

# *LONG TAKES IN LATIN AMERICAN CINEMA*

An analysis of the films by Carlos Reygadas, Pablo Larraín  
and Lucrecia Martel

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## INTRODUCTION

In the 2015 film VICTORIA there is a scene where all the characters are in a car which drives at a high speed. They have just committed a crime and are attempting to flee the scene. The main character, Victoria, is behind the wheel. Suddenly, when she takes a left turn, the other passengers panic and start yelling. From where the camera is located in the backseat, the spectator is able to see through the window that the car drives a particular street twice. Ultimately, Victoria circles the block, finds the right direction and drives on. Slowly, the panic expressed by the passengers subsides. At the end of the scene, she parks the car at a safe distance from the crime scene and they exit the vehicle. While the screaming and panic is fitting for the moment, the actual explanation behind the overheated reactions from the occupants of the vehicle is not of narrative origin. According to the director, the actress portraying Victoria had simply forgotten the route she had to drive, risking exposing several crew members and actually ruining the entire film (Barnes, 2016).

With a running time of over two hours, VICTORIA by Sebastian Schipper consists of one continuous take.<sup>1</sup> Cinematographer Sturla Brandth Grøvlen manages to capture the action, without ever losing sight of Victoria or her companions. Through intimate, nearly claustrophobic, close-ups and the use of a handheld camera, the spectator becomes a character within the narrative, nearly experiencing the film from a first person's perspective. Combined with the continuous take, the result is almost a highly realistic filmic experience. While the narrative of VICTORIA is something that can be seen as a limitation of the film, it is the stunning visualization of the film that draws the spectator in. The lack of clear narrative is a result of the director choosing style over narrative substance. The film is an impressive experiment and its only unique selling point, as not many directors have achieved such a continuous long take

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<sup>1</sup> The story takes place during one single night in the city of Berlin. The film starts off with the main character, Victoria who, upon ending her night in a Berlin nightclub, meets a group of friends near the exit. The group, led by the charming Sonne, already appears to be inebriated. For unknown reasons, Victoria is drawn to the group, especially Sonne, and they eventually join together for drinks on a rooftop. The chance encounter leads to an epic continuation of the night, involving a bank robbery and ending with an impressive shootout with the Berlin police. The motivations of Victoria to join the group remain somewhat in the dark, which could be a creative decision made by the director in favor of his experimental long take film. Nevertheless, she sticks with the group, rendering her character perhaps the most naïve or the craziest of them all. Even after they have started their encounter off by stealing beer and getting into a small fight with some passersby, Victoria sticks with Sonne and his friends anyway, the viewer can perhaps only assume because she is very lonely and in desperate need for some exciting company.

film. Therefore, the holes in the narrative can be overlooked and it is the experiment of a long take that what remains.

Still, the only strong point of *VICTORIA* is that it is shot in one long continuous take. It is a stunning feat, one that many other directors have tried to attempt. The film remains an example of the possibilities that are currently available within filmmaking. And, in addition, while the film itself is not a great narrative achievement, what makes it memorable is the achievement it made in presenting realism. The realism is a direct result of the continuous take and the lack of edits. The film definitely set a precedent with regards to the possibilities of the continuous take.

Before continuing, I'll first set a definition of the concept of long takes, to be used throughout this thesis. The definition comes from the Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication, and is as follows: The long take is a continuous single shot in a film, the duration of which exceeds conventional expectations. These shots can be very complex (Chandler, 2016). Several long takes employed in films stand out, such as an early effort by Alfred Hitchcock, in his film *ROPE*. Because his attempt was defeated by running out of 35mm, the takes could not have a duration longer than 10 minutes. *ROPE* was eventually created with eleven takes, neatly edited together and hardly noticeable. Every time the film was starting to run out, Hitchcock would smartly let a character pass by the camera slowly, creating the ability for an invisible cut. More recent, Academy Award-winner *BIRDMAN*, from director Alejandro González Iñárritu. A film which has made use of impressive digital editing, concealing the actual cuts between scenes and constructing the idea that the audience is watching an actual long take film. The film is highly focused on its characters, as they are tasked with the unfolding and continuation of the narrative. The long take that shifts among characters gives [the audience] a wider range of information. Whenever one character leaves another, there's a forced choice: Which one does the narration follow? In the long take films, the options are narrower: the issue is which one the camera will follow (Bordwell, 2015). As a result, without the use of clear montage, Iñárritu is still able to manipulate his audience with long takes.

*VICTORIA* might be closely related to the 2002 film *RUSSIAN ARK*. Directed by Aleksandr Sokurov, the film is one long tracking shot through the Hermitage Museum. Closing in at a total length of 99 minutes, the film is seen as the first film which has been able to achieve one continuous single take. Often, when mentioning the subject of long takes, critics make mention of a standard list of films containing remarkable long takes. Films mentioned are the 2006 film *CHILDREN OF MEN*, *GRAVITY* (2013), *GOODFELLAS* (1990), *MAGNOLIA* (1999),

TOUCH OF EVIL (1958) and DePalma's BONFIRE OF THE VANITIES (1990). Of course, the abovementioned films are considered to be part of relatively popular cinema. The long take also occurs in more global cinema, with films such as Bela Tarr's WERCKMEISTER HARMONIES (2000), EL SECRETO DE SUS OJOS (2009), OLD BOY (2003) and Godard's WEEK END (1967).

### **Digital revolution of Cuarón**

Films from director Alfonso Cuarón are a good example for the argument of the resurrection of the long take, perhaps within Hollywood. Although these takes should be seen light of the more recent transition to digital cinema. What becomes clear is that directors such as Paul Thomas Anderson and Cuarón use the long take more as a filmic oddity than as a serious method to deliver realism. It is a fundamental departure from the more classical application of the long take. While Cuarón does use the effect of long take to create a more realistic look in his films, he still makes great use of editing. In GRAVITY (2013), the long takes were not actually lengthy runs of the camera. (...) Rather, they were created in the special-effects animation (Bordwell, 2013, 2). While the digital film development can be attributed to a sort of revolution in Hollywood, this new method of using long takes has perhaps pulled long takes into a new discourse and divides the purists of film between the necessity of certain technological advancements in film.

Some critics even noted that the long take has become his signature as each of Cuarón's films demonstrates a fixation on the capacity of the image to display greater and more complex indices of time and space, holding shots across what would be deemed uncomfortable durations in a more conventional mode of cinema (Isaacs, 2016, 457). The Mexican director is an interesting, more modern example of the reason behind the use of long takes. In earlier days of filmmaking, creating takes with a longer running time was more common and regular. There were fewer cameras available for shooting, the equipment was heavier to move around and the cutting of a scene into different shots was a less than regular engagement.

Cuarón has become an important player in the digitalization of Hollywood, an illustration of the change Hollywood has endured during the departure from the original studio system and has created a trend for other directors to include longer takes. But even before this development of digitalization, the director had the capability of combining characteristics of art cinema with the larger budgeted productions of Hollywood. This is exemplary in his 2006 film CHILDREN OF MEN. Set in the near future, the film explores a world that has been in total chaos since women have become infertile. One man is tasked with the protection and transportation of a woman who has miraculously become pregnant. It is a highly intense and

chaotic film, which also makes great use of handheld cameras and a darker color scheme. As well as in his debut film *Y TU MAMÁ TAMBIÉN* (2001), Cuarón employs the method of the long take, yet in a different manner and for different reasons in both pictures. As James N. Udden notes that there is an overall pattern for the long take in *CHILDREN OF MEN*: the more action and violence a particular scene possesses, the longer the shot duration generally becomes (Udden, 2009, 29).

An almost perfect example of the long take used by Cuarón is the car chase scene, where the entire unfolding action play within the confines of the car. The five characters are seated in the vehicle, with the camera being able to completely rotate 360 degrees and the scene has a running time of nearly four minutes. A highlight of this particular scene is definitely the fact that one of the characters is shot and killed during the action. While Cuarón in the rest of *CHILDREN OF MEN* utilizes more common methods of editing, such as shot and reverse-shots and establishing shots, he uses the long takes, as Udden noticed, during more heightened scenes. The reason behind it that it creates a more intense and chaotic experience, fitting with the chaotic and unnerving qualities of the narrative. The film proves that such a scene has become possible because of the digital development and the presence of new filmic technology. In *CHILDREN OF MEN*, the digital long take repackages the ontological basis and existential allure of the filmic long take (Isaacs, 2016, 478). Cuarón proves that the long takes in *CHILDREN OF MEN* add a deeper layer to his narrative. It creates a more intense narrative focus, and the long take device is structured to fit the challenging and deeply layered plot.

In *Y TU MAMÁ TAMBIÉN*, the long takes are inserted to bring the viewer closer to the characters and their subsequent world. Not that the long takes elicit or ask a larger commitment from the audience. Rather, the long takes are employed to establish contemplation and reflection. Apart from the abovementioned uses of the long takes, Cuarón also employs long takes to construct different narrative layers which are not inherent to the main plot. Not only depicts *CHILDREN OF MEN* the exhilarating journey of Theo, in the background is another, almost documentary style, narrative layer that depicts the horrors of a refugee crisis. And the boys in *Y TU MAMÁ TAMBIÉN* only have eyes for their female passenger, yet the camera explores the sights seen from the car. Through these long takes, Cuarón finds the ability for a different kind of deep focus. Not only are his long takes visually strong, which results in much action and room for discovery within the frame, they are adapted to fit the developed narrative. The result is a layered, more focused narrative that requires concentration and attention from the viewer.

Both the films of Cuarón and *VICTORIA* of Schipper are examples of the different effects of a more modern use of long takes. Through the realism of *VICTORIA*, the viewer is placed right within the action, which result in the viewer experiencing a nearly similar rush of adrenaline as the characters. “Utter realism in cinema is justified by the film’s unique ability to represent time itself”, as Bazin wrote (Bazin, 1967, 14). However, Cuarón’s long takes do not share those similar traits. The director has established the story and the plot. On top of that, he registers additional back story, such as the refugee crisis in *CHILDREN OF MEN* and the largely disregarded landscape in *Y TU MAMÁ TAMBIÉN*. The establishing of the back story is essentially produced by the cinematography

*VICTORIA*’s unique ability, that it is a continuous take, is its only interesting qualm. With new digital possibilities, *VICTORIA* could be seen as an example of what is possible within filmmaking at this moment. It is not heralded for its closeness to reality, but rather seen as an example for the viewer having a feeling of being one of the characters. This is a departure from other approaches to long takes, where the resulting effects are often contemplative in nature. Herein also lies the paradox of the film; it is innovative, yet, were it not for the technical expertise, the film would not be more than average.

