TAKE YOUR TIME: TOWARDS A THEORY OF CONTEMPLATIVE SPECTATORSHIP IN SLOW CINEMA

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1. INTRODUCTION

His [Usai’s] portrait of a culture ignoring the loss of its own image is a devastating moral tale: there is something very wrong with the way we are taught to dismiss the art of seeing as something ephemeral and negligible.¹

1.1 Death

The death of cinema can mean different things for different people. For archivists it can mean the problematics of the decay of the medium (the physical photo-chemical film stock) and consequently the fading away of parts of cultural memory that are preserved in these media – such is Usai’s conviction referred to in Scorcese’s abovementioned formulation. Moreover, evident in Scorsese’s outcry is a related but slightly different departure: the end of a cinematic ‘way of seeing’, the concluding of a regime of visuality. This largely concurs with what Anne Friedberg (referencing Foucault) described as a ‘mediated episteme’²; or what Raymond Williams termed a ‘cultural form’³; or more recently in the words of phenomenologist Mauro Carbone: ‘our relationship to them [screens] seems to be changing our way of seeing, perceiving, desiring, and thinking. [...] To borrow Merleau-Ponty’s terms, “the relations of man and Being”’.⁴ Finally, for cinephiles it can mean the extinction of so many film theaters and even the downfall of the status of the institution as such that is mourned, and with it the vanishing of the theatrical experience and a cinephiliac moviegoing practice.⁵

1.2 Afterlife

In our thinking about this supposed death of the cinema – mourned by some, applauded by others – we, cinephiliacs in the guise of scholars (or perhaps I should come clear and adopt the more authentically sounding “I” from here onwards), might be tempted to provide counter-narratives to this obituary of cinema in a number of ways. It is important to realize that these defenses will rely on

¹ Scorsese, quoted in Usai, The Death of Cinema, ix.
² Friedberg, The Virtual Window, 6.
³ Williams, Television.
⁴ Carbone, “The Mutation of Our Relations with Screens as a Mutation of Our Relations with Being.”
⁵ Think for instance of Susan Sontag’s influential formulation. Cf. Sontag, “The Decay of Cinema.”
two diverging conceptions of “cinema”, designating either a set of conventions (cinematic) or a cultural practice (the cinema). What unites existing arguments of these kinds is the underlying idea that in one way or another the cinema haunts other media, that it is not dead nor really alive – a walking dead medium.

Firstly, with regards to cinematic conventions, there are theorists who claim that cinema is not dead, but merely taking different shapes and guises; that it is in turn also shaping other media. Lev Manovich, for one, stresses the importance of continuity in media history. He analyses how our current cultural interface, the Human-Computer-Interface (HCI), in fact remediates (a concept he takes from Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin) older cultural forms by adopting their ‘action grammars and metaphors’. Most notably and importantly, the HCI borrows from cinema its ‘mobile camera, representations of space, editing techniques, narrative conventions, spectator activity’. In other words, cinema lives on in our contemporary digital media in the form of their semiotic systems as well as in our spectatorial position, to the degree that prompts Manovich to emphatically state that ‘rather than being merely one cultural language among others, cinema is now becoming the cultural interface, a toolbox for all cultural communication, overtaking the printed word’. Likewise, Anne Friedberg notices that cinema ‘forms an originary visual system for a complexly diverse set of “postcinematic” visualities’.

Secondly, scholars could be to argue for the continuing livelihood of the cinema as a dispositif, so in its latter meaning of a cultural practice. Surely, the death of cinema doesn’t mean there are no more cinemas. Rather, it describes the end of the dominance of a certain way of viewing moving image, or what I’d like to call a cultural practice: the normative set of viewing conventions,

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6 This is a helpful distinction that saves us from exactly such an equivocation that Hansen accuses Manovich of: ‘One the one hand, Manovich uses “cinema” as a general term designating what he calls a “cultural interface”: [...] in short different elements of cinematic perception, language and reception. [...]On the other hand, Manovich circumscribes “cinema” as a historically and technically specific media type – the projection of a moving image on a screen in a darkened theatre to largely immobilized viewers.’ Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media*, 33.

