Slow Time, Visible Cinema: Duration, Experience, and Spectatorship
by Tiago de Luca

Abstract: This article examines how the body of films commonly described as "slow cinema" demands certain conditions of the film theater for the spectatorial contract to be fully met, an aspect illustrated by recent durational films that focus on the theatrical experience as a theme in its own right. By exploring the ways in which slow cinema eschews the conventional temporal articulations of narrative cinema in favor of indeterminate temporalities, the article posits that the slow style might be fruitfully understood as a metareflection on a collective mode of spectatorship that loses its exclusivity as cinema ventures into new spaces and onto new screens.

It is a fait accompli that new technologies have drastically altered and redefined traditional modes of spectatorship. Displaced from public and fixed sites onto the variously sized screens of portable devices, the ways in which films are consumed and experienced have never been so flexible, fragmented, and mobile. In this article, however, I do not examine these new modes of spectatorial engagement, the contours of which have been, and continue to be, finely delineated.[1] What I find more interesting is how the body of contemporary films now broadly designated as "slow cinema" seems to resist this state of affairs through a mode of address that makes demands of the film theater for the spectatorial contract to be fully met. This, in my view, is the key to a deeper understanding of the slow style, and it provides the opportunity to reconsider the collectivity of the theatrical experience as film viewing becomes increasingly dispersed and individualized.

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[1] See, for instance, Laura Mulvey, 24x Death a Second (London: Reaktion Books, 2006); 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), 27–44; Ekkerhard Knörer, "Movable Images on Portable Devices," in Screen Dynamics: Mapping the Borders of Cinema, ed. Gertrud Koch, Volker Pantenburg, and Simon Rothöhler (Vienna: SYNEMA, 2012), 169–178; Ute Holl, "Cinema on the Web and Newer Psychology," in Screen Dynamics: Mapping the Borders of Cinema, ed. Gertrud Koch, Volker Pantenburg, and Simon Rothöhler (Vienna: SYNEMA, 2012), 150–168.

The question of slowness in cinema has gained unprecedented critical and theoretical currency over the past decade. Harking back to 2003, when the French film critic Michel Ciment coined the expression "cinema of slowness," the term has since been widely used to refer to films characterized by measured pace, minimalist mise-en-scène, opaque and laconic narratives, and an adherence to the long take as a self-reflexive stylistic device. Filmmakers such as Béla Tarr (Hungary), Lav Diaz (Philippines), Carlos Reygadas (Mexico), Tsai Ming-liang (Taiwan), Lisandro Alonso (Argentina), and Abbas Kiarostami (Iran), among others, are often cited and studied as exemplary of this trend.[2] At the same time, the style has been the subject of heated and polarized debates in film criticism, and accordingly it gained momentum in academia with the publication of several books on the subject.[3] To date, it is

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[2] Michel Ciment, "The State of Cinema," Unspoken Cinema, October 30, 2006, http://unspokencinema.blogspot.co.uk/2006/10/state-of-cinema-m-ciment.html. For a foundational article on slow cinema and its main aesthetic properties, see Matthew Flanagan, "Towards an Aesthetic of Slow in Contemporary Cinema," 16:9 6, no. 29 (2008): http://www.16-9.dk/2008-11/side11inenglish.htm.

[3] See, for instance, Nick James, "Passive-Aggressive," Sight & Sound 20, no. 4 (2010): 5; Steven Shaviro, "Slow Cinema vs. Fast Films," The Pinocchio Theory (blog), May 12, 2010, http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=891; Harry Tuttle, "Slow Films, Easy Life," Unspoken Cinema (blog), December 5, 2010, http://unspokencinema.blogspot.co.uk/2010/05/slow-films-easy-life-sight.html; Dan Kois, "Eating Your Cultural Vegetables," New York Times, April 29, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/01/magazine/mag-01Riff-t.html; Manohla Dargis and A. O. Scott, "In Defense of the Slow and the Boring," June 3, 2011, New York Times, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/05/movies/films-in-defense-of-slow-and-boring.html. For books on slow cinema and/or on slowness in film and audiovisual media, see Ira Jaffe, Slow Movies: Countering the Cinema of Action (New York: Wallflower, 2014); Song Hwee Lim, Tsai Ming-liang and a Cinema of Slowness (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014); Lutz Kopenick, On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Tiago de Luca, Realism of the Senses in World Cinema: The Experience of Physical Reality (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014); Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge, eds., Slow Cinema (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016). See also Matthew Flanagan, "Slow Cinema": Temporality and Style in Contemporary Art and Experimental Film (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2012); Tina Kendall, ed., "In Focus: Speed," Cinema Journal 55, no. 2 (2016): 112–158.

fair to say that slow cinema is a fully fledged concept with its own detractors and advocates, the former condemning its ossified, apolitical, and "made for festivals" style, and the latter praising its measured tempo and artistic depth.[4]

In this article, I propose that a more productive way of looking at the emergence of slow cinema is not to focus so much on what this cinema is, its supposed artistic merits or otherwise, but to take the opportunity to interrogate often unquestioned assumptions regarding the fruition of cinematic time in relation to traditional modes of film spectatorship. On the one hand, by adopting a style grounded in stillness, silence, and duration, a cinema of slowness is unsuitable for domestic film viewing and the fragmented and distracted modes of spectatorial interaction evinced by miniaturized screens, thus demanding a mode of engagement perhaps attainable only in the film theater. On the other hand, the slow style has made a remarkably smooth transition to the art gallery and the museum as more and more directors associated with the trend make films and installations for these spaces. Understood as an aesthetic project grounded in the experience of durational cinematic time, slow cinema thus asks us to reassess the distinct economies of attention and engagement evinced by theatrical and gallery settings.

This article, however, claims no position in empirical audience research. While I acknowledge the importance of this approach in providing increasingly nuanced insights into film reception, my intention here is to conduct a broader inquiry into what Miriam Hansen has described as "the more systematic parameters of subjectivity that structure, enable, and refract our personal engagement with the film," including questions of film style and site specificity, as well as their imbricated relationship.[5] In this respect, I allude to specific films and filmmakers to illustrate my points, yet I also refer to "slow cinema" as a shorthand term for what I deem an aesthetically cohesive group of films, even though questions relating to the appropriateness of the term as applied to such a group remain outside the scope of this

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[4] For a perceptive account of the slow cinema debate, see Karl Schoonover, "Wastrels of Time: Slow Cinema's Laboring Body, the Political Spectator, and the Queer," Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media 53, no. 1 (2013): 65–78, reprinted in Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge, eds., Slow Cinema (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 153–168.

