FROM HESITATION TO RESISTANCE: SLOW WORLD CINEMAS' TRANSNATIONAL POLITICS

by

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of contemporary slow world cinemas and their formal aesthetics – the use of long shots and long takes, de-dramatisation and the attentive observation of everydayness – have been read as nostalgic evocations of European cinematic canon of realism and modernism. This Eurocentric type of reading, on the one hand, facilitates the circulation of contemporary slow world cinemas within the global film festival and cinephilic circuits; on the other hand, it also runs the risk of reducing the diverse cultural specificities displayed in a world of representations of cinematic slowness to purely formulaic and teleological universality. In response, this thesis adopts *Jiaoyou* (*Stray Dogs*, Tsai Ming-liang, 2013), *Japón* (Carlos Reygadas, 2002), *Yi Yi* (*A One and a Two…*, Edward Yang, 2000) and *La soledad* (*Solitary Fragments*, Jaime Rosales, 2007) as case studies to repurpose slow world cinemas' formal aesthetics as, rather than a universalist strategy, a coincidence of hesitation that leads to a consensus of resistance against the homogenising force of globalisation and the hegemony of capitalist society and neoliberal modernity. This thesis further adopts *The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open* (Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers and Kathleen Hepburn, 2019) in a coda as a standpoint, or even counterpoint, to interrogate an ethical dilemma that lies in this transformation of coincidental hesitation into consensual resistance. Besides recognising that the theories of Gilles Deleuze, Henri Bergson and André Bazin provide productive readings of cinematic slowness, this thesis also brings into dialogue the existing scholarship on slow cinema, the de-Westernisation of film studies, Transnational Cinema and World Cinema to not only elaborate on but also reconfigure these theorists' established frameworks. Finally, this thesis demonstrates that a world of slow cinemas' resistant tendency, which addresses the detrimental

impacts of modern hegemonic social mechanisms in different sociopolitical and geopolitical contexts, can facilitate the dissemination of a localised, vernacular sensibility with the aim of achieving a transnational empathy – an empathy that recognises and interconnects, rather than distills, filters and homogenises, a world of different voices.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The aesthetics of cinematic slowness – the use of long shots and long takes, de-dramatisation and the attentive observation of everydayness – have been read as a nostalgic evocation of the European cinematic canon of realism and modernism. This thesis will adopt *Jiaoyou* (*Stray Dogs*, Tsai Ming-liang, 2013), *Japón* (Carlos Reygadas, 2002), *Yi Yi* (*A One and a Two…*, Edward Yang, 2000) and *La soledad* (*Solitary Fragments*, Jaime Rosales, 2007) as case studies to rethink this entrenched and Eurocentric genealogical reading of the emergence of contemporary slow world cinemas. On the one hand, the Eurocentric type of reading that this thesis challenges facilitates the circulation of contemporary slow world cinemas around the global film festival and cinephilic circuits; on the other hand, this kind of reading runs the risk of reducing the diverse voices of a world of representations of cinematic slowness to a purely formulaic and teleological universality. In response, I aim to provide a non-binary, non-essentialist reading of the dynamic between cosmopolitanism and vernacularism, between the transnational and the national. Moreover, I will repurpose slow world cinemas' formal aesthetics as, rather than a universalist strategy, a coincidence of ethical hesitation that leads to a consensus of resistance against the homogenising force of globalisation and the hegemony of capitalist society and neoliberal modernity. The ethical consequences of this hesitation and this potential for consensus will also be examined in a coda that positions *The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open* (Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers and Kathleen Hepburn, 2019) at the nexus of this transformation of the one into the other, recognising and interrogating an ethical dilemma that exists in the theoretical formulation of this thesis as much as in the five films.

To perform this analysis, the thesis incorporates the cutting-edge discourse of World Cinema into the study of Slow Cinema to reflect the flux between different filmic representations of slowness in different geopolitical and sociopolitical contexts – a flux that prevents the resistance from being purely fixed, absolute and universalist or nationalist. By adopting contextual analysis in each of the four main case studies, and textual analysis in the Coda as a comparative standpoint, or even counterpoint, this thesis foregrounds not only the cultural specificity of each film but also the interconnectedness between the films in question, informed by an ethics of hesitation and its concomitant politics of an act of resistance. Besides recognising that the Deleuzian formulation of the time-image, the Bergsonian enquiry into duration and the Bazinian theorisation of realism provide productive readings of the aesthetics of cinematic slowness, this thesis also brings into dialogue the existing scholarship on slow cinema, the de-Westernisation of film studies, and both Transnational Cinema and World Cinema not only to elaborate on but also to rethink and repurpose these theorists' established frameworks. Underpinned by David Martin-Jones' illuminating analyses of an ethics of hesitation manifested in a world of time-images, this thesis also pays its attention to this dialogue between philosophy and film studies by formulating its own philosophical enquiry into the transformation of a hesitant moment into a resistant act, and an ethical dilemma that puts this transformation's generalising, universalising impulse under scrutiny. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate that, through my close reading of the four case studies and the Coda, the resistant tendency shown in these slow films is a shared humanist sensibility that is intermingled with, rather than distilled and filtered from, different viewpoints of individual cultures, and is not without its own internal complications.

