



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

This is a repository copy of '*Modernist Belatedness in Contemporary Slow Cinema*'.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/136870/>

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

Koutsourakis, A (2019) '*Modernist Belatedness in Contemporary Slow Cinema*'. *Screen*, 60 (3). pp. 388-409. ISSN 0036-9543

<https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/hjz023>

© The Author(s) 2019. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of *Screen*. All rights reserved. This is an author produced version of a journal article published in *Screen*. Uploaded in accordance with the publisher's self-archiving policy.

Reuse

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>

Modernist Belatedness in Contemporary Slow Cinema

Forthcoming in Screen (Oxford University Press), 2019. Final corrections approved 27 August, 2018.

In an essay published in 1925 titled ‘Literature beyond “Plot”’, the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky argued for a non-linear ‘inheritance’ and classification of literature contending that the innovations produced by new literary movements aim to overthrow past conventions, yet things are more complicated because the dialectics between past artistic forms and novel ones are far from being linear. As he says,

The defeated line is not destroyed; it doesn’t cease to exist. It only plummets from the crest, rests and may rise again; it remains an eternal contender for the throne. Moreover, matters are complicated by the fact that the new hegemon usually does not simply canonize an established form but also adds features borrowed from other young schools, and even features (albeit functionally used) inherited from its predecessor on the throne.¹

In this article, I want to take a cue from Shklovsky’s point so as to explore the revivification of modernism in contemporary slow cinema. While slow cinema is now a widely used term in film studies that describes films that make use of strategies of long duration and slow pace, I use the term reluctantly for the sake of disciplinary conversation. This is because slowness is a debatable and historically laden term; many of the contemporary ‘slow films’ utilise formal characteristics associated with the early days of the medium both in its silent as well as the talkie era, which were not judged as slow at the time. Nonetheless, I understand films that are normally examined under the rubric of slow cinema as objects that make primarily use of cinema’s capacity not just to dramatise but to allow aspects of material reality to enter the fictional universe by means of their resistance to narrative fluidity. Slow cinema thus uses an approach typical of non-studio cinema practices that characterised post-war modernism. This aspect of the ‘movement’ restores what Jean Renoir considers to be the quintessence of the medium, that is, the disruptive intrusion of the real into the diegetic cosmos.² In what follows, I engage with scholarly debates on cinematic slowness; I argue that slow cinema’s apparent

recuperation of modernism has not been subjected to scholarly scrutiny that can reveal the politics of this anachronism. I then clarify the historical significance of slow cinema's belated style using contemporary films from the World cinema canon as a lens with which to view the political implications of their modernist belatedness and their recovery of the modernist critique of liberalism. In the second part, I focus on two films – Pedro Costa's *Ossos* (1997) and Angela Schanelec's *Marseille* (2004), whose study can expand our understanding of the slow cinema movement as a reactivation of the modernist impulse to encounter the real and make material realities visible.

Productive anachronism: the recovery of modernist aesthetics and politics

Before moving to the main corpus of the argument a few comments that can clarify my approach, which refutes neat periodisations, are in order. Shklovsky's abovementioned valorisation of a non-linear and non-teleological understanding of artistic movements resonates with contemporary debates in media archaeology, a strand of media theory that contests commonsensical classifications of temporality when considering the history of media and media practices. In bringing together the past and the present, media archaeology invites us to think how contemporary media practices have their roots in the past, but ultimately it also enables us to understand time not as a linear continuum, but as a series of Benjaminian constellations. As such, neat temporal categories are problematised and historical processes that were relegated to the past come to haunt our present.³ The implications are far-reaching, since in contesting historical temporalisation, media archaeology urges us to reconsider not just past and present media practices, but also the specific material processes that gave rise to them. For instance, the expropriation of material resources from the colonies for the production of media that was prevalent in the nineteenth century is a standard practice in the contemporary so-called post-colonial period, in which the production of media is reliant on the cheap labour and the natural resources provided by the global South. In effect, one is asked to reflect on how

particular material, historical, and social processes that we might associate with the past can still be pervasive in our present historical experience.

Is not there a possible way of adopting a similar archaeological approach to the study of aesthetic recurrences or repetitions in cinema so as to get a better understanding of the interconnection between aesthetics and politics? Noël Burch, whose research has been influential on media archaeology, is a good case in point, since his work has challenged canonical evolutionary film histories, according to which cinema's shift from spectacle to narrative can be seen as the teleological improvement of a medium that had not fulfilled its potential. Burch's project instead aimed to write a counter-history of the medium, which aspired to reveal historical gaps and lacunae that challenge the understanding of cinema history as a linear progress towards narrative.⁴ Burch turned to the cinematic past, and in particular to the silent cinema, so as to debunk the established argument according to which the Hollywood narrative codes are the endpoint of cinema history, or the medium's universal and natural language.⁵ In doing so, he aspired to rescue a modernist and avant-garde aesthetic from the margins of cinema history and show that the study of the past can help us understand that their roots are in the popular cinema of the early twentieth century. For example, in his discussion of two notable modernist films, Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* (1975), and Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962), he underlines how they consciously return to formal features associated with the early history and the prehistory of the medium. Akerman utilises early cinema's 'rigorous frontality' and Marker draws on the pre-cinematic technology of the 'magic lantern lecture'.⁶ The significance of Burch's project was also that his counter-history of cinema aimed at exposing how aesthetic developments are also socially determined, as it is evidenced in his Marxist class analysis of the shift from a cinema of attractions to a story-telling one.

Shklovsky's and Burch's advocating of non-linear histories of art facilitate a more nuanced understanding of artistic movements that trouble a well-ordered chronology. After all, past aesthetic practices and forms can be revitalised as a result of the re-emergence of analogous social contractions like the ones that produced them. This approach is fruitful when considering contemporary slow cinema that consciously returns to the post-war modernist cinematic tradition of the past. Following in the footsteps of scholars like Laura Marcus, David Trotter, Julian Murphet, and Michael Valdez Moses, I consider cinema as a medium that is inextricably linked with the history of modernism.⁷ However, when considering contemporary slow cinema, I link it with post-war slow modernism (instead of the 'vernacular modernism' – to invoke Miriam Bratu Hansen – of popular Hollywood cinema or the avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s) which expressed a disenchantment with modernity and abandoned modernity's heroic narrative towards progress; this is the reason why velocity and speed are replaced by a more contemplative style.

Studies in slow cinema have proliferated in the last decade in the field of film studies and commentators have certainly addressed important issues with respect to questions of aesthetics and politics. Then again, scholars have not really taken issue with slow cinema's modernist belatedness nor have they tried to elucidate the social and historical determinants behind this recovering of practices associated with the past. In this article, I shall examine the reanimation of modernist techniques in contemporary slow cinema as a gesture that aims at the re-historicisation of our experience. I argue that slow cinema's reanimation of modernist aesthetics should not be seen as a nostalgic homage empty of historical significance, but as a desire to respond to the material (labour, historical, and social contradictions) realities of the present. Following Terry Eagleton, I understand modernism not simply as a series of stylistic devices, but as an appreciation of art as 'material intervention';⁸ this implies that aesthetic modernism reacts to the conditions of its own emergence, while its critique of representation

is not just an aesthetic project, but one that asks us to envisage a different modernity shorn of alienating social forces and conditions. All the same, although I disagree with András Bálint Kovács' understanding of modernism as a movement located strictly in the past (of which more below), I share his view that postmodernist appropriations of modernist tropes have not necessarily de-radicalised them; postmodern strategies of fragmentation and self-reflexivity do not point to a material reality behind representation, since reality in postmodernism has disappeared in its simulations, whereas for modernism the critique of representation is a response to a concrete material reality outside the representational boundaries.⁹

Along with scholars such as Murphet, Tyrus Miller, Marcus and Trotter, I understand modernism as a multimedia phenomenon. It is a truism to suggest that modernism describes a diverse rather than a unified set of artistic traditions, styles, and innovations; nonetheless, the common thread that joins different modernisms together is the way formal innovations critically respond to capitalist social relations. In film scholarship, cinematic modernism is normally divided into two different phases. Kovács and John Orr associate the first phase with German Expressionism, Surrealism, and the Soviet avant-garde. The second phase of modernism, on the other hand, is linked with the post-war period, the new waves in Europe, and the Third cinema. According to Kovács, the first period of modernism can be seen as a response to a broader range of artistic experiments beyond cinema, that is, painting and music. This was the period that cinema aimed at foregrounding its medium specificity and its distinction from theatre and literature. Kovács argues that in its second phase, cinematic modernism, seems more comfortable to engage with its previous “enemies”, that is, literature and theatre.¹⁰ Exposed to critical scrutiny, Kovács' argument can be questioned given that aesthetic experiments in theatre and literature were influential on films that belong to the first period of modernism. One needs to consider the influence of Erwin Piscator on German Expressionist filmmakers,¹¹ as well as James Joyce's on Eisenstein. As Marcus explains, the

latter went that far so as to describe *Ulysses* as ‘the most important event in the history of cinema’,¹² on account of its employment of a montage aesthetic that successfully connected an inner with an outer reality.