[5] Miriam Hansen, "Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Permutations of the Public Sphere," Screen 34, no. 3 (1992): 197–210, 207.

article.[6] Although I am aware of the dangers of obliterating contextual and textual divergences in favor of a more generalizing perspective, it is my hope that an approach of this kind will contribute to aspects of film theory and aesthetics more broadly, particularly the dynamics at work among modes of address, exhibition sites, and spectatorial activity.

In what follows, I start by retracing some key theoretical observations that have historically been put forward in relation to the cinema-going experience, and then move on to analyze its experiential particularities as activated by the slow style. Through its contemplative mode of address, slow cinema elicits a heightened awareness of the viewing situation. Not coincidentally, as I proceed to demonstrate, slow films such as Tsai Ming-liang's Goodbye, Dragon Inn (2003), Lisandro Alonso's Fantasma (2006), and Abbas Kiarostami's Shirin (2008) all reveal a desire to reflect on cinema spectatorship as a theme in its own right. At the same time, as durational images move into art galleries, questions arise regarding the extent to which they are differently experienced in the spaces of the museum and of the film theater. By way of conclusion, I suggest that slow time makes cinema visible, turning the film auditorium into a phenomenological space in which a collectively shared experience of time is brought to light for reflection.

Visible Cinema. The continued appearance of viewing technologies has always posited threats to the theatrical experience and generated anxiety about its disappearance. Already in 1953, French film critic André Bazin noted that the rise of 3-D technology and CinemaScope promised to inject new vitality into the film experience as a direct response to a drop in cinema-going attendance caused by the arrival of television: "The defense against [it] had to be of a 'spectacular' nature."[7] Although the relaunch of 3-D and the proliferation of IMAX screens have given continuity to this process in our time, to explore the ways in which spectacular cinema asks for state-of-the-art theaters is not my aim here. Instead, my intention is to examine how spectacular cinema's alleged antithesis, that is to say slow cinema, can be said to need the big screen to a similar extent—not to heighten the impact of hyperbolic and immersive features but to facilitate a sustained perceptual engagement with the audiovisual elements on-screen. To that end, I revisit in this section some key arguments advanced in relation to the theatrical experience with a view to speculating on slow cinema's proposed

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[6] For a position against the term, see Harry Tuttle, "Slow Films."

[7] André Bazin, "Will Cinemascope Save the Film Industry?," Film-Philosophy 6, no. 2 (2002): http://www.film-philosophy.com/vol6-2002/n2bazin.

spectatorial contract and its wider implications around notions of perception, absorption, and collectivity in film viewing.

In fact, the question of concentrated perception in the cinema is hardly new; it was an essential component of experimental cinema's aesthetic project in the 1970s, when the likes of Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton, and Jonas Mekas and Peter Kubelka, among others, sought to revitalize the sensory-perceptual cinematic experience through specific devices (duration, minimalism, and stillness) and a shared reliance on the existence of the film theater. Their "utopia of concentrated perception," as Volker Pantenburg has observed, is best illustrated by two examples: Frampton's piece <u>A Lecture</u> (1968) and Mekas and Kubelka's <u>Invisible Cinema</u> architectural project (1970). Thus, in the voice-over opening the former, Michael Snow defined the cinema theater as "the only place left in our culture intended entirely for concentrated exercise of one, or at most two, of our senses," whereas the latter project was built with partitions between seats so that viewers would focus exclusively and without distractions on the big screen.[8]

Identified with progressive notions by experimental filmmakers in the United States, the atmosphere of absorption associated with the film theater would, however, suffer a backlash a few years later in the "apparatus" theory developed in France by Christian Metz and Jean-Louis Baudry. Drawing on psychoanalysis, Metz and Baudry argued that the womblike conditions of the cinema-viewing situation induced the viewer into a regressive and unconscious psychic state comparable to that of a dream. This, coupled with the textual strategies of classical narrative film and its diegetic absorption effect, provided the ideal scenario for a disembodied viewing subject to become a purely perceptual receptacle of the film's own ideological "vision," unfolding in the viewer's unconscious as if produced by his or her mental processes. Metz writes:

> Spectator-fish, taking in everything with their eyes, nothing with their bodies: the institution of the cinema requires a silent, motionless spectator, a <u>vacant</u> spectator, constantly in a sub-motor and hyper-perceptive state, a spectator at once alienated and happy, acrobatically hooked up to himself by the invisible thread of sight, a spectator

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[8] Volker Pantenburg, "1970 and Beyond: Experimental Cinema and Art Spaces," in <u>Screen Dynamics: Mapping the Borders of Cinema</u>, ed. Gertrud Koch, Volker Pantenburg, and Simon Rothöhler (Vienna: SYNEMA, 2012), 82–83.

who only catches up with himself at the last minute, by a paradoxical identification with his own self, a self filtered out into pure vision.[9]

Metz's remarks are all the more interesting if we consider that in the same year, 1975, Roland Barthes published his essay "Leaving the Movie Theater," which, inflected with the psychoanalytic discourse of his contemporaries, similarly likened the cinematic apparatus to ideological "hypnosis."[10] Crucially, however, Barthes introduced a "body" to the equation, proposing an alternative viewing stance—in his words "another way of going to the movies" —which would involve

> letting oneself be fascinated <u>twice over</u>, by the image and its surroundings as if I had two bodies at the same time: a narcissistic body which gazes, lost, into the engulfing mirror, and a perverse body, ready to fetishize not the image but precisely what exceeds it: the texture of the sound, the hall, the darkness, the obscure mass of the other bodies, the rays of light.[11]

It is interesting to examine how Barthes's corporeal and active viewer anticipates the embodied modes of spectatorship that have emerged in Anglophone film theory since the early 1990s, when apparatus theory was debunked as foreclosing spectatorial agency by reducing the viewer to a transcendental visual entity devoid of subjective intentionality. Thus, in her film-phenomenological project, Vivian Sobchack rejected Metz's claims that the spectator in the film theater is "motionless," "vacant," and "silent," arguing that the viewer is always "embodied and conscious" despite the behavioral codes implicitly dictated by the cinema-going activity.[12]

With a few exceptions (Barthes being one), however, the question of the collectivity of cinema spectatorship has been relegated to a second plane through much of film theory, which, whether in the apparatus or the film-phenomenology mode, has largely advanced the notion of an individual spectator as the receptacle of the film's ideological visions or sensory effects. To redress this balance, Julian Hanich has thus made the case for a "theory of

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[9] Christian Metz, <u>The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and Cinema</u>, trans. Celia Britton et al. (London: Macmillan, 1982), 96, original emphasis.

