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# ALAPSZAKOS SZAKDOLGOZAT

*Long Takes and Continuity in the Narrative of Filmic Language*

*Hosszúvágások és kontinuitás a film nyelvezetének narratívájában*

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## Abstract

In a fast-paced world, filmmaking techniques produce a myriad of devices to experiment with the medium and usher a new wave of storytelling. This thesis addresses the importance of the long take as an aesthetic tool in the filmic narrative and its contribution the viewers' metacognition. The aim of this thesis was to identify the various aspects of the long take that make it independently expressive. It also examines its contribution to the success of various films and the introduction of significant theories such as Tarkovsky's Time-Pressure, André Bazin's theory of reality and Jean Mitry's theory of the film image. Moreover, this work highlights the ways the long take creates a homogenous reality on screen through its fixed relationship with time and space. Finally, it will reflect upon the viewers' neuropsychology and how the long take changes them from objective observers to absorbed participants in the narrative.

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**Introduction**

This thesis investigates the technical and theoretical aspects of the long take historically and contemporarily. It explores the development of the medium since the early beginnings of the cinema and the way it has evolved from a technical limitation to an artistic choice. More specifically, it examines the ontology of the film image and its relation to the spatiotemporal aspect of the filmic narrative. Space and time are among the chief organizing principles of all art forms; in the cinema, they contribute significantly to the development of its narrative. Consequently, these principles have contributed to the evolution of an arsenal of cinematic techniques in order to deliver the film's narrative. Based on this, I will explore how some film theorists, cine-semioticians, cinematographers and filmmakers around the world differed in their approach to the long take as an artistic medium of reality. Relatively, I will examine how time and space are delivered formally and philosophically through the long take, while contrasting this idea with that of editing with its spatiotemporal manipulation on the viewers' brain activity.

This thesis is divided into two sections. Chapter one covers the historical background of the long take, it traces back the world's first film screenings by Lumière Brothers and how they started unintentionally the notion of the long take. Moreover, this chapter will also provide the various specifics of the moving image, including the average shot length (ASL) to compare the different editing techniques, the mise-en-scène and deep focus to explore the long take's potential in delivering a fixed relationship with the dramatic space through a direct reproduction of reality's continuum. Finally, this chapter will also underline the formalist approach to cinema, the *montage* theory developed by Sergei Eisenstein that formed a contrastive definition to the film's narrative.

In chapter two, I will explore the *poésie* and the aesthetic features behind the long take through examining its relationship with reality that produces the image's totality. In other words,

I will investigate the long take's liberation from the pre-existing conventions of storytelling. This chapter also analyzes André Bazin's realistic approach to the film image based on his ontology in *What is Cinema?* Furthermore, Bazin's realistic approach to film image will be contrasted to that of Christian Metz's linguistic approach of the language of cinema. In other words, how both theoreticians treated the ontology of the film image and the way it affected our understanding of today's cinema. Moreover, in this section, I will provide a coherent analysis of Jean Mitry's new ideology of reality in the film image and explore how it differs to that of the Bazinian theory and Metz's theory of his filmic syntax. In addition, this chapter will outline the *raison d'être* of the long take through a visual and psychological examination of Andrei Tarkovsky *Stalker* (1979), Béla Tarr's *Sátántangó* (1994) and Alfonso Cuarón's *Roma* (2018). Subsequently, this chapter will deal with the documentary genre and compare its exploitation of the long take with the fiction's use of this medium. Finally, chapter two will also provide a neuropsychological analysis of the medium and how it affects human's brain activity. A systematic study of *Neurocinematics* will underline a detailed explanation of the notion of boredom and its relation to the slow cinema genre in the light of the long take.

## 1. The long take: definition and functions

A large number of existing studies in the broader literature of filmic theory and practice attempt to draw various conclusions from what defines a long take. Most of these conclusions predicate temporal length as a measurement to define it. It is usually defined as a "sequence shot of excessive duration"[1], "a shot that lasts much longer than the standard editing pace of the movie itself or movies at large"[2], or "a shot that continues for an unusually lengthy time before the transition to the next shot"[3]. Yet, for contextual reasons of this thesis, a working definition must be taken into consideration.

It is evident that these definitions are technically valid. However, since its engagement in the aesthetic sensation of the film image, defining the long take will undeniably go beyond its temporal duration. The cinema, throughout the course of its history, gave rise to worldwide filmmakers and cinematographers who produced an arsenal of cinematic devices and techniques to communicate this aesthetic sensation. In other words, defining the long take should not merely describe its technical bravura; it is supposed to engage both its aesthetic and practical prowess that give it a working definition.

Ultimately, and taking into consideration its classic and contemporary development, the long take is a sequence shot presented directly and uninterruptedly, whose duration is longer than the average shot length, yet limited to the narration needs. That is to say, the long take's duration is not randomized, it must follow the narrative rules including the mise-en-scène, the

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[1] Bruce Isaacs, "Reality Effects: The Ideology of the Long Take in the Cinema of Alfonso Cuarón", p.474.
[2] Jason Hellerman "How the Long Take Uses Creative Camera Work to Control the Audience", *No Film School* (2019). https://nofilmschool.com/the-long-take-and-how-to-use-it
[3] David Bordwell & Kristin Thompson, *Film Art An Introduction* (1997). http://hcc.humanities.uci.edu/archive/Student/WritersHandbook/Bordwell-Thompson-film-terms.pdf

cinematography, the composition, the character configuration, the depth of field and the spatiotemporal arrangement that define its length.

## 1.1. Average Shot Length (ASL)

To increase the reliability of measures in studying filmic data, *Cinemetrics* was introduced as a website that reveals the film's visual characteristics. One of the main visual specifics employed to study filmic data is ASL, which is used as the shot's average duration "to describe how quickly a film is edited with a low ASL representing a fast editing style and a high ASL indicating a slow cutting rate"[4]. That is to say, the lower the ASL the higher the speed of a film; the higher the ASL the lower the speed of a film. For instance, Hollywood film productions have shown a decline in ASL from 12'' (per shot) in the 1950s to 4'' in the 2000s[5]; the latter is part of a trend called *intensified continuity* coined by Bordwell, he goes on to explain that

> the crucial technical devices are not brand new - many go back to the silent cinema – but recently they've become very salient, and they've been blended into a fairly distinct style. Far from rejecting traditional continuity in the name of fragmentation and incoherence, the new style amounts to an intensification of established techniques. Intensified continuity is traditional continuity amped up, raised to a higher pitch of emphasis. It is the dominant style of American mass-audience films today.[6]

Continuity has proved to be an integral part of visual storytelling; it has developed to be a medium that carries its narrative through accelerated editing. This suggests the rise of the action, comedy, thriller, and adventure genre in American productions. Furthermore, the use of low ASL that generates rapid editing has dominated worldwide cinema even before 1950s, including:

Sergei Eisenstein's *Strike* (1925) ASL = 3''

James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) ASL = 8.6''

Yasujirō Ozu *An Inn in Tokyo* (1935) ASL = 4.5''

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[4] Cinemetrics.lv. "Film and Statistics: Give and Take". The University of Chicago.
[5] In this thesis, (') will be used for minutes and ('') for seconds.
[6] "Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in Contemporary American Film" by David Bordwell (2002).

However, in some parts of Europe, this trend was not widely adopted; the use of high ASL was still maintained:

Michelangelo Antonioni's *La Signora Senza Camelie* (1953) ASL = 55.6''

Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959) ASL = 10''

Béla Tarr's *Sátántangó* (1994) ASL = 2'33''

Apparently, ASL is employed "to compare films from their editing style"[7]. Since a film's editing style can denote much of the filmmakers' filmic practice, it can be inferred that the tradition of long take was and still adopted in Europe, as well as in Russia (Andrei Tarkovsky), and contemporarily revived in south American (Alfonso Cuarón).

## 1.2. The long take and the mise-en-scène

Just like theatre, the mise-en-scène plays a crucial part in developing the visual storytelling of a given film. Mise-en-scène comes from the French term "placing on stage"; relatively, in the world of the moving image, stage is adopted to be the field of view, that is, what appears in the frame of the camera. This term is usually linked to the arrangement of the various elements that the camera encompasses: characters' kinesis, objects' positioning, costumes, lighting, sets and props. Furthermore, the term also refers to the way these elements are arranged within the field of view or the dramatic space. However, it is noteworthy that this arrangement is not arbitrary; every placement connotes multiple interpretations with regard to the filmic narrative. Because of its broadness, the mise-en-scène is often called film criticism's "grand undefined term".