Unlike Kovács, I understand the key distinction between the first and the second phase of cinematic modernism to be an epistemological one. The first period of cinematic modernism used formal experimentation as a means of analysing reality and revealing its changeability in the interest of human and social liberation. The latter one shares the belief that formal innovation can produce new ways of understanding the world, but not necessarily of mastering it. Still, both the first and the second phase of cinematic modernism may well be understood as responses to historical developments associated with the contradictions and impasses of capitalist modernity. Certainly, as scholars have acknowledged, post-war modernism is much more pessimistic something that is to be understood as a response to the historical traumas of fascism, the concentration camps, Stalinism and the gradual end of European colonialism.¹³

While a good case can be made for this argument, it is important to note that this Eurocentric narrative cannot account for the fact that cinematic modernism becomes a global phenomenon in the post-War period. Modernism’s global expansion can be more productively understood as a response to conditions of combined and uneven development, a reading that has been put forward by the Warwick research collective in their discussion of literary modernism. Taking a cue from Fredric Jameson’s understanding of modernity as a singular and transnational event in history, the Warwick scholars suggest that modernism is a global phenomenon precisely because it responds to conditions of development and unevenness. To understand this argument, one needs to acknowledge that modernity does not simply produce conditions of development and modernisation; the latter co-exist with conditions of underdevelopment which are the dialectical product of modernisation. Put simply, development in the core of Europe or the Americas, simultaneously produces

underdevelopment in their peripheries. This is also the case when considering former colonies. Development for the colonisers generates underdevelopment for the colonised. Similarly, this dialectic takes place within areas in the global North. For instance, development in southern parts of the UK can produce underdevelopment in the North; modernity is not the same historical experience for London and Sheffield. It is a singular phenomenon, but does not have ‘the same form everywhere’.¹⁴ This approach that understands modernism as a phenomenon that responds to conditions of development and underdevelopment enables the scholars from the Warwick research collective to explain its global dimension and flourishing in diverse places across the globe, where the effects of the conflict between modernisation and underdevelopment are far from being uniform.

This line of thought may enable us to expand the geographical, chronological, and historical parameters of modernism not just in literary studies (which has recently challenged conventional chronological categories of modernism considering its prehistory and its contemporary manifestations), but also in film scholarship too. This is the key reason why I understand modernism as an important critical concept that may allow us to understand contemporary slow cinema. My non-linear reading of modernism understands slow cinema’s reanimation of its aesthetic as a response to past contradictions that neither modernity nor late modernity has managed to resolve. Such a reading can account for the fact that slow films are produced both in the global north, which experiences the consequences of overdevelopment, as well as in the global south, which faces the effects of underdevelopment. This conflict between core and periphery is also an important reason why I have chosen to discuss one case study from Germany and one from Portugal in the next section. While Schanelec’s and Costa’s works are different slow films that reactivate past modernist tropes – the first one long takes and *temps morts* associated with a post-war modernist aesthetic, and the second one a Bressonian emphasis on gesture – they both respond to capitalist conditions: *Marseille* to

processes of development and *Ossos* of underdevelopment examining their effects on the individual and collective psyche. They are therefore good examples that can stimulate our understanding of the persistence of modernism in the European core and the periphery.

My central claim is, therefore, that the re-emergence of slow modernism can be seen as a response to past political problematics against which modernism reacted that are still applicable in the present. This is what differentiates my approach compared to Lúcia Nagib's recent critique of the dichotomy between classical and modernist cinema, which is, consistent with studies by Ian Aitken, Ivone Margulies and Mary Ann Doane, who have also questioned the standardised binary between realism and modernism.¹⁵ Studies in slow cinema have flourished and scholars' contributions have definitely expanded our understanding of this global movement. Matthew Flanagan has clearly articulated slow cinema's indebtedness to modernism and pertinently situated its emergence within the context of the neoliberal turn. He has also touched albeit briefly on the issue of underdevelopment arguing that 'the distinctive aesthetics of slow films tend to emerge from spaces that have been indirectly affected or left behind by globalisation, most notably in the films of Alonso, Bartas, Jia, Costa and Diaz'.¹⁶ Tiago de Luca has usefully discussed slow cinema as a self-reflexive commentary on the importance of collective spectatorship, at a historical moment that film viewing has increasingly turned to an individualised experience.¹⁷ Lutz Koepnick has pertinently explained that alongside a modernism valorising velocity and speed, there was a slow modernism concerned with refuting Enlightenment ideas of history marching towards progress.¹⁸ Asbjørn Grønstad has discussed the ethics of duration in slow cinema and slowness' capacity to visualise social conditions that remain invisible in our everyday encounters.¹⁹ Karl Schoonover has appositely analysed slow cinema's laborious style with reference to questions of labour and a queer aesthetic of resistance.²⁰

Yet the question of slow cinema's modernist belatedness and its revival of aesthetic tropes associated with modernism has not been situated in a historical context that can reveal the interconnection between the past and the present not just in terms of aesthetics but also of politics. Commenting on the cinema of Béla Tarr, Kovács sees the re-emergence of modernist aesthetics as something that is at odds with post-war modernism, for which artistic innovation went hand in hand with the renewal of national film industries. Whereas the New Waves of the 1950s and 1960s had a strong national dimension since modernist techniques were combined with the cultural traditions of the nation, contemporary filmmakers drawing on the modernist tradition deploy an international language to muse on universal questions apropos the human condition.²¹ I find this argument problematic, since as the history of modernism demonstrates, modernism was a transnational phenomenon per se; some of its key representatives in post-war cinema, such as Roberto Rossellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Glauber Rocha, Ousmane Sembène, and Theo Angelopoulos amongst many responded aesthetically to historical conditions of development and underdevelopment and ended up being more visible outside their countries of origin. Part of the problem with Kovács is his acceptance of a neat chronology according to which modernism is something that belongs to the past and, as he provocatively suggests elsewhere, contemporary films might employ modernist techniques and tropes but they are not modern anymore.²² One could interject that it is precisely in the present media, social and political landscape that modernist slowness becomes more pertinent; late modernity's accelerated life style, reinforced by new technologies that facilitate temporal and spatial shrinkage and by flexible labour conditions and social relationships, renders these objects even more qualified in reinvigorating the modernist impetus to acknowledge the social aspect of representation as a means of responding to the antinomy of the Enlightenment project, which simultaneously produces freedom and oppression/social conformity.

Part of the problem with most scholars' responses to slow cinema's obvious recovery of the modernist aesthetic sensibility lies in the fact that they seem to treat modernism solely as an aesthetic rather than a political project, without reflecting on whether our present historical experience has revitalised the modernist critique of the Enlightenment. As Timothy J. Clark aptly explains, modernism was a response 'to the blindness of modernity'²³ that provoked a combination of fascination for the overcoming of the past and simultaneously a persistent anxiety for the present and the future. The difference with the postmodern critique of the Enlightenment is that time for postmodernism seems to have frozen as if we are caught in an eternal present from which there is no way out.²⁴ As such, the postmodern critique of Western rationality becomes a means of stabilising the existing state of things; while the present can be subject to critique, such a critique hardly grants us a better understanding of its material conditions and social processes.