7 That is to say, the first Manovich who we find in *The Language of New Media*. This book has a fundamental tension in it of trying to both argue for the newness of new media while simultaneously also arguing for their remediation of older cultural forms. Mark Hansen has stridently criticized him for that in his *New Philosophy for New Media*, writing polemically that the former fails to ‘adequately theorize [the] implications’ of his own claim of the new language of new media and seems incapable to ‘see beyond contemporary framings of media, [and thus] threatens to reduce new media to a mere amplification of what came before’ (2001: 31). The second Manovich who is present in *Software Takes Command*, however, seems to have taken this criticism to heart. There he is more adamant in his emphasis on rupture rather than continuity: ‘I argue that in the process of the translation from physical and electronic media technologies to software, all individual techniques and tools that were previously unique to different media “met” within the same software environment. [...] It disrupted and transformed the whole landscape of media technologies, the creative professions that use them, and the very concept of media itself. Once they were simulated in a computer, previously incompatible techniques of different media begin to be combined in endless new ways, leading to new media hybrids. [...]this ability to combine previously separate techniques represents a fundamentally new stage in the history of human media, human semiosis, and human communication, enable by its “softwarization”. I describe this new stage in media evolution using the concept of hybridity’ (2013: 45-46, first emphasis mine, the rest is original). Cf. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*; Manovich, *Software Takes Command*; Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media*.

8 Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 70.

9 Ibid., 71. So Manovich here captures both meanings of cinema.

10 Ibid., 86.

social rules, architectural, and technological positioning; institutional channels of distribution and projection as well as the discursive strategies of promotion; and modes of (non)discursive reception – these taken together constitute the cinema dispositif.\textsuperscript{12} This line of defense would entail making the case that this cultural practice of cinematic viewing is in fact to be considered, echoing Friedberg, the originary viewing mode for a complexly diverse set of “postcinematic” viewing conventions. In other words, such an attempt would pose the challenge of unearthing certain old, hard(ly)-dying viewing habits from under the surface of seemingly new ways of engaging with moving images across various, diverging dispositifs. For example, the fact that we still tend to sit or stand still and envelop ourselves in sound to view moving images (like the originary immobile cinematic spectator) when watching moving images on a mobile screen could be a way the cinema still haunts us. But this is a rather tentative suggestion, as I’m not familiar with any such type of theory nor with any supporting (empirically oriented) reception research into actual viewing practices.\textsuperscript{13}

Furthermore, a focus on the cultural practice of cinema could also entail a look in the opposite direction: not following the movement of the cinema into other media (relocation), but considering how other media conversely find their way into the cinema; how innovative aspects of spectatorship ‘whose birthplace is to be found in other environments and in proximity to other media, are quick to flow into the film theatre and to redraw the traditional forms of the filmic experience’ (re-relocation).\textsuperscript{14} In other words, watching a film in the cinema is ‘no longer a localized activity, and it is no longer just a scopic activity. It is a doing that leaps beyond the presence of a big screen. [...] [it] becomes a performance even within the temple of attendance’.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{1.3 Imagined life}

Valuable as all these options seem to me, in this paper I’ve nonetheless chosen to take a different route, which I think is complementary to the strategies I already mentioned. Rather than focusing on how cinema changed other media – or conversely the changes that cinema itself went through – I suggest to look at the cinema as it is, or as it could be. In other words, to salvage the soul of cinema

\textsuperscript{12} This is normative because this set of heterogeneous elements that make up this cinema dispositif is actually historically and culturally contingent (making it more apt to speak of the plural of cinema dispositifs). To speak of just one single dispositif and present it as a singular, almost monolithic entity, would not do history justice. Nevertheless, with a clear definition, one could still define a single dispositif, for example the Multiplex Cinema as it forms the most common cinema going practice that is widely shared (as long as this doesn’t mean placing it at the top of a value hierarchy - which would constitute an objectionable and undesirable kind of normativity). Cf. Kessler, “Notes on Dispositif.”