Since the mise-en-scène is dependent on the dramatic space for its arrangement, the long take is undeniably regarded as its *priori*, it is "the ground or field in which the mise-en-scène can

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[7] Harry Tuttle "Unspoken Cinema: Average Shot Length". http://unspokencinema.blogspot.com/2007/01/average-shot-length.html

occur, it is the time necessary for mise-en-scène space".[8] Unlike editing, the uninterrupted presentation of a given space allows for the continuum of reality to take place, thus the creation of the wholeness of the dramatic space.

Eventually the mise-en-scène affords the art of imagery whose interpretation is derived through well-crafted camera movement, often used as a long take. It is true that the edited image can afford its own art, but "it is generally thought that the true cultivation and expression of image as such – as opposed to the relation between images, which is the central expressive category of montage – requires the duration of the long take"[9]. In other words, the take's fixed relationship with time and space enhances the mise-en-scène's expressive independency; considering that the viewer has ample time to observe the given space, to contemplate the given arrangement, and to deduct the given interpretation from the film's narrative.

**1.3. The long take and deep focus**

Given its wide use in photography, its active effects in the cinema, and its creation of an aesthetic of perception, the depth of field or *profounder du champ*[10] has been widely recognized as a technique favoured by a myriad of cinematographers and filmmakers for its efficient use in storytelling. In photography and in cinema, it is defined "as the portion of scene that appears acceptably sharp in the image"[11]. However, it should be emphasized that there are two kinds of depth of field, shallow and deep focus. The shallow one takes one part of the frame in focus while the rest is out of focus, whereas the deep one takes the entire frame in focus (in sharp). Since deep focus is a function of the long take, this section will merely explore it in terms of the sequence shot.

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[8] Brian Henderson, "The Long Take".
[9] "The Long Take" by Brian Henderson. The long take is believed to be the integral reality of the mise-en-scène.
[10] French term for depth of field.
[11] "The Photographer's Guide to Depth of Field: A Light Stalking Guide" by Nicolas Raymond.

In deep focus, the foreground, the middle ground and the background are all in sharp in the field of view; thus, it provides full access to the image's details to the viewers. However, this homogeneity is only attainted through a direct reproduction of reality without the interference of editing. For example, in Alfonso Cuarón's *Roma* (2018), every scene employed deep focus considering that the director's aim was to provide all details of his memory. The aesthetic of the image is produced because both the foreground and background information are deeply interconnected. In Cleo's cinema date scene, the frame is static in deep focus with wide angle, displaying in the foreground the couple, in the middle ground other couple kissing and in the background the audience looking into the big screen with a movie being projected. In the background, the movie that was projected was Gérard Oury's *La Grand Vadrouille* (1966)*,* a French comedy set during World War II; the film explores the lives of French civilians struggling to cope with the Nazi oppressors. It can be inferred that the background of this film was intentionally used to reflect on the political situation of Roma in Mexico.

According to André Bazin, the use of deep focus results in "outstanding mastery" of a filmmaker's work, it is "an evidence of inventiveness of expression"[12]. Moreover, the use of long take with deep focus maintain an excellent level of spatiotemporal unity. Evidently, both techniques, with their free relationship with time and space, allow the viewer to observe and participate in the narrative while the event unfolds uninterruptedly. Moreover, both techniques absorb unintentionally the viewer's attention through the characters' positions. In other words, no matter where the characters move within the field of view, from background to foreground or vice versa, the viewer is able to engage, unconditionally, within the narrative closely or remotely; which results in the absoluteness of the film image.

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[12] Translated from André Bazin's acclaimed book, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* (1958), p. 69.

**1.4. Tracing back the long take: a technical limitation, not a choice**

From a historical standpoint, the 19$^{th}$ century marks the birth of the early projections of the moving image.  However, it was the invention of the *cinématographe* by Auguste and Louis Lumière that led to the breakthrough of the cinema as a mass medium.  Unlike Thomas Edison's *kinetoscope*, the *cinématographe* was a practical film projector that allowed Louis Lumière to hold one of his first commercial film screenings: *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon* (1895) and later, *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1895) directed by the two brothers.

These films, among other early projections, were yet to encounter the invention of editing. They were recorded as one long static shot, directly reproducing reality and movement. Technically, the camera "was set up on its tripod, while the dramatic scenes unfolded one after the other in a succession of single takes"[13]. Hence, the viewer's first amusement was observing life on screen; it was the movement that gave sense to the medium despite the absence of editing. In his essay of "Metaphysics of the Long Take", Mark Le Fanu explores the early capacities of this medium:

> Such visual complexity as there was, was provided by the camera's powerful depth of field, allowing different actions to take place in different sections or different planes of the frame simultaneously: - a variety that was to be at once abolished and reconstituted by the introduction of editing, which parcelled out the details into separate short cuts, simplifying the logic of the action at the same time as it clarified it, and brought it closer to the emotions of the audience.[14]

Nonetheless, it is not clear whether the invention of editing was introduced to facilitate "the logic of the action" or to complicate the action's narrative. It is true that D.W. Griffith's first editing inventions such as the "cut-in", the setting up of multiple cameras (which led to the evolution of the 180 degree rule), intercutting and crosscutting, led to the introduction of one of editing's major concepts, *Continuity Editing*, which is defined as the "cutting between shots with the purpose of

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[13] "Metaphysics of the 'long take': some post-Bazinian Reflections." (1997), by Le Fanu, Mark.
[14] Here Le Fanu explores the potential of the first unedited shots in film history. Both these shots and the long take serve the same purpose, their direct representation of reality manifests the aesthetic and technical prowess of the long take.

maintaining smooth sense of continuous space and time"[15]. Yet, Georges Méliès's accidental creation of the jump cut in 1896 made him notice a different potential behind editing. He experimented with the medium to revolutionize the cinema from a medium of reproduction to a medium of illusion. Méliès's 1902, *A Trip to the Moon,* was introduced as the *priori* of science fiction genre, thanks to its magical illusions that manipulate the viewers' conscious and subconscious responses to the screen. Therefore, if Griffith is deemed to be the "father of film", Méliès is regarded as the "father of special effects" in the history of cinema.

### 1.4.1. The theory of *montage*: a formalist cinema

Another film theorist who spotted another different potential in editing was the Soviet film director and film theorist, Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein. He performed a dialectic approach to film form, which resulted in the birth of montage. If Griffith's editing is logical, then Eisenstein's montage is intellectual. In other words, montage for Eisenstein followed the same Marxist dialectic approach, perceiving conflict as "the fundamental principle for the existence of every art-work and every art-form"[16]. However, how did Eisenstein created conflict in the film image?

According to his theory, conflict is at the core of cinema. Images are juxtaposed in a contradicted way leading to the formulation of a new meaning creating a synthesis. Since this synthesis is "arising from the opposition between thesis and antithesis"[17], then in film form, the first shot which forms the thesis, will collide with the second shot which forms the anti-thesis, leading to a new phenomenon forming the synthesis, creating a new meaning for the audience. Consequently, the new phenomenon will create a new thesis, followed by another counterpart

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[15] Filmmakeriq.com. "The history of Continuity Editing: D.W. Griffith and Continuity Editing" (2017), by John P. Hess.

[16] Translated book by Sergei Eisenstein *Film Form*, 1949, pp. 46. In this book, he explains his theory of montage in light of the dialectic approach. This book explores the main points of Eisenstein's film theory development and his analysis of the sound-film medium.

[17] In *Film Form*, particularly in his essay "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form", he explains how art is based on the philosophy of dynamics and dialectics. The synthesis arises from the conflict of two "contradictory opposites".

leading to another synthesis. Thus, these filmic dialectics, according to him, "build up in a film like a series of controlled explosions in an internal combustion engine"[18] driving the film forward.

Ultimately, due to its easy manipulation of time, space, and brain activity, this technique was and still used in a large-scale in most of the classic and modern movie productions. However, the question becomes how best to define cinema's *raison d'être*. Despite its effectiveness, Eisenstein's theory lacks an important feature of the cinema's early intentions, content independency. In other words, montage deprives the shot's expressiveness in itself. The sequence's meaning is only derived through the accelerated rhythm created by the juxtaposition of these images to arrive at a new meaning, just like Kuleshov's experiment with the medium.[19]

Conclusively, tracing back the advent the long take is undeniably identical to the advent of the first unedited films. If the long take is considered as a shot of considerable length, representing reality uninterruptedly; then one will find its historical traces in the first movies where editing was absent. Apparently, it was after the predominance of the formalist approach to the film image when the long take was revived as an artistic choice; a detailed analysis of its rebirth will be explored in the following chapter.

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[18] Eisenstein's essay "The cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram" in *Film Form*.
[19] The Kuleshov effect, one of film editing famous techniques in the film industry. It is based on the mental phenomenon that the audience derive more meaning from the interaction of two shots than from one single shot.