This distinction helps us appreciate this crucial political aspect of post-war cinematic modernism that has been recovered by the slow cinema movement. A good example here is Jia Zhangke's *三峡好人* (*Still Life*, 2006), whose registration of the destruction of old settlements for the construction of the Three Gorges Dam produces a dialectical image – in a Benjaminian sense – in which the failures of the socialist past come to haunt the present and simultaneously produce an uncertain future; the market solutions to past problems do not seem to offer any hope to the underdogs of history, who are again the ones to be negatively affected by the changes on the country's economic development. Not unlike Antonioni, the characters' psychological anxiety is a historical one, but also one embedded in the dialectics between tradition and change that was a central preoccupation of modernism. Flanagan and Cecília Mello aptly explain that Zhangke's employment of canonical modernist techniques e.g. the merging of documentary and fictional material and the emphasis on mundaneness can be understood as aesthetic responses that seek to come to terms with the new market conditions

in mainland China.²⁵ Thus, to adequately account for the retrieval of aesthetic principles belonging to the modernist past, we need to seriously consider whether these principles have similarly revitalised past political problematics, something that has not been subjected to much critical scrutiny on the part of film scholars.

For instance, even Mark Betz, an advocate of the persistence of modernism in the current global film landscape does not go beyond (skilfully) identifying the reappearance of formal characteristics that have historically been linked to modernism in contemporary films in and beyond Europe.²⁶ Commenting on filmmakers such as Béla Tarr, Pedro Costa, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, and others, Ira Jaffe suggests that their work has little to do with modernist precursors such as Antonioni and Angelopoulos on the grounds that characters in contemporary slow cinema employ a more ‘affectless acting’ compared to the two modernist predecessors.²⁷ One can notice in Jaffe’s work the knee-jerk understanding of modernism strictly as a formal category without considering the movement’s political confrontation with the antinomies of the social experience in modernity. But even Jaffe’s emphasis on the affectless acting of contemporary slow cinema is far from a novel trope as the examples of Straub/Huillet, Chantal Ackermann, Miklós Jancsó, and indeed of Angelopoulos’ early films show.

Grønstad, whilst helpfully acknowledging the modernist lineages of the movement and referring to slow cinema’s ethical implications in terms of spectatorship (that is, its capacity to produce feelings of compassion and empathetic responses when dealing with the losers of history), he also seems to be at a loss to explain its recuperation of modernism and he stops short of engaging with the politics of this anachronism.²⁸ Similarly, de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge, whilst acknowledging the roots of the movement in modernist precursors and usefully arguing that slow filmmakers do not just negate the present reality of late capitalism, but try to make sense of it, skilfully evade the question of the currency of the modernist aesthetic model in the present.²⁹ But is this opposition just an aesthetic one? Does it have to do with a different

understanding of reality or perhaps a desire to unearth its contradictions concealed by the endless circulation of capital facilitated by a supposedly immaterial (service) labour in the global North, which is ironically the consequence of outsourcing material labour in the global south? Was not after all the modernist critique of classicism not just an aesthetic but a political reaction towards representations of reality that rendered it unified, well-ordered, and static, by confounding the social determinants and processes behind its appearances? Cannot we instead suggest that the transnational resurgence of slow modernism may be understood as a reaction to the naturalisation of a world of ceaseless capital circulation and reproduction that posits the reality of the free market as the new eternal present that simultaneously produces economic growth and poverty? If, echoing Dudley Andrew's reading of Bazin's response to post-war modernism as a realisation on the part of the filmmakers that the world had become too complex to be represented within the studio,³⁰ one acknowledges that something similar takes place at the present, it is legitimate to suggest that slow cinema's aesthetic anachronism is a return to older problematics. It is a testament to a desire to use the medium so as to confront the historical ambiguities of the present by being attendant to contradictions whose causes are invisible in the world of transnational capital flow and increased technological mediation.³¹

The critical discomfort brought about by cinematic slowness has to do with the fact that it advances a different understanding of the politics of time, according to which time is not a sequential process but one that reiterates past contradictions. This is why some scholars who subscribe to a neat periodisation, according to which modernist experiments of the past have been de-radicalised by the postmodern turn, see this as a regressive gesture. As Steven Shaviro says, 'there isn't a technique used by Jean-Luc Godard that hasn't become a mainstay of television and Internet commercials'.³² This thesis taken literally seems to suggest that people respond in the same ways, derive the same pleasures and confront the same challenges when watching an Antonioni, Godard, Straub/Huillet, Béla Tarr film and a blockbuster, or a YouTube

video.³³ The problem with Shaviro's criticism is that it tends to equate modernism solely with a set of formal principles and not as a critical reaction to established ways of seeing and understanding the world.

To understand the differences, one needs to note that postmodern/post-classical cinema, which is defended by Shaviro, might deploy shock effects associated with modernism, but in its celebration of pluralism and historical amnesia it posits a new unifying principle which is non-other than the commodity. As opposed to modernism's refutation of reality as static and fixed, the post-classical postmodern blockbuster celebrates the very idea of the commodity and articulates a new ahistorical worldview that seems to propagate the reality of the market even when allegedly negating it. Modernism saw reality as variable and its stylistic innovations aimed to undermine the coherence of the world; postmodern cinema instead counters strategies of narrative fluidity but only to reinforce a fragmented market reality of ceaseless capital circulation and reproduction.

Despite the thematic differences what connects contemporary slow films from various parts of the world is an emphasis on the alienation produced by the new forms of economic organisation and insecure labour that favour individualism and lead to the disappearance of community. This is a recurring theme in slow films even ones whose subject matter draws on the impasses of the twentieth century state socialism, such as Béla Tarr's *Sátántangó* (1994), which Jacques Rancière reads as a parable on the failure of communism.³⁴ *Sátántangó* centres on life in a Hungarian village following the collapse of a collective farm. The community at the beginning of the film is shown as disintegrating, it is a world of mendacity, treachery and deception, since each character wants to swindle each other from the money they collectively earned in the farm. The death of a mentally disabled girl will eventually make the villagers easy preys to two schemers Irimiás (Mihály Vig) and Petrina (Putyi Horváth), who manipulate their guilt for the death of the child and convince them to give them all their savings to establish

a new collective farm. The irony is that in promising them a new cooperative enterprise that will assist them in meeting their economic needs, they facilitate the community's further disintegration since they swindle them out of their money and set them apart from each other.

While the film holds out contradictory readings one can legitimately suggest that Tarr muses here on the post-communist reality, where the counterfeit and deceitful social cohesion of state socialism is replaced by individual entrepreneurship that leads to the usurpation of public wealth and furthers the disintegration of the social fabric leading to atomization and social fragmentation. There is one passage in the film – titled 'Irimiás gives a speech' – that is particularly telling in this regard. The sequence starts with a static medium shot showing the villagers surrounding the body of the dead girl, which is placed in the centre of the frame. The shot here has a tableau quality, since the camera and the characters remain immobile for seventy-one seconds. Suddenly, the camera cuts to a close-up of Irimiás, who starts accusing the villagers of moral blindness and asks them to confront their responsibility for Estike's death while promising at the same time that they can be exonerated if they fund his plan for a new collective farm outside the village. Irimiás' monologue lasts for ten and a half minutes and throughout this part the villagers are left off-screen. The camera remains mostly static at times following his movements slowly panning to the left or the right side of the frame; when he concludes his speech he is still framed motionless for a few seconds. What ensues is a circular pan showing one of the villagers moving from the right to the left and placing his money next to the body of the dead girl. The others do the same although now the camera – echoing Bresson's *L'Argent* (1983) – registers only their hands and their gesture of delivering their money to the swindler. Again, the members of the community do not share the frame with Irimiás. When they all leave, the sequence culminates to a close-up of Irimiás' face after having collected the money.