With Cuarón, a trend has been set with the reemergence of the long takes within a Hollywood production.<sup>2</sup> The director has demonstrated what the influence of a long take can be on the narrative and has demonstrated effectively a resulting creation of deeper narrative layers. The additional narrative frameworks Cuarón establishes within his films are reminiscent of a European Cinema tradition. A similar approach can be found in the neorealist works of, for example, Antonioni. His films are often highly stylized works, with every frame having been impeccably developed and set up, however his narratives rarely play out close to the surface. Joseph Luzzi writes the director creates breathtaking images to which he then gives movement and life. But beneath the surface of Antonioni at his best – especially in the films

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<sup>2</sup> In Europe, contemporary directors of Cuarón have also rediscovered the long take. Aside from Schipper’s creative interpretation, Italian director Paolo Sorrentino frequently incorporates the long take. For example, in his political biography *IL DIVO* (2008). Already known for the impressive visuals in his films, Sorrentino uses the long take as a moment of contemplation and observance within the narrative, a point where dialogue is superfluous. His long takes are always in motion – the camera is moving across different rooms, meeting up and leaving several characters, witnessing diverse moments of inaudible dialogue. For example, there is a beautiful scene where much is happening within the frame; there is a party with a full African drum band, guests are dancing, there is a greeting line for the prime minister Andreotti and the camera smoothly moves through the space. It’s alive, loud, explanatory, but mostly an impressive visual feat.

about a rebuilt Italian society in the 1960s – a world of social and historical currents makes its presence felt (Luzzi, 2013, 107).

### **Latin Contemporary Cinema**

Further focus on the subject of the long take will be specifically in combination with the cinema of contemporary Latin American filmmakers. In contrast to the more modern development of the long take that can be witnessed in Hollywood, with directors such as Cuarón, Edgar Wright and Paul Thomas Anderson, there are three directors this thesis will focus on who have interpreted a more classic use of the long take in their contemporary films. All three directors have interpreted the long take in their own manner, incorporating it to fit their narrative, as well as their formal approaches.

The three directors from Latin America are Pablo Larraín, Lucrecia Martel and Carlos Reygadas. This research is therefore an attempt to answer the following question: What are the functions of the use of long takes in the cinema of contemporary leading Latin American directors? All three have their own individual style of filmmaking which do not necessarily focus solely on the use of the long take. From all three, it is especially Larraín and Martel who have incorporated the method as an important aspect of their storytelling. Through their distinct style, the influences of Antonioni and Tarkovsky, as well as the readings of Andre Bazin, are revived. A sense of European Art Cinema could be discovered in the contemporary works of the three directors, especially in the formalism. While there are clear similarities to be found in the style of filmmaking, it is important to establish the differences with regards to their countries of origin and respective political histories. These political backgrounds have shaped the directors and can hardly be ignored.

The following chapters will take a deeper look into the legacy of the once-called Second Cinema, that has perhaps been adapted by the Latin cineastes, also known as Third Cinema.

Firstly, it is important to create the distinction between several forms of cinema, based on social and political definitions and vital for the insight in the history of the Latin American Cinema. The terms used are coined in the 1960s and further defined by two Latin American filmmakers, Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas, who have incorporated the terms for use in their own manifesto regarding Latin American cinema. As written in their manifesto, the writers start off with First Cinema, which they have defined as, of course, being Hollywood. The manifesto makes it no secret that the influence and capitalist tendencies of America's Hollywood have wiped out the borders of international cinema with the rise of US imperialism and the film model that it imposed, namely Hollywood movies (Getino/Solanas, 1969).

A first alternative that reasonably pits itself against the influence of Hollywood is what Getino defines as Second Cinema. Second Cinema is mainly focused on auteur's cinema that has emerged from Europe. The alternative can pride itself in taking a step forward inasmuch as it demanded that the filmmaker be free to express themselves in non-standard language and inasmuch as it was an attempt at cultural decolonization (Getino/Solanas, 1969). Second Cinema could be regarded as the cinema of, for example, Jean-Luc Godard, Michelangelo Antonioni, Carl Dreyer and, perhaps even Andrej Tarkovsky. Second Cinema is usually considered as the setting for European art cinema. Second cinema has its emergence after World War II and its influence on future Latin American cinema is evident, as will be more clear further in this research.

Both Europe and several Latin American countries have strong political histories in regards to their resurgence of culture, and specifically their national film industry. Of course, the writers aim Third Cinema on the cinema of Latin America. Although the term Third Cinema has been linked to countries and their cinemas outside of Europe and is not exclusively meant for Latin America. A revolutionary opening towards a cinema outside and against the (Hollywood) system, to a cinema of liberation (Getino/Solanas, 1969). In political distress and war, culture is the first thing to disappear, as the history of Argentina, Chile and Mexico will show. This Third Cinema was usually nationally oriented, functioning as a showcase for the deplorable social-economic situation of the home country. These films could be interpreted as an expression of the culture from which they originated (Verstraten, 2012, 50)

Latin American Cinema has a rich history, which only in the recent decades has been able to rise again after multiple years of war and turmoil. Paul Schroeder Rodriguez divides the history of Latin American Cinema into different phases. Rodriguez refers to New Latin American Cinema (NLAC) from the beginning of the 1960s, its militant era, through the 1970s and 1980s, the neobaroque phase, until its renewal during the 2000s (Rodriguez, 2012, 90). After the 1980s, the era became known as the lost era. As opposed to the financial system of Hollywood, film productions of the NLAC were often funded through the government and cultural programs. As part of neoliberal measures from 1985, many Latin American governments systematically cut back on social and cultural programs, including direct investment and incentives for the film sector. Given the key role these state-funded enterprises had played in film production during the previous decades, it is not surprising that production practically collapsed as a result (Rodriguez, 2012, 88).

Similar to the way European countries had to reestablish their culture post Second World War, many Latin American countries were again starting from zero after 2000. Several

directors, from different countries, have participated in the renewal of Latin American Cinema. Rodriguez writes: a new generation of filmmakers has succeeded in reinserting Latin American Cinema onto the global cinematic marketplace, by appropriating some of the very conventions that the NLAC rejected out of principle (..) and aesthetically, it is a cinema that recycles earlier cinematic movements, such as auteur cinema and neorealism (Rodriguez, 2012, 108).

A central point within this thesis will be the growing connection Latin American Cinema has made with cinematic traditions of Second Cinema. Not only is the political history Postwar-Europe comparable to several countries in Latin America, the forms of film style are also similar. Perhaps that is what makes it so attractive to Larraín, Martel and Reygadas.

## A HISTORY OF LONG TAKES

The focus of this thesis will be specifically on narrative film, leaving out the methods of filmmaking of documentary, experimental film and art films. Narrative film has created a certain language in which the spectator has to be, or has to become fluent. It is a harder and tougher sell for filmmakers to change or adapt this language. It is widely acknowledged that film is an art form that is able to alter the spectators' perception of space and time. Through the use of montage, the filmmaker has the methods to break through space and alter time all the while remaining a real viewing time of perhaps two hours. In this specific time, it is possible to experience a whole lifetime on the screen, traveling to different spaces on top of that.

Across a wide range of different technical methods, such as, but definitely not limited to, the shot-reverse shot, close-ups, and even the long takes, meaning is able to be conveyed across the screen. Apart from these methods, there is also the possibility of what Bazin called the *plastics*. According to him, everything from set design, the performances to even composition can be defined as plastics (Bazin, 1967, 24). Basically, there is a distinction between montage, which is often related to time and *mise-en-scene* and the so-called plastics of Bazin, which is more closely related to space. It is safe to say that narrative film consists always of a combination of sorts of these methods.

In addition, it was Bazin who first wrote extensively on the subject of long takes and mentions the importance in relation to reality and time. Bazin had already passed away in 1958, subsequently missing a vast part of the development of cinema, threatening to diminish his work as basic and old-fashioned, as some critics have noted (Younger, 2003, 1). Yet, his writings and sights on film remain as important as they were at the beginning of the art.<sup>3</sup> One of Bazin's important thoughts was on realism in film. He identifies the distinction between two types of directors; one that puts his faith in images and one who puts his faith in reality (Bazin, 1967, 23). The difference of both efforts lies in the use montage. Both categories of director are involved with the depiction of reality. Faith in images is used by directors such as Eisenstein and Kuleshov, who manipulate their images and leave less freedom for interpretation for the spectator. These directors do not directly depict their events, but they allude to the events with the use of montage (Bazin, 1967, 25).

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<sup>3</sup> In the book *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and Its Afterlife* (2011), edited by Dudley Andrew, several authors have analyzed and reflected on his theories and their lasting relevance in more modern film studies.

This is most clear with the basic example of Kuleshov and his famous experiment; a single shot image of an actor with a similar expression on his face throughout. The image is intertwined with shot of subsequently a plate of food, a deceased child and a woman lying on a couch. Because of the shot, reversed-shot between the actor and the objects displayed, the spectator automatically connects both images and create from the face of the actor diverse emotions in relation to the objects. While this also creates in a sense an active spectator; after all, the director has to depend on the spectator to interpret the link between the two images, the freedom given to the spectator for interpretation remains limited. One can hardly read a different emotion than grief of the face of the actor when it is juxtaposed with the image of the deceased girl. As evidenced, according to Bazin, this method creates the least active spectator. The narrative is revealed by the director, who demands no input from his audience. This method not only limits the spectator in interpreting the scene, it also limits the range of time and space.

The long take on the other hand, has a secure relationship with reality, and therefore time and space. Because of the long take's close relation to time, the spectator has the possibility to revisit the space and experience the similar time depicted in the long take. When placed in relation to montage, this experience of time and space is limited. Through the edits used in montage, there is essentially a cut in time and space, however long or short. Therefore, it is not possible to experience these scenes within the similar and given time frame. Real time will consequently differ from the screen time. The spectator has long become used to edits having the predisposition of time moving forward, and perhaps even backwards. A single shot cannot easily convey meaning; it is the combination that creates its significance (Bazin, 1967, 25). One could make an important note that the ability to cut through space and time is indispensable within cinema. These abilities are what set film apart from photography and theater. Again, to take *VICTORIA* (2015) as an example, the director has less options to deviate and take breath to explain certain vague storylines, as he has no possibility for edits that will not leave the spectator reeling with interpretation. Yet this could be the ambiguity within scenes that Bazin was looking for.

Long takes have the tendency to create a distance and to create a feeling of ambiguity with the spectator, specifically if used in a single take narrative. In contrast to perhaps the more mainstream and traditional cinema, where the editing is utilized in close combination with the narrative and helping the spectator along in the story and thus ultimately revealing a well build-up uncover of the plot. Again, it remains important to understand which function of the long take is used. Cuarón enjoys long takes to establish a deeper, more realistic world and adapting

the form of long takes to the narrative he wishes to convey on the screen. As well as going below the surface of his narratives, that which is not immediately visible on the screen.