## 2.  The Poésie of the Long Take

Cinema is an ongoing systematic process that usually exists between two opposite ends of a spectrum, realism and formalism, and "the two tendencies are well balanced if the latter does not try to overwhelm the former but eventually follows it lead"[20]. The former is often liberated from the restricting manipulative regime of time and space given that time cannot be shortened or extended (e.g. flash back and flash forward) and space cannot be compacted or extended (e.g. ellipsis).  Conversely, the formalist tendency works through montage to reveal what is hidden in the diegesis of a film and to achieve harmony in spatial and temporal arrangements through visual manipulation. On the above grounds, it can be inferred that the long take is an adaptable medium for reality that is produced on screen considering its fixed relationship with time and space.

In practice, since the take's duration is longer than the average length of a shot, the long take gives the sequence an absolute sense of time and space through cinematic excess[21] that transgresses the norms of a classical narrative film. Whether it was a fixed or a moving-camera, it will allow more time for the viewer to consume all details to fully experience the aesthetic of the mise-en-scène. As a result, the viewer's position shifts from a mere observer to a participant, then from participant into *mesmérisé,* and finally, from *mesmérisé* into a meta-film viewer, who starts to think of how to think about films.

In theory, the viewer's metacognition is reinforced through the long take's ambiguous content that provides multi-layered sensibility to accumulate inside the film. The un-reality of montage reduces the ambiguity level of interpreting its content since it orders time and space, thus,

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[20] Siegfried Kracauer, in his *Theory of Film* 1960, pp. 38-39. He believes that the essence of cinema lies in finding the "right" balance between realism and formalism.
[21] Kristine Thompson argues that an awareness of excess carries significant importance for the spectator-critic.

it "rules out ambiguity of expression"[22]. Because montage is based on cutting and juxtaposing shots to create new meaning while unveiling other meanings, the viewer will be able to jump from one place to another in constantly drifting and shifting time periods. However, since the long take is actually ordered by time and space given that events appear unpredictably in reality, the ambiguity level increases for the viewer who will be able to interpret the content in multiple ways. The fixed relationship between the long take and space and time represents a serious commitment to realism in observing an event and/or following a character while activating both the conscious and subconscious responses to these filmic impressions. Therefore, the long take produces a beautiful poetry to the beholder in its coherent treatment of an ever re-producible reality on screen.

The *poésie* behind the long take is not a conclusive definition considering that the use of this form of expression varies from one artist to another. As discussed in chapter one, the long take appeared initially as a technical limitation due to the absence of the crafted art of montage or editing. However, since its beginning, the cinema industry has experienced ongoing drastic change in movie-making both technically and theoretically.

A considerable number of cinematographers uncovered the inherent aesthetic features of the long take in its creation of a sculpture of time and space in that it can be recreated and revisited. Furthermore, these artists discovered the organic unity of this tool through creating a visual rhythm simultaneous yet heterogeneous to the poetic or musical one because the "criterion of a good film rhythm should be a modulation whose uniform progression and uninterrupted continuity transcend the fragmentation discontinuity of the shots, while at the same time dependent on them" [23]. That

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[22] In his book (pp. 36)*, What is Cinema?* André Bazin condemns the "trickery" of montage and discloses the latter's effects on depriving the audience of visual vagueness and ambiguity of expression.
[23] This correspondence between filmic rhythm and musical rhythm is referred to in Jean Mitry's *Aesthetic and Psychology of Cinema* (1997, 107), in his discussion of *Cinematic Rhythm*.

is to say, cinematic rhythm combines two superimposed temporal and spatial rhythms that are diverse. The correlation proves that the long take holds a great potential in the future of film studies and film practice; its scope is large enough to absorb all the technical possibilities and the aesthetic connotations in one long take.

## 2.1. The Revival of the Long Take as an Artistic Choice

As indicated in chapter one, the birth of the long take is inevitably simultaneous to the birth of the cinema, not as an artistic choice, but as a technical limitation. Early filmmakers were unaware of the incalculable possibilities behind this technique. Nonetheless, since their development from a scientific experiment to tools of communication and entertainment, motion pictures adopted new waves of technological development that rendered this seventh art a global target for artistic expression.

Commonly, a considerable amount of literature has been published on the scope of the cinema and its aesthetics. Several theories have revealed that the cinema's chief purpose is to maintain a certain level of purity and truthfulness while others have argued that it can go beyond this integrity to achieve a more complex level of aesthetic sensation.

Complex cinema is simply the cinema of magic and visual trickery with physical and psychological manipulation; in short, the cinema of editing and montage. Under other conditions, the cinema has also shown different potential in achieving an absolute level of aesthetic sensation with maintaining purity through restoring the long take as a technical tool and artistic choice. Ergo, pure cinema is simply the cinema of the realist eye, the cinema of the objective approach and pure

registration of the real world. In his essay "Neorealism and Pure Cinema"[24], André Bazin explores the term through De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* [25] (1948) with investigating the film's objective treatment of an absolute reality.

According to Bazin, the aesthetic sensation is found in the employment of non-professional actors, the use of real life streets and settings, and the authenticity of the dialogue. He goes on to explain that the action in the film "follows from the pre-existence of the narrative, it is the 'integral' of reality"[26]. Additionally, the use of the long take and deep focus in some of the scenes provides a detailed insight into Rome and the various public living spaces and institutions of a post-war Italy (e.g. the flea market, the police, the church). That is to say, with the long take, the viewer participates in the story so that he/she can have an insight into a larger scope of the political and social situation of Italy while focusing on the protagonist and his son simultaneously.

Not only does the long take allow the viewer to participate in the story, but also through its pure presentation of reality and fixed relationship with time and space, it opens for the meta-film thinker a gate for understanding one's own existence and connect it with that of the protagonist's. It is apparent that *Bicycle Thieves* is regarded as one of the early films in its frequent use of long takes to nurture realism on-screen especially that this medium of expression brings to life casual events and mundane moments in the film.

The revival of the long take as an artistic choice resulted in the emergence of a multitude of films and theorists for its efficient use in the cinema industry. Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948),

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[24] André Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* Vol 2: *Ontologie et langage*. In this essay, he investigates the "pure cinema" in the Italian neorealism through De Sica's film, *Bicycle Thieves*. Bazin believes that this film is a "perfect aesthetic illusion of reality".

[25] *Bicycle Thieves*, directed by Vittorio De Sica, is a 1948 post-World War II Italian neorealist drama film that follows the story of a poor Italian father, Ricci, searching for his stolen bicycle with his son, Bruno, hopelessly in the streets of a sad and broken society.

[26] Bazin, "Neorealism and Pure Cinema: *Ladri di Biciclette*".

Béla Tarr's *Sátántangó (1994),* Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas* (1990), Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* (2003), Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Birdman* (2014) and many other classic and contemporary movies recognized the potential behind this medium to convey different meanings and provide multiple interpretations for the viewers. On a theoretical level, the long take attracted the pen of a variety of theorists who pondered the aesthetics behind it, namely, Jean Mitry, Siegfried Kracauer and André Bazin. The following section will highlight the main theories of André Bazin and his realist approaches towards this medium.

## 2.2. André Bazin's Realist Approach

What is cinema? A frequently asked question that troubled, for a long period of time, a myriad of film critics, theorists, technicians, cinematographers, artists, cinema goers, and even average viewers. A question that is controversial, yet clear and complex in the same time. In his book, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* Bazin tries to explore the true value of the cinematographic image, the *raison d'être* of the cinema, through investigating the historical, the humanitarian, the social, the psychological, the literary and the philosophical world and interlacing it to the realm of the moving image.

Understanding cinema, according to Bazin, is simply understanding the nature of things, and understanding the nature of things is simply understanding reality. The cinema presented itself originally as a registration of the real world, assuming that, "if the origin of an art reveal something of its nature"[27], then, the nature of the cinema is, and inevitably, realism. Therefore, *Qu'est-ce que*

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[27] Translated from André Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* (1958), "les origines d'un art laissent apercevoir quelque chose de son essence". This book defines the ontology of the photographic image, the myth of total cinema, the evolution of its language and other topics that are still used in the study of filmic language. Bazin explores and identify the cinema as going back to nature. This section will use some of the original French terminology. English quotations and terms are derived from the translated text by Hugh Gray.

*le cinéma?* is regarded as a valuable guide to understanding the "objective laws" of the cinematic image, particularly the aesthetic unity of the long take in consonance with Bazin's realist approach.