\textsuperscript{13} Such a strategy could possibly constitute a similar comparative account of cultural screen practices as can be found in Verhoeff, \textit{Mobile Screens}. However, the author focuses on a regime of navigation, rather than a purely visual regime of looking across various screens.

\textsuperscript{14} Casetti, “Back to the Motherland,” 8. The terms relocation and re-relocation are his.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 8–9. Casetti outlines a number of doings that have added a performative dimension to the act of attending to (viewing) an image: sensory, cognitive, emotional, relational, expressive, and textual doings. These doings all have their origin in other screen practices, notably television, computer and mobile phone (2011: 7-8).
by arguing that it has some specificities that have value on their own. So, what I propose more concretely in this paper, is to consider the possible experiential value of watching slow cinema to argue for the vitality of cinema. I take an interest in this peculiar niche film genre because I believe it affords a particular viewing experience that stands out against other film genres and against watching moving images in other screening contexts and thus holds a unique position within the media landscape. I.e., there are specificities to the genre, the medium, and the dispositif that are valuable to analyze and theorize. In this paper, I focus on the genre, addressing the virtual life of cinema in both meanings of semiotic conventions and cultural practice, considering both film form and viewing mode.

This experiential value, I suggest, resides in the fact that even though watching slow cinema at first might seems as an archaic, specialized practice no one takes interest in (besides an inner-circle of devoted cinephiles), on second view it might have interesting implications for other viewing practices and might shed light on more general cultural concerns such as the experience of time and forms of attention. In other words, it should become clear why slow cinema is not ‘profoundly nostalgic and regressive’, as philosopher Steven Shaviro once characterized it on his blog, but actually highly relevant for our contemporary society, as the issue of temporality relates to our culture’s preoccupation with the increase in the speed of life and the diminishing of attention. Slow spectatorship shares similarities with other slow movements, each of which ‘disrupts daily practices that prioritize speed, efficiency, and output at the expense of quality’. Indeed, the works of slow cinema directors such as Tsai Ming-Liang, Lisandro Alonso, and Lav Diaz testify to an acute awareness of and concern with cultural history as well as contemporary society’s social, economic and cultural issues. However, the political content of their films will not be the main focus of this paper. I will argue, rather, for the thesis that slow cinema affords a unique temporal experience which viewers actively seek after – I’ll call it contemplation. It is in this experiential value where I find contemplative spectatorship’s possible ethical function.

To make such a claim persuasively, my account of slow cinema should provide a response to a kind of criticism to which the idea of slowness, which underlies all slow movements, is susceptible. The accusation one could make is that the philosophy of slowness rests on an individualistic assumption of the good life and that it wishfully leaves this as an unquestioned belief.

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16 I find Casetti (in the abovementioned article) a tad ambiguous on his position in this respect. On the one hand, he suggests that sticking to the mode of attendance (the old-fashioned mode of contemplative viewing) is ‘a wave of nostalgia’ and that non-relocation is ‘cinema in a film theatre which closes its doors to every possible innovation’, while, on the other hand, he seems to value this attentive viewing mode, stating that ‘a bit of attendance can substantiate an experience that performance often promises but cannot deliver’; and he continues to praise attention by noting that ‘from attendance results the sense of an unforeseen encounter and, simultaneously, the possibility of mastering that which is encountered’, while ‘on the new devices […] amazement is replaced by self-satisfaction, […] self-congratulation; there is no awareness, […] doing often appears to be an end in itself’ (2011: 9, 11-12).

17 Shaviro, “Slow Cinema Vs Fast Films.”

18 Just a small sample of recent books (not even mentioning the endless stream of self-help books that advice one to slow down or decelerate to find inner peace) on the issues of time and attention: Klingberg, The Overflowing Brain; Kahneman, Thinking, Fast and Slow; Crary, 24/7; Rushkoff, Present Shock; Rosa, Social Acceleration; Hayles, How We Think.


20 For such an argument, see for instance: Mai, The Aesthetics of Absence and Duration in the Post-Trauma Cinema of Lav Diaz.