[10] Roland Barthes, "Leaving the Movie Theater," in <u>The Rustle of Language</u>, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 349.

[11] Ibid., original emphasis.

[12] Vivian Sobchack, <u>The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience</u> (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 273.

collective spectatorship." Hanich takes issue with Miriam Hansen's thesis that only early cinema, with its "alternation of films and non-filmic acts," contributed to fundamentally collective forms of reception, owing to its interactive and social nature.[13] He suggests instead that the silence that has come to characterize many cinema audiences "functions as a precondition for a synchronized collective experience, because it allows for the tacit sense that the others not only act as I do but also experience similarly to me, and hence that we act jointly and experience something collectively."[14] This means that one "can enjoy watching a film collectively without being fully aware of this fact."[15]

As Hanich himself acknowledges, however, different cinematic styles will solicit different degrees of concentration and types of psychic and/or corporeal engagement in the context of the film theater and that of other viewing spaces. Thus, while some films may directly address the spectator with shocks, such as the early "cinema of attractions" famously theorized by Tom Gunning, others may require an interpretative stance toward the diegetic world, and still others may have their own set of expectations derived from generic and/or cultural conventions (think of the audiences who sing along in India or in cult or fan screenings in the United Kingdom, for example). In the case of slow cinema, its aesthetic and temporal properties solicit a mode of spectatorship whereby one is made consciously aware of its collective experience in the larger context of the cinema theater. As a means to understand this process in more detail, let us first turn to the style with which this cinema is now largely associated.

Intolerable Duration. A limping woman (Chen Shiang-chyi), with a broom in hand, walks into an empty cinema auditorium framed in a static long shot. She enters the frame from the right, walks up the stairs while slowly sweeping the floor, crosses the upper part of the auditorium, and then climbs down the stairs on the other side and leaves the frame from the left, an action that lasts nearly three minutes. The clicking sound of her leg brace, acoustically enhanced against the silent emptiness of the setting she unhurriedly traverses, repetitively punctuates the slowness of her actions (Figure 1). As she leaves the frame, the

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[13] Miriam Hansen, Babel & Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film (London: Harvard University Press, 1991), 91–92.

[14] Julian Hanich, "Watching a Film with Others: Towards a Theory of Collective Spectatorship," Screen 55, no. 3 (2014): 338–359, 352.

[15] Ibid., 354.

camera continues recording the large silent auditorium, now devoid of human presence, for nearly three minutes (Figure 2).

FIGURES 1 & 2

Figure 1. Chen sweeps the cinema auditorium in Goodbye, Dragon Inn (Homegreen Films, 2003).

Figure 2. The camera continues recording the now-empty auditorium in Goodbye, Dragon Inn (Homegreen Films, 2003).

From Goodbye, Dragon Inn, by Malaysia-born, Taiwan-based director Tsai Ming-liang, this single stationary shot is charged with meaning in that it lays bare the waning of the theatrical experience as visualized in an empty movie theater. Yet beyond its obvious symbolism, this scene is also emblematic in that it makes no concession to those viewers avid for storytelling. Lasting nearly six minutes and featuring no camera movement, its audiovisual content is slowed down through the limping movements of a woman with a physical disability in its first half, then reduced to the unchanging sight of an empty space through the remaining duration. In many ways, this shot radicalizes hallmarks of contemporary slow cinema in the sense not only that it is premised on the hyperbolic application of the long take but also that the long take is here combined with other elements that together may likely produce the experience of slowness for the spectator, namely silence, stillness, minimalism, and an emphasis on duration itself—all of which force the a2udience to confront images and sounds in their material and perceptual plenitude.

At first glance, this formal idiom, steeped in unbroken takes depleted of dramatic charge, would seem to comply with Bazin's defense of the sequence shot, which in his view implied "a more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator," who is then "called on to exercise at least a minimum of personal choice" and from whose attention "the meaning of the image in part derives."[16] Although this is true in many respects, there is a crucial difference here related to the ways in which this scene extrapolates the dramaturgic dictates of Bazin's temporal realism, which, as I have explored elsewhere, was often subscribed to narrative imperatives.[17] As Tsai's unpopulated cinema vividly indicates, what is often the

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[16] André Bazin, What Is Cinema? Volume 1, trans. Hugh Gray (London: University of California Press, 2005), 37.

[17] de Luca, Realism of the Senses, 18–21.

case in the contemporary slow aesthetic is that it proceeds through opaque and elusive images whose temporal indeterminacy far exceeds plot demands, if a plot even exists.

From the perspective of dominant cinematic models of narrative economy and its standard meaning-making patterns, this scene is emblematic in that shot duration is no longer dictated by, or subordinated to, audiovisual content. Not only does it supply the viewer with time to scan within and across the screen, as Bazin would have had it, it provides too much time, triggering a self-conscious mode of spectatorship whereby the viewer becomes aware of the viewing process and the time spent in such a process. As Karl Schoonover puts it, "The restlessness or contemplation induced by art cinema's characteristic fallow time draws attention to the activity of watching and ennobles a forbearing but unbedazzled spectatorship."[18] In this context, Schoonover goes on, slowness emerges "as a crucial sociopolitical parameter of art cinema's consumption" through the "idea of a spectator who recognizes the value of slowness."[19]

Whereas it would be impossible to determine why some viewers valorize and enjoy slowness while others do not, the historical and geopolitical supremacy of a narrative cinema informed by the principles of functionality and efficiency points to a larger set of anxieties and suspicions surrounding slow time in capitalist modernity. After all, good films, or so we hear in common parlance, are precisely those that make us unaware of the temporality of their projection, those in which time passes by without one's noticing. To properly understand the question of slowness in the cinema and how it is usually perceived as a hindrance to spectatorial enjoyment, then, we would do well to go back to the very "emergence of cinematic time," to cite the title of Mary Ann Doane's book.[20] Looking at the ways in which narrativity was swiftly articulated at cinema's dawn, which involved the elimination of undesirable temporalities from its syntax, might provide us with a privileged insight into the temporal mechanisms of contemporary slow cinema in relation to normative cinematic time as well as prevailing modes of experiencing time.

As Doane has argued, whereas the introduction of film and other technologies contributed to the large-scale rationalization of time at the turn of the twentieth century,

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[18] Schoonover, "Wastrels of Time," 70.

[19] Ibid., 65.