In his texts, Christian Metz often writes about the language of cinema. Specifically, he focuses on the importance of montage. It is true that montage is in a sense an analysis, a sort of articulation of the reality shown on the screen. Instead of showing us an entire landscape, a filmmaker will show us successively a number of partial views, which are broken down and ordered according to a very precise intention. It is well known that the nature of the cinema is to transform the world into discourse (Metz, 1974, 78), he states. Metz sees the use of montage as the language of cinema, creating a difference, but also a mutual understanding, between the spectator and the filmmakers. However, a film put together haphazardly would not be understood (Metz, 1974, 72). So, as well with language, montage in film needs a powerful basis to be able to convey both the connotation and the denotation of the images, a basis that is somewhat easily understandable for its spectators. Metz' meaning of denotation in regards to film can be translated to the literal sense of the film, as opposed to the connotation meaning of film – that what is the symbolical sense (Metz, 1974, 77). However subtle, the long take can be a useful endeavor, not revealing a clear denotation, yet inviting the audience to look better, and interpreting that what happens within the scene on a deeper level.

Bazin always thought that the use of long takes was a superior form than the use of montage, both because the long take has the ability to encase reality within film, but also because the long take invites the viewer to actively participate with the film (Bazin, 1967).

According to Bazin, Orson Welles is a key filmmaker in the history of long takes, predominantly thanks to the director's use of depth of field. Often used in combination with a wide angle lens, depth of field allows the filmmaker to exploit the space represented in the image, as everything that is present in the image is in focus. By doing so, the space on the screen becomes a more layered and structured world. As the image becomes a world with depth, it departs from a composed image and advances to a space that allows the spectator to discover and explore, in closer relation to time and space. The use of depth of field results in the freedom to create longer takes, as the camera moves through the space, diminishing the use for cuts, consequently adding to reality in a film. Welles continually uses his approach to depth of field to not only discover time and space. He employs his wide angle lens as well to repeatedly jump back and forth from background to foreground and to create forms of optical devices, or illusions.

For example, in his film *THE TRIAL* (1962), where the scene in the church is a good example of Welles playing with his depth of field. Welles is continually using a wide-angle lens to throw a gulf between foreground and background, making figures near the camera loom preternaturally large over those farther away (Comito, 1985, 144). Naturally, the use of depth of field is not the single method of creating longer takes. The long take also has the possibility to create a certain self-awareness of the spectator, in a sense that it grants a form of freedom. The spectator could possibly create a montage, without interference of actual edit and interpret the narrative through that own montage. An effect that Bazin saw as one of the strong elements of the long take, because it invites the spectator to become an active participant within the narrative of the film. Well used, shooting in depth of field is not just more economical, a simpler, and at the same time a subtler way of getting the most out of a scene. In addition to affecting the structure of the film language, it also affects the relationships of the minds of the spectators to the image, and in consequence it influences the interpretation of the spectacle (Bazin, 1967, 35).

### **The argument of Shaviro**

In a recent blogpost, Steven Shaviro shared his opinion on the contemporary state of slow cinema, or as it is sometimes called, contemplative cinema. There is an oppressive sense in which the long-take, long-shot, slow-camera-movement, sparse-dialogue style has become entirely routinized; it's become a sort of default international style that signifies "serious art cinema" without having to display any sort of originality or insight (Shaviro, 2010). Shaviro sees a clear divide between the slow cinema of the '60s and '70s, with directors such as Michelangelo Antonioni, Chantal Akerman and Andrej Tarkovsky and more contemporary directors, Bela Tarr, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Abbas Kiarostami and Carlos Reygadas. According to Shaviro, he is missing the dare and provocation that he witnessed in the films by Antonioni and Akerman. Instead of being daring and provocative, he opinions that contemporary slow cinema is utilized by modern filmmakers as an international film style that signifies serious art cinema (Shaviro, 2010).

As it will become clear with the historical trilogy of Larraín, the social critique of Martel, and the themes of Carlos Reygadas, the influence of European Second Cinema is evident in the cinema of Latin America. Following Shaviro, one could make the argument that the incorporation of this particular style of slow cinema, does not add to any originality or innovation of such a style. With the adaptations of certain methods of filmmaking, nothing new comes to the surface and Shaviro appears to see only a mere copying of filmmaking styles.

When speaking of the originality of Third Cinema, it is important to research its history and its future as perhaps a more global cinema. Also, when discussing Third Cinema, it is almost impossible to negate the influence of Second Cinema on it. However, what is more important is that Latin American directors have adapted slow cinema and art cinema, and assessed the style for their own interpretations. Given the similar political and social history of a postwar society, directors from countries such as Chile and Argentina have turned to European directors for inspiration and methods to depict their own countries political history and social structure.

Shaviro's opinions on originality in Second Cinema are shared with Matthew Flanagan, who writes that the work of the directors mentioned here above constitutes a cinema which compels the audience to retreat from a culture of speed, modify expectations of film narration and physically attune to a more deliberate rhythm (Flanagan, 7, 2008). Fitting for this new structural design of filmmaking, Flanagan calls it an aesthetic of slowness, and thus placing it in an essentially new category. In this vein, contemporary slow cinema can be seen as a contrasting reaction to contemporary Hollywood cinema. According to David Bordwell, since the 1980s, the average shot length of Hollywood cinema has become shorter, with an average shot length of about three to six seconds at the beginning of the century (Bordwell, 2002, 17).<sup>4</sup> Bordwell calls this an intensified continuity, meaning there is an intensification of existing techniques which has resulted in a new form of film style. (Bordwell, 2002, 16).

So while Hollywood has sped up in recent decades, there are still film industries where some contemporary directors have embraced the aspects of slow cinema and make great use of the long take. With Metz writing on the long takes almost twenty years after Bazin, the cinematic language has been in constant shifts and changes. With the development of montage in the sixties and seventies, the use of the long take has taken a back seat. The use of multiple cameras increased in the sixties and seventies, enabling more editing (Bordwell, 2002, 23) pushed the long take back. Also, as Christian Metz stated, cinema and filmmaking saw a growing belief in the principle that montage is the language of cinema.

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<sup>4</sup> The origins of these developments in contemporary Hollywood can be found in the emergence of television, as more directors have been active in both film and television. In addition, there have been more technical developments, such as the increased use of multiple cameras.

## ANTONIONI AND TARKOVSKY, THEIR INFLUENCE

There are many directors from 1950s and 1960s Europe who have influenced next generations, but for this thesis, two directors in particular will be essential. In part because of their importance on European art cinema, the Second Cinema and on the other hand their views and incorporation of the long take style. I would like to focus on two directors in relation to the development of long takes and realism in film over the past decades, to illustrate how long takes have continuously been used within filmmaking.

Both Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni and Russian Andrej Tarkovsky have been known for their realism and passionate use of long takes in their films. Antonioni and Tarkovsky have created a beautiful mixture between montage and the long take and are often seen as two directors closely related to realism in film – Antonioni with a countermovement of Italian neorealism and Tarkovsky, who has used his films as methods for philosophy and discovering the core of the human condition. There was something daring and provocative about Antonioni's portrayals of fatigue and ennui, and his precise contemplations of the positive emptiness of both natural and human-made landscapes (Shaviro, 2010).

“Despite the current plight of the cinema, film remains an art form, and every art form is specific, with a content which does not correspond to the essence of other forms. To me, cinema is unique in its dimension of time. No other art form can fix and stop time like this, film is a mosaic made up for time” (Tarkovsky, 1982). Russian director Andrej Tarkovsky, himself a devoted user of the long takes, saw long takes as an important part of establishing time in his films. For Tarkovsky, creating an awareness of time starts during the shooting of the films and the act of editing should be incorporated during this same period. Editing has to do with stretches of time, and the degree of intensity with which these exist (...) with the diversity of life perceived (Tarkovsky, 1986, 119).

Tarkovsky actively denounced the method of editing by Eisenstein, ‘the montage cinema’, claiming it did not allow the film to continue beyond the edges of the screen: they do not allow the audience to bring personal experience to bear on what is in front of them on film (Tarkovsky, 1986, 118). Principally, Tarkovsky's view sides with the viewings of Bazin, who also argued that it is important for the audience to be able to fill in parts of their story based on their own experience and interpretation. Just as life, constantly moving and changing, allows everyone to interpret and feel each separate moment in his own way, so too a real picture, faithfully recording on film the time which flows on beyond the edges of the frame, lives within

time if time lives within it, as Tarkovsky writes (Tarkovsky, 1986, 118). Tarkovsky uses his method of filmmaking as a reflection, perhaps stemming from his own desire, on life, or as his attempt to make an understanding of the vast unknown entity that life can be. But, with using the long takes, he does not attempt to implement his own thoughts and revelations. As he writes, an important characteristic of the long takes is the ability of the audience to add their own interpretations. And because Tarkovsky does not use montage as a method of explaining certain narrative thoughts and developments, his films wander between a clear, narrative vision and an unknown realm left to discover for the audience.

The director does not have the urge to direct his audience in any directions, there is no interference. It is what Tarkovsky became most known for, and has written a book about, it is what he called sculpting in time. Sculpting in time is the method where time movement can be deliberately experienced, in a sense that is only possible with the art form of film. A perfect example of one of Tarkovsky's philosophical long takes is the final scene from his final film, *SACRIFICE* (1986). The film tells the story of Alexander, an older gentleman who has just retired and has many past lives. During a gathering on a Swedish island with his family, Alexander, already never the religious man, grows unnerved of the growing threat of a Third World War. He takes it upon himself to restore the peace in the world, and turns to God for advice. Alexander discovers he has to sacrifice himself and everything he holds dear, in order to achieve saving the world from a devastating war.

The final scene is a six-minute culmination of Alexander's sacrifice. He sets his house ablaze and is finally led away by an ambulance. The whole scene is one long take, shot from a certain distance. The camera even moves away from the shot of the house on fire, and continues to move back and forth across the area, finally returning the shot to the house at the exact right moment, right before the house collapses. Again, here Tarkovsky makes great use of the depth of field. The house in the background is in focus, as it is clearly an integral part of the scene, but the action plays out across the surrounding fields. It creates a wide scene, where time does not stop when the camera is not filming a particular part; time continues where it falls out of the frame. Just as life, as Tarkovsky would confess.