Throughout this passage there is a clear contrast between individualism as manifested in the character of Irimiás and the already split community as embodied by the villagers. In a way, this sequence encapsulates one of the key themes in the film, which is the shift from an oppressive conformity, where social cohesion is kept by means of deception, lies and intimidation, to a different type of conformity that is contingent on the total breakdown of communal spirit. Thus, the film further complicates the politics of time, since the transition from Communism to a neoliberal reality of individualism, resurfaces past hierarchical social relations that entrench rather than abolish authoritarianism. Slowness here turns to a critical representational mode that facilitates the observation of this shift by attending to the actors' movements and gestures that are loaded with political meaning. As Rancière cogently states, Tarr is not interested in narrative development, but in 'situations and movements';³⁵ I would add to this that the effect is that one is asked to draw attention to the ways these situations affect the bodies of the characters whose movements are also conditioned by the changing social dynamics within the space. Typical in this respect is the casual, impersonal manner in which the villagers deliver their money to their pseudo-benefactor, and the equally casual way he collects them. De-dramatisation here is not a fetishistic repetition of past practices, but an acknowledgement of the object's incapacity to resolve contradictions located off-screen.

Such an emphasis on minor everyday details and routines calls attention to the separation of the individual from the community, which is a central contemporary historical experience across the globe. Consider, for example, Ivan Sen's – an Australian aboriginal director – *Goldstone* (2016). The film focuses on an indigenous cop Jay (Aaron Pedersen) who goes to the fictional town of Goldstone to investigate a missing Asian girl. He realises that the town has fallen prey to mining companies which bribe members of the aboriginal community, so as to appropriate the resources of their land, ultimately dividing them against each other. One of the elders of the community (David Gulpilil) refuses to approve the mine's expansion

something that brings him into conflict with the others who have received bribes. Here the separation of the individual from the community is intimately tied to practices of neo-colonial appropriation of natural resources. At some point the rebellious elder takes Jay to a journey through the sandstone of Cobbold Gorge and here the slow registration of this sacred Aboriginal site juxtaposes the indigenous spiritual understanding of the land to the mining practices of plundering natural resources for profit. Again, past and present dialectically interact with each other; Sen's emphasis on extended shots of visuals of the landscape points to the past colonial violence and the present neo-colonial one that disintegrates the community through monetary bribes. The camera's capturing of the Aboriginal artworks on the sandstones invites the viewer to consider the historical weight carried by the landscape and acts as a reminder of the persistence of colonial practices of cultural suppression. Whereas past colonial violence was structured around community extermination, contemporary neo-colonial violence is an economic one that perpetuates the forceful severance of the indigenous population from their cultural identity and community.

The individual's separation from the community is something formalised in many slow films that muse on the changes brought about by the further expansion and entrenchment of neoliberalism. For instance, in Fred Kelemen's *Frost* (1997) this question becomes the starting point for the exploration of a new reality of deprivation in Germany following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Focusing on the late capitalist underclass, the film betrays a sense of nostalgia for the past; a young woman flees her abusive husband with her small son and goes on a journey to the former East Germany trying to find her hometown that no longer exists. This nostalgia becomes a meditation on history's missed opportunities and the ways the failures of the past inhere in the present. But similar themes preoccupy filmmakers outside Europe, and Tsai Ming-Liang's *Vive L'Amour* (1994) is a good case in point. Set in Tapei city, the film follows the lives of a real estate agent Mei-mei Lin (Yang Kuei-Mei), a columbarium niches seller Hsiao-

kang (Lee Kang-sheng), and a clothes street vendor Ah-jung (Chen Chao-jung). Their lives intersect coincidentally when they unknowingly share an apartment that Mei-mei tries to sell. The latter uses it for her brief and affectless sexual encounters with Ah-jung, whom she meets at a café. Hsiao-kang has found a key to that apartment and retreats to it to work through his loneliness and sexual dissatisfaction. The three of them are alienated by the urban reality and the new economic landscape that encourages flexible, non-committed social interactions and ironically the apartment acts as the locus in which their solitude and angst is shared. Significant screen time is devoted to the characters spending time in public spaces, such as cafes and restaurants, where little dramatic action takes place. Consequently, the film becomes a semi-documentary about the changing urban landscape in times of neoliberal economic reforms and the feelings of desolation these changes produce. This is the reason why *Vive L'Amour* has been compared thematically to the work of Antonioni.³⁶ Emblematic in this respect is the last sequence that follows Mei-mei after a brief sexual encounter with Ah-jung, which is witnessed unbeknownst to them by Hsiao-kang, who is hiding underneath their bed. When Mei exits the apartment, she realises that her car is inoperative and heads towards the still-incomplete at the time Da'an Park, sits on a bench behind an elderly man reading his newspaper and starts sobbing. While the two characters are briefly framed together, we see the man's facial expression acknowledging her grief without doing, however, anything to alleviate it. The shot shifts to a close-up of Mei-mei crying; the extended duration of this six-minute sequence is gratuitous to the diegesis, since nothing follows it and the film concludes. What this sequence performs, however, is a summary of the film's central preoccupation, which is the negative effects of neoliberal individualism – shaped by long working hours, flexible and loose social interactions – upon the collective psyche and emotions.

Consequently, the common thread between these different films such as *Still Life*, *Sátántangó*, *Goldstone*, and *Vive L'Amour* is the way they reactivate the modernist critique of

liberalism. Michael North's work on literary modernism's opposition to liberal democracy and capitalism offers a productive prism through which to approach this critique. According to North, what connects left and right-wing literary modernism is the return to past political theories that understand the individual as a member of the community and not as a self-determined and independent social being as it is the case with European liberalism. Modernism's reaction to liberalism is akin to its critique of the Enlightenment, whose power to liberate is simultaneously a capacity to enslave and produce different types of mythologies, such as ideas of economic rationality. Aesthetic modernism emerged as an alternative against liberal individualism and the abstract understanding of the individual as independent of the community. In a passage that merits to be quoted North suggests that:

The promise of modern political movements to win individual freedom and self-fulfillment for all had come to seem a hollow form; the rights and freedoms guaranteed by liberalism seemed mere abstractions, blank checks that could never be filled in or cashed. One source of the power of aesthetic modernism was its implicit claim to effect the liberation that liberal democracy had promised but failed to deliver. Even a reactionary modernism could seem vital in contrast to the ossified remnants of a failed system, and it was reactionaries like Marinetti who promised the most thorough and the most thrilling revolutions. When Ezra Pound called liberalism "a running sore," or when T.S. Eliot complained that his society was "worm-eaten with Liberalism," they joined the attack on a system that had come to epitomize the failure of modernity. Reactionary critics like Eliot and Pound identified in liberalism the same weakness that Auden had found: the misconception that the individual is "an absolute entity independent of all others."³⁷

Although North's comments are focused on literary modernism, one can certainly find similar preoccupations in post-war cinematic modernism that reflects on questions of individual alienation and desolation. From filmmakers as different as Kobayashi, Antonioni, Akerman, Straub/Huillet, and Fassbinder this critique of liberal individualism and the individual's alienation from the community is a recurring theme in their works. For the contradiction of liberal democracy is that individual freedom becomes a means of integrating the individual to an alienating reality. In the current socio-political environment of neoliberal individualism, which produces further atomization, lack of community bonds and roots, flexible social

relations, and lack of leisure time, the modernist challenge to liberalism regains new urgency and indeed filmmakers across the world such as Kelemen, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Diao Yinan, Costa, Schanelec (of whom more below) and Christian Petzold are amongst the many examples of directors, whose work does not simply revive formal modernist tropes, but also modernism's very critique of the liberal concept of freedom.