[20] Mary Ann Doane, The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive (London: Harvard University Press, 2002).

cinema also resisted this process through its ability to record duration.[21] Carrying the promise of recording seemingly anything for unspecified periods of time, film enabled the potential irruption of the contingent into the image. Yet this ontological promiscuity posited the danger of a purely indeterminate and disembodied temporality that was subsequently countered with the emergence of narrative structures. Doane explains:

> The inevitably historiographic tendency of cinema, its ability to record "real" time and its duration, at first a source of endless fascination, poses critical difficulties for the early cinema. Cinema's time is surely referential; it is a record of time with the weight of indexicality. But its time is also characterized by a certain indeterminacy, an intolerable instability. . . . The cinema hence becomes the production of a generalized experience of time, a duration. The unreadability and uncertainty concerning the image's relation to temporality and to its origin are not problems that are resolved—they are, in fact, insoluble. . . . The resulting cinema delicately negotiates the contradiction between recording and signification.[22]

It does so through a plethora of ways, but two strategies particularly stand out. First, to manufacture meaning, cinema adheres to the notion of the event in the sense of a <u>significant</u> happening that justifies its being the object of attention for a recording camera for a determined period. Second, cinema learns how to deal with the "intolerable instability" of duration by summarily excising "uneventful," "'dead time'—time in which nothing happens, time which is in some sense 'wasted,' expended without product": the cinematic event is thus "packaged as a moment: <u>time is condensed and becomes eminently meaningful</u>."[23]

Slow cinema's capital sin is that it often turns a blind eye to both of these lessons, which early cinema very quickly learned. To use the scene from <u>Goodbye, Dragon Inn</u> again, not only does it bypass the notion of the event by lingering on seemingly insignificant occurrences (a woman sweeping the floor, an empty space); it does so for an unjustifiably long time. Here we could say that time is stretched and becomes eminently meaningless, at least in the way it refuses to be instrumentalized by representational content. This is why, moreover, some critics may experience slow films as frustrating. Unable to abandon a well-trained viewing mode based on the scanning and gathering of narratively meaningful

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[21] Ibid., 163.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., 160, my emphasis.

information, they express an anxiety over the ways in which cinematic time is not translated into the expected mental processes identified with narrational fruition in the cinema.[24]

Of course, not all spectators will feel anxious or frustrated when confronted with vacant temporalities, given that the experience of time is also fundamentally subjective. As Matilda Mroz notes, "What for one viewer might seem too long for another might offer a moment of elongated rapture."[25] In a similar vein, Lee Carruthers has questioned Doane's stress on the anxiety produced by unregulated cinematic time by arguing that "conceived differently—that is, from a perspective less invested in the knowledge effects of cinema, such as Bazin's—this instability [of duration] is quite tolerable, and even catalyzes our engagement as viewers."[26] Discerning a broader tendency in film studies to theorize time from an epistemological rather than phenomenological prism, Carruthers proposes an approach to cinematic time that "gives positive value to the intense interpretive field extended by filmic duration," one that emphasizes it "as an immersive experience that is pleasurable and not simply anxious; . . . and, potentially, as a situation in which the elusiveness of time is made available for contemplation."[27]

And yet, the fervent responses arising from the slow cinema debates demonstrate that even die-hard cinephiles can be very skeptical of the pulsing experience of unqualified duration, confirming its general association with waste and linking it to anxiety. In this respect, Doane's insights into the arrival of cinema as a recording technology and its potential nonalliance with the measured temporality of capitalist modernity illuminate the critical discourses surrounding slow cinema, which, as Schoonover observes, make visible a number of unchallenged assumptions regarding what constitutes wasted or productive time in film spectatorship.[28] To look at the debate from this historical perspective is, moreover, to recognize that slow cinema merely formulates, though certainly with renewed vigor, a conflict that has been effectively at the heart of cinema since its emergence. Cinema learns

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[24] See James, "Passive-Aggressive." Dan Kois also questioned whether slow cinema is worth "enduring" in the pages of the New York Times. Kois, "Eating Your Cultural Vegetables."

[25] Matilda Mroz, Temporality and Film Analysis (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 41.

[26] Lee Carruthers, "M. Bazin et le temps: Reclaiming the Timeliness of Cinematic Time," Screen 52, no. 1 (2011): 13–29, 20.

[27] Ibid., 28–29.

[28] Schoonover, "Wastrels of Time."

how to contain and eventually suppress "dead," "uneventful," and "wasted" time—anomalous temporalities that, however, will never cease to surface through film history. From Rossellini to Angelopoulos, Dreyer to Akerman, Antonioni to Warhol, Tarkovsky to Tarr, empty cinematic time comes to the fore, exposing in return the calculated temporal mechanisms by which cinema conventionally abides in its production of meaning.

However, while the contemporary slow trend is indebted to this illustrious lineage, its prevalence in today's context is significant for several reasons. For one thing, the sheer number of filmmakers, from all corners of the globe, resorting to the slow style is striking. And while the scope and viability of this phenomenon must be understood in relation to cultural institutions such as the international film festival, as I will shortly discuss, it is noteworthy that the trend has emerged at a time when capitalism itself undergoes a radical transfiguration based on nonstop monetary circulation and 24/7 communication models. For Fredric Jameson, we are witnessing "the end of temporality," a "situation [that] has been characterized as a dramatic and alarming shrinkage of existential time and the reduction to a present that hardly qualifies as such any longer, given the virtual effacement of that past and future that can alone define a present in the first place."[29] More important for the purposes of this article, it is telling that the films subsumed under the "slow" moniker require the conditions provided by the film theater for their full appreciation. Whether we consider the ways in which these films downplay or disregard human presence; their play on scale, stillness, and laconism; or their adherence to unbroken shots with little by way of action, slow cinema would seem to express a yearning to reclaim the phenomenology of the film experience whose ideal site is the film theater.

Not coincidentally, films directly associated with the trend have openly focused on the theatrical experience as a theme in its own right, including Tsai's aforementioned Goodbye, Dragon Inn and his short It's a Dream (2006), Lisandro Alonso's Fantasma (2006), and Abbas Kiarostami's Shirin (2008). Despite their dissimilarities, these films are unified in their durational quest to inspect the settings and processes associated with the cinema experience. In fact, such is their disregard for dramatic patterns and narrative structures that they often resemble installation pieces and in some cases, as we will see, indeed migrate from or into the spaces of art galleries. Torn between the cinema and the museum, slow cinema

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[29] Fredric Jameson, "The End of Temporality," Critical Inquiry 29, no. 4 (2003): 695–718, 708.

thus finds itself at the crossroads of distinct spectatorial projects and social spheres, each of which crystallizes different configurations of aesthetic and temporal experiences.