A common strategy employed to study the long take is the depth of field or *la profondeur du champ* with its perfect composition and structure. As stated in chapter one, *la profondeur du champ* is equally important in providing multidimensional interpretations to the spectator through the long take. This is stated in Bazin's essay "The evolution of the Language of Cinema" where he believes that through the depth of field, the long take

> implies, consequently, both a more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator and a more positive contribution on his part to the action in progress. While analytical montage, only calls for him to follow his guide, to let his attention along smoothly with that of the director who will choose what should see, here he is called upon to exercise at least a minimum personal choice. It is from his attention and his will that the meaning of the image in part derives. [28]

Bazin goes on to illustrate his argument with examples from Orson Welles's masterpiece, *Citizen Kane*, which revolutionized the language of the moving image. Through his heavy use of the long take, Welles does not deceive the audience by playing with time and space, he provides a sort of freedom of choice, the ability to choose how to understand things. With his accurate design of the image, the perfect control of the frame while condensing time and space, the viewers are welcomed to explore, actively, the dramatic field on their own. They enjoy the free access of all information projected into the atmosphere on screen; even "if the camera cannot see everything at once, it makes sure not to lose any part of what it chooses to see"[29].

For example, one of the film's outstanding long takes is when Charlie plays in snow outside Mrs Kane's boarding house. The sequence begins with Charles playing outside, the event is clear,

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[28] From his essay "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" in Bazin's *What is Cinema?* Bazin singles out montage as a "bête noire" since it imposes the interpretation of an event on the viewer. While free cinema, or the cinema of realism, allows the spectator to swim in the ocean of philosophy and metacognition.

[29] When the camera registers, it registers the maximum of what it can take into the field of view. However, what makes realist cinema distinct is its pure registration of every detail.

a fixed frame with a kid playing and a snowman. However, the event is disturbed when Mrs Kane enters the frame looking for her son. The viewer realizes that the actual dramatic space is inside the cabin not outside. When the camera starts to zoom out gradually, the viewer follows the movement of Mrs Kane who now leads the sequence while becoming the foreground. Kane's father and Mr. Thatcher follow Mrs Kane to the foreground. The last fixed frame ends with the father occupying the first 1/3 of the three vertical compositional sections, Mrs Kane occupying the last 1/3 of the three vertical sections, and Mr Thatcher in the middle, whose head is positioned right on one of the intersections of the rule of thirds'[30] compositional gridlines (i.e., top right intersection, see fig. 1). As for Charles, he is positioned on the first vertical gridline to highlight him as the focus of the frame, in order to enhance the aesthetic of the image for the viewer who is guided, seamlessly, to the middle by this compositional principle. Furthermore, this sequence affords a perfect example of the workings of the so-called Fibonacci Sequence,[31] enabling the viewer to consume the flow of each detail of this composition without distortion or confusion.

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[30] The rule of thirds is a concept and technique used in the composition of photography, painting, films…etc. The rule asserts that a frame should be divided into nine equal parts by two equally spaced horizontal lines and two equally spaced vertical lines. The frame's important elements should occupy and be places along these lines or their intersections. In the mentioned sequence of Citizen Kane, it is perfectly employed to give emphasis to each character and element in the screen, whether it was in the background or in the foreground.

[31] Or the Fibonacci spiral/principal/sequence, commonly denoted $F_n$, in which each number is the sum of the two preceding numbers, beginning with 0 and 1. In cinema and in visual culture, it is used under the term the Fibonacci Spiral, for frame composition. It makes the frame more visually appealing and makes the viewer smoothly engaged in following all the details of a series of compositions. In this sequence, the spiral naturally leads from the main character to the secondary character by the eye involuntarily following this line.
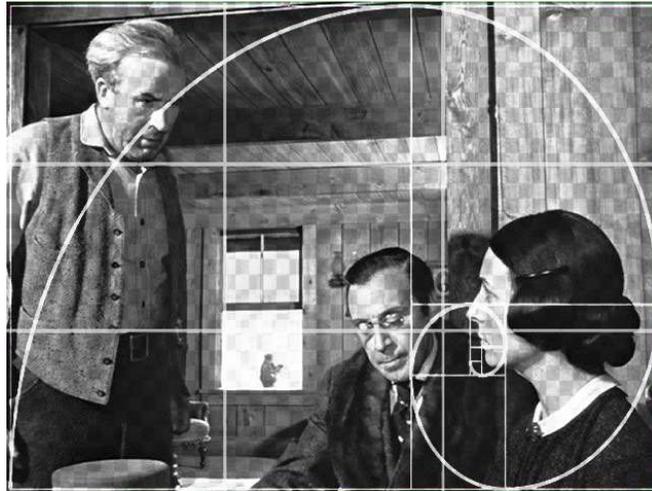
Fig. 1. Flashback sequence from Welles's film *Citizen Kane* (00:20:16)

Consequently, and thanks to this freedom of choice, the viewer is able to resonate with the character through associating the varied elements on screen and drawing numerous conclusions out of the narrative.

For Bazin, the cinema *par excellence* is not the cinema that alludes to meanings. It is the cinema that produces the likeness of the real through a continuum of time and space. This continuum of reality gives a subjective participation to the viewer through an objective registration of the real. Bazin discusses the idea of montage considering that it decreases the viewer's participation to what the director wants the viewer to see. On the grounds, the montage is *un transformateur esthétique* because "the meaning is not in the image, it is in the shadow of the image projected by montage onto the field of consciousness of the spectator"[32]. Therefore, the continuum of reality has finally enabled the director to be equal to an author in his work.

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[32] Bazin argues that the content of the image is not self-explanatory. First, by using montage and juxtaposing shots, the director impose certain interpretation of an event on the viewer. Second, not only the director limits the viewer's freedom of interpretation, but also, by ordering time and space, the viewer is unable to have ample time to participate, engage actively, feel the continuum of time and space and consume all the given details to have a new reading.

However, contrary to Bazin's approach is Robert Bresson's[33] notes on cinema in his 1975 book *Notes sur le cinématographe* [34] where he believes that images are un-cinematic if they carry meanings independently, especially that "an image must be transformed by contact with other images, as is a colour by contact with other colours. A blue is not the same blue beside a green, a yellow, a red. No art without transformation"[35]. Bresson believes that the true value of cinematographic image is exerting its power over other images to derive meanings. That is to say, images only have power through relations and positions. If Bresson believes in the interconnectedness of images, Bazin attributes power to the viewer who can control his participation on the screen.

Based on this, it can be inferred that the quality of cinema is perceived differently by a myriad of theorists and filmmakers, which explains its varied contexts and definitions. *What is Cinema?* does not provide a firm definition to the cinema, it only explains its true value based on its origins, its natural origins. Generally, Bazin's realist approach identify itself with the art of the long take provided that the latter is, after all, an artistic choice.

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[33] A French film director and cineaste, famous for his ascetic approach. He believes in the use of minimalist films. For him actors are merely human models, and that cinema should be separate from theater, novel and painting.
[34] *Notes on the Cinematograph* (*Notes sur le cinématographe*) is a 1975 book by the French filmmaker Robert Bresson. This book compiles his reflections as short aphorisms on cinema. For Bresson, cinematography is the highest form of cinema, and that cinema without it is meaningless.
[35] *Notes on Cinematography*.

**2.3. The Semiotics of the Long Take in the Narrative of Filmic Language**

To date, there has been little agreement on the definition of the cinema and its value, which leads to a re-examination of its language in the realm of semiotics and structuralism. Central to the study of film theory is the study of films as a system of signs, and numerous film theoreticians and linguists strive to explore it in the shadow of syntagmatic and paradigmatic structures. However, what is erroneous about these studies is that many of them try to use semiotics as a study that systemizes the filmic image as a whole made up of linguistic units.

According to the cine-semiotic theoretician Christian Metz[36], these linguistic units are referred to as syntagms that exits in the "present" as visual units organized in chains (e.g. shots); whereas the associative implication that exists in the "absent" is refereed to as the paradigm; in other words, "the plane of the paradigm is that of selection whilst the plane of the syntagm is that of combination"[37]. Contrary to this is Jean Mitry's non-linguistic approach to cinema which validates its autonomy as a distinct language, believing that, "film images have no phonetic equivalent"[38] because the nature of cinema is showing, not telling. In his book, *The Aesthetics and Psychology in the Cinema*, Mitry asserts that cinema

> is a language in which an equivalence of data of the perceptible world is no longer acquired through (more or less) abstract shapes but through the reproduction *of concrete reality*. Thus reality is no longer 'represented' – signified by a symbolic or graphic substitute. It is presented. And this is what is used to signify. Ensnared in a new dialectic for which it becomes the form, reality becomes employed as an element in its own narration.[39]

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[36] A French film theorist, pioneer of film semiotics, inspired by Ferdinand de Saussure's theories of semiology to film.
[37] "Semiotics for Beginners" by Daniel Chandler. Paradigm and syntagm are terms introduced by the Russian-American linguist and literary theorist, Roman Jakobson.
[38] Mitry, *Aethetics and Psychology in the Cinema,* he believes that film images have their own independent language far from the literature-like ones, in that film images's uniqueness lies in their reproduction of a concrete reality.
[39] Mitry, *Aethetics and Psychology in the Cinema.*

Broadly speaking, the traditional interpretation is that the syntagmatic analysis in filmic language involves the study of a shot and its relationship with the preceding and following shots. However, syntagmatic relationships prove to exist within one autonomous take where the actual cinematic units are all combined to build-up the narrative within the long take. That is to say, there is no need to break up a sequence into shots to analyse its *syntagma*. The long take carries, in its continuum of reality, cinematic units such as camera movement, lighting, frame composition, *profondeur du champ*, dialogue and character position that all exit, not necessarily successively just like sentences or paragraphs, but concurrently on screen, to increase paradigmatically, the effects produced by the connotative code[40].