Making Visible: *Ossos* (1997) and *Marseille* (2004)

Taking a cue from the abovementioned comments, it is legitimate to suggest that the renewed prominence of modernist tropes in contemporary slow cinema is to be seen as a response to concrete social realities whose visualisation has been suppressed. Modernism was predicated on the acknowledgement of the labour behind representation, but its ultimate aim was not the mere virtuoso exposition of the artistic object's fictionality, but also an attempt to make visible the complex material realities and structures to which its aesthetic forms react. It is this endeavour to make something invisible visible that characterises the work of filmmakers whose works can be subsumed under the banner of slow cinema. Typical in this respect is Pedro Costa's *Ossos* (1997), which is his first film of his Fontainhas trilogy, which also consists of *No Quarto da Vanda* (*In Vanda's Room*, 2000) and *Juventude em Marcha* (*Colossal Youth*, 2006). The film is shot on location in the outskirts of Lisbon called Estrela d'África, which is inhabited by Cape Verdean immigrants and underprivileged locals. Eschewing canonical dramatic plot, *Ossos* relies mainly on a Bressonian study of gesture and the relations of the characters to their social environment. The starting point for the minimalist narrative is an unwanted pregnancy. The film follows the lives of the mother, Tina (Mariya Lipkina), the father who is an addict (Nuno Vaz), their friend Clotilde (Vanda Duarte), and Eduarda (Isabel Ruth), a kind-hearted nurse who gets involved with the three of them and tries to offer a helping hand. Tina is a melancholic woman, who unexpectedly becomes a mother and cannot cope with the pressures of her new role due to her socially vulnerable position and the lack of support

on the part of her addict husband. The latter uses the baby to beg for money and meets Eduarda, who feels compassion and tries to help him. Meanwhile, Clotilde tries to find the traces of the father and the baby and gets a cleaning job for Tina. The baby ends up being sold to a sex-worker who is a friend of the father, and Eduarda's interference in the lives of the Cape Verdean immigrants cannot alleviate their destitution.

Costa's film does not make use of the long sequence shots, which are the stock in trade of slow cinema; instead, the film's slowness emerges out of its resistance to narrative development, the absence of long dialogues, and the affectless acting on the part of the characters. *Ossos* registers both the materiality of vulnerable bodies as well as the materiality of spaces and invites us to observe the social relations as they unfold in everyday, undramatic situations. In this respect, it conforms to the modernist desire to cultivate the audience's capacity for social observation by means of de-dramatisation, attention to social spaces, and non-dramatic everyday situations. One recalls here Roland Barthes' well-known praise of Antonioni's cinema for its aptitude to register history, history though understood not as grand historical events, but 'that of the little History of which each of us is individually the measure'.³⁸ Costa does something similar the difference though being that his point of reference is not the universal alienated bourgeois subject as it is the case with Antonioni. What we have in *Ossos* is a counter-visuality that refuses to reproduce the familiar metropolitan cosmopolitanism of neoliberal capitalism. Instead, we get to see the losers of history, those who are left in the margins of a shadow economy, whose collective presence remains largely invisible in the central urban spaces, but also in the cinema.

But what are the historical traces captured by Costa in his engagement with the underclass of Estrela d'África? Firstly, it is important to acknowledge that the film's de-dramatised style aptly reflects on changing conditions of labour and the ways they have affected the Cape Verdean community, whose historical experience of inequality has been

further aggravated following the shift from an industrial based economic sector to one based on services. As Luís Batalha explains, the Cape Verdean community in Portugal has its roots in the country's colonialist past. Most of these immigrants were illiterate and from peasant backgrounds and came to fulfil Portugal's shortage of urban labour, which was pressing given that Portuguese unskilled labourers were attracted by the higher wages in Northern Europe. Following the Carnation Revolution in 1975, which overthrew the Estado Novo dictatorship, many of the immigrants found themselves unwelcome given that their admission into the country was associated with the authoritarian regime of the past. The democratic regime that rose out of the revolution ignored them and even persecuted them, despite the fact that these immigrants had worked to build the country's infrastructures. Furthermore, the lack of affordable housing in the city centre of Lisbon, and the racist prejudices on the part of many Portuguese landlords, led them to move in shantytowns located in the outskirts of the city.³⁹ Yet the changes in the mode of production with industrial labour being replaced by employment in the service sector contributed to the further segregation of the Cape Verdean community, also reinforced by the identity crisis suffered by the second generation, which could not completely identify with the culture of their parents nor with the one of the former coloniser.

It is on this second generation that Costa's film focuses and looks at how changing working and social conditions have relegated Cape Verdeans to a life of wagelessness, poverty and material deprivation. This is most obviously seen through the way in which the film's slowness problematises the whole notion of narrative and as an extension of social agency. Characters in the film, and particularly, the male ones act as if waiting for things to happen to them, an index of their incapacity to imagine themselves as active social beings who can alter their material circumstances.⁴⁰ For instance, in one of the first appearances of the father in the narrative universe, he is shown accompanying Clotilde to a household where she works as a

cleaner. Within a static medium shot, he is placed on the left side of the frame, while Clotilde is cleaning the room. The dialectics between labour activity and male impassiveness is reinforced by his fixed position in the field of vision as opposed to Clotilde's movement. Later on, in another fixed shot that lasts for two minutes, we see him entering his bedroom intoxicated and falling into bed; Tina aimlessly tries to recover him and get him to join her and the baby. Similar examples can be taken from the film when the father passively attempts to solicit the passers' sympathy for him and the new-born baby so as to receive some money, as well as when encountering the compassionate nurse. His corporeal rigidity and limited gestures establish a sense of crisis of masculinity, which also applies to Clotilde's husband, who similarly leads a passive lifestyle with casual sexual gratification being his main interest.

As Flanagan rightly suggests, Costa's meticulous attention to gestural details unsettles the boundaries between documentary and fiction;⁴¹ I would add to this that the emphasis on gesture is not just a means by which the actors show themselves being performers – as per Brecht's lessons –, so as to prevent empathetic identification and allow the audience to understand the social processes behind the dramatic events. Costa pushes this Brechtian technique further making the amateur actors act in ways that affirm their extra-diegetic identities; they act and show themselves as individuals whose lives are loaded with historical and social traumas that have compromised their capacity for agency. Slowness emanates precisely from this detailed registration of everyday gestures and as such, social processes are not foregrounded behind the dramatic events; instead what is complicated is the distinction between gestures that belong to the realm of the aesthetic and those that are part of the social reality. Following the footsteps of modernist predecessors such as the Italian Neorealists and the latest work of Straub/Huillet,⁴² this problematisation of reality and representation is at the antipodes with the conception of the art as such. It is part of the modernist will to make sense of the characters within a specific material reality. Commenting on Rossellini, Sam Rohdie

aply suggests that his engagement with the reality of post-war Italy is an index of a desire to visualise the material and historical contradictions of a recognisable reality ‘that had always been there but unnoticed’, and a similar gesture of making something invisible visible takes place in *Ossos*.⁴³ Likewise, Costa invites us to experience structural conditions of underdevelopment that coexist with capitalist development in Lisbon, but have largely remained overlooked.

Costa’s attention to details loaded with social material is an indicator of his indebtedness to the modernist objective to make social situations visible without necessarily illuminating them. Still though, *Ossos*’s stress on traumatised masculinity can be understood as a commentary on the changing labour demand and markets that render the traditional manual labour of the male Cape Verdean immigrants superfluous. It is not accidental, that there are no passages in the film where we see men from the community working. It is solely the women who are active in the precarious market of affective labour. For instance, Tina and Clotilde are cleaners, Eduarda a nurse, and the woman (Inês de Medeiros), who ends up buying the child from the father, a sex-worker. In his discussion of American literature’s anticipation and response to the transformation of labour, Jasper Bernes explains that the shift from an industrial economy focused on the production of objects to a service one concerned with the production of services has increased the demand for work that expects from workers to bring to the labour environment attitudes and affects linked with unpaid female work at home. This ‘feminization of labor’,⁴⁴ as he calls it, has a double effect: on the one hand, companies ‘import values associated with leisure and the home to make work more tolerable’⁴⁵ and get workers to work longer hours; on the other hand, jobs traditionally held by male workers tend to disappear. In effect, many vulnerable workers (particularly from racial minorities) are condemned to a life of worklessness, ill-health and inability to re-join the working population.