Crossing Over. Let us go back to Tsai's Goodbye, Dragon Inn: focused on the last day of a crumbling cinema (in reality, the Fuhe Grand Theater, in Taipei's West Gate District), the film laments the waning of the theatrical experience and testifies to Tsai's ongoing preoccupation with disappearing places in rapidly urbanizing and late-capitalist cities. Filmed in Tsai's hallmark static long takes, Goodbye, Dragon Inn is characterized by a conspicuous lack of dialogue and practically nonexistent narrative. The film proceeds episodically and takes its time to show the furtive, often surreal, activities going on in the cinema while the wuxia film Dragon Gate Inn (1966) unfolds on the big screen. In the auditorium, a meager audience: a male Japanese tourist (Kiyonobu Mitamura) gay cruising; random, possibly ghost, characters engaged in absurdist situations; and a hobbled ticket girl (Chen Shiang-chyi) limping around in search of the film projectionist, Tsai's unfailing alter ego Lee Kang-sheng.

An elegy on the collective experience of cinema, Goodbye, Dragon Inn prefigures Tsai's short film It's a Dream (2006), in which the director filmed another cinema theater, this time on his native soil of Malaysia. It's a Dream was commissioned for the Cannes Film Festival upon its sixtieth anniversary, when thirty-three directors were invited to reflect on the big screen for the portmanteau Chacun son cinéma: Une déclaration d'amour au grand écran. Like Goodbye, Dragon Inn, it combines images set in a crumbling cinema, inspired by the director's own childhood memories, as the narrator tells us: his mother and the director as a child eating durian; a picture of his grandmother in one of the auditorium's seats; his then-young grandmother watching a film and eating pears on a skewer, and so on.

Spectral characters also seem to populate Lisandro Alonso's Fantasma (in English, "Ghost"). Set in an empty Teatro San Martín in Buenos Aires, one of Argentina's major theaters and cultural centers, Fantasma mostly comprises tableaulike shots of the building's vacant interiors and inconsequential scenes involving the aimless wanderings of two inexpressive men. These are the real peasants who starred in Alonso's previous Freedom (2001) and The Dead (2004), the latter film being screened in the near-empty cinema within the diegesis, and watched by its own protagonist (Argentino Vargas) and two other staff members coming in and out of the auditorium (Figures 3 and 4).

FIGURES 3 & 4

Figures 3–4. Argentino Vargas watches himself on the big screen in a near-empty cinema in Alonso's Fantasma (4L, 2006).

By contrast, Abbas Kiarostami's Shirin (2008) is set in a crowded cinema. Stitching together facial close-ups of more than one hundred Iranian actresses (with the exception of Juliette Binoche) while they watch the Persian tale of the princess Shirin, the film refrains from showing the reverse shot that would disclose their object of attention, meaning that the viewer can only hear the unfolding narrative but never actually see the film within the film. Curiously, however, its auditorium, unlike those on display in Goodbye, Dragon Inn, It's a Dream, and Fantasma, is the result of an editing trick. An assemblage of close-ups filmed individually in the director's own house, the film creates the illusion of shared collectivity through the juxtaposition of facial shots (Figures 5 and 6).

FIGURES 5 & 6

Figures 5–6. Close-ups of Iranian actresses watching the film Shirin in Kiarostami's Shirin (Abbas Kiarostami Productions, 2008).

To a certain extent, these films are the metareflexive equivalent of a wider trend in the art world that reflects on the fate of the cinema theater. Examples include installations such as Janet Cardiff's and George Bures Miller's The Paradise Institute (2001), a plywood replica of a cinema; Douglas Gordon's and Rirkrit Tiravanija's Cinéma liberté/Bar Lounge (1996/2008), which screened previously censored and/or banned films; and Tobias Putrih's Venetian, Atmospheric (2007), a screening space inspired by the "atmospheric" cinema of the 1920s and 1930s.[30] As Erika Balsom notes, the current prevalence of pieces that reflect on the physical spaces of film exhibition expresses "a fear about the lack of sitedness of today's mobile screens. In the face of such nomadism, one finds meditations on the traditional architectural situation of cinema coming from within the gallery walls."[31] And while the films mentioned would immediately attest that such meditations are also occurring from

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[30] See Erika Balsom, "Screening Rooms: The Movie Theatre in/and the Gallery," Public 40 (2009): 24–39; Maeve Connolly, "Temporality, Sociality, Publicness: Cinema as Art Project," Afterall 29 (2012): http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.29/temporality-sociality-publicness-cinema-as-art-project.

[31] Balsom, "Screening Rooms," 27.

within cinema theaters, the relationships between the slow film, the gallery, and the cinema is a complex triangular web that requires some unpacking. For, if Goodbye, Dragon Inn, It's a Dream, Fantasma, and Shirin can be interpreted as celebrating the uniqueness of the theatrical experience while mourning its waning, Tsai, Kiarostami, and many other directors associated with slow cinema have had no qualms in moving into the realm of film and video installations—quite the contrary.

Take the example of Shirin. On the one hand, the film expands on the director's short film Where's My Romeo? (2006), which, like Tsai's It's a Dream, featured in the portmanteau Chacun son cinéma. Yet Shirin also resonates with Kiarostami's multichannel video installation Looking at Tazieh, which showed different perspectives of an open-air performance and its audience at the Edinburgh International Festival in 2008. The case of It's a Dream is even more telling, as it was transformed into a twenty-three-minute moving-image installation and showcased at the Venice Biennale for the Taipei Fine Arts Museum in 2007. Using exactly the same images featured in the short, but holding them on screen for longer, Tsai collected fifty-four chairs before the theater was demolished and reintegrated them into the museum installation, which became part of the Taipei museum's permanent collection in 2010. One could also cite Kiarostami's Five Dedicated to Ozu (2002)—originally an experimental film containing five (mostly) unbroken shots filmed on the shores of the Caspian Sea—which became a five-channel video installation soon after it was acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2004, its segments screened onto five separate partitions.[32] By contrast, Tsai's feature-length film Face (2009) followed the reverse route: it was commissioned and coproduced by the Louvre Museum, in which it was largely filmed, to then become the first audiovisual item in the museum's collection.