### **Importance of film festivals**

Film festivals have been a pillar in the development of European cinema after the end of the Second World War. Beginning with the first film festival in 1932, that would be the Venice Film festival, the aim has been to unite and promote the films produced in different European countries. Several crises had threatened the development of cinema in Europe; the

invention of sound, as well as lingering nationalistic feelings divided the avant-garde cinema of the interbellum and after the Second World War. Film festivals seemed to be the answer to solve these particular crises. By working explicitly with the nationalistic sentiments that divided the European nations at the time and simultaneously addressing the necessary international dimension of the film industry, the international film festival instantly became an important factor (de Valck, 2007, 24). Also, film festivals can, and could be, seen as a direct opposition to the views of Hollywood, in terms of economic perspective. Film festivals did not treat films as mass-produced commodities, but as national accomplishments; as conveyors of national identity, as art and as unique artistic creations (de Valck, 2007, 24). Of course, over time, Hollywood and film festivals have created a sort of symbiotic collaboration, with film festivals reaping the rewards of big Hollywood stars attending the events and the promotion that resulted.

Film festivals still play an important role in the distribution and the creation of a platform for new talent. All of the following directors, Reygadas, Larraín, as well as Martel, have hugely benefited from the strong influences and distributions of the festivals. Their films and their subsequent premieres have all been at important film festivals. Larraín's *TONY MANERO* (2008) was introduced during the Cannes festival of 2008 and the follow-up *POST MORTEM* (2010) witnessed its big release during the Venice Film Festival of the same year. Both Reygadas and Martel have had similar releases of their features, with premieres at festivals from cities such as Toronto and New York. Film festivals are of intrinsic value for the resurgence of a national cinema. The festivals offer a gateway to get films noticed and a platform for new directors to emerge, without the competition that is sometimes found within regular releases.

### **Michelangelo Antonioni**

In the early 1960s, Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni suddenly became an instant sensation with the release of his film *L'AVVENTURA* (1960). The film premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in that same year, where it was booed by the audience, upon its first screening. Despite this, it won the Jury Prize and became an international success. According to David Bordwell, the booing was based on the lack of narrative and plot. In the film, a character disappears and it is never explained why, nor is the character found; the film just ends. This caused a great controversy, as the audience could not wrap itself around the 'pointlessness of this enigma'. (Bordwell, 2012, 342).

His film *L'AVVENTURA* became part of a trilogy that explored contemporary Italian life after the war. It was because of this trilogy that Antonioni was seen as a director who could shape film into a new, and perhaps even further developed language. Film theorist Gene Youngblood wrote in an essay on Antonioni that his trilogy of films opened the way to a more mature art form. (Youngblood, 1989, 1).

Rather than using the narrative or the dialogue to tell the story, Antonioni makes great use of style and scenic methods to create his scenes. The characters react to their surroundings, the landscapes or other persons; they don't have clear motives for their action and Antonioni sees no use in explaining these actions (Nowell Smith, 2001, 1).

The premiere of the film of Antonioni is significant for the importance of film festivals. While *L'AVVENTURA* was initially booed when it premiered, the prizes awarded to the picture generated interest and eventually made it a success. This in part, possibly, with the position film festivals held, and still have, within the film industry; the festivals enjoy specific affinities with the power of Hollywood, while on the other side the festivals affiliate with the obscure characteristics of the avant-garde cinema. After his primary success at Cannes, Antonioni returned often with his following films, winning the grand prize, the *Palme D'ore*, for his 1975 film *THE PASSENGER*. This growing importance of film festivals after the Second World War is fundamental for the development of European cinema, but subsequently also created a passageway for the reemergence of Latin American cinema.

As an example, Antonioni's film from 1975, *THE PASSENGER*, explores the emptiness of living a repetitive and unfulfilling life. Sometimes, there is an opportunity to change it all around, such befalls the main character, a journalist named Locke, played by Jack Nicholson. Locke is covering a war in Chad, but has a lot of trouble tracing the right local characters to create the story. One night in his hotel, after a particular disappointing day, he discovers that his fellow hotel guest has died. With an impetuous action, Locke trades identity with the man. Having faked his own death, he returns to Europe with the newly assumed identity, only to discover that the deceased man was working as an arms dealer. Attempting to keep up appearances, Locke tries to keep all the appointments and deals, finally resulting in the inability to escape from his new life as well. The character is fitting for the oeuvre that Michelangelo Antonioni has established. His films often display lost characters, detached from their lives or emotionally troubled. His films exude a form of distant existentiality through his characters. It is a recurring theme of loneliness, emotional distance, depression and despair throughout

Antonioni's collection of characters, ranging from his earlier Italian films and continued in his endeavors in the US.

Other than Tarkovsky, Antonioni uses his characters as methods to reflect on reality. He refrains from explaining the reasons behind the actions of characters. Instead of expanding the characters' intentions through the cause-and-effect approach of conventional narrative cinema, Antonioni uses his characters as cinematic devices in order to express his personal philosophical reflections on the realities surrounding modernity (Melzer, 2010, 2). Where Tarkovsky sees the long take as an important part of the time that passes and methods of reflecting, the Italian director projects his visions on his characters and letting his characters explore the cinematic space and time. And because Antonioni decides to reveal his film in this matter, the audience also explores *THE PASSENGER* in the similar manner.

Again, same with Tarkovsky, Antonioni creates his penultimate scene as a long take. Locke, having been unable to escape his new life as well, finds himself in a hotel in Osuna, outside of Seville. His cover is nearly blown, and his pursuers are close by. Leaving Locke lying on the bed, the camera starts to explore the space, observing the people and the cars arriving and passing past the window. Antonioni leaving much up to the audience to decide is combined with a calm method of filming; there are no explanatory shots – the camera slowly follows the unfolding action. The same goes with the final scene, which only has diegetic sounds and changes from an interior scene to an exterior. Once the camera starts exploring the space, there is the sound of a gunshot. Instead of revealing the source of the sound, the camera continues to explore the space, slowly turning to reveal the hotel. Finally, after turning to the hotel, the camera is observing and wrapping up the narrative.

The audience becomes a distant observer, free to create own conclusions as passing witnesses to the unfolded story. A particular aspect of Antonioni's style is what is called *temps mort*. This term is used for a scene where nothing of significance happens. Often the characters have already departed the cinematic space, only the camera lingers where they have passed (Verstraten, 2008, 26). *Temps mort* is in some respects also visible in the final scene of *THE PASSENGER*. The camera has left the main character behind and for a few moments, nothing of significance appears to happen. Life outside the window seems to continue, only to be interrupted by the arrival of the vehicles, when the action returns.

Antonioni used his long takes to slow down his narrative and as a method to create a wider world wherein his characters exist. The result is a more documentary-style, realistic portrait of the characters that inhabit his world. There is a distance between character and viewer, yet they share a similar alienation, which is created by Antonioni's slow-moving and

inexpressive long takes. Tarkovsky definitively focuses with his long takes on time. He expressed that time is created within the frame, rendering the use of montage futile. Rather, Tarkovsky links the depiction of time to the natural rhythm that exists in the world. Instead of creating time through montage, the director uses longer takes to present time more naturally. Menard writes that therefore, time within the frame expresses something significant and truthful that goes beyond the events of the screen and those in the frame; and so, the direct perception of time is like a pointer to infinity (Menard, 2003, 2).

## CARLOS REYGADAS AND HIS MAGICAL LONG TAKES

Of all the three directors who have been explored in this thesis, Carlos Reygadas is the one who is most closely related to the tradition of style and theme of the Second Cinema in Europe, around 1955 and 1980, and perhaps one of the most direct descendants of the style of Tarkovsky. Art cinema is often also interacting with themes such as globalization and nationalism, and on the other hand the incorporation of the histories of film aesthetics. Mexican director Carlos Reygadas might be the most prominent director emerging from the former Third Cinema region. Within the national cinema of Mexico, Reygadas could be viewed as a sort of outsider. Due to enormous cuts in social and cultural programs, in the end of the 1980s, film productions, which were funded by the governments of Mexico, as well as other Latin countries, dropped significantly.

Mexican productions declined from ninety-eight features in 1989 to an average of twenty-eight features per year during the 1990s (Rodríguez, 2012, 88). In recent years, the cinema has only slowly been able to create new productions; however, the prevalence of Hollywood is strong. There is a one-way traffic of labor mobility as Mexican filmmakers move north to find better work opportunities (Muñoz Larrao, 2011, 846). This is evident in the successes of directors in the U.S. such as Alejandro González Iñárritu, Alfonso Cuarón and Guillermo del Toro. What is seen as an important result of these shifts in productions and financial solutions is a new cinema sometimes referred to as a New Mexican Cinema. Three films that have started these new wave are *AMORES PERROS* (2000), *Y TU MAMÁ TAMBIÉN* (2001), and *EL CRIMEN DEL PADRE AMARRO* (2002), by Iñárritu, Cuarón and Carlos Carrera, respectively. Jeff Menne writes that these productions did not rely on state subventions, nor did they offer themselves as a counter aesthetic to Hollywood-style; these films were private sector co-productions that used Hollywood tropes and genres (Menne, 2007, 72).

As Mexican cinema adapted to new methods of funding and production, Carlos Reygadas is a director who does set himself off against Hollywood-style and genres. For his films, the director searches for cooperation of Europe. Two of his productions discussed in this thesis have been co-production of several countries. For example, *STELLET LICHT* (2007) is a combination of Mexico, France, Germany and the Netherlands and *JAPÓN* (2002) is a collaboration with Mexico and Spain. However, despite his movement against the influence of Hollywood, the director is often seen as a part of the New Mexican Cinema and integral to the cinema of Mexico. Though Reygadas would be last to admit it. “The geographical context is not important. I feel I could be Lithuanian or African, or whatever” (Higgins, 2005). When

discussing the expansion of world cinema, the works of Carlos Reygadas can not be denied. His films are a remarkable example of the transcultural influences and the matter in which Second Cinema has been transformed to a global cinema. This is foremost evident in the theme and location of his films; they are not particularly Mexican and could be set across the world.

The filmography of Reygadas is an interesting example on how to analyze the style and themes of art cinema that have expanded across the globe, and have been incorporated into different national cinemas. As Robert Eford writes: Over the course of only four feature-length films, explicit references to classic works of world cinema have become integral to Carlos Reygadas' unique and increasingly complicated aesthetic (Eford, 2014, 14). There are several important themes that recur within Reygadas' cinema, such as faith, the hardships of life and the challenges of family. The director made his debut in 2002, with the film *JAPÓN*, telling the story of a man leaving the city to find a peace and calm in the remote Mexican outback. Along the way, he forms a silent, but loving connection with the older woman who runs a farm. Perhaps Eford wrote a description of the film which most closely resembles the style and aim of the director; a bold experiment with non-chronological temporal dimensions calculated to stimulate intense emotional and intellectual reactions conducive to a dynamic spiritual experience (...) often through this notorious concern with the flesh, which opens out from the film and creates a more active role for the viewer (Eford, 2014, 16).