21 For a comprehensive introduction to the ideology of slowness, see: Honoré, In Praise of Slow.
In other words, slow movements seek the proper attitude and action towards societal issues of the speed of life in a rather individual, at worst even solipsistic solution: slowness as a means to enjoy more, better, and more intense. It then obviously begs the question how this adoption of a basically hedonic lifestyle can ever be the basis of a productive alternative to the very same consumerist position it tries to overcome.\textsuperscript{22} In response to such a critique, a theory of cinematic slowness should entail a convincing account of how the individual relates to the social, or structure to agency; how aesthetics relates to ethics. This paper is, in part, a humble attempt at formulating such a relationship. That is, exactly through its autonomous status, cinema (as art) can be the site of untimely meditations; through his individual, disinterested engagement with art, the viewer can freely reflect on what it is to be human, both individually and socially. So, not despite the divide between life and art, but because art stands from life at a necessary aesthetic distance, can it live up to its critical and ethical potential. Such is the way this paper hopefully forms a welcome counter-narrative to the persistent “death of cinema” narratives.

1.4 Slow Cinema

Perhaps I should start out with some notes on slow cinema, as we are gathered here with a group of students from different disciplinary and theoretical fields. Slow cinema has been concisely defined by Matthew Flanagan in his dissertation as ‘a field of cinema that shares common traits and aesthetics: an emphasis on the passage of time in the shot, an undramatic narrative or non-narrative mode, and a rigorous compositional form that is designed for contemplative spectatorial practice’.\textsuperscript{23} A non-limitative canon of slow cinema directors could list auteurs such as Tsai Ming-Liang, Lisandro Alonso, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Naomi Kawase, Lav Diaz, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Carlos Reygadas and Pedro Costa.\textsuperscript{24}

Elsewhere, I have attempted to show how these formal features relate to a particular viewing experience of what I then called slowness – or, again, what I now propose to call contemplation: ‘a form of heightened temporal awareness; a foregrounding of time. Moreover, it entails a

\textsuperscript{22} Such a Frankfurter School inspired critique of slowness is found, for instance, in: Lijster, \textit{De grote vlucht inwaarts}. However, Thijs Lijster has a too narrow (hedonic) understanding of slowness and fails to acknowledge the political (or ethical) implications of the philosophy of slow that is more encompassing than just slow food as a form of gustatory delight. For an account of this political dimension of slowness, see: Andrews, \textit{The Slow Food Story}.

Like Lijster, Jasmine Ulmer notes that ‘this is perhaps the greatest limitation of Slowness: its rhetorical appeal suggests itself adequate in addressing the concerns of society and individuals, however complex. [...] At this point, the Slow movement is largely aspirational. [...] it largely remains unrealized’ (Ulmer 2016: 8). On closer look, Ulmer actually raises two different objections here. The former critique entails that the slow philosophy is by definition more appealing than productive, while latter means that it is only temporarily, at this moment in time, unable to live up to its promises. The former is the more fundamental, and indeed legitimate objection: slowness cannot and should not be a panacea, a magical solution for all problems in the world. So, what is at stake is to argue precisely and concisely what form of slowness can aid us in our daily lives and in what concrete ways can it do so. In this paper, I am merely hinting at one way to slow: watching film.

\textsuperscript{23} Flanagan, \textit{“Slow Cinema”: Temporality and Style in Contemporary Art and Experimental Film}, S; See also: Çağlayan, \textit{Screening Boredom}; Jaffe, \textit{Slow Movies}; Luca, \textit{Slow Cinema}.

\textsuperscript{24} Flanagan makes a clear and convincing genealogical claim that contemporary slow cinema shares formal similarities with European Art Cinema (Italian Neorealism, Dreyer, Antonioni, Tarkovsky), American post-war Avant-Garde (Structural Film, Snow, Warhol), and more recent experimental, non-narrative film and video (Benning, Lockhart). Cf. Flanagan, \textit{“Slow Cinema”: Temporality and Style in Contemporary Art and Experimental Film}.
transgression of film time and viewing time. In this paper, I follow up on this idea and suggest how the experiential value of slow cinema might link aesthetics with ethics. That is, I not only explain the experience of watching slow cinema (description), I also attribute a particular function or value to it (prescription).