1.1 A World of Slow Cinemas

Before moving on to the main argument of this thesis, I will clarify the reasons behind my choice of the term ‘slow world cinemas’. As other academic research on cinematic slowness has pointed out, even though applying ‘slow’ to describe a cohort of films ‘suggests a binary opposition based on speed and motion’ (Flanagan 2012: 5) and on ‘arthouse slowness [and] the kinetic, popular Hollywood style’ (de Luca 2014: 14), it is also clear that ‘slow’, as a denotative collocation, has been ‘commonly accepted as a broad signifier of a certain mode of durational art and experimental film’ (Flanagan 2012: 5) and has thus provided the scholarship with an entryway into ‘disciplinary conversation’ (Koutsourakis 2019: 388). However, it is not my intention to regard this application of shorthand as a compromise or even as an established idée fixe that is immune to challenge. As Tiago de Luca rightly observes, to theorise the film movement in question under the lens of slowness, where the ‘directors are not unified in […] a structured and self-conscious [manner]’, is a question or an ethics of ‘avoid[ing] essentializing traps’ (2014: 13–14). It is on the basis of this call for a non-binary, non-essentialist sensibility that my choice of the term ‘slow world cinemas’ comes into play. By connecting ‘slow cinema’ with ‘world cinemas’ I aim to respond to David Martin-Jones’ idea that ‘the term world cinemas captures something of its plural nature, and avoids the connotations of a singular entity associated with world cinema’ (2011: 5). Moreover, following Rob Stone et al., it should be borne in mind that, like ‘the task of remapping the cinemas of the world on a spinning globe’, mapping a world of slow films has to embrace its own ‘inexactitude […] because of the flux, drag and effervescence that constitutes a busy network of ebb and flow, of centripetal and centrifugal impulses that constantly reshape the form and function of the cinemas of the world’ (Stone et al. 2018: 1). However, this malleable, ever-shifting nature of world cinemas should not be seen as an impediment to research but, instead, as an infinite potential for ‘revealing,

exploring, explaining and considering commonalities and differences between the scale, engagement, strategies and anomalies of areas of filmmaking activity worldwide' (Stone et al. 2018: 2).

At the turn of the 21st century, the term 'slow cinema' has gradually gained currency in Film Studies. Throughout the last two decades, the discussions on slow cinema's formal devices, genealogy and circulation around film festival and cinephile circuits have highlighted the disparity between commercial Hollywood films, which entertain the mass market, and art cinema, which is praised on such circuits. Michel Ciment, in his speech at the 46th San Francisco International Film Festival, pointed out that the dichotomy between 'great cinema stylists with a limited audience – the regulars of film festivals – and mindless escapist movies with eye-boggling visuals, deafening sounds, and limited substance' had become much more obvious. Moreover, Ciment was aware that an emerging tendency of 'a cinema of slowness, of contemplation' was a reaction to the 'bombardment of sound and image' and a search for the lost 'sensuous experience of a moment revealed in its authenticity' (Ciment 2003).

However, more than a decade after Ciment's speech, reading contemporary slow world cinemas from different countries in such a reactionary and nostalgic way is anachronistic at a time when Film Studies has begun to foreground a de-centring, transcultural and border-crossing pursuit informed by the discourse of Transnational Cinema and World Cinema. As Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge argue, although the lineage of the tendency of slowness in cinema history can be traced back to the 1960s and 70s, a purely genealogical reading puts contemporary slow world cinemas at risk of being 'decidedly teleological and also Eurocentric' (2016: 9). If ongoing or future research still insists on the reductionist idea of the aesthetics of slowness and the essentialist genealogy of this cinematic movement, then slow world cinemas are at risk of losing their potential

to elicit a more illuminating reading of the philosophical, cultural and aesthetic exchanges between different nations and eras. Consequently, instead of claiming that this global emergence of slow world cinemas is predicated on its inheritance of its European predecessors' cinematographic style, I will argue that the dynamic between contemporary slow world cinemas and their precursors is not a hierarchical or linear progression but a mobile and intuitive dialogue. To wit, my aim in this thesis is to free this cosmopolitan phenomenon of cinematic slowness from teleological discourse. It is when slow world cinemas stop being reduced to subordinate, parasitic, cultural products that their ethical enquiry and political intent, which address the detrimental impacts of modern hegemonic social mechanisms in different sociopolitical and geopolitical contexts, can facilitate the dissemination of a localised, vernacular sensibility with the aim of achieving a transnational empathy – an empathy that recognises and interconnects, rather than homogenises, a world of different voices.