Reygadas' influences of European Art cinema and its directors is particularly visible in his film *STELLET LICHT*. Centered around a family within the Mennonite community, the film explores the hardships and consequences of the patriarchs' actions when the man finds himself attracted to another woman. The story is deeply rooted within the Mennonite community, located in the state of Chihuahua. The language spoken in the film is Plat-Deutsch and the actors are genuine Mennonites, discovered by the director. This choice of non-actors in important roles is again an attribute Reygadas finds significant in his films. The casting of non-professional actors has its roots in the European neorealism. *STELLET LICHT* is heavily influenced by the 1955 film *ORDET*, by Carl Dreyer. Its influence is noticeable in its similar religious themes, similar use of long takes and the focus on the narrative. An immediate similarity that has possible origins of Second Cinema is the specific use of non-professional actors. In Dreyer's classic, the actors are all uncredited. In Reygadas', the main players are not professional actors, discovered by the director living within the actual Mennonite community of Mexico.

Similar to *ORDET*, the main male character is having a crisis in faith. In *STELLET LICHT*, the patriarch Johan is married to Esther; with whom he shares several children. Johan has fallen

in love with another woman, Marianne, and has pursued an affair with her. His disloyalty devours him with guilt. While the fact of his affair is no secret to his wife, nor to his father, Johan is desperate to resolve the issue, as his guilt is not necessarily directed to his family, but rather his troubles are regarded to the strength of his faith and his standing within the Mennonite community. What becomes clear, as Niessen writes, is that *STELLET LICHT* seems to unfold as a minimalist representation of a man who sees all his truths shattered and who comes to realize that his guilt is not predetermined by transcendent forces but instead is fully immanent to his own desire (Niessen, 2011, 32).

Reygadas has the ability to blend several influences from earlier art cinema of Europe with his own films, with which he creates this aforementioned minimalist representation. He has an affinity for long takes, although his long takes serve a different purpose than the narrative long takes of, for example, Dreyer. Dreyer presented his long takes as methods to keep dialogue moving uninterrupted, thus centering the focus on dialogue, whilst using the movements of the camera as a source for the rhythm in the scene. In addition, Dreyer also employs his long takes to add to the realism of his film. This creative decision adds to the minimalistic filmmaking that Dreyer wants to achieve. The minimalism works in favor of realism within the film, and same can be said of the minimalistic approach of Reygadas.

The notion of realism and the realistic depiction of both directors' created worlds is challenged in both films by the ending. *ORDET* and *STELLET LICHT* share similar endings, depicting the resurrection of a character that was presumed dead. In Dreyer's depiction, the resurrection occurs after the character Johannes, who throughout the film believes he is Jesus Christ, has spoken. As a result, both Morten and Peter disregard their earlier differences regarding their faith and unite. The resurrection is grounded in the notion of realism. After the words of Johannes, a character is alive again, the surrounding characters have no other choice than to unite and regain their faith. While Reygadas' film has a similar reveal, his approach is not as clear and realistic, again leaving the viewer somewhat in the dark. Reygadas' resurrection is established through the point of view of a child, therefore the viewer is never certain if what happens in the scene actually happened or is a figment of a child's imagination. Where Dreyer's resurrection is imbedded in his minimalistic approach to filmmaking and realistic narrative, Reygadas connects his minimalistic filmmaking to the ambiguous narrative of *STELLET LICHT*.

David Bordwell writes that Dreyer's version of modernism acknowledges the film's source in a literary text and creates a "minimal" cinema of a minutely varied pace (Bordwell, 2010, 353). The long takes of Reygadas, however, are clearly established to confirm the passing

of time. For Reygadas, and in *STELLET LICHT*, time is nearly as important as the characters and it is therefore closely related to the theme of the film. First evidence is visible in the opening shot of the film.

Reygadas has bookended *STELLET LICHT* with time lapses of the landscapes, with both exploring a sunrise and a sunset. The first, the sunrise, is situated in the beginning, and is nearly ten minutes in length. He finishes his film with the time lapse of the sunset. It seems almost simple that Reygadas would start and end his film with such obvious symbolism, the beginning of the day and then the ending of the day. However, to place the entire time lapse in the scene is a reflection on the importance of time within the story. And this similar use of long takes in relation to the passing of time is comparable to Andrej Tarkovsky. And with neither character, Johan or Marianne, making an active attempt to resolve their issues, time is also used by the director as a method to solve their problems.

An example is the conversation Johan and his father exchange. Situated outside of the house of Johan's father, perhaps to be out of earshot of Johan's mother, the two men talk about Johan's situation. The father does not condemn the actions of his son, as desire appears to be a natural, god given trait. The scene indicates that Johan is troubled by his actions, yet remains unclear of how to act, or perhaps, has an unwillingness to act. With time already hazy within the narrative, Reygadas decides to close the scene with what becomes an apparent time jump. Having started the conversation with clear skies and sun, immediately after, the landscape is covered in a thick layer of snow. Again, Reygadas plays with narrative conventions and with montage, leaving the audience again free to interpret the scene and he places his faith in the viewer to create the narrative from within the separate scenes.

The similarities between Dreyer's *ORDET* and *STELLET LICHT* are clear. Both have heavy religious themes, protagonists struggling with their devout commitment and moral standards. And in both films, a similar miracle is witnessed, in the form of women returning from being, or appearing to be deceased. And not only in narrative do the films match in similarity. What becomes evident is that Reygadas has incorporated the cinematic formalism presented by Dreyer, with long takes, cinematography and a lack of montage. The use of long takes by Reygadas are imperative to both his personal style and the development of his narrative.

As mentioned earlier, for Reygadas the use of long takes is almost a necessity, specifically if he wants his narrative to remain ambiguous. Reygadas almost goes out of his way to elaborate further on the motives of his characters, he opts to rather leave it opaque. His insistence on withholding character motivation results in the condemnation of plot as the

audience attempts to interpret the psychological impact of the affair through study of the character's actions (Tompkins, 183, 2013). Rather than having his characters take action, the cuts and jumps in time, as well as the time lapses and long takes, in a sense take over for the characters. Obfuscation of the narrative in *STELLET LICHT* is consciously chosen by the director to fit the theme of the film or is it intrinsic to his approach of style and manner of filmmaking. And in combination with his committed decision to use unprofessional actors, Reygadas makes no attempt to soothe the audience, nor is he interested in giving a clear demonstration of his narrative.<sup>5</sup> What he accomplishes is the ability to create films that are recognizable in the art cinema of Europe, yet are taken to such a new level, that it is nearly impossible to argue that it is merely a style copy.

It can be argued that of all directors that have emerged from Latin America in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Reygadas is the director that is least connected with the continent. As he has stated, originating from Mexico is irrelevant to the director, and his films are not inherently Mexican or politically and socially of relevance. Which can hardly be said for his Latin American contemporaries Pablo Larraín and Lucrecia Martel; these last two directors incorporate the importance of their home country as being inextricably connected to their narrative. In this light, the argument that Shaviro makes concerning originality within Third Cinema is correct. Reygadas has incorporated a European style and made it his own, even, as Shaviro fears, taken slow cinema to an almost incomprehensible next level. Therefore, per Shaviro's argument, Reygadas can be considered to be deficient of an own, recognizable style. Yet, it can not be denied that Reygadas has never set out to create original Mexican cinema. By continuing the legacy of Tarkovsky and Dreyer, the director has found his own contemporary style and trademark.

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<sup>5</sup> With *POST TENEBRAS LUX*, his follow-up film after *STELLET LICHT*, Reygadas has taken all the style characteristics of *STELLET LICHT* and brought them to extremes in the execution of this new film. *POST TENEBRAS LUX* lacks a clear narrative structure, consists of unclear and successive long takes. The plot evolves around a wealthy family that makes the decision to move from the city to the country. Every component of the film affirms its lofty artiness, leaving little doubt that Reygadas is intent on crafting a cinema whose metaphysical explorations are a revelatory as those of his forebears: Dreyer, Tarkovsky and late Godard (Sullivan, 2013).

## LARRAÍN, THE POLITICAL LONG TAKE

Continuing with director Pablo Larraín, who hails from Chile. Larraín's films are heavily influenced by the tumultuous history of his country. While his narratives focus on the political Chilean past, his film style is inspired by films and directors of the European Second Cinema. On the resurgence of Chilean cinema, Carolina Larraín writes that the cinema has been experiencing significant renewal with young directors exploring new topics and alternative methods of producing and distributing their work, creating a so-called 'independent cinema'. And working on diverse subjects, adapting, and/or crafting their own visual language, this new breed is revitalizing the established representational system (Larraín, 2010, 161-162). Larraín also writes that the new generation of filmmakers have departed from the original Third Cinema's own political themes. The filmmakers have disassociated their works from the political activism of previous generations (Larraín, 2010, 162).

Pablo Larraín's first film, of what would become a trilogy exploring life in Chile following the rise and fall of dictator Pinochet, with subjects ranging from the coup to the military dictatorship, is the film *TONY MANERO* (2008). *TONY MANERO* is an unsettling portrait of living under the dictatorship of Pinochet through the depiction of the life of Raul Peralta. While living in Santiago during the end of the 1970s, Raul is unemployed and harbors an unhealthy obsession with the character Tony Manero, from *SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER* (1975). He regularly performs a Tony Manero-inspired show with some other young performers in a small, local café. His obsession knows no bounds and even drives him to commit several crimes in order to achieve his goal, which is to become a solid imitation of his idol. Similar to the character Mario in *POST MORTEM* (2010), has Raul discovered a manner of living which is comfortable for him, within the confines of the dictatorship. The characters that Larraín establishes in his trilogy are significant. In all three features do the characters conjure up the requisites that are needed for living during the dictatorship of Pinochet. Essentially, they are mirrors for Larraín's critique on the political history and represent the mindsets of Pinochet supporters, which made it possible for Pinochet to remain in power for such an extended period of time.

The follow up to *TONY MANERO* is the film *POST MORTEM* (2010), which is particularly interesting for the use of long takes and the direct link to European filmmaking in the seventies, Getinos and Solanas' Second Cinema. While *TONY MANERO* focused on the life during the military dictatorship, *POST MORTEM* delves into the coup of Pinochet and the demise of

Salvador Allende. Main character Mario Cornejo is an assistant to coroner, working at the local morgue and taking notes during the autopsies. In contrast to his previous character Raul Peralta, Mario is ordinary and insignificant, perhaps even dull. Brought to life by the same actor, Larraín-regular Alfredo Castro, both characters are vastly different, yet both radiate an immense uneasiness with their surroundings and their lives. While Raul experiences a total alienation of his environment and the political situation, Mario seems to openly ignore any developments of the coup.