2. **Contemplation**

Next, after this short introduction to the genre, I’d like to give an outline of what I think could be the possible pleasures of watching slow cinema. Whether or not, and to which extent, the viewer attains any of these potential pleasures always depends on the interaction between film and viewer. It’s not completely in the eye of the beholder (or ear, for that matter), nor is it completely a property of the film’s formal features. Instead, it’s pivotal to always correlate film form and viewing experience.

I analyze what I referred to earlier as contemplation on two levels: perception and cognition. Note, however, that this distinction is only a heuristic tool. In reality they interact in complex ways, which makes it impossible to maintain this delineation – as will become clear. The gist of my argument will be that slow cinema provides relatively little perceptual stimulation for the viewer, due to the films’ stylistic minimalism or stillness, and that the viewer’s cognitive capacities are not overly strained, because the films’ stories are rather uneventful and their spatiotemporal ordering is often relatively straightforward and chronological. Consequently, a contemplative space-time for non-functional attention and mental reflection opens up to the viewer.

2.1 **Perception: forms of attention**

On the level of attention, I propose that slow cinema’s appropriate spectatorial mode comprises a form of deep viewing, analogous to Katherine Hayles’ notion of deep reading. This deep reading means that ‘the field of consciousness is restricted to a limited set of relevant concerns’ and it ‘prefers a single information stream, focuses on a single cultural object for a relatively long time, and has a high tolerance for boredom’. She opposes this to hyper attention, a mode of attention with low tolerance for boredom that is relevant to hyper reading used by readers to cope with a high intensity of perceptual stimuli, for instance in the context of the internet with its various hyperlinks and windowed mode of representation that combines various media. It’s important to understand that deep attention is a form of controlled attention – as distinct from stimulus-driven attention and arousal. What sets controlled attention apart is that it requires deliberate effort of the viewer to

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26 Or perhaps I should rather talk of gratifications, as slow cinema’s rewards can be manifold and heterogeneous – it can comprise bodily and affective pleasures as well as deep, intellectual or philosophical epiphanies. The term pleasure is historically (at least since Aristotle) used pejoratively to denote the ‘lower’, bodily, instant pleasures. To my ear, gratification sounds more neutral in that sense. See for instance: Arnheim, “From Pleasure to Contemplation.”
27 Cf. Loht, “Phenomenological Preconditions of the Concept of Film-as-Philosophy.”
28 Hayles, How We Think, 120.
29 Ibid., 12.
30 Klingberg, The Overflowing Brain.
attain, it is a mode of sustained and purposive engagement with a film. In other words, it is a form of top-down perception, whereby the viewer's mental schemata actively shape the way he distributes his attention to the film. Stimulus-driven attention, by contrast, is guided by the perceptual stimuli of the film that catch the viewer's attention – whether he wants it or not. So, we immediately begin to see how the layers of perception and cognition are inextricably tied together: perception is never a neutral state of processing external stimuli, rather what is perceived is always already filtered, what is attended to is already partly controlled and intentional. Hence, attention is not purely a perceptual process.

It is on this dimension of the mode of attention that important difference is made between enjoying a slow film or being radically and overwhelmingly bored by it. It is this particular viewing strategy that is significant for the difference between pleasure and displeasure – or put more boldly: pain and pleasure. The viewer who approaches slow cinema in a mode of hyper viewing is prone to be bored, because he receives low levels of perceptual stimuli, a single information stream and has to focus on a single cultural object for an extended period of time. Understandably so, this is actually a common phenomenon, as hyper viewing (and reading) is the default mode of attention appropriate to the engagement with the ubiquitous digital, tethered screen media to which we've become accustomed in our everyday life.

