Michelangelo Antonioni, Extreme Aesthete of the Real,” *Film Quarterly* 62 (2008): 46-57; and Chris Fujiwara, “Boredom, Spasmo, and the Italian System,” in *Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style, and Politics*, ed. Jeffrey Sconce (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 244.

<sup>106</sup> See Andrew Sarris, *Confessions of a Cultist: On the Cinema, 1955-1969* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 280. In his review of Antonioni’s *Blow-Up* (1966), Sarris uses the term “Antoniennui” in a slightly derogative manner by associating it with the feeling of pain experienced by the spectator. See *ibid.*, 189-193 for a negative review of Antonioni’s *Red Desert* (1964), although it does not contain the term “Antoniennui.”

<sup>107</sup> In Bellow’s *Humboldt’s Gift* (1975), Charlie Citrine, the protagonist who is working on a scholarly book on the experience of boredom, writes: “Modern French literature is especially preoccupied with the theme of boredom. Stendhal mentioned it on every page, Flaubert devoted books to it, and Baudelaire was its chief poet.” See Saul Bellow, *Humboldt’s Gift* (1975; repr., London: Penguin Books, 2007), 200. An extract from the book was reprinted as “On Boredom,” *The New York Review of Books* 22.13 (August 7, 1975): 22.

<sup>108</sup> In addition to the already cited Kuhn’s *The Demon of Noontide*, see Elizabeth S. Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005) for the relationship between boredom, modernity and modernist literature.

<sup>109</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, “Boredom,” in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 334.

<sup>110</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, “Cult of Distraction,” in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 326.

<sup>111</sup> Patrice Petro, “After Shock, Between Boredom and History,” in *Aftershocks of the New: Feminism and Film History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 66.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*, 68.

<sup>113</sup> Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 142.

<sup>114</sup> For an examination of how mainstream cinema disavows boredom, “which reflects a cultural refusal to address the implications of time passing,” see Richard Misek, “Dead Time: Cinema, Heidegger, and Boredom,” in *After Taste: Cultural Value and the Moving Image*, ed. Julia Vassilieva and Constantine Verevis (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 133-141.

<sup>115</sup> Pamela Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), 308.

<sup>116</sup> See, for example, David Bordwell, “Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in Contemporary American Film,” *Film Quarterly* 55.3 (2002): 16-28 and Steven Shaviro, *Post Cinematic Affect* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2010).

<sup>117</sup> Nuri Bilge Ceylan, “The Second Marathon,” *Sight and Sound* 22.4 (2012): 30.

<sup>118</sup> Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide*, 184. Following quotes from the same source, same page.



<sup>119</sup> Joseph Brodsky, "In Praise of Boredom," in *On Grief and Reason: Essays* (London: Penguin Classics, 2011), 94. In the next page, Brodsky writes that boredom "puts your existence into its perspective, the net result of which is precision and humility." *ibid.*, 95.

<sup>120</sup> Toohey, *Boredom*, 186-187. Although I agree with Toohey up to this point, in the remaining page of the same book he writes: "Such contemplation, thanks to boredom, is not necessarily a mind-altering experience. Getting a sense of yourself, paradoxically can be quite a boring pursuit," which, perhaps satirically or not, effectively disapproves his main argument in the preceding pages of the book.

<sup>121</sup> Jonathan Smallwood and Jonathan W. Schooler, "The Restless Mind," *Psychological Bulletin* 132.6 (2006): 946.

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*, 951.

<sup>123</sup> See Michael D. Mrazek, Jonathan Smallwood and Jonathan W. Schooler, "Mindfulness and Mind-Wandering: Finding Convergence Through Opposing Constructs," *Emotion* 12.3 (2012): 442-448, for a study that approaches the same question by another concept, mindfulness.

<sup>124</sup> Benjamin Baird et al., "Inspired by Distraction: Mind Wandering Facilitates Creative Incubation," *Psychological Science* 23.10 (2012): 1120.

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*, 1121. See also Ap Dijksterhuis and Teun Meurs, "Where Creativity Resides: The Generative Power of Unconscious Thought," *Consciousness and Cognition* 15.1 (2006): 135-146; Ilan Yaniv and David E. Meyer, "Activation and Metacognition of Inaccessible Stored Information: Potential Bases for Incubation effects in Problem Solving," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition* 13.2 (1987): 187-205; and Eric Klingler, "Thought Flow: Properties and Mechanisms Underlying Shifts in Content," in *At Play in the Fields of Consciousness: Essays in Honor of Jerome L. Singer*, ed. Jefferson A. Singer and Peter Salovey (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1999), 29-50.

<sup>126</sup> Manohla Dargis and A.O. Scott, "In Defense of Slow and Boring," *New York Times*, June 3, 2011, accessed July 9, 2013, [www.nytimes.com/2011/06/05/movies/films-in-defense-of-slow-and-boring.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/05/movies/films-in-defense-of-slow-and-boring.html).

<sup>127</sup> Karl Schoonover, "Wastrels of Time: Slow Cinema's Laboring Body, the Political Spectator, and the Queer," *Framework* 53.1 (2012): 70-71.