POST MORTEM is slow cinema, but not necessarily a slow film because of that. Larraín makes great use of the nature of his character to develop his film, but also with the method of his filmmaking; it is almost documentary-style. “We shot on 16mm with these old old anamorphic Lomo lenses from Russia that were made for 35mm, so the result was very special. That type of lens was used on a lot of Russian films from the Seventies, including Tarkovsky's” (Larraín, Film Comment, 2012). The result is a documentary-style film that looks particularly greyish, something that blends well with the theme of the film and is an almost accurate depiction of the drab style of the 1970s. This is similar to the Third Cinema of the 1960s and 1970s.

Although director Larraín has chosen for his trilogy a subject that is highly political, the trilogy is not politically charged, or heavy on its political message. Particularly POST MORTEM is more of an honest depiction of a political period than a strong political statement. With this film, Larraín creates an interesting combination of the new wave of Chilean directors, who, as mentioned earlier, forget the political importance of decades earlier, but incorporate the style to create a film that almost relives this earlier period. This trend is parallel to what appears to develop in other Third Cinema countries. Over the last few years, the cinema in Asia, Africa and Latin America has played down the political edge that was once innate to the Third Cinema of militant collectives. Instead, it has sought to connect to an artistic heritage that had the European cinema of the 1950s and 1960s as its pivotal pretext and the New Hollywood of the early 1970s as its side-kick (Verstraten, 2012, 59).

Similar, Larraín has adapted Antonioni's method of exploring the space and the time with the camera in POST MORTEM. He enables the camera not as a method to further delve in to the protagonist, nor as a method to further explore the narrative. Rather, he uses the camera inherently connected to his style of filming. Almost style over substance, even though his narrative is plenty substantial. By choosing such a shared history of Chile, he can allow himself not to fully delve into the narrative, but rather create a poignant retelling of this history.

Together with this old style lenses and the great use of long takes, Larraín produces a troubling portrait of a coup.

Starting off a couple of days before the coup, Mario is living a lonely and simple life. He harbors a secret crush in his neighbor Nancy, a burlesque dancer at the Bim Bam Bum Club and in his mind, and the manner in which Larraín displays their relationship, Nancy appears to reciprocates his love. However, as Mario is primarily focused on Nancy, he, perhaps pretends, to remain oblivious and ignorant to the unfolding historical events. An important aspect of the filmmaking is what Larraín chooses not to show. Larraín establishes a deep contrast between the protagonist's mental projection of Nancy, and the absence of his point of view regarding historical events (Toledo, 167). Larraín makes great use of color in his film, he incorporates very few bright colors to mimic the grey existence of his character. In a pivotal moment of both the coup and the narrative of the film, the camera follows Mario preparing for work. After seeing the neighbor girl depart, leaving her dog in the front yard, Mario retreats to the shower. The unfolding of the scene is shot with a static long take, where the audience is witness to Mario showering. During this long take, the only diegetic sounds are the shower, the soldiers during the raid of Nancy's house and the yelping of the dog. Mario is unaware of the sounds that are created in the background. Here, the director makes a decision on how to depict the violence. He remains consistent with the style of the film, not wanting to directly address the severity of the coup and again using the absentmindedness of Mario to his advantage.

Larraín uses the long take as a method to let time pass, in real time. The showering of the character is parallel to the quick and aggressive attack of the Chilean soldiers. The use of the long take is also a method of shielding the audience from the violence. The character on the screen does not engage or interact, and so by way of the method of the long take, so does the viewer. The truth and the Chilean military history remains in the background, but the depicting of this history is because of that even more poignant. Rather than depicting the harsh attack, Larraín uses the long take as a method of creating an even more haunting effect. Because of the long takes, there is and remains a certain distance between the character and the viewer. The viewer is never drawn in through a close-up or a medium shot. It's a method that has also frequently been used by Antonioni and Tarkovsky. Similar to the works of Andrej Tarkovsky does Pablo Larraín take on a more philosophical approach to the coup of Chile, with a heavy focus and theme on time.

Through his use of long takes, but certainly not limited to, Larraín wants the viewer to know that this was how living in Chile was starting in the 1970s. Larraín approach to filmmaking is adapting his formalism to his narrative. As mentioned, he imported similar

lenses from the same era that were used by Tarkovsky, to recreate an authentic feel and realism of Chile in during the time of Pinochet. His narrative can be construed as a social critique and approach. One of his central points, and critiques, within the trilogy is the compliance of many Chilean citizens. Rather than resisting the regime, they went along with it without resistance. Resulting in the dangerous consequence was the habituation towards violence and death. Because of the created detachment, there was a bigger threat to derail and grow more individualistic. The characters of Raul and Mario are examples of such derailment.

Perhaps also as an approach to ambiguity, Larraín makes the decision not to directly depict the violence on the screen. This could be because the main character seems insensitive to it, but also because it can be argued that the violence and the reign of Pinochet is a part of a shared history in Chile. Hence, the film avoids the depiction of violent actions with which the spectators are familiar, in part because they belong to a critical memory (and post memory) (Toledo, 167). In combination with the unmitigated use of the long takes, the viewer has no actual awareness of the depiction of violence and passing of time within the narrative. To add to this confusion, the director decides to add a flash forward, edited in at an indistinguishable moment. Right after the two main characters have been caught in a protest, Nancy has left Mario's car, leaving him behind and joining the march. Right after, the viewer finds Mario at work in the morgue. On the slab is the deceased body of Nancy and her autopsy is ongoing. Mario seems detached and unemotional, solely focused on his job. The narrative continues after this scene, picking up at the present time. The flash forward is so subtle, that many viewers will pass it without any notice. Thus, the confusion created ties beautifully with the detachment of the protagonist. Only after the final scene of the film does the flash forward become imperative, as it becomes clear that it is Nancy, and Mario is primarily responsible for her death.

The confusion this flash forward creates is similar to the use of the device in the 1973 film of Nicolas Roeg, *DON'T LOOK NOW*.<sup>6</sup> Where in this 1973 film, the confusion is directly

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<sup>6</sup> Flash forwards are inherent to the plot of *DON'T LOOK NOW* (1973). The main character, John Baxter, has an eerie feeling he is being followed. He and his wife have fled to Florence to recover from the untimely death of their young daughter. After a chance encounter with an older, blind psychic, who mentions she has seen their daughter, the events that follow begin to slowly influence the life and perception of both John and his wife. Unable to uncover the truth in time, Baxter falls victim to what he is unable to see and it becomes evident that several scenes within the narrative are to be interpreted as flash forwards, because John turns out to be clairvoyant and was witnessing his own deadly future. Where the flash forward of Larraín becomes a signifier for the indifference that befalls the character of Mario, the flash forwards of Roeg's film are inherently connected to the plot and the characters of the film are interpreted as replacements for the audience. Whilst less powerful as a narrative tool, Larraín decision to incorporate a flash forward can be interpreted as a method of

linked to the main character of John Baxter, who embodies the confusion the viewer is experiencing, in Larraín case, the confusion remains with the viewer. However, the flash forward is telling for the character of Mario; he remains unaffected to his surroundings and his actions. The flash forward is a foreshadowing of Mario's cold behavior. He is still able to do his job, regardless of who is on the slab and under dire circumstances. However, the flash forward depicts not only that he remains capable of working, but also reveals a deep grudge Mario has towards the character of Nancy.

At a specific moment in the film, Larraín makes the decision to depict the violence and it contains the autopsy of Salvador Allende. Mario is present during the autopsy of Allende, but is unable to perform his job, due to his inability to use a typewriter. He never questions the autopsy, which might incorrectly have been ruled as a suicide. Even when the new regime takes over the morgue, Mario conforms and continues his job. After the autopsy, through the eyes of Mario, the audience is a direct witness to the bodies that begin to pile up in the morgue. No longer is it just the perspective of Mario; with the scenes in the morgue the director has chosen to depict a common history, they are part of a shared history of Chile. For the first time, Larraín chooses to straightforwardly show violence of the new regime of Pinochet.

In a particularly haunting scene, Mario's colleague has a mental breakdown during the work in the morgue. The bodies begin to pile up, and the colleague suspect that the army is deliberately executing the people she has been trying to save. During the long take scene, an army official dressed in a doctor's coat, takes out his pistol and begins shooting at the scattered bodies. A silence follows. The power and impact of the new regime is immediately clear; both to Mario and the viewer. Directly after this scene, there is the final scene of POST MORTEM. Nancy, who has been on the run since her house was raided, has found shelter in the backyard shed of Mario. It appears their romance has predominantly been played out in Mario's imagination. Mario comes to the realization that Nancy has only been with him for shelter and protection. "Interpreting this as betrayal, in his mind, Mario accuses Nancy of destroying his imaginary and the symbolic realm that organizes his world. This definitively introduces him to the horror (...) he can no longer sustain his fantasy and the character will release his anger and psychotic tendencies" (Toledo, 168).

The revenge of Mario plays out in a magnificent long take of close to seven minutes. After handing Nancy and her companion something to eat, Mario closes the door of the shed.

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cinematography that was more common in the 1970s, or perhaps even inspired by the film, as DON'T LOOK NOW and the events in POST MORTEM exist in the same timeframe.

The camera changes position and remains static for what unfolds next. Slowly, but steadily, Mario retrieves nearly all his furniture from his house. One by one, he places it in front of the door, effectively blocking the entrance. It is a mesmerizing scene, seeing Mario so calmly placing the furniture like a puzzle. Sometimes the door of the shed shakes, but it is not enough to collapse the blockage. The final scene is telling for the entirety of the film. The reasoning of Mario is not immediately clear – the scene also has no dialogue – and the static placement of the camera and the absence of editing leaves the viewer to make conclusions on their own.

With his long takes, Larraín certainly has no intention of defining his narrative. The viewer slowly comes to the realization that the protagonist is psychotic. And as Larraín has explained it, “if Mario is the product of an entire society when its morals fall away, Nancy represents the new world, the country that will now become the real country, that will import stuff that will try to be from a First World country. Both characters are symbols, and they’re absolutely from opposite sides, and that’s why they’ll never be together. It wouldn’t work.” (Larraín, 2012).

## SOCIAL STRUCTURES FROM LUCRECIA MARTEL

“In the world of cinema, there’s this idea that cinema is about storytelling. I do not share that view. Cinema is a lot more than that, I believe storytelling is just the starting point; it is like the device you use to share a lot more than the story itself”, Martel once mentions in an interview (Taubin, 2009). Director Lucrecia Martel hails from Argentina, a country that just as Chile was subjected to a harsh dictatorship that reached its peak in the 1970s. Argentina is still recovering since the 1980s from a devastating economy and its subsequent consequences on culture. As a result, several new laws have been established to create a reemergence of Argentinian cinema, which has been in a steady rise since the mid-1990s. According to Schroeder Rodriguez, the ascent in production can be linked to the growth in new international co-production programs, with examples such as the Sundance Institute’s Feature Film Program, from France’s Canal Plus and Rotterdam Film Festival’s Hubert Bals Fund (Schroeder Rodriguez, 2012, 89).