Ossos' portrayal of passive males unable to adapt to the new labour reality is also evidenced by the father's total inability to provide basic (non-paid) affective labour and care for his child. It is not fortuitous that the only way he can deal with the child is to treat it as a commodity that can be sold in the underground economy, for his ephemeral profit. Through this lens, one may well understand the film's laborious pace and extended shots of the father aimlessly wandering through the streets of Lisbon with his child, not just as an aesthetics of resistance, but as reflection on tangible social realities and their effects on the vulnerable lives of the Estrela d'África residents. Ironically, aesthetic laboriousness turns into a commentary on worklessness, pauperism and an enduring socially produced condition of lethargy. What vindicates Costa's approach is the way he explores how changes in the labour landscape perpetuate other forms of gender oppression and inequality within an underprivileged community, thus dividing it further. Slowness and suspension of narrative actions are not ways of providing an aesthetic experience of wonderment, as per Koepnick's famous formulation,⁴⁶ but means of underlining mediations between art and social processes.

But there is also something more intricate here, since slowness, as I mentioned earlier, becomes a means of taking issue with the neat categories of time. If the Estrela d'África residents – remnants of a history of colonial violence and dispossession – become the new manifestation of what Marx defined as the 'stagnant population',⁴⁷ what we now call precariat, a class of people condemned to working insecurity, exploitation, or even wagelessness, are not we entitled to say that past contradictions return forcefully to the present? If the modern service economy simultaneously produces wealth and lack of work, cannot we say that it destabilises its own existence by perpetuating social contradictions that undermine its own survival? These are questions that have to do with capitalist forces and contradictions, and as James Naremore perceptively suggests, as long as these processes/crises remain with us, 'they have a need for cinema',⁴⁸ a term whose employment here does not solely refer to the medium itself, but to an

attitude of curiosity towards the world. Taking a cue from Naremore's point, it is legitimate to suggest that given that capitalist forces produce simultaneously development and underdevelopment, the modernist will to destabilise dramatic coherence so as to connect art with social contradictions located off-screen becomes once again pertinent.

Costa's belatedness, his conscious reworking of aesthetic strategies associated with the past is not therefore an abstractly ethical project or a homage to the masters of the past; it is rather a way of reactivating what he understands to be cinema's primary objective, which 'is to make us feel that something isn't right'.⁴⁹ Evoking Shklovsky, Costa contends that the audience can only get to see things on screen when they do not recognise themselves, when they encounter something that resists their own recognisable reality. This is a central precept of cinema's epistemological potential, its capacity to visualise something that has been suppressed and it is this aspect of the medium that *Ossos* reactivates. Rancière intimates that the characters in *Ossos* seem to live their lives as destiny and that Costa's politics is to be located in his refusal to 'explain and mobilise'.⁵⁰ While this approach sounds valid, it disregards the revelatory dimension of Costa's cinema, the commitment to the medium's capacity to explore the wrongness of things, which is deeply rooted in the modernist tradition.

This post-war modernist political impetus to picture the world in an austere manner so as to reinvent our understanding of it, is certainly applicable to Angela Schanelec's *Marseille*. Schanelec belongs to the Berlin School of filmmaking, which consists of a group of contemporary directors including Christian Petzold, Thomas Arslan, Christoph Hochhäusler, and Ulrich Köhler, whose work focuses on the contemporary reality of Germany and the impact of neoliberalism on individuals, families, and social relations. Although these filmmakers differ from one another, critics have identified their aesthetic similarities, such as a tendency towards narrative reduction, slow pace, affectless acting, and an emphasis on everyday spaces and life, whose representation does not necessarily contribute to dramatic coherence and development.⁵¹

De-dramatisation, is thus, a central characteristic of these films, an aesthetic approach that reiterates modernist cinema's ambition to observe everyday spaces, gestures, and situations, with the view to making sense of how time has affected social experiences. This emphasis on the everydayness of things connects pre and post-war modernism. For instance, in the city-symphony films of the 1920s, emphasis on the dailiness of life in the cities became a means of coming to terms with social conditions in the metropolises that might even skip those who inhabit them.⁵² Similarly, in post-war modernism the emphasis on time and space becomes liberated from narrative objectives aiming at exploring what Barthes calls commenting on Antonioni, 'the changes of time'.⁵³ The difference is, as I mentioned in the beginning of this essay, that in post-war modernism this preoccupation with the details of everyday life becomes a means of expressing a disenchantment with modernity and not a euphoric belief in modernity as progress, as it was the case in Vertov's and Ruttmann's films. It is this disenchantment with everyday life that is rekindled by the Berlin School.

Koepnick suggests that the long-take aesthetic recuperated by the Berlin School aspires to reinstate the 'category of the wonder'⁵⁴ and replace the modernist critical attitude towards representation with an aesthetics of absorption. For Koepnick, the New Berlin School has little to do with the post-war modernist tradition that aimed at uncovering the mechanisms of the cinematic apparatus so as to remind the audience of the film's fictionality. I want to caution here about the facile understanding of modernism that continues to hold sway in film studies. Aesthetic modernism was not a phenomenon explicable in terms of a set of formal elements, neither was its supreme aim to call attention to its aesthetic production. I see modernism rather as an aesthetic of negation, whose formal responses to modernity can be seen as indices of a crisis of representation of a world that has become much more complex and fragmented. Modernism downplays formal and aesthetic coherence (even its realist representatives as evidenced in Italian Neorealism whose preoccupation with the everyday undermines

dramatic/semblance harmony), because it acknowledges art's failure to solve the contradictions it aspires to picture. This is what connects several manifestations of modernism in different art forms, such as literature, drama, and film. In the works of Kafka, Döblin, Beckett, Ionesco, Antonioni, Pasolini, Jancsó, and others, the refusal of aesthetic coherence is a reaction to social and historical changes and crises, which have challenged the faith in a unified and coherent reality. The proposition that the New Berlin School evades modernist criticality is hard to sustain given – and indeed as has been noted by many commentators – most of the films deal with the material contradictions of neoliberalism.⁵⁵ One of the key figures of the school, Petzold has admitted that the starting point of his work was the lack of German films analogous to Antonioni's, whose work talks 'about how a country builds itself, crumbles, and falls prey to an increasing individualism',⁵⁶ situations which are not alien to the German experience.

Similar preoccupations are present in Schanelec's films, which tend to express an unease with the historical reality of individualisation/privatisation of life, the social conditions of individual vulnerability and insecurity, and their effects on people's lives. As Hester Baer says, despite the minimalist plot of her films, they all address issues pertaining to the 'contingency of contemporary life, set in the nonplaces of French and German cities, and they specifically focus on female characters who are figuring out how to build a life amid the changed expectations of the neoliberal present'.⁵⁷ *Marseille* engages with similar concerns and follows the more typical narrative of what Orr calls the 'modernist anti-hero'⁵⁸, who is either materially privileged or has the luxury of moving between spaces. The film focuses on Sophie (Maren Eggert), a German photographer who exchanges her Berlin apartment with Zelda (Emily Atef), a Marseillaise woman. Sophie drifts in Marseille, walks around the city and takes pictures; she seems to be curious to discover places and spaces that are not touristic. She has a chance flirt with Pierre (Alexis Loret), a local mechanic, which is interrupted when the film unexpectedly cuts to her return to Berlin. In Berlin, Sophie's role in the narrative is downplayed

and the film focuses on her best friend Hanna (Marie-Lou Sellem) and her husband Ivan (Devid Striesow), with whom Sophie seems to be in love. In the second part, the focus is on Ivan's and Hannah's routine; we see the first one while photographing female workers in a washing machine factory, and the latter while taking part in a rehearsal of Strindberg's *Dance of Death*. Following a sequence in Ivan's house and an argument between him and Hanna, a sudden temporal ellipsis takes place and the film cuts back to Sophie returning to Marseille in the summer only to see her reporting to the police after having been mugged by a local.