A considerable amount of literature has agreed on editing as the main source of meaning production, endorsing the fact that syntagmatic analysis is only confirmed in light of structuralist reasoning that tackles the filmic language as syntax. According to Metz, the language of the cinema is parallel to the textual and spoken language (with its linguistic units). He goes on to explain that "a syntagm is a set of elements which are co-manifest in the same fragments of texts, which are already next to one another before any analysis"[41]. Thus, it can be shown that the syntagmatic analysis can also be carried for the long take, not linguistically but aesthetically. Considering that the long take encompasses within its autonomous shot elements that co-exists audio-visually, charged with multi-layered interpretations, in that the image, in contrast to the word, is not a fixed

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[40] Referring to Ronald Barthes's 1970 structural analysis S/Z of "Sarrasine", Honoré de Balzac's short story, where Barthes denotes in his analysis of the story the five signifying codes that he uses to examine different dimensions of realism: Hermeneutic, Proairetic, Semantic ( or connotative), Symbolic, and Cultural.

[41] Christian Metz *Language and Cinema*. Metz analyses the cinematic language as a system of codes that manifests itself in the syntagm just like linguistic units manifest themselves in the syntagm of syntax.

sign but it is a "potential for signifying", it "invests with new meaning the context in which it appears" [42].

It is noteworthy that the distinction between long takes and shots is equally important to the distinction between homogeneity and heterogeneity; that is, "long takes tend to build homogeneity with an absolute value and a minimum rhythm (there is just one signifier unit)"[43]. On the other hand, "medium shots, close-up, etc. are types of shots with discontinuity within their syntagmatic chaining because the shots are limited by the cut and it generates discontinuity and heterogeneity"[44]. Therefore, it can be inferred that filmic language does exists, not in view of syntax, but in view of cinema's own ability to reproduce the real, to generate its own connotation with its own visual and auditory codes; whether these codes were absent or present. Eventually, it is the autonomy of the cinema's language, the language of lighting, images, camera movement, textual and sub-textual dialogue, composition, and sound (far from grammar-like system) what assures its self-declaration of its own language.

### 2.3.1. The Mitry Approach

Around 100.000 years ago, Homo sapiens are speculated to have developed the early means of communication through cave drawings. This proves humans' complex capacities in devising countless options to communicate. Whether the means were linguistic or visual, verbal or non-verbal, humans managed to establish an advanced and complex ground for language through various means, including technology.

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[42] Mitry, *Aethetics and Psychology in the Cinema*
[43] In his article "Semiotics and rhythm of film: Hollywoodian cinema compared to Cinema Novo", Levi Merenciano analyses the homogeneity of a shot in terms of its rhythm and continuity. In films with less editing, there is a "minimum plastic rhythm" and in film with more cuts, there is a "predominant plastic accelerated rhythm".
[44] Merenciano goes on to explain that even these discontinuous cuts have a flow in their narrative. He gives examples with action movie that have an accelerated rhythm.

It is said that language is used to convey thoughts and ideas, to facilitate speech and interaction, to transfer the abstract to the concrete (e.g. literature); yet language still finds natural ways to experiment with the medium of the moving-image. In his approach to the cinematic medium, Jean Mitry explores a different reading to the film image[45]. He believes, as opposed to Christian Metz, that the language of film is so unique that "it cannot be the equivalent of a word or a phrase; rather it is the equivalent of a whole series of phrases"[46]. For example, what differentiate a writer from a director is the focus on the significant. That is to say, when reading a novel, the readers are limited to what the writer wants them to focus on. This does not refute the imagination's scope that the readers have while reading, but it refers to the scope of the significance/attention the writer gives to his/her subject matter. In other words, if a writer is interested in a specific object or a character, he may dedicate pages describing that single object/character.

For a director, on the other hand, one take can focus on every detail while giving each object, dramatic space, utterance and movement its own significance in one sequence while simultaneously drawing new conclusions through associating each element's own significance with the other. Consequently, the viewer is able to freely accumulate and enjoy the totality of the take with its abundant provision of details, unity, time and space.

However, for Mitry, there is no pure reproduction of the dramatic space on screen. According to him, what the viewer see on screen is not an exact copy of the real but it is a an *image of space*. Despite his claim that the film image is similar to the one of reality, he insists that they

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[45] Not necessary a static image or a single shot, film image can also refer to a continuous sequence.
[46] Jean Mitry, *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*,.

are not identical because what the viewer see is merely an impression of the real. He goes on to explain that the film image

> effectively presents itself as an image. It exists objectively as such. Stuck to a cellulose base, projected onto a screen, it is detached (as an image) from the material objects of which it is the image and has no further association with them.[47]

Nevertheless, his approach towards the film image does not imply that the image is merely a photograph presented in a "flat surface", or that it lacks life. According to him, the film image is distinguishable from that of a painting or a photograph because it represents photographs "whose succession represents movement"[48].

Movement in the cinema creates the feeling of depth in space; thus, the film image is represented to one's eyes as a "spatial image", just like when one perceives real space in real life. As opposed to photographs and paintings, the film image do not appear by itself because "its quality are those of the sequence to which it belongs"[49]; whereas photographs and paintings only project objects whose quality is based on their perspective. Though this theory may refer to fragmented shots within one sequence, the interpretation can also apply itself to the art of the long take where one sequence can carry multiple images whose unity is created through movement (e.g. tracking shot).

In his essay, "The Principles of 'Nonmontage' and Global Reality"[50], Mitry asserts that film images create an "arbitrary reality altogether different from true reality". He concludes that the frame limits the represented space in the film image; the reality of the space is not absolute because the image do not cover the whole space, just part of it. As a result, within the frame, what

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[47] Mitry, chapter II, "The Film Image: The Image Itself". Here he explains the different dimensions of the film image.
[48] Images are displayed in a frame per second; the frame rate (the frequency rate) is 24 images per second.
[49] Photographs and paintings make objects appear individually; their significance is perceived in isolation. In the film image, whether they were isolated shots in one sequence, or long takes who make up the sequence itself, the significance is always perceived based on the association of the images or the elements within the take.
[50] Mitry, *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*, pp. 168-183.

is real is what is perceived in the limits of the frame since the image records a fragment of space. In other words, the image's revelation is "not for reality-in-it-self but a new appearance correlative to the direct reality of the world and its objects and the perception of the camera"[51]. Therefore, the latter introduces a new reading to film realism. Here, the image reveal a reality, not necessarily an objective and direct one, but a reality whose intention is to create a different world; a reality that is "captured by the lens and is structured according to various formalizing values creating a series of new relationships, and thus a new reality, or at the very least, a new appearance". This comes from Mitry's believe that the audience's attention is frequently focused on the *newness of the appearance*.

Equally important is the viewer's psychology towards the film image. Just as movement within the frame is important, the psychological mobility of the viewer is equally significant. The latter is always dependent on the former, if the image lacks homogenous continuity within its narrative, the viewer's "power of anticipation" will decrease. According to Mitry, what makes films distinct as a form is its actualization of the event, the duration

> is "in the process of happening"...we are able at least to step back a little and become detached from events while we observe and judge them. Though we are subject to them, it is insofar as we live them and not in any way insofar as their life is imposed on us. We think and act with the characters while reflecting on their actions, and we are able to do this because we are experiencing them and assessing their plausibility.[52]

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[51] What the viewer sees in the real life is not 100% identical to the one presented in the image. What is presented is an impression of the real, or a new reality whose newness is based on creating a spatial image where objects and their significance have a new interpretation.

[52] Here, Mitry explains the level of the viewer's participation. It is active since it lets the viewer to judge and engage within while the happening of the action. He explains this by saying that in real life, the viewer cannot detach himself or herself from what he sees, in the cinema, however, the viewer is able to detach himself or herself to freely observe the event. Mitry differentiate between living in the happening and being imposed by the happening. Detaching one's self from the events provide a special power of judgment and assessment. A free power to actively engage on the screen and draw multilayered interpretation.