Similar to her Mexican counterpart Reygadas, Martel opts to create films that are characterized by large gaps in its narrative. In her trilogy concerning the social classes of Argentina, an important subject within the culture, she places her three main characters, all women, within this intrinsic social structure. Martel acknowledges with this approach that it is not possible to ignore the current social state of Argentina. Her trilogy, containing *LA CIÉNAGA* (2001), *LA NIÑA SANTA* (2003) and *LA MUJER SIN CABEZA* (2008) all explore life within this society outside of the major cities.<sup>7</sup> In all three of films that comprise her trilogy, the focus is on the rich, upper class, with the main characters in all three being affluent, white females and the interactions with their indigenous servants. In the trilogy, the narrative disputes arise from within the characters’ life itself. In the first feature, *LA CIÉNAGA* (2001), two families find themselves in too close quarters with each other, giving rise to old disputes and violence, all the while the matriarch accuses her servants of theft. And in the second feature, *LA NIÑA SANTA* (2003), a religious, teenage girl living in a hotel takes it upon herself to save a hotel guest, after he appears to make sexual advances towards her. The complete trilogy focuses on themes such as alienation and social power.

Especially the final film makes this evident. *LA MUJER SIN CABEZA* (2008) follows several days in the life of Veró, a bourgeois woman who lives a comfortable life outside of the city of Salta.

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<sup>7</sup> An exception is found in her latest feature *ZAMA* (2017), which is a period drama and follows the life of Don Diego de Zama.

After returning from a social gathering, Veró drives along a dirt road, which is bordered by a dried up ditch. Suddenly, she hits something with her car. Shocked, and presumably scared, the woman stops the car, and briefly exits. After a few moments, she has composed herself and continues to drive. She visits the hospital for a checkup and spends the night in a hotel. In the following days, she is slowly able to tell what has happened to her husband. Still disillusioned and traumatized, her husband then drives to the road, to show her that it was probably a dog she had hit.

Because Martel chooses not to reveal important plot points throughout the exterior narrative, she resorts to the cinematography and the montage for elucidation. To uncover the several layers that make up Veró, her surroundings and her social and family life, Martel employs several long takes and long sequences, which results in a slow pacing rhythm. The rhythm is closely related to the disconnection of the main character with her social surroundings. Veró's slow and panicked state when she hits the object with her vehicle, in the beginning of the film, is cinematically accompanied by a long and unbroken sequence. The camera is situated in the passengers' seat, static, and witnessing Veró from the side whilst she is driving. After the hit, Veró stops her car, visibly shaken. She exits the vehicle, her head leaving the frame, with only her body remaining in sight. A literal visual interpretation of the continuation of the story. The camera follows her as she moves to the front of the car, gathering herself. After she returns to the vehicle, adjusts her hair in the rear view mirror and drives on. She never looks behind. And because of the cinematography so closely fixated on her character, audience is also unable to uncover what has occurred.

The aftermath of the suspected hit is played out in real time in one singular take, revealing that Veró doesn't need much time to recover, or is quick to leave the site of the accident. More importantly, it is a stylistic and a narrative choice. The shock of the collision becomes greater when it slowly sinks in, it is as if the director is granting the audience a short moment to come to grasp with what has unfolded on the screen. But also, it gives Martel the freedom to continue to slowly unveil the narrative and let time almost literally pass for Veró to come to terms, and with her, the audience. Both Veró and the audience have been granted time to decide how to resolve the issue.

Martel makes great use of close-ups, keeping a close focus on the main character. As a result, the viewer also never discovers what actually happened on the road. The close-ups are closely linked to the narrative. The method of filming adds suspense, as well as confusion. The confusion the audience experiences, is surely shared with Veró. Yes, it could be a dog she has hit, there is a dog spotted on the site. However, moments earlier before Veró drives across the

road, the audience has witnessed several poor boys playing in the surrounding ditch of the road. Much like Veró, the viewer will never discover the actual truth.

By keeping the camera at a close distance of Veró, Martel aims to confront the audience with the characters' inner turmoil. For the greater part of the film, the camera is glued to the main character, giving scarce viewings of her surroundings, which results in an environment that is mostly out of focus, created with a little depth of field. Because the camera is closely following Veró, Martel is also able to create chaos and division amongst the main characters and their surroundings. The main characters are displayed as calm and often collective, seemingly appearing to have plenty of time on their hands. Lange-Churión comments that the pace of the film immerses the viewer in the morose, stretched out sense of time that characterizes the futile and ineffective lives [of the upper class of Salta] (Lange-Churión, 478, 2012). This is effectively displayed through the directors' choices in cinematography, but as well in the decision of scene length and timing.

Without excessively dialogued scenes and explanatory shots, *LA MUJER SIN CABEZA* is able to create a narrative that is enigmatic, as well as a character that is detached and uncomfortable in her surroundings. And with her discomfort and detachment, the narrative is set up and diligently attached to character development and actions. Because of the character, the narrative is mostly directed at an inner development, with a few exterior purposes to hoist the narrative forward and emphasize the characters' inner turmoil and state of mind. All the supporting characters act as secondary agents to highlight the distress. Perhaps some even act as antagonists, mostly within Veró's own inner circle. These antagonists can be held accountable for endorsing her behavior and creating an escape route for her actions. What results is Veró's inability to adequately resolve the situation herself, leaving her a victim of her own environment.

### **Visualization**

To further elaborate on the method of Martel, it is important to look at the cinema of Antonioni, specifically his 1960s produced trilogy regarding modern life in Italy. What is clear is that Martel applies similar methods of filming that recalls that of Antonioni. Also, similar themes such as alienation and social struggle are explored by both directors. Therefore, it is beneficial to use phrases coined by Ted Perry in 1970. Perry distinguishes the events depicted by Antonioni in *L'ECLISSE* by fact context and value context. Fact context he defines as consisting of the elements which represents the actions, objects, and events of the physical world signified by the motion picture images (Perry, 79, 1970). Whereas value context consists of the attitudes,

impressions, and values by which the film fixes or frames the fact context so the latter will be regarded in a specific way (Perry, 79, 1970). What Perry distinguishes here, could be interpreted as the essence of the trilogy of Antonioni. He further elaborates that the meaning of L'ECLISSE is primarily dependent upon cues given within the film and not upon the ability of the film to faithfully record and represent the facts of the physical world (Perry, 79, 1970). These methods of analysis again come close to Metz' writing of the sign and signifier, mentioned earlier in this thesis.

Through visual interactions and, as Brunette writes, seemingly aimless cuts – justified *formally* at times, rather than narratively or dramatically – prepare [the audience] for the powerful, wordless, and characterless finale in the film (Brunette, 75, 1998), Antonioni builds a film that is predominantly focused on the interior of the characters, but reinforced with exterior signs. Antonioni's film L'ECLISSE is the final film of his trilogy. The film focuses on Vittoria, played by Antonioni muse Monica Vitti, and the man she meets, Piero. The relationship is doomed from the start, as both characters crave different desires from each other, and from their new modern Italian life. Piero appears as a man who mainly is materialistic, whereas Vittoria searches for more free and thoughtful approach to her way of living. However, as clear as the plot can be described, Antonioni steers clear of any method to unambiguously reveal the narrative to his audience. By placing narrative of the film lower in importance, formalism is becoming more significant. Taking a step away from the two earlier films in the trilogy, L'ECLISSE is often seen as more of an artwork than a narrative film. He chooses to highlight the necessity of visual interpretation throughout the film. Three of four times, she thoughtfully moves her head left and right, standing in for [the audience], in the familiar gesture of trying to understand a visual work of art, as though to underline the interpretive effort that must necessarily accompany all visual representation, including the film [the audience] is watching (Brunette, 76, 1998).

A critique that is often compared to Antonioni is the confidence the director places in visual meaning and its method of interpretation. Can the use of long takes create a too ambiguous meaning? The finale of L'ECLISSE is a series of longer takes, where the audience observes several scenes that are shot outside of the streets. A recurring theme is the symmetry found in the surrounding objects, such as the guard rail of a bridge, a departing bus and the lines on a crosswalk. However, it remains unclear what is meant with these images. Brunette writes that it simply may be better to see these images, both visual and aural, as creating a nonspecific emotional field that accompanies, or enhances, more specific thematic levels suggested through the conventional means of dialogue, character, and story (Brunette, 79,

1998). The final scene is fitting for Antonioni, as the rest of the film is also saturated with ambiguous shots and characters.

Can this also be said in the case of Martel? While it never becomes vividly clear what exactly happened, the resolve of the issue also appears to transpire off screen, apparently not an important theme within the narrative. While Antonioni creates ambiguity through the editing and organizing of his scenes, Martel creates ambiguity within her frame and connects it to her character. Both methods demand an active spectator and the visualization of the narrative leaves the audience free to conclude what or who Veró has struck with her car. All the while, certain manipulation of the audiences' interpretation is in the hands of the director. In particular, right before the accident scene the audience is witness to several local, poor boys, playing and running around the road.

However, to establish that Martel's characters and the trilogy are ambiguous is too informal. While the character may appear as if unfazed by the events or her surroundings, her actions and development is definitely well-thought out and flawlessly executed by the director. Much like Antonioni, her films are a mixture of indeed ambiguity, but most of all an understanding and honest depiction of a society that is regaining its strength, yet still fighting with social differences.

Conventions of montage create meaning within separate presented scenes. The combination of cross-cutting the scene with an earlier scene where Veró departs with her car signifies a connection; the audience assumes Veró is driving across the same road. And when she hits the object with her vehicle, the viewer immediately must assume that she has hit a child. Yet, the truth remains ambiguous and the audience is further dependent on the visual cues and character development presented by the director. This approach to creating meaning is where the use of long take can play an important role. As Bazin writes that montage in its very nature rules out ambiguity of expression (Bazin, 1967, 36). Whereas the use depth of focus and the long takes reintroduce this sought after ambiguity. He continues with the fact that the uncertainty in which we find ourselves as to the spiritual key or the interpretation we should put on the film is built into the very design of the image (Bazin, 1967, 36). This consideration of Bazin is evident in *LA MUJER SIN CABEZA*. This reasoning is exactly what makes the long takes in Martel's film important. In a sense, the long takes are able to replace an important void that has been left by the minimal reveal of narrative.

By shifting the focus from presenting a real narrative to a more interpretative form of narrative, Martel has the freedom to steer the viewer more and inviting the viewer to look

further than what appears within the frame. As a result, a sizeable percentage of the narrative is played outside of the frame, free for interpretation. Veró is a pawn for the viewer to use as a method for interpretation. The character forces the viewer to look at the circumstances in a certain way, herself being a witness to several visual clues on the screen. For example, in the scene where she is in the backseat of the car and witnessing the body being removed from the ditch, both Veró and the viewer share the visual and point of view. Almost automatically, a connection is made by Veró and therefore also the audience, between the accident and the discovery of the body. This method of cinematic formalism, in combination with the cinematography and montage, work as a substitution for a clearer narrative. Where Antonioni mainly uses formalism to create an interpretational work of art that materializes as a film, Martel adapts his developed formalism into a more narrative structure.