One of the noteworthy aspects of *Marseille* is the manner in which it meditates on the contradictions of neoliberal cosmopolitanism and the disintegration of human bonds. This is brilliantly conveyed in the sequences, where Sophie engages in brief transactional conversations with Zelda and Pierre. The characters seem unable to hold conversations, something that is powerfully exemplified when one of Pierre's friends unnecessarily insults Sophie, only to create discomfort that furthers their communicative unease. The mundaneness of the dialogue throughout the film is an index of a communication crisis, which is not to be attributed to linguistic barriers or national differences, but to the characters' inability to build substantial relations in an environment that privileges a fluid life style, constant movement and circulation. Marco Abel intimates that Schanelec's 'films foreground the banality of the communicative act'⁵⁹ thus deriding the neoliberal motto of individual expression. Yet this reiteration of formal principles associated with modernist predecessors such as Straub/Huillet, namely dialogue's resistance to narrative fluidity, is also an indication of a communication breakdown in a neoliberal environment that valorises fleeting, fragmented and precarious human encounters that lead to the commodification of social relations. Unlike Costa, Schanelec's aesthetic in this film responds to conditions of overdevelopment; she views with profound suspicion the neoliberal cosmopolitanism that tends to reduce human interactions to consumer ones. This corresponds with Zygmunt Bauman's description of neoliberalism as

'liquid modernity', one that privileges constant movement and flux rather than stable productive foundations and social interactions. Bauman suggests that citizenship and community become the casualties of liquid modernity, whose understanding of the individual is that of the universal consumer, rather than the productive worker or the community participant.⁶⁰ The ideology of consumerism ends up filling the void of community interactions and permeates all aspects of social existence, including leisure time, holidays, and affective relationships. This results in further alienation and *Marseille* touches upon this theme; at the same time, Sophie's flânerie and curiosity during her staying in Marseille, turns into a mode of resistance, a desire to look beyond the surface of appearances.

Schanelec's long takes and elliptical narrative downplay diegetic consistency in favour of an exploration of bodies in space, gestures, and everyday spaces. Yet what her film restores is this aspect of curiosity that characterised the Western post-war modernist cinema concerned with issues of urban alienation **generated by capitalist overdevelopment**. This reiteration of aesthetic forms associated with the past revitalises post-war modernism's abandonment of the heroic narrative of modernity's march of progress; equally important is to acknowledge that Schanelec recovers also the modernist impetus to defamiliarise our view of the everyday in order to observe the social processes and transformations that have taken place. The motif of the character photographer certainly evokes Antonioni and his emphasis on individuals, who are caught in the middle of social spaces and serve more the function of the observer, rather than the standard narrative agent. Sophie's flânerie throughout the film is not just an index of an enigmatic alienation, but also an attitude that exposes the viewer to spaces and places that offer hints about France's colonialist past, individualism, and the lack of spaces that have not been subjected to market imperatives.

The lingering camera documents these contradictions in a suggestive way. For example, in a passage that we see Sophie in a bus, Schanelec by means of an aperture framing through

the bus window captures a group of black children playing in the background. The sequence is initially focalised from Sophie's point of view, established by means of a shot-reverse-shot; suddenly the character exits the bus. The camera remains stationary as we see Sophie disappearing from the field of vision while the black children are still visible in the background. The shot duration extends over fifty seconds and has very little narrative function. Later, a stationary shot captures Sophie in front of a shopping centre; a black man approaches her and asks her to fill a questionnaire. The shot persists without cut, while in the one that comes immediately after this one, Sophie is pictured in a French-Arabic night club with Pierre and his friends. How can we interpret this prolonged registration of minority groups and spaces? In his influential account of female flanerie in post-war modernist cinema, Betz convincingly makes a connection between the female gaze and the anxieties produced in Europe following decolonization. Betz suggests that there is something that links anxieties brought about by decolonization in France and the female flaneur of the French New Wave. The woman drifter becomes a figure that muses on decolonization, but also on the ways capital colonises the everyday.⁶¹

Schanelec here does something similar to silently comment on the assimilation of difference by the market, but also the material traces of past historical phenomena. Sophie is a curious observer, and the audience witnesses the spaces she explores without getting access to her thoughts and feelings. Observing, as Roland Barthes famously remarked about Antonioni's cinema, is a dangerous task, because 'it disturbs established orders of every kind'.⁶² Something analogous is suggested in one emblematic shot in *Marseille*, when a security guard in a train station approaches Sophie twice to tell her that it is illegal to take pictures, and here we are confronted with questions concerning the privatisation of public space. It is through an attention to details of everyday life, gestures, and spaces that Schanelec re-establishes cinema's revelatory rather than reproductive dimension, to comment on the force of neoliberal changes

and their 'violent' effects on collective experience, public space, and social relations. What Schalenec takes from modernism is chiefly this attitude of curiosity towards the world, what Trotter calls modernism's 'commitment to the ordinary',⁶³ which is concerned with exposing aspects of everyday life by blurring the boundaries between the act of representing and recording the world. Modernism's emphasis (literary and cinematic) on the mundane and the everyday was a means of taking issue with it and question its very 'ordinariness'.

I have tried to demonstrate that the reiteration of modernist aesthetic principles in contemporary slow cinema needs not be seen as a nostalgic/regressive return to the past, but as a response to historical anxieties that modernity and our contemporary late modernity never managed to resolve. It is not far-fetched to suggest that contemporary slow cinema does what Laura Mulvey had proposed years ago in an essay for this journal, that is, it reactivates a dialogue between the present and the past, so as to make us re-examine the 'lost histories of modernity and left aspirations'⁶⁴, and adopt a new understanding of time. The uncertainty of the future and the lack of a positive narrative of progress might imply that we need to look back not only to the failures of modernity, but also to the lessons of modernism and its view of cinema as a critical lens through which to deal with the complexity of social and historical processes. Seen in this way, slowness restores cinema's revelatory quality and debunks the mythologies of globalisation according to which the market has succinctly overcome past historical, social and political conflicts. Such an approach, can open a way towards a different conceptualisation of cinematic slowness not as a regressive style, as per Shaviro, or as an abstractly ethical gesture, but as one that is historically germane. Slow films aim at reaffirming cinema as an art form that aspires to interrogate the world and re-establish an element of epistemological curiosity to the audience. It is this curiosity that has been lost in a media-sphere where what appears to be user/spectatorial agency is nothing but the execution of pre-programmed commands.

¹ Viktor Shklovsky, 'Literature beyond "Plot"', in Alexandra Berlina (ed) *Viktor Shklovsky A Reader* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp.97-99.

² Sam Rohdie, *Film Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p.141.

³ See Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (eds), *Media Archaeology Approaches, Applications, and Implications* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2011). See also Jussi Parikka, *What is Media Archaeology* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).

⁴ See Noël Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, (Berkeley: California University Press, 1990). See also, Burch, 'Porter, or Ambivalence', *Screen* Vol. 19, No. 4 (1978), pp. 91-106.

⁵ As Thomas Elsaesser says, for Burch, 'the rediscovery of the 'primitive mode' seemed like a vindication of more than fifty years of indefatigable efforts on the part of the avant-garde in both North America and Europe to rethink the basis of 'film language''. *Film History as Media Archaeology: Tracking Digital Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), p.76.

⁶ Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, p.253.

⁷ See Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); David Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007); Julian Murphet, *Multimedia Modernism: Literature and the Anglo-American Avant-*

garde (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Michael Valdez Moses, 'Introduction: A Modernist Cinema?', *Modernist Cultures* Vol. 5, No 1, pp.1-8.

⁸ Terry Eagleton, Capitalism, 'Modernism and Post-Modernism', *New Left Review* 152 (1985), pp.60-73.

⁹ See, András Bálint Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), p.400.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.54.

¹¹ See, Lotte H. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), p. 224.

¹² Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, p. 91.

¹³ See, John Orr, *Cinema and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p.2. See also Hamish Ford, *Post-War Modernist Cinema and Philosophy: Confronting Negativity and Time* (London: Palgrave, 2012), p.19.

¹⁴ Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and Uneven Development Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), p.12.