It is striking that many filmmakers who have crossed over to art galleries in recent years are often placed under the slow cinema umbrella, and that they often recycle their own

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[32] Upon its release on DVD, Jonathan Romney even made a point of stressing that "Five is neither a gallery work nor a collection of separate pieces, but a seventy-four-minute feature film, designed to be shown in cinemas to a seated audience that is prepared to watch from start to finish." And yet Kiarostami did transform Five into an installation piece soon after. Romney, "Five," in the leaflet included in the Five DVD case (London: BFI Video, n.d.).

cinematic works.[33] In addition to Tsai and Kiarostami, one could cite a precursor of slowness like Chantal Akerman, who made several audiovisual installations in the past two decades, many of which utilized and expanded on her long-take films. One could equally mention Portuguese Pedro Costa and his installation Alto cutelo (2012), composed of images and characters from his previous films, such as Ventura, the protagonist of his Colossal Youth (2006). Another filmmaker who has navigated between moving-image art and slow cinema is Thai Apichatpong Weerasethakul, whose multichannel installations, as Jihoon Kim has noted, resonate with and "spatialize" the bifurcated temporal structure of his feature films.[34] Experimental filmmakers such as James Benning and Sharon Lockhart, whose nonnarrative durational films are frequently discussed in relation to slow cinema, have similarly made concessions for their work to be screened in gallery settings in recent times, and indeed it is in these settings that their films are now most commonly viewed.

To be sure, freedom for artistic experimentation and the more flexible formats of installation cannot be discounted as strong reasons for luring filmmakers into the gallery. Yet as Laura U. Marks has noted, "Institutional venues for single-channel experimental media are shifting from the festival/distributor circuit to the gallery/museum circuit, primarily for economic reasons."[35] Although Marks's focus is on what she terms independent "experimental media artists," her contention that the film festival circuit now competes with galleries in the commissioning of durational moving-image works is certainly relevant here. It is by now commonplace that the international film festival has been over the past two decades the institutional and cultural home of slow cinema, and one that has largely enabled not only its promotion and consumption but also its production. An international film festival like Rotterdam, for example, offers grants like the Hubert Bals Fund, which has financially helped directors such as Reygadas, Alonso, Weerasethakul, and Diaz among others. In fact, slow films may be rarely shown outside film festivals, whether because they will not resist

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[33] Glyn Davis has also examined this in "Slow Film between Cinema and Gallery," as part of the panel "New Directions in Slow Cinema" at the SCMS conference in Seattle in March 2014.

[34] Jihoon Kim, "Between Auditorium and Gallery: Perception in Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Films and Installations," in Global Art Cinema, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 125–141.

[35] Laura U. Marks, "Immersed in the Single Channel: Experimental Media from Theater to Gallery," Millennium Film Journal 55 (2012): 14–23, 14.

the dominant logic of film distribution worldwide or because their duration is unviable commercially, as in the films of Diaz and Wang Bing, which can last up to nine hours. Yet the art gallery should now be reckoned as an equally important institution in the production and circulation of durational images.

One way of looking at Goodbye, Dragon Inn, Fantasma and Shirin, then, is to see them as saying farewell to the theatrical experience as slow films and their directors gradually make their way into the museum. Tsai is certainly the most vocal in this respect, announcing in 2013 that his tenth feature film, Stray Dogs (2013), featured and awarded at the Venice Film Festival, "could be [his] last film" because he would concentrate on "making short art films" for the "fine art museum."[36] And yet no sooner than 2014, Tsai's experimental "short" (fifty-six minutes) Journey to the West (2014), which was sponsored by the International Film Festival Marseille in exchange for showcasing his other short film No Form in 2012, was premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival in theatrical format, going on to be showcased thereafter at many festivals worldwide.[37]

Tsai is an exemplary case, then, to illustrate the fact that filmmakers can now resort to different institutions as a means to secure financial support and accordingly experiment with audiovisual products in different exhibition spaces. And indeed, most of the filmmakers listed here have continued to make feature films in parallel to installation pieces while simultaneously transforming the former into the latter and vice versa. So, rather than gesturing toward a great divide, these border crossings often attest to an economic phenomenon by which cultural institutions such as museums and film festivals can become mutually reinforcing entities in an interlinked circuit that allows for the production,

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[36] Gobby Wand, "Tsai Ming-liang Wins Grand Jury Prize at Venice Film Festival," Taiwan Culture Portal, September 11, 2013,

http://www.culture.tw/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2452&Itemid=235.

[37] No Form and Journey to the West are, respectively, the first and sixth installments of the Slow Walk, Long March series of Tsai short films, all performed by Tsai's regular Lee Kang-sheng in the role of a Buddhist monk. The second and third shorts, namely Walker and Diamond Sutra, also premiered at film festivals, namely Cannes and Venice, respectively. I have acquired most of this information from Song Hwee Lim, for which I am grateful.

dissemination, and (com)modification of slow images across different spheres, events, and platforms.[38]

However, if there is much to be said about the ways in which similar or the same durational images may easily traverse back and forth through the spaces of the museum and the cinema, the _experience_ of such images will be necessarily of a different order depending on the place in which they are consumed. Gallery pieces and feature films solicit modes of aesthetic appreciation that are not interchangeable. Not only do gallery contexts privilege a peripatetic, individual, and distracted viewing mode in contrast with the collective immobility of theatrical settings; as Pantenburg reminds us, in "the cinema, temporality is also prescribed by the duration of the film, whereas the temporal calculations of a visit to an exhibition are mostly made independently of the time required to actually see the works."[39]

Of course, distraction and immersion can be experienced both in the museum and in the cinema, dependent as they also are on subjective faculties. Yet external factors may limit, structure, or encourage particular ways of viewing, and in the case of slow cinema, the question of how temporality is primarily experienced is of the essence. To put it crudely, is slow cinema "slow" in the gallery, given that it is the viewer, rather than the film, who largely controls the time spent watching?

As Griselda Pollock remarks of Akerman's contemplative documentary From the East (1993), which was turned into an installation soon after its release, even a seemingly innocuous transference of screening sites resulted in significant changes from a spectatorial standpoint: "[The film] ran continuously in a large room with a few seats so that it was already a wall-projected image rather than a film on a screen with a fixed start and end time. The visitor met the film at arbitrary points in its perpetual loop."[40] In this respect, Marks has argued that the temporal disengagement characteristic of gallery viewing entails a primarily "cognitive," rather than experiential, spectatorial mode, given that "duration tends to get reduced to an idea of duration . . . centrally because people don't stay for the whole

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[38] One could also cite a cultural event like the New Crowned Hope Festival, commissioned by the city of Vienna to commemorate the 250th birthday of Mozart, which financed Tsai's own I Don't Want to Sleep Alone as well as Weerasethakul's Syndromes and a Century.

[39] Pantenburg, "1970 and Beyond," 84. See also Balsom, "Screening Rooms," for a perceptive account of the different spectatorial modes evinced by the cinema and the gallery.