### **Alienation**

The film explores the deep-rooted social differences in the Argentinian society. The focus on an imbalanced society is a recurring theme for Martel. A theme which she has passionately explored in her trilogy, which consists of *LA CIENAGA* (2001), *LA NINA SANTA* (2005) and *LA MUJER SIN CABEZA* (2008). Aside from the focus on this theme, her trilogy is also a beautiful example of the human spirit; a term that has been used to refer to director Antonioni. The camera is the microscope Antonioni deploys to discover hidden “motions” or adjustments of the soul. As a director he seeks to record those emotional nuances that escape “Hollywood”-filmmaking, dominated as it is by standardized, generic, and commonplace forms of romantic comprehension, Kevin Z. Moore writes (Moore, 24, 1995). In his article, Moore relates Weber’s analysis on the modern human condition, and the subtopic of alienation, with the filmography of Antonioni. Weber defines alienation as something that arises when the self becomes disenchanted with the world and retreats into itself (Moore, 22, 1995).

Alienation is often a central theme in Antonioni’s trilogy, which is comprised of *L’AVVENTURA* (1960), *LA NOTTE* (1961) and *L’ECLISSE* (1962). The trilogy could be seen as a sort of homage towards the struggles of postwar modern life. Antonioni’s main characters, often also female, make an attempt to create a distance between themselves and the high-maintenance society. A culture mainly focused on a bourgeoisie and the pressure of marriage. The roles seem somewhat reversed in *LA MUJER SIN CABEZA*. Martel makes it an indirect critique, for Veró originates from a prosperous, white family, which supplies the character with safety. After the incident, Veró again tries to find the comfort in her high society life, for that is her safe space. It is almost a reverse alienation, for Veró, a sudden shock ejects her from her

comfortable life, jetting her closer towards a layer in the Argentinian society she is definitely not familiar with. And it is exactly through this perspective and the actions of the character that Martel creates her social critique. While never explicitly condemning the character's actions, either through formalism or dialogue, Martel leaves the interpretation up to the viewer, yet reveals just enough to make a decisive statement.

In Antonioni's *L'ECLISSE* (1962), main character Vittora wants to divorce herself from the deadening claustrophobia of high modern culture, which is represented by Riccardo at its liberal, cosmopolitan, and refined best, in order to resituate herself within the enabling conditions of authentic cultural production. Acting as a counterpoint to Italian conformist postures, she refuses to conform to the dominant passions of the day (Moore, 27, 1995). For the character of Vittoria, the high modern life is confining, and stifling.

Veró is a victim of her surroundings, likely causing her subsequent alienation. Before the hit and run, she lived a comfortable life, consisting of some hours of work, converging at the local swimming hall, and being with family. Any great responsibilities befell to her husband, or were solved with the household staff. After she has most likely hit a child, her earlier life and social status is a provocation for her detachment from reality, or as a cause for her alienation. Suddenly, she finds herself unable to connect with her closest surroundings, living out the days in a daze. Yet, she also does not resolve to actively solving the issue. Again, rather than acting, she decides to silently reveal her issue to her husband, placing her trust in him to solve the problem. Which he predictably does. For Veró, keeping up appearances and the power of her social status is inevitably more important.

Her status is also confirmed by people close in her vicinity; when Veró looks stressed, her friends advise to her to receive a massage for example. In the beginning of the film, Veró has recently dyed her hair blonde, something that is only revealed by Martel through comments of friends, and the image that Veró keeps adjusting and running her fingers through her hair. Near the end of the film, when nearly everything is back how it was, Veró reveals to have re-dyed her hair, to her original brown color. A signal that the headless woman has once again found her composure and confidence, her head safely back on her shoulders. Similar to the style of Antonioni, Martel chooses the narrative to remain hazy, depending rather on stylistic choices and cues to reveal. And this is also exactly how she approaches the theme of alienation. Just like Veró's sudden jerk from comfort and familiarity, the characters in Antonioni's trilogy experience a similar separation from the familiar.

The film also functions as a vehicle for Antonioni to express his critique on contemporary life in Italy after the WWII. A critique that he expresses through his characters and his cinematography, which Martel has similarly adapted for her view and critique on the Argentinian society. While both do not actively denounce the social structures that make up their postwar society, both visual interpretations lay the structure bare, and invite the viewer itself to interpret the condition.

Through her cinematography, Martel reveals the underlying social inequality that is alive in Argentina. Without revealing anything narratively through the character's dialogue or any explanatory shots, *LA MUJER SIN CABEZA* never explains, only suggests. And these suggestions only come from the point of view of the main character. As mentioned earlier, Martel follows Veró close with the camera, unveiling little to nothing of Veró's direct surroundings. For example, the several maids that Veró has employed in her household are most often heard out of frame or seen fleetingly crossing the screen. Often, Veró turns her back from lower class, having her husband deal with the interactions. This uncomfortable, or perhaps even some guilt ridden, behavior becomes most in a scene where she is asked to give a local Salta girl a lift home by car. The girl lives in a nearby shantytown. It's a short ride, nevertheless, Veró is visibly uncomfortable. After arriving she never exits her vehicle. The car has throughout the film been an important symbol of safety for her. When the girl has left the vehicle, she briskly asks for the quickest exit, letting slip her social status and her condescending attitude.

Similar to Veró does the camera also not leave the vehicle, instead remaining with the main character and observing the action from the inside looking out. In this matter, the viewer also remains within the vehicle, observing the situation from Veró's safe place, and never exploring the space outside. By applying the camera to remain confined to Veró and the interior of the car, a space is left undiscovered and this results in the outside, the indigenous village, to remain vague and perhaps even threatening. In *LA MUJER SIN CABEZA*, but also visible in the other two films of the trilogy, they are mostly shot from the point of view of the protagonists and in their gaze the other is hardly registered. This is most visible with Veró, where the ethnic servants are usually backlit and become an out-of-focus stain in the frame (Lange-Churión, 479, 2012).

Most servants indeed remain a stain in the frame and many spaces and surroundings have remained a mystery therefore. Only when Veró interacts or deals with the ethnic minority directly, such as in the scene where she finds herself in the shantytown, do they become more visible in the scene. Yet, this interaction is always combined with the main character's disdain

and discomfort. So, through an intense close up and low depth of field from the camerawork and the slow pacing, long sequences, Martel finds the ability to visualize the social hierarchy that exists within the area that is Salta.

It is evident that Martel chooses to have her narrative unfold through aesthetic decisions rather than to create a well-defined and explanatory narrative. Instead of focusing extensively on the already existing plights that trouble current Argentina, and turning it into a film that highlights such social issues, Martel places the viewer in the middle and presents her films as a mirror that reflect the social imbalance. Through her characters, intense cinematography and long sequences, a more personal and perhaps realistic portrait of a society is created. An excellent choice, as it results in a focus on the internal, whilst almost solely using cinematography that is reinforcing the external. The portrait that unfolds of Veró and her social status and life in Salta, is strong and honest. And also, by choosing such a focus on formalism, the director grants the viewer a greater freedom in interpretation. A focus on the strenuous cultural and social status of Argentina's citizens is an intrinsic quality of Argentinian cinema, having incorporated the themes from other films that produce an absolute and seamless illusion of reality prevent the viewer from developing the critical scrutiny that is demanded by Martel's work (Lange-Churión, 470, 2012).

## IN CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have made an attempt to research the influence of European art cinema on New Latin American cinema, with a specific focus on the use of long takes in both. By analyzing three directors who all three have originated from a different country within Latin America, I have tried to discover how these directors have adapted art cinema, or European Second Cinema, in order to make an attempt to reestablish their countries' own cinema. All three directors discussed in this thesis have presented three different approaches towards the use of the long takes. My leading question for this research was as follows: What are the functions of the use of long takes in the cinema of contemporary leading Latin American directors? What has become most clear is that all three of the directors have executed the long takes in three different manners.

Carlos Reygadas' films can be seen as having the most classical approach towards the use of long takes. To be more specific, a classic approach similar to that of Bazin's description. Both Bazin and Reygadas view the long take as a device to evoke realism. The realism of Reygadas can be found in the narrative and the formalism. With exploring narratives that are largely focused on human interaction and morals, Reygadas' long takes are created to embody a more realistic and interpretative film. Similar to the works of Carl Dreyer, Reygadas' filmography is an example of slow and contemplative cinema, with a minimalistic approach to filmmaking.

Both Pablo Larraín and Lucrecia Martel use their films to call attention to several social issues occurring in their countries, Chile and Argentina, respectively. Yet both directors have differing approaches to achieving this. Larraín has approached the long take as a powerful tool to highlight the political issues, adapting his style to the narratives of his political trilogy. He relives a shared history, which takes place in the 1970s, by adapting an aesthetic that also hails from that similar era, in his case the art cinema of Europe. It is in this light the use of long takes is analyzed. Inspiration comes from directors Tarkovsky and Antonioni, with the latter using the long takes as a method to explore space within the frame. Tarkovsky is evident in Larraín with regards to the alienation of time, but also to let play time pass within the frame. Larraín adapts his films make his formalistic style fit within the timeframe of his narrative. In this sense he revives the style of 60s and 70s art cinema, yet completely depart from it too, by adapting it to fit a more political structure. His use of long takes is a direct result from this adaption of style, yet are not used to replicate a similar intention to that of Antonioni or Tarkovsky. Rather,

the long takes of Larraín are integral to the strong political narrative of his films and create a poignant and harsh history of Chile.

Martel plays with the long take to reveal longstanding social imbalance in Argentina. Other than Reygadas and Larraín, her long take style works closely with the narrative and the characters. Instead of exploring time and space, Martel remains close to her characters with the camera, which results in an alienation and confusion by the viewer. Through the long takes and close ups, Martel projects the uneasiness and imbalance from her characters on to her audience. The result is true-to-life, yet with a powerful political message.

In regards to the opinions expressed by Steven Shaviro, it has become clear that the cinema of Latin American has not copied the style of the art cinema, but rather adapted the style to more accurately fit their own political agenda and history. Their tradition of filmmaking has a much stronger political background than that of Europe. Yet the style of European art cinema, with its close relationship to realism and interpretative filmmaking, is rather fitting for the resurgence of Latin American cinema. Each of the abovementioned directors have taken inspiration for their own works from the art cinema, yet have created films that have such a strong identity rooted in Latin America, that it is hard to state that they lack any originality and a merely a style copy.

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