Even though a slow film equally provides little perceptual stimulation to all viewers, it is the degree to which it appeals to their default mode of attention that determines their evaluation of their viewing experience. In other words, the difference originates in the variation in the viewing modes of the slow cinema newbie and adept: the latter supplements the

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31 It might be more correct to speak of two information streams: image and sound. However, one could also make a case that film is perceived as a single stream, as an inseparable sound-image. In any case, my point is that film is viewed in a different perceptual mode than the hyper viewing, multitasking mode with which we engage with for instance our internet-connected mobile screens.

32 It seems tempting to equate the opposition of deep attention and hyper attention with Walter Benjamin's dichotomy of contemplation and distraction, or John Ellis' gaze-glance opposition. However, as Francesco Casetti notes, viewers in a mode of hyper attention 'are not distracted, they simply multiply their centres of attention' (2011: 3-4). He proposes to call this a viewing style of 'multicentred watching' (Ibid.: 4). Cf. Benjamin, Jennings, and Doherty, The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media; Ellis, Visible Fictions; Casetti, “Back to the Motherland.”

33 We shouldn't conflate these modes of attention with historical contexts, as if different eras are solely coinciding with just one mode of attention. Rather, we could signal a dominant mode of attention which correlates to the most commonly used media in people's everyday lives. Moreover, resistant viewing practices will always emerge and are never futile. So, even in our media environment that favours a mode of hyper attention, people are indeed still more than capable of engaging with moving images in a mode of deep viewing. Think, for instance, of the habit of binge watching television series. My own research focus of watching slow cinema is a similar moving image practice in which people engage in a “deviant” mode of deep attention. Between them we can find similarities and differences. Both require a prolonged engagement with a single cultural object and a single information stream (sound-image, see note 26). The major differences between them are both their formal features (serial narrative vs. feature film) as well as their typical viewing context (cinema vs. television). Think of watching, say, a 10-hours Lav Diaz slow film and binge watching episodes of Game of Thrones of equal duration. The latter is immensely more perceptually, emotionally and cognitively stimulating than the former, resulting in a perceptual mode that is more attention-driven than controlled, not to mention the differences that the different dispositifs (cinema vs. television) bring to bear on the viewing experience.
film’s lack of stimulation with a form of internal stimulation, whereas the bored viewer lacks this additional stimulation and stays stuck in an absence of meaning.\footnote{And the other way around: we can even be overstimulated but still be bored, what matters is the meaning we attach to a situation.}

Therefore, I contend that the mode of attention of deep viewing is more \textit{appropriate} to watching slow cinema. I mean to say that its particular formal features require this spectatorial mode: its lack of narrative drive; its scarcity of onscreen actions as well as visually arresting camera movements and jolting cuts; the uneventful, everyday life it often depicts; the understated style of acting so often employed. All of this results in a radically \textit{underwhelming perceptual excitation}, or relatively modest at best. Consequently, the viewer is then required to \textit{imaginatively} invest in the film; to use his own recollections and projections to make meaning out of the film; to switch from an outwards tendency of attending to the film’s external perceptual stimulation to an inwards inclination of intently focusing on his internal consciousness.

\section*{2.2 Cognition: Imagination and Memory}

This play of imagination has already taken us to the second level of \textit{cognition}. To understand how we generate new meanings through imagination and memory, the work of French philosopher Henri Bergson proves helpful. He distinguishes between, on the one hand, the cerebral mechanism of our mind, that conscious part of our self which we have at our disposal at will and which we use in a functional manner, and, on the other hand, an unconscious part of our memory which we cannot access at will and consists of obscure, pre-linguistic, and embodied memories which nonetheless form part of who we are.\footnote{Bergson, \textit{Creative Evolution}, 5–6.}