[40] Ibid., 231.

experience, just long enough to 'get an idea of it.'"[41] Dudley Andrew, for his part, has noted that "those who come upon [images in the gallery] no longer comprise an audience but are in every sense museum 'visitors,' often solitary ones," an experience that he deems analogous to the experience of private users watching "films on PCs in their own fashion [as] they watch them on one window among several that may be running simultaneously."[42]

My interest in rehearsing these arguments aims not at denigrating gallery viewing—which certainly offers its own set of pleasures—but at situating it within the dominant economy of viewing attitudes of our time as a means to appraise its compatibility with the larger aesthetic program of a cinema of slowness. As a relatively new space for moving-image consumption, and in its fostering of a solitary spectator always "on the move" as he or she experiences fragments of temporalities, images and sounds, the art gallery replicates the contemporary viewing regime evinced by new technologies, which Jonathan Crary has described as follows:

> Most important now is not the capture of attentiveness by a delimited object—a movie, television program, or piece of music . . . but rather the remaking of attention into repetitive operations and responses that always overlaps with acts of looking or listening. . . . Any act of viewing is layered with options of simultaneous and interruptive actions, choices, and feedback. The idea of long blocks of time spent exclusively as a spectator is outmoded. This time is far too valuable not to be leveraged with plural sources of solicitation and choices.[43]

The outmoded "idea of long blocks of time spent exclusively as a spectator" is, of course, the ontological kernel of slow cinema and what makes it stand out in the context of new modes of looking and listening that Crary describes. And indeed, if we are to understand the emergence of a cinema of slowness in our time as a "desire . . . to formulate a different relationship to time and space," as Song Hwee Lim rightly puts it, then we must conclude that this formulation finds many obstacles for its full realization in the museum, the temporal structures of which often coincide with those of the world at large.[44] In the gallery, temporally distended images eminently lose their grip on the spectator, who, as Andrew notes,

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[41] Marks, "Immersed in the Single Channel," 21.

[42] Dudley Andrew, What Cinema Is! (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 86–87.

[43] Jonathan Crary, 24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep (London: Verso, 2014), 52, my emphasis.

[44] Lim, Tsai Ming-liang, 5.

is in fact not even a spectator anymore; they also compete with the simultaneous and overlapping temporalities of other artworks and those of the visitors themselves, who are connected on their own networked devices. If slow cinema's aesthetic defiance lies in the fact that it requires sustained perceptual attentiveness through the experience of durational rhythms, then I would argue that the only place in which such temporalities are brought to full fruition is the film theater.

Collective Experience. In the last part of this article, I would like to argue that, in its activation and imposition of a time that cannot be suspended, fragmented, or interrupted, the cinema theater remains the most important site from which and in which to evaluate slow cinema's critical value and validity, as well as its aesthetic and political effects. More specifically, I suggest that the slow style, with its deflated pauses and rhythms, diverts attention away from the screen and onto the space of the film theater itself, thus illuminating the viewing situation as a collective situation from the historically privileged prism of today's spectator. Seen in this light, slow cinema might be fruitfully understood as a reflection not only on the activity of watching but also on the particular affects and political effects at stake in communal watching, asking us to reassess the implications of collective spectatorship as the latter becomes displaced by individualized and fragmented viewing modes.

Significantly, in one of his now famous Sight & Sound editorials on slow cinema, Nick James remarked on the ways in which this cinema is, in his view, antithetical to the notion of collective experience. James advanced this idea with reference to the Chilean film The Sky, the Earth and the Rain (José Luis Torres Leiva, 2008). For him, the audience "can attach only arbitrary emotions [to its images]. Such a film cheats the audience of a collective experience, for if our feelings are as unanchored as this film makes them, then we're sharing nothing."[45] At stake here is the idea that narrative opaqueness prevents spectators from evaluating and comparing their cognitive and emotional attachment in relation to clearly delimited parameters. By amplifying ambiguity of expression through temporal indeterminacy, slow cinema poses a "critical dilemma," as one ponders whether one should "demand some return for the seeming pointlessness of watching [characters trudging] motivelessly from one place to the next."[46]

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[45] Nick James, "New Crowned Despair," Sight & Sound 18, no. 3 (2008): 5.

[46] Ibid., 5.

James is interested in the knowledge effects of cinema and frustrated about the lack of such effects (or returns) in slow cinema, whose openness of signification impedes, in his view, the collective sharing of ideas. From a phenomenological perspective, however, it can be argued that the slow film in fact greatly heightens a sense of the collective precisely because it quickly exhausts the image's representational dimension. To take James's own example, the discomfort or boredom provoked by extended shots of characters wandering pointlessly from one place to another, which stubbornly delay narrative gratification, may prompt the spectator to look around and see whether such feelings are being shared by other spectators or make one wonder what other viewers within the same site are making of such a film. In this context, the slowness with which actions and events unfold on-screen is translated into a renewed cognizance that one is powerless to manipulate the temporalities to which one is being subjected and is watching a film in the auditorium together with an audience of strangers (unless, of course, one decides to walk out).

We have seen that Goodbye, Dragon Inn, Fantasma, and Shirin, all films focused on the theatrical experience and that have been, in principle, designed to be watched in the film theater, invite us to study in meticulous detail the viewing process of the theatrical experience. By offering a mirror of cinema's most ritualistic mode of reception, they solicit and encourage a spectatorial attitude grounded in an intensified awareness of the dynamics between film and viewer(s) in the context of the film auditorium. My contention is that these three films merely articulate and reiterate through their content what slow cinema always forges through form, namely an enlarged perception of the screening site and of the sociality of spectatorship. But let me clarify this point by drawing on Raymond Bellour, who has argued that the theatrical experience retains its uniqueness when compared to all other configurations of film viewing insofar as it is

> the lived experience in real time of a cumulative process of remembering and forgetting, each of which nourishes the other, an experience according to which our attentiveness (more or less drifting or concentrated)—naturally varying according to the specific subject and the particular projection—becomes the testing ground for all the subtle shocks of which any film worthy of the name offers a more or less differentiated variety, according to its own style.[47]

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[47] Raymond Bellour, "The Cinema Spectator: A Special Memory," in Screen Dynamics: Mapping the Borders of Cinema, ed. Gertrud Koch, Volker Pantenburg, and Simon Rothöhler (Vienna: SYNEMA, 2012), 16, original emphasis.