When the camera actualizes the events, it enables the viewers to follow the event and act with it while it unfolds. The viewer becomes more involved in "the here and now" as opposed to an accelerated scene in montage. He goes on to suggest that editing allows seizing the movement in that it changes instantly the position of the viewer ( their psychological mobility moves faster than the object in motion); since editing can provide angles from different dimensions: top, down, left and right in successive shots and accelerated pace. However, even if editing allows seizing the movement it does not give free duration to feel it as in a long take for example. Not only the latter allows seizing it but also it provides a space of complete sensation.

## 2.4. The Narrative Benefits of The Long Take Between the Past and Present

It is certainly true that telling a story with one uninterrupted take is of a great challenge, technically and aesthetically. This is in contrast to editing, which was and still the main source of meaning production and story development for a variety of filmmakers. Exploiting editing techniques is undoublty effortless as opposed to creating uninterrupted sequence shots. Not only does it provide an easy access to different angles of the given object/subject matter, but also it has a great potential in creating temporal and physical illusions that manipulate the viewer's conscious and subconscious responses to the screen. However, despite its feasibility, editing lacks content independency. That is to say, one shot's meaning is only derived through its proximity with the previous/following shot in a larger scheme. It is true that this shot may contain within it, before subsuming it to the other ones, a sign or a metaphor; yet, the latter's significance is only complete through joining it with that of the previous/following shot.

Under other conditions, the long take have proved to possess a well-defined internal rhythm that grants its narrative a distinct way of storytelling, considering that filmic rhythm is at the core

of the "poetic film" as Tarkovsky believes[53]. Hence, despite its technical difficulty, its intricate management of physical space to achieve unity, its intellectual direction of the characters' kinesis to absorb the viewer into the film's diegesis, and its plot structure and temporal arrangement to coalesce, homogenously, its narrative; the long take manifests more than its technical bravura. Its narrative benefits is what attracted the scripts and lenses of a mass of filmmakers between the past and the present.

Since its revival as an artistic choice, this technique has been exploited as a technical risk that ended up as a reward for a great number of directors. Whether it was Andrei Tarkovsky, Alfonso Cuarón, or Bela Tarr, all of these filmmakers, despite the generation gap that exists between their productions, have proved to use the long take for the same end, for its narrative benefits. Therefore, the long take is not merely a way to display a director's technical prowess, artistic audacity or transgression of norms[54]; it is also an intricate medium of narration, technically innovating by creating tension, capturing realism, sparking energy and enhancing one's own filmic theme[55]. Eventually, the long take do not confine itself to achieving a complex technical level, but

[53] The reference is extracted from the offscreen electronic journal that explores "A Deleuzian Analysis of Tarkovsky's Theory of Time-Pressure" (2003) by David Goerge Menard.
Andrei Tarkovsky, a Russian filmmaker, writer and film theorist. An influential figure in the history of the Russian and world cinema. His film themes range between philosophical, spiritual, and metaphorical ideologies. He is famous for his slow pacing style, excessive use of long takes, dream like imagery and preoccupation with nature. His book *Sculpting in Time* refers to Tarkovsky's own name for his of filmmaking. In his book, he refutes the Eisenstein theory of montage of attraction and contradict it with his own theory, 'time-pressure'. The latter will be discussed in details in the following section.
[54] This refers to cinematic realism. Transgression of norms simply means the non-extensive-use of montage or editing and its substitution with an extensive use of long takes or slow cinema genre. This typically occurred in French New Wave and Italian Neo realism era.
[55] Online blog, POND5 BLOG, by Alexander Huls, "5 Masterful Examples of How a Long Take Can Elevate Your Film". In his analysis of *Goodfellas*, he explores how the long take became part of the theme of the story though his example of the "Copacabana Shot" in the film. He goes on to exemplify how the long take is technically innovative through *Children of Men* that enabled Cuarón and his team to realize his ambition to achieve a complex level of shooting the four-minute car chase. As for creating tension, he exemplifies this with *Touch of* Evil with the three-minute opening crane shot in the film. Unlike "editing that obscures an audience's sense of time, here, the real-time aspect of the long take makes you stressfully aware of the seconds ticking". Considering the long take's capturing of realism, Huls refers to Park Chan-wook's *Oldboy*, through his example of the fight scene through the long take that shows touches of realism, where the "continuous shot realistically highlights how exhausting and brutal a fight like this would be".

its revival as an artistic choice is a stimulation to realizing an intellectual level of authorship on screen.

In brief, this technique is born out of the narration needs for most of the filmmakers who exploited it, as opposed to editing that was born out of the needs to create special effects for Georges Méliès (*A Trip to the Moon*, 1902), establish continuity for D.W. Griffith (*Intolerance*, 1916), or produce conflict for Sergei Eisenstein (*Battleship Potemkin*, 1925). The following section will examine and explore how each of the directors of *Stalker* (1979), *Roma* (2018), and *Sátántangó* (1994) exploited the long take to satisfy their narrative needs, their innermost desires to convey their filmic theme and to introduce a new way of meaning production.

### 2.4.1. Andrei Tarkovsky's Time Pressure (*Stalker,* 1979)

In charting the path of Russian cinema and its history, most particularly the Soviet film industry, one will find a list of names who paved the way for cinema's formalist language and theories. Most of the prominent figures of this era adopted the notion of montage as cinema's formative truth; however, one man diverted his vision towards another truth that re-conditioned the film's pre-organized principles, and that truth is, simply, time.

Duration, as Andrei Tarkovsky asserts, is the quintessential trait of cinema. His approach refutes that of Eisenstein in his introduction of montage of attraction, considering that "rhythm is determined not by the length of the edited pieces, but by the pressure of the time that runs through them".[56] Tarkovsky's "time-pressure" theory validates the *raison d'être* of the long take because "time-pressure" is defined by the atmosphere created within the sequence. When atmosphere reaches its final point, then there can be a cut; however, the take should take enough time so that

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[56] *Sculpting in Time*, by Andrei Tarkovsky. He believes that "the consistency of the time that runs through the shot, its intensity or 'sloppiness', could be called time-pressure" (117).

its meaning/meanings be formed without the interruption of editing that interferes with the image's infinite scope of emotions.

For Tarkovsky, images and sound make a character's inner states concrete, not necessarily through relying on "superficial symbols", but through absorbing the fleeting nature of time that demonstrates what resonates with the character. For example, in the dream sequence in *Stalker*[57], the protagonist's dream is reflected in a two minutes long take underwater. As it begins, a voice-over of a woman recites a passage from the Bible, the screen changes to the colour of rust and the camera starts to run subtly through nature's elements combined with rusty objects underwater. One of the discernible rusty objects is a syringe, an old picture of a saint, coins and a machine gun, which may imply man's addictions, religion's false directions, passion for money, war and violence. This dream reflection draws the viewer's attention to the subconscious of the man who is lying down on the wet grass as if he is listening to earth while dreaming. In other words, the uninterrupted atmosphere reflects the protagonist's state of mind. Thus, in this sequence, Tarkovsky employs the camera as a physical medium that translates the character's stream of consciousness through the heavy passage of time, considering that time

> becomes tangible when you sense something significant, truthful, going on beyond the events on the screen; when you realize, quite consciously, that what you see in the frame is not limited to its visual depiction, but is a pointer to something stretching out beyond the frame and to infinity.[58]

Tarkovsky's cinema is instinctive rather than logical; it is instinctive because it produces instantaneous emotional responses to the viewer. Stalker's dilemma is faith, faith in the beyond; this is outlined in the last four minutes sequence where the child, Monkey, reads a book while the camera gradually zooms out enlarging the field of view and stopping at the horizon of the table.

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[57] Stalker is a 1979 sci-fi about a protected wasteland (The Zone), where a stalker guides a writer and a scientist into the heart of this place in search of a room that realizes one's own innermost desires.
[58] Tarkovsky implies that the image connotes more than what it presents within its frame.

The last fixed frame displays the table with three glasses in the middle ground while the child sits in the background. The child starts watching the first glass moves towards the foreground, then the second one moves and finally the third one. As each of the three glasses move, the child's eyes follow them; hence, the viewer starts to develop a belief that the child possess telekinesis skills. However, when the third glass reaches the edge and falls on the ground, the sound of train rattling increases. Therefore, the final assumption do not prove whether it was the train or the girl that caused the movement. The film ends with an open ending that supports its large theme, believing in the purpose of things. It can be inferred that the director supplied his film with this technique to fulfill the needs of his narration. His narrative is charged with contemplative moments, dreams, physical space, silence and stream of consciousness, all of which presented seamlessly and organically through several long takes.