<sup>128</sup> Mieke Bal, "Sticky Images: the Foreshortening of Time in an Art of Duration," in *Time and the Image*, ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 80.

<sup>129</sup> For example, sculptures by the Norwegian artist Jeannette Christensen that are made of Jell-O and marble chips, two contrasting materials in terms of their physical changes over time. For Bal, this relationship in the sculpture makes the notion of linear time even more complex. See *ibid.*, 89-90.

<sup>130</sup> *ibid.*, 80 and 81-88. See further in Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>131</sup> Onur Civelek notes that these photographs are from the series *The Country Doctor* (1948), shot by W. Eugene Smith, in which he shadowed a real American country doctor, Dr. Ernest G. Ceriani, in his daily tasks. Civelek considers this more than a basic reference to Ceylan's previous profession: not only is Dr. Ceriani an alter-ego model for Cemal, but it is an indication that Cemal is becoming a spectator himself, just like us watching the film, and although he tries to convince himself otherwise by keeping the photograph on his desk, he has succumbed into a permanent spectator by accepting provincial mores. See Onur Civelek, "Bürokratik Ağda Dolaşım," [Wandering in the Bureaucratic Network], *Altyazı* 110 (2011): 84-85.

<sup>132</sup> It is worthwhile to note here that *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* was adapted from the real life experiences of a doctor, Ercan Kesal, also Ceylan's friend and co-scriptwriter since *Three Monkeys*, who takes the cameo role as the *Muhtar* (literally, an administrative official of a village community, periodically elected by its members). Kesal also spent years in an Anatolian province to fulfil his national duty as a qualified doctor and witnessed a similar series of events

in which he and other government officials set out in search for a dead body across a whole night. Much of this main arch-story was complemented with quotes and allusions from stories of Chekhov, including a poem by the Russian poet Mikhail Lermontov. See this interview with Ceylan, Geoff Andrew, "Journey to the End of the Night," *Sight and Sound* 22.4 (2012): 28-32.

<sup>133</sup> J. Hoberman, "A Search for a Corpse is So Much More in Once Upon a Time in Anatolia," *Village Voice*, January 4, 2012, accessed March 28, 2013, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2012-01-04/film/a-search-for-a-corpse-is-so-much-more-in-once-upon-a-time-in-anatolia/>.

<sup>134</sup> Senem Aytac "Bir Zamanlar Anadolu'da: Hakikat Kırıntıları," [Once Upon a Time in Anatolia: Fragments of Truth], *Altyazı* 110 (2011): 28-31.

<sup>135</sup> Geoff Andrew, "Journey to the End of the Night," 28.

<sup>136</sup> quoted in Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Overrated Solutions: *L'Humanite*," *Chicago Reader*, June 23, 2000, accessed March 27, 2013, <http://www.jonathanrosenbaum.com/?p=6389>.

<sup>137</sup> The folk tune is titled *Allı Turnam*, in this instance performed by Neşet Ertaş, who recently passed away on September 25, 2012.

<sup>138</sup> Vecdi Sayar, "Bozkırda Otopsi: Bir Zamanlar Anadolu'da," [Autopsy on the Steppes: Once Upon a Time in Anatolia], *Altyazı* 107 (2011): 39-41.

<sup>139</sup> On the struggles between the Republican intellectuals and the Anatolian villagers as well as Karaosmanoğlu's literary career, see Asım Karaömerlioğlu, "Peasants in Early Turkish Literature," *East European Quarterly* 36.2 (2002): 127-153.

<sup>140</sup> Fırat Yücel, "Utancı," [Shame], *Altyazı* 110 (2011): 1. My translation. Zeynep Dadak takes a similar approach to the film in her longer critical review "Bir Zamanlar Anadolu'da: Bir Evet Uğruna," [Once Upon a Time in Anatolia: For the Sake of a Yes], *Altyazı* 111 (2011): 82-83.

<sup>141</sup> Ceylan, *Kasaba*, 102. My translation.

<sup>142</sup> A key example to these claims can be seen in Dan Kois, "Eating Your Cultural Vegetables," *New York Times*, April 29, 2011, accessed June 26, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/01/magazine/mag-01Riff-t.html?pagewanted=all>.

<sup>143</sup> See Jonathan Romney, "In Search of Lost Time," *Sight and Sound* 20.2 (2010): 43-44.

<sup>144</sup> Toohey, *Boredom*, 7.

## 5. Conclusion

<sup>1</sup> Tiago de Luca, "Realism of the Senses: A Tendency in World Cinema," (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2011), 24; Matthew Flanagan, "'Slow Cinema': Temporality and Style in Contemporary Art and Experimental Film," (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2012), 213.

<sup>2</sup> Mette Hjort, "On the Plurality of Cinematic Transnationalism," in *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, ed. Nataša Durovicová and Kathleen Newman (New York: Routledge, 2010), 26.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, 24.

<sup>4</sup> Dudley Andrew, *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 19.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 234.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, 25.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Dudley Andrew, "Foreword," in *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), x.

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