It is this "relation between drifting attentiveness and concentrated or exacerbated attentiveness," Bellour concludes, that every other film-viewing situation will more or less depart from.[48]

Although Bellour's hypothesis is flexible enough to be applied to the fruition of all kinds of film styles, it is striking that the relation between these two poles of attentiveness is stretched to their very limits and on both sides in slow cinema, which, thanks to its contemplative properties, demands concentrated absorption at the same time that its delay in narrative gratification encourages a drifting spectatorial attitude. As Lim has argued, slow cinema's hallmark "strategies of camera stillness and narrative emptiness . . . allow ample time to instill a sense of slowness and to create moments of nothing happening, during which our minds can contemplate as well as drift."[49] In these drifting moments, the spectator may well find in the auditorium a newly found object of attention and in the collective character of the cinematic experience an object of reflection. Of course, even the most fast-paced and engrossing of films might produce the same effect, or conversely, one might become entranced by a film that unfolds at a snail's pace. My point is simply to note the way a slow mode of address will encourage more than others a self-reflexive spectating posture that activates a relationship with the film theater whereby its own sense of material being-thereness emerges, together with a heightened awareness of the communality of spectatorship.[50]

We have seen earlier that the collectivity of film spectatorship has been largely neglected in film studies, a situation that Hanich has attempted to redress by theorizing cinema viewing as an activity based on "joint action."[51] Hanich calls into question the notion that spectatorship can be deemed collective only when viewers are consciously aware of it as such, arguing that watching a film in the theater with others remains a collective activity even when viewers are not interacting or aware of each other. He writes:

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Lim, Tsai Ming-liang, 81.

[50] This, incidentally, could not be further removed from the theater space as appropriated by spectacular films, which, as epitomized by its 3-D incarnations, aim to immerse the viewer in the on-screen world rather than opening up a perceptual continuum between it and the film theater.

[51] Hanich, "Watching a Film with Others," 338.

There is no doubt that the quiet collectivity of the theatrical experience rarely becomes thematic in a fully-fledged sense: the audience predominantly experiences jointly without reflectively experiencing each other. I therefore need to emphasize that the viewer's conscious experience of others is predominantly a phenomenon at the margins of consciousness that can become explicit, but it certainly does not have to be reflected upon.[52]

Nevertheless, it is interesting to observe the ways in which different film styles may encourage different attitudes within the cinema theater. My contribution to this debate aims to consider the specific relationship between one film style and spectatorial activity so as to demonstrate that, owing to its specific aesthetic and temporal properties, a cinema of slowness solicits a spectatorial engagement based on a conscious awareness of the collective viewing situation.

One could say that slow cinema elicits by its own nature the aforementioned "perverse" spectator that Barthes describes, who is "ready to fetishize not the image but precisely what exceeds it: the texture of the sound, the hall, the darkness, the obscure mass of the other bodies, the rays of light."[53] Yet while Barthes championed a perverse mode of spectatorship at a time when the theatrical experience enjoyed widespread dominance, today's spectator is confronted with the historical situatedness of cinema viewing, its aggregation of individuals in the dark being hardly the predominant way of watching films. As the contemporary regime of image consumption renders this once exclusive screening experience partly outmoded, and as film viewing becomes an individualist endeavor mediated by the digital screens of portable devices, to look closely and consciously at the film theater and its "obscure mass of other bodies" is thus to allow time to reflect on the historical, social, and cultural significance of its collective configuration of experience in a period of dramatic technological change.[54]

Why and how does the collective and reflexive experience of time matter today? In his astounding book 24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep, Jonathan Crary replies to this question by highlighting its sheer paucity in a world where "the accelerated tempo of apparent changes deletes any sense of an extended time frame that is shared collectively."[55]

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[52] Ibid., 339.

[53] Barthes, "Leaving the Movie Theater," 349.

[54] Ibid., 346.

[55] Crary, 24/7, 41.

Thus, "billions of dollars are spent every year researching . . . how to eliminate the useless time of reflection and contemplation. This is the form of contemporary progress—the relentless capture and control of time and experience," one that entails "the incapacitation of daydream or of any mode of absent-minded introspection that would otherwise occur in intervals of slow and vacant time."[56] Significantly, Crary finds an antidote to this state of affairs expressed in a film like Chantal Akerman's aforementioned documentary From the East. As Akerman "conveys the time of waiting" through "extended tracking shots of people standing in line or waiting in railroad stations," one of her

> revelatory achievements is . . . to show the act of waiting as something essential to the experience of being together, to the tentative possibility of community. It is a time in which encounters can occur. Mixed in with the annoyances and frustrations is the humble and artless dignity of waiting, of being patient . . . as a tacit acceptance of time shared in common. The suspended, unproductive time of waiting . . . is inseparable from any form of cooperation and mutuality.[57]

The on-screen act of waiting (whether in isolation or collectively) is, of course, one of the dominant tropes of slow cinema, and one that is translated into a collective act of waiting on the part of spectators in the space of the cinema theater. From this perspective, the "tacit acceptance of time shared in common" that is the fundamental premise of the slow theatrical experience can be considered a "tentative possibility of community" in its own right. This is not to suggest that this experience is cooperative in that it may result in collective action, but that it is political insofar as its reflexive, social, and interhuman configuration restores a sense of time and experience in a world short of both. Seen in this light, slow cinema can also be taken to provide the conditions for an ethical spectatorship founded in a renewed awareness and appreciation of the principles of sociality and proximity on which the theatrical experience is based, and the "responsibility for other people that proximity entails."[58]

It is often noted that a slow aesthetic inculcates sustained ways of looking at images that might rejuvenate perception and refresh new ways of looking at the world. As I hope to have demonstrated, this is also a self-reflexive look that turns back on itself and illuminates the space of the intersubjective film theater, enabling the emergence of a spectator who reflects on the historicity of cinema viewing and on time and its passing. As such, slow

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[56] Ibid., 40, 88.

[57] Ibid., 124.

[58] Ibid.

cinema engenders a collective experience in the sense that Hansen, drawing on Benjamin, conceives of this term, experience as "that which mediates individual perception with social meaning, conscious with unconscious processes, loss of self with self-reflexivity."[59] And as Hansen notes, for Benjamin, "the reification of time not only [erodes] the capability and communicability of experience—experience as memory, as awareness of temporality and mortality—but the very possibility of remembering, that is imagining, a different world."[60] In this context, if cinema emerges as the "production of a generalized experience of time," to cite Doane once again, then slow cinema brings about a renewed awareness of temporality and the opportunity to imagine different worlds by soliciting a mode of spectatorship that reflects on its own phenomenology as a collective act of physical coexistence and lived experience in time.[61]

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[59] Hansen, Babel & Babylon, 12.

[60] Miriam Hansen, "Cinema and Experience: 'The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology,'" New German Critique, no. 40 (1987): 179–224, 189.

[61] Doane, Emergence of Cinematic Time, 163.