### 2.4.2. Alfonso Cuarón's Long Takes (*Roma*, 2018)

When cinema lost its sense in the 1960s and 1970s in Mexico, Nuevo Cine Mexicano[59] emerged as a wave that could revive Mexican cinema and upgrade its productions to higher-quality films in the early 1990s. Thanks to Mexico's *Three Amigos*,[60] Alfonso Cuarón, Alejandro González Iñárritu and Guillermo del Toro, Mexican cinema was successfully reshaped, transformed and recognized nationally and internationally. Moreover, the Mexican film industry started to bloom with worldwide nominations and awards with its high-quality output, namely,

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[59] or the New Mexican Cinema. It is a film movement that ushered in the early 1990s. The rebirth resulted in high international praise that was lost since the golden age of Mexican cinema of the 1930s and 1960s. Themes of this movement include family, tradition, socio-political conflicts, gender and identity.

[60] The Three Amigos refer to Mexico prominent figures who paved the way for Mexican cinema's success and development. Alfonso Cuarón, Alejandro González Iñárritu and Guillermo del Toro all of which won countless international awards for their films such as *Y Tu Mamá También* (2001), *Amores Perros* (2000), and Pan's Labyrinth (2006).

with *Roma* which received countless awards including the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film, Best Cinematography, Best Picture and Best Director.

Alfonso Cuarón is considered as one of the contemporary filmmakers who did not renounce the tradition of the long take in his films. Whether it was *Children of Men* (2006), *Gravity* (2013), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004) or *Great Expectations* (1998), the art of the long take has become the director's trademark in his filmography; in *Roma* for instance, it is exploited in almost every scene. Technically, the film used black and white to enhance the depth of field effect that accentuates the details of the composition. Aesthetically, black and white is also employed to consider the director's childhood and past memories. This emphasizes the cinematic stream of consciousness of the director with his recollections of his past memories including his family, his house and his neighbour in the riotous Mexico City. In light of this, the director's use of the wide angle with the long take was a perfect combination that created images with excellent detail, tonality and clarity with entire hues of grey, black and white. Ergo, the latter will inevitably lead the viewer to observe the dramatic space and reorient him/her to the director's position and sometimes to that of the characters. Ultimately, the viewer's engagement within the narrative is crucial to its development.

In Cuarón's filmic language, the camera becomes the character itself. This is apparent in the four-minute courtyard opening sequence. The viewer is first introduced to a static shot with an unclear event. The shot displays fragments of dry floor tiles; thus, the dramatic space is also enigmatic. What the viewer see is only a fragment of the actual physical space. However, thanks to the extra-diegetic sound, the sound of someone's movement, water coming from tab, birds and splashing, the event gradually clarify itself; particularly when water enters the frame. It is apparent that there is an initiator of this movement as it repeats itself. As time runs throughout the take, the

viewer hears from the background the sound of a plane; as the sound increases, the plane becomes discernible in the reflection created by water with the black and white contrast. These factors validate Tarkovsky's theory of *Sculpting in Time*; Cuarón sculpted visually an atmosphere that made time seem touchable. Therefore, this sequence may refer to a variety of interpretations such as time passage, despair, washing of sins, grief or relief through water. As for the plane, one connotation can be that of relocation or homesickness. According to the director, the whole idea

> was the film begins by looking at the floor that is the earth, in which water begins to flow, cleaning but getting murkier and murkier, with all this foam (which is an obvious reference to the waves later on).[61]

This suggests that the long take enabled Cuarón to sculpt his memory in *Roma*; additionally, it also enabled the audience to share a personal experience with the director's past through the protagonist's life, Cleo.

### 2.4.3. Béla Tarr's Filmic Practice (*Sátántangó,* 1994)

In the film's celebration of its 25th anniversary, Béla Tarr describes, in an interview, the rationale behind using the long take in his films:

> early on, I noticed that when the camera is rolling and the whole scene is moving, everyone starts to breathe in the same rhythm: the actors, the crew members, the cinematographer, everyone. You are all 'in'. And that is very important. It creates a special tension. It gives a special vibration. Somehow you can feel it on the screen too. You become a part of it.[62]

Conventionally, *Sátántangó* is a work that is preceded by reputation. This seven-and-a-half hour artwork is deemed as one of the director's most polemical works. Most viewers who do not make it until the end of the film do not share the same aesthetic of time with Tarr. According to him, time is crucial in up-taking the diegesis of the film. His filmic practice is self-conscious, that is to

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[61] Bill Desowitz. He discusses the factors that contribute to the success of Roma as Cuarón's masterpiece.
[62] *Little White Lies* magazine interview (2019).

say, the viewer has a responsibility to reformulate assumptions about a distinct type of Tarr's narrative, which made him as one of the prominent figures of European pictorialism[63].

Slowness in *Sátántangó* has a unique language. It demands from viewer, through the long take, to endure the film as the characters endure their sufferings. Furthermore, the slow-paced narrative proposes a different impression of reality. It provokes feelings of immobility and hopelessness into the viewer's consciousness; the same feelings that overshadow the lives of the village people who are in constant wait for nothing or search for something to happen. In his essay "Observations on the Long Take", Pier Paolo Pasolini conceive life in terms of long takes, "a chaos of possibilities, a search for relations among discontinuous meanings. Death performs a lightning quick montage on our lives"[64]. Thus, the adoption of slow-paced cinema in *Sátántangó* may lead the audience to experience disagreeable moments of meaninglessness, which by its turn, a feeling, that is inevitable for humans to experience in their life.

The film's melancholic opening sequence lasts about ten-minute uninterruptedly. The *poésie* behind it is to intensify the tension, even if nothing happens, there is the tension of time to feel; it is the empty passage of time, the void and the rising expectation what nurture the narrative. In this sequence, the viewer follows the slow movement of the cattle as they exit a warehouse. The first few minutes show a static frame of the cattle in the background, as they wander around, the viewer's horizon of expectation builds up gradually, waiting for an event to happen. This time pressure sequence intensifies the narrative's atmosphere; finally, the latter reaches its zenith when a lone bull moves to the foreground of the frame, leading the rest of the herd towards his position,

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[63] An aesthetic movement during the later 19th and early 20th centuries. Refers to creating an image rather than simply recording it. First employed in photography and later adopted in cinematography.

[64] For Pasolini, death mirrors montage, because it "chooses our truly significant moments…and places them in sequence, converting our present…into a…linguistically describable past".

which ultimately, results in the movement of the camera simultaneous to that of the herd. Thanks to this change of events, the viewer starts to explore the physical space.

It is apparent that Tarr feeds his narrative with what is casual than what is causal, and this is a common feature of the long take, considering that his "orchestration of appearances relies on the physicality of moving, restless bodies, on vividly photographed landscapes, and on faces, which create an aura of personal, atmospheric, and changing expressions"[65].

It can be inferred that Tarr supplies his narrative with this technique to establish the inner and outer states of mind of the characters, even that of the dramatic space and of animals. Every element in the frame has a *raison d'être,* a reality that exists in the viewer's mind and that project itself into the narrative; enabling the viewer to take a proportion of what the image speaks of, of what the character feels and of what time retains.

## 2.5. The long take and the documentary

It has been conclusively shown that the scope of the long take is large enough to encompass more than the fiction genre of the moving image. Just like fiction, the documentary has proved to justify the *raison d'être* of the long take since its first debut as a cinematic genre. Generally, documentaries were first called "actuality films" and Lumière Brothers happen to be the first advocates of this genre. This is evidenced in their first film screenings: *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon* and *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1895). Similar to the long take, the documentary receives various definitions, it is considered as "the creative treatment of actuality"[66], "the communication, not of imagined things, but of real things only"[67], or a genre that "give a

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[65] Jarmo Valkola, *Metaphysical Essentialism – The Pictorial Harmony of Béla Tarr's Films.*
[66] John Grierson "The First Principles of Documentary" in Forsyth Hardy (1966), p. 147.
[67] William Stott, *William. Documentary Expression and Thirties America*, pp. 9-11.

sense of what we understand reality itself to have been, of what it is now, or of what it may become"[68].

This genre carries a significant emotional impact on the audience considering its proximity with the latter. It seeks empathy through highlighting social, cultural, political and historical issues, with the "the ability of interpreting the past, analysing the present or anticipating the future"[69]. Since it deals with reality, the long take happens to be an operable facility employed to deliver the aesthetic of the film image. It is noteworthy that some documentaries resort to editing techniques used in fiction films to upgrade the narrative or the aesthetic of their films. However, despite its effectiveness, editing deprives the story from its "actuality" considering that it exerts maximal control on the viewers' mind. As mentioned earlier, maximal control can trivialize the story because the audience do not have ample space and time to reflect on the narrative and connect with the characters.