What is relevant for my argument here is Bergson’s idea (similar to Freud’s subconscious and Proust’s involuntary memory) that we are not wholly rational beings that coincide with the conscious part of our mind. There is always a part of ourselves that eludes us and forever shall do so. This adds an unforeseeable and uncontrollable element to our being. We are thus perpetually becoming, never ceasing to change as we built up memory throughout our life. Watching slow cinema forms an occasion for a qualitatively different experience: it allows us to safely stand in a different, non-functional relation to this past part of ourselves that haunts us\footnote{Similar to Bergson’s idea of the unconscious, philosopher Dylan Trigg, building on Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the ‘flesh’, speaks of our ‘archaeological past’ which haunts our present perceptual life. This primordial part of ourselves is imagined by Trigg quite radically as ‘alien’ and ‘nonhuman’ parts of our human being. Cf. Trigg, \textit{The Thing}.}; it’s in the dark of the cinema that we gently nudge the half-open door of our consciousness\footnote{As in Bergson’s characteristically evocative description: ‘superfluous recollections [which] may succeed in smuggling themselves through the half-open door. These memories, messengers from the unconscious, remind us of what we are dragging behind us unawares [sic]’ (5).} a little farther open because we no longer focus on the present situation from the perspective of action and useful work.\footnote{It is helpful, in addition, to take the ontology of the film medium into account. Being screened from the film world, which is of a different ontological order than us spectators in the cinema, allows us to be passive, as it frees us from the burden of responsibility. This passivity is a freedom from both mental response (deciding whether and how you should intervene) as well as a concomitant bodily response (having to physically reaction...} The narrative and
thematic openness as well as the formal minimalism of slow cinema allow us to admit more of ourselves beyond the threshold of consciousness, both of our past (memory) and of our future (imagination). So, slowness is not merely a retardation of pace, but a transition to a different quality of lived-time.

It is here that we can finally connect these individual perceptual and cognitive processes of aesthetics with the ethical potential of contemplative spectatorship. Critical theorist Theodor Adorno has a distinctly ethical understanding of contemplation that we can bring to bear analogously on watching slow cinema. In Minima Moralia Adorno writes of: ‘the long, contemplative look that fully discloses people and things, [...] a praxis by which one is open to the other, and yet can let the other be [...] [a] purpose-free connection to the Other and to others’. For me this forms an accurate analogue to the contemplative experience of watching slow cinema, as it similarly consists of a prolonged and renewed attention to the sound-image, a ‘protracted inspection of physical reality’. Adorno’s notion of contemplation as a form of attention clearly derives from an ethical attitude: it forms a part of his critique of modernity. For him, contemplation is a way of overcoming modernity’s ‘pure functionality’ of human relations to both things and people. Slow cinema endows us with such a long, contemplative look at film, ourselves and the other. It holds a personal transformational potential which derives from the slow form of thinking and feeling it engenders.

3. Conclusions

Now, I hope I’ve made a compelling case for theorizing the contemplative slow cinema spectator as a mentally active viewer who adopts a particular viewing mode that entails deep attention and who creatively engages with his own boredom through his faculties of imagination and recollection.

Further research into the topic could revolve around the cinema as a cultural practice. My hunch is that the cinema dispositif paradoxically encourages (bodily) passivity of the viewer, in order to enhance his mental activity. Thus the cinema could arguably be an institutional site where the form of contemplative spectatorship that I’ve described could actually flourish. Such arguments will neatly tie in with mine: taken together, a theoretical account of slow film and the cinema even more convincingly enables the researcher to elucidate the particularities of film form and viewing context. What’s at stake is ultimately cinema’s continuing relevance as an institution as well as the legitimation of the (digital) film medium as an art form: cinema’s ethical value as a heterotopia, an untimely space-time for active contemplation of pressing cultural issues of time and attention. On a final note, I suggest we consider the implications of the examined ideas of slowness for our own scholarly practices of thinking and writing.

to a situation). This ontological gap opens up a spectatorial space-time for mental reflection. Cf. Cavell, The World Viewed.

39 Adorno and Jephcott, Minima Moralia, 89–90.
40 Luca, Realism of the Senses.
41 This seems to me to be similar to Heidegger’s notion of the other as ‘standing-reserve’, which he employs in his ‘Question Concerning Technology’. Reprinted in Scharff and Dusek, Philosophy of Technology.
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