¹⁵ Lúcia Nagib, 'The Politics of Slowness and the Traps of Modernity', in Tiago de Luca, Nuno Barradas Jorge (eds) *Slow Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp.25-46. For more film studies that have challenged the realism and modernism binary see Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*, (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press, 2002); Ivone Margulies, 'Bodies too Much', in Ivone Margulies (ed), *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 1-23; Ian Aitken, *Realist Film Theory and Cinema: The Nineteenth-Century Lukácsian and Intuitionist Realist Traditions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006). This is also the case in studies in literary modernism. Fredric Jameson, for example, suggests that modernism's emphasis on everyday life, typicality, and dailiness was hugely influenced by the aesthetic trends that it opposed, namely the nineteenth century realist novel and naturalism. See, Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, (London: Verso, 2013).

¹⁶ Matthew Flanagan, 'Slow Cinema': *Temporality and Style in Contemporary Art and Experimental Film*, PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2012, p.111.

¹⁷ See, Tiago de Luca, 'Slow Time, Visible Cinema: Duration, Experience, and Spectatorship', *Cinema Journal* Vol. 56, No 1 (2016), pp.23-42.

¹⁸ See Lutz Koepnick, *On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p.14.

¹⁹ See, Asbjørn Grønstad, *Film and the Ethical Imagination* (London: Palgrave, 2016).

²⁰ See, Karl Schoonover, 'Wastrels of Time: Slow Cinema's Labouring Body, the Political Spectator and the Queer', in Tiago de Luca, Nuno Barradas Jorge (eds), *Slow Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp.153-168.

²¹ See, Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr: The Circle Closes* (London, New York: Wallflower Press, 2013), p.4

²² Kovács, *Screening Modernism*, p.204.

²³ Timothy J. Clark *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1999), p.8.

²⁴ Exemplary in this respect, is the inability even on the part of the contemporary elite to imagine a positive narrative about the future as evidenced by the news that Silicon Valley magnates share cultural anxieties about climate change, financial collapse and nuclear disaster, leading them not to work to avert them, but to prepare plans of escape. See Mark O'Connell, 'Why Silicon Valley billionaires are prepping for the apocalypse in New Zealand', *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/feb/15/why-silicon-valley-billionaires-are-prepping-for-the-apocalypse-in-new-zealand>, last accessed 19 February, 2018.

²⁵ See, Flanagan, p.87; Cecília Mello, 'If These Walls Could Speak: From Slowness to Stillness in the Cinema of Jia Zhangke', in Tiago de Luca, Nuno Barradas Jorge (eds) *Slow Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp.137-149.

²⁶ See, Mark Betz, 'Beyond Europe: On Parametric Transcendence', in Rosalind Galt, Karl Schoonover (eds), *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.31-47.

²⁷ Ira Jaffe, *Slow Movies: Countering the Cinema of Action* (London: Wallflower Press, 2014), p.6.

²⁸ See, Grønstad, p.124.

²⁹ Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge, 'From Slow Cinema to Slow Cinemas', in *Slow Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp.1-21, here p.15.

³⁰ See, Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema is!* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 107-108.

³¹ Particularly relevant here is Lutz Koepnick's argument in his study of slowness as a mode of critical intervention in contemporary art, photography, video, film, and literature. For Koepnick, slowness urges us to see the present as a site in which multiple temporalities and histories intersect. See Koepnick, *On Slowness*, p.20.

³² Steven Shaviro, 'Post-Continuity: full text of my talk', <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=1034>, last accessed 19 February, 2018.

³³ Other scholars including de Luca and Jorge have already refuted Shaviro's suggestion that slow cinema is nostalgic arguing instead that its re-emergence is inextricably connected with the rise of digital cinema. See, Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge, 'From Slow Cinema to Slow Cinemas', p.11.

³⁴ Jacques Rancière, *Béla Tarr: The Time After*, trans. Erk Beranek (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2013), p.37.

³⁵ Rancière, p.43.

³⁶ See Song Hwee Lim, *Tsai Ming-liang and a Cinema of Slowness* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), p.126.

³⁷ Michael North, *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.2.

³⁸ Roland Barthes, 'Dear Antonioni', in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith *L'Avventura* (London: BFI, 1997), pp.63-68, here p. 63.

³⁹ See Luís Batalha, 'Cape Verdeans in Portugal' in Luís Batalha, Jørgen Carling (eds), *Transnational Archipelago: Perspectives on Cape Verdean Migration and Diaspora*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), pp.61-71.

⁴⁰ This evokes Neorealism's problematisation of character agency. As Kovács explains, a key feature of Neorealist cinema is that characters' lives are conditioned by external situations: 'things happen to them; they don't make things happen'. *Screening Modernism*, p.254.

⁴¹ See Flanagan, p.29.

⁴² Costa's debt to Straub/Huillet has been acknowledged by scholarly literature on the filmmaker. See Jacques Rancière, *The Intervals of Cinema* trans. by John Howe (London: Verso, 2014), p.127.

See, Ilka Brombach, 'Zur Idee gemeinschaftlichen Filmemachens bei Pedro Costa', in Malte Hagener, Tina Kaiser (eds), *Film-Konzepte 41: Pedro Costa* (München: Edition Text + Kritik, 2016), pp.25-40.

⁴³ Rohdie, p. 187.

⁴⁴ Jasper Bernes, *The Work of Art in the Age of De-Industrialization*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2017), p.26.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.29.

-
- ⁴⁶ See Lutz Koepnick, *The Long Take: Art Cinema and the Wondrous* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
- ⁴⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fawkes, Trans, (London: Penguin, 1976), p.796.
- ⁴⁸ James Naremore, *An Invention Without a Future: Essays on Cinema* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2014), p.4.
- ⁴⁹ Pedro Costa, 'A Closed Door That Leaves Us Guessing', http://www.rouge.com.au/10/costa_seminar.html, last accessed 19 February, 2018.
- ⁵⁰ Rancière, *The Intervals of Cinema*, p.128.
- ⁵¹ See Hester Baer, 'Affectless Economies: The Berlin School and Neoliberalism', *Discourse* Vol. 35, No 1 (2013), pp. 72-100; Marco Abel, *The Counter-Cinema of the Berlin School* (New York; Rochester: Camden House, 2013); Roger F. Cook, 'Embodied Simulation, Empathy and Social Cognition: Berlin School Lessons for Film Theory', *Screen* Vol. 56, No. 2 (2015), pp.153-171.
- ⁵² See, Laura Marcus, 'A Hymn to Movement': The 'City Symphony' of the 1920s and 1930s', *Modernist Cultures* Vol. 5, No. 1 (2010), pp.30-46, here p.30.
- ⁵³ Barthes, p.63.
- ⁵⁴ Lutz Koepnick, 'Long Takes', in Roger F. Cook, Lutz Koepnick, Kristin Kopp and Brad Prager (eds) *Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema* (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), pp. 195-203, here p.199.
- ⁵⁵ Abel is one of the main proponents of this reading.
- ⁵⁶ Marco Abel, 'The Cinema of Identification Gets on my Nerves: An Interview with Christian Petzold', Vol. 33, no. 3, <https://www.cineaste.com/summer2008/the-cinema-of-identification-gets-on-my-nerve/>, last accessed 15 February, 2018.
- ⁵⁷ Hester Baer, p.77.
- ⁵⁸ Orr, *Cinema and Modernity*, p.15.
- ⁵⁹ Abel, p.122.
- ⁶⁰ See, Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), p.2, 3, 29, 74, 76.
- ⁶¹ Mark Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p.27, p.96.
- ⁶² Barthes, p.68.
- ⁶³ David Trotter, 'Hitchcock's Modernism', *Modernist Cultures*, Vol. 5, no 1, pp.106-126, here p.109.
- ⁶⁴ Laura Mulvey, 'Passing time: reflections on cinema from a new technological age', *Screen*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (2004), pp. 142-155, here p. 144. To this I would add that Mulvey's point that digital cinema needs to be in dialogue with the old celluloid modernist cinema of the past gains new currency if we consider that slow cinema has proliferated precisely on account of the rise of the digital technologies. As James Naremore maintains, 'Digital technology has vastly increased animation in big-budget Hollywood movies, but it has also made it easier for contemporary directors to create documentaries and neo-neorealist cinema'. Naremore, p.7.