Furthermore, the use of excessive editing in this genre will lead the narrative towards the fictional scope of the cinema. For instance, it is impractical to use flash backs and flash forwards in a documentary. Instead, the long take enables the audience to reflect on the character's facial expressions while resonating with his/her past, presence or future assumptions.

The long take plays a crucial role in displaying the objective conditions of the subject matter, it can "reveal the relations between simultaneous actions and co-existing objects in one setting. These may be complex personal interactions between people and their surrounding social and economic environment"[70]. Because of its fixed relationship with time and space, the long take proves to be a serviceable medium in the hands of the documentary genre. The latter's continuum

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[68] Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (2001), p. 2.
[69] Abraham Umobuarie, "Documentary: A Creative Treatment of Actuality", p. 2.
[70] David MacDougal, "When Less Is Less: The Long Take in Documentary", p. 42.

of reality brings casual events on screen that enhances the viewers' proximity with the narrative. In this case, the viewers feel as they follow an event as it unfolds in the realities of the physical world, the adventitious spirit that editing cannot provide.

It is noteworthy that this genre is not an arbitrary one, a large amount of documentaries are planned with careful observation and research. Some directors would even spend a considerable time with the subject, live in their environment, interact with the people, and observe the daily life of his subject. In other words, the director wears the character of a viewer, who observes the events as they unfold and participate in the life of the people whom the film will treat.

## 2.6. Neurocinematics

Recent developments in neuropsychology have shown the need to address the issue of control in the field of cognitive film theory. To investigate more the phenomenon of control on human's brain activity, Neurocinematics was introduced as "the study of films through the use of functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) during film watching under experimental conditions".[71] However, due to the spatiotemporal complexity of the film image, fMRI's methods were unsuitable for assessing the input collected during film viewing. Therefore, a group of researchers, led by psychologist Uri Hasson, published their findings of neurocognitive cinema in the journal *Projections*, where they used fMRI to measure brain activity, and ISC (inter-subject correlation analysis) to "assess the similarities in the spatiotemporal responses across viewers' brains during movie watching"[72]. Eminently, their findings demonstrate that the level of control

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[71] Maria Poulaki, "Neurocinematics and the Discourse of Control: Towards a Critical Neurofilmology", p.1.
[72] "Neurocinematics: The Neuroscience of Film". A study lead by Uri Hasson to describe new methods to investigate the effects of films on viewer's brain activity. This study was conducted on multiple viewers "free viewing" films, to measure and assess their brain responses to different filmic sequences and filmmaking techniques.

over the viewer's eye movement and brain activity differed "as a function of movie content, editing, and directing style".[73]

The viewers' mental state is undeniably related to the brain one. Filmmakers, over the course of film history, have developed numerous devices and techniques that exert different control levels on the viewer's brain, emotions and perceptions. The aforementioned study categorizes two extremes of control; minimal control (with low ISC) exerted by "Bazinian" filmmakers, followers of European Art Cinema and Italian neo-Realism, and maximal control (with high ISC) exerted by Classical Hollywood style, whose directors follow the formalist "conventions of continuity". Where high ISC refers to similar brain activity across viewers, low ISC indicates variability in the brain activity across viewers; however, according to the study, low ISC does not necessarily imply that films that exert minimal control disengage the viewers.

Because of their complexity, minimal control films that "use uninterrupted long takes, deep focus, multi-space composition, or other realistic film conventions, introduce a democratic ambiguity to the image, and invite viewers to draw their own individual conclusions".[74] Hence, the response will inevitably differ with an art film that acquire high and intense intellectual effort from its viewers. Moreover, according to the journal, despite their effectiveness, films with high ISC or maximal control "might simplify and trivialize the art work; this can be seen in some popular films where the fear of losing the grip over the audience creates oversimplified or overstated films, which simply 'explain too much'".[75] It is noteworthy that ISC is an objective

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[73] It is these elements what measure the degree of control on the brain activity.

[74] From the same study by Uri Hasson and his researchers, the minimal control allows more liberty to engage one's own individual conclusions to the narrative. The minimalist control supports the argument of cinema's objectivity in its treatment of the content.

[75] Films with maximal control may provide unnecessary information and no space for the viewer to draw their own conclusions.

measurement far from aesthetic or ethical judgment as the journal emphasizes; ISC is a measurement, which gauge the different styles of filmmaking and its effects on humans' brain activity.

One question that needs to be asked, however, is why a high number of viewers appear to dislike the slow cinema genre that conveys its narrative with the use of long takes. One may criticize this genre for its idleness and banality, while others would praise it for its contemplative, realistic and hypnotic nature.  Fact remains that most viewers who resort to cinema is because of its entertainment and escapism from the emptiness of life, they seek cinema's productivity in storytelling. Yet, what is unaccustomed to viewers is the inherent productivity of boredom, as Lars Svendsen points out

> 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.[76]

Therefore, despite its monotony, boredom seems to be a productive tool for creativity, it enables humans to reflect on their own insignificance in a large scheme, just like Tarr's characters in *Sátántangó*.

Boredom is equally evidenced in psychological studies, namely the *Mind wandering* phenomenon. It is defined as "a shift of attention away from a primary task toward internal information".[77] In their research on mind wandering during film comprehension, Kopp, Mills and D'Mello suggest that having prior knowledge about the film's plot before watching it decreases

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[76] From a Philosophy of Boredom by Lars Svendsen. This book examines the nature of boredom, tis origins and history and how it is related to human beings.
[77] Jonathan Smallwood and Jonathan W. Schooler, "The Restless Mind", a study that investigate Mind wandering and its integration into the executive models of attention, p. 946.

the functionality of mind wandering.[78] That is to say, watching films without prior knowledge increases the viewer's engagement in the film as it makes them wander more unintentionally. Since it makes the viewer's engagement unintentional, it "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".[79] Therefore, the slow cinema genre is aesthetically and psychologically creative in its nature. With its transgression of conventional storytelling, character configuration, cause-effect relationships, it generates lack of familiarity, which shifts the viewer's mind towards the aesthetic of the film image, the mise-en-scène, the sound, the cinematography and camera movement, that is to say the long take, to decode the seemingly complex/slow/tedious narrative.

More importantly, using the long take for a documentary is more difficult than using it for a fiction film. In the latter, the mise-en-scène, the choreography, the characters' kinesis, the composition, lighting and camera movement are all prescheduled and worked out. Conversely, for documentaries that are based on the "actuality" and casualty of time and space, it is hazardous considering that the protagonist or the subject is an unexperienced, non-professional character who may never have been in contact with a camera before. Furthermore, the non-professionalism of the characters may lead to unexpected dramatic spaces where lighting may or may not be sufficient. In other words, long takes "characteristically contain ambiguities, interruptions, and competing centers of attention"[80]. Yet, it can be inferred that it is the casual exposure to events what increases the viewers' anticipation and absorbs the participation of their conscious and subconscious.

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[78] Kristopher Kopp, Caitlin Mills and Sindey D'Mello, "Mind wandering during film comprehension: The role of prior knowledge and situational interest" (2016), pp. 842.

[79] Jonathan Smallwood and Jonathan W. Schooler, "The Restless Mind" (2006), p. 951.

[80] David MacDougal, "When Less Is Less: The Long Take in Documentary". p. 302. Here he explores the casual events that this genre may evoke during the shooting. pp. 301–303.

**Conclusion**

It is evident that the cinema has been and will be an art in constant search for new ways to experiment with its narrative. The art of the long take, despite its rarity, has proved to carry the aesthetic sensation to a different level of expression. Whether a continuous shot feature film (e.g. Tarr's *Macbeth*), or part of a feature film, the long take is becoming an independent instrument where reality takes different forms. In as much as they can represent reality uninterruptedly, long takes can create new realities on screen. In other words, this facility enables the viewer to go under the skin of the characters, dive deep into their emotions that resonate with their surroundings to derive multiple interpretations. The unedited take, through a continuum of space and time, gives new readings to the spectators with respect to the narrative; however, sometimes it can also give new readings to the director in the post-production.

Equally important is the long take's contribution to the psychology of the viewers. Recent developments in the field have led to a renewed interest in the slow cinema genre. Neuropsychology has proved that humans, when watching an uninterrupted scene, develop their metacognition by adding their intellect to the narrative. The latter adds a significant aspect of the art of storytelling provided that the viewers' participation becomes a new way of addressing filmmaking techniques. Unlike editing that exerts maximal control on the viewers' mind, depriving their intellect from enjoying the ability to read the given images, the long take invites the spectator to the screen world where they can observe to become absorbed.

Finally, in a fast-paced world, the long take is an opportunity to take a break from the pre-existing regime of accelerated time and space. It liberates the screen from the spatiotemporal manipulation, and unreservedly introduce the world in a creative, artistic and realistic manner.

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