1.2 Defining Cinematic Slowness

As mentioned earlier, Tiago de Luca aptly observes that although the emergence of slow world cinemas is not a structured movement, a 'similar aesthetic imprint makes [this cohort of films] immediately comparable' (2014: 13). Similarly, Emre Çağlayan argues that the films of slow world cinemas, each of which concerns different local specificities, 'transcend national and cultural boundaries [and] manage to speak to different groups of people that share similar sensibilities concerning cinema and its aesthetic, cultural and political functions' (2018: xii). Each of academic publication in this area contains its own list of the characteristics of slow aesthetics, in line with its individual research focus and framework. For the purpose of this thesis, I focus on Matthew

Flanagan's criteria regarding the cinematic devices of slowness that the films in my four case studies apply: 'the employment of (often extremely) long takes, de-centred and understated modes of storytelling, and a pronounced emphasis on quietude and the everyday' (Flanagan 2008).

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the scholarship has not actually reached a consensus on defining what truly defines whether a film is categorised as a slow film. The most prominent challenge for scholars is to pin down different individuals' subjective responses to slowness. For Song Hwee Lim, 'time (or slowness) is, to a great extent, a matter of perception and experience, and it can never merely be an objective temporal (or rhythmic) measurement' (2016: 89). For instance, the use of the long duration shot is usually deemed to be the trademark of the aesthetics of cinematic slowness, but, in Lúcia Nagib's view, it 'does not necessarily elicit the experience of slowness by the spectator, for its use attains radically different results, say, in a contemplative film, such as *Liverpool* (Lisandro Alonso, 2008), and in a sci-fi action feature, such as *Children of Men* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2006)' (2016: 27). A more recent case, *Victoria* (Sebastian Schipper, 2015), is a more extreme example in the sense that it comprises a single long take; however, the film is not necessarily regarded as slow due to its action-packed and eventful narrativisation. As a result, Lim adds that the study of slow cinema is geared towards discussing the 'nothing happening' or 'nothingness' that is recorded and represented 'over a long (and for some, longer than "necessary") duration' (2016: 90). For instance, Nick James, in his polemical article on slow cinema in the April 2010 issue of *Sight and Sound*, claims that 'such films are easy to remember and discuss in detail because details are few' but, at the same time, '[t]he bargain the newer variety of slow films seem [sic] to impose on the viewer is simple: it's up to you to draw on your stoic patience and the fascination in your gaze, in case you miss a masterpiece' (2010: 5).

Addressing James' critique, Karl Schoonover points out that the debates on slow cinema are predicated on 'the opposition of time wasted versus time laboured' (2016: 155). Schoonover recognises that '[t]he slow art film anticipates a spectator not only eager to clarify the value of wasted time and uneconomical temporalities but also curious about the impact of broadening what counts as productive human labour' (2016: 153). Elaborating on this idea of 'dead time', Lim maintains that slow cinema:

> Create[s] non-events as events through which a different temporality, meaning, and value can come into being, thereby questioning the notion of 'event' or 'happening' and unsettling the very foundation of what constitutes a film's narrative. (2014: 30)

However, again, questioning whether watching a slow film is a waste of time because nothing really happens repeats the aforementioned quest for pinning down a diversity of subjective perceptions of time to a fixed agreement on the speed or the passage of time. It seems that, from the discourse of temporality to the questioning of productivity, to define slow cinema unavoidably reduces subjective perception to a scientific formula that 'can be repeated and calculated, and consequently […] is not in a state of flow' (Bergson 2007: 3). Nevertheless, as Henri Bergson argues, 'it is not a question of giving up that logic or of revolting against it. But we must extend it, make it more supple, adapt it to a duration in which novelty is constantly springing forth and evolutions is creative' (2007: 15). Following Bergson, in order to explore a more adequate framework that does not define but instead seeks out the flexibility and potentiality of this cinematic movement, I will now address the aesthetic features of slow world cinemas that deconstruct a sense of meaninglessness and boredom wherein time is the common denominator.

A barely edited film mainly comprising long takes and de-dramatised narrative is supposed to be easily graspable. However, long durational recording and minimalist representation of everyday banality place great demands on the audience's concentration and patience. Indeed, slow world cinemas are sometimes labelled 'pretentious' due to their 'manner of masterpieces judged to be overly ambiguous, lacking a proper story, or unforgivably bereft of scenes of cars blowing up' (Leigh 2010). These negative impressions of slow world cinemas manifest an aberrant aesthetic that rejects the traditional interpretation of the 'meaning' of a film, and have thus focused the interest of this thesis on the deconstruction of a sense of boredom and meaninglessness. This absence, or more specifically this deferral of meaning, counterintuitively incites a new form of meaning in the context of film analysis and spectatorial experience and thus resonates with Jacques Derrida's formulation of *différance*.

Derrida argues that the meaning of a sign is in fact produced by its differences from other terms and that these meanings are constructed 'by the network of oppositions that distinguish them and relate them to one another' (1973: 139). In other words, a word gains its meaning through the process of differing and deferring, and Derrida describes this invisible linguistic trace as the neologism, *différance*. I maintain that *différance*, albeit mainly focusing on linguistic discourse, reveals how the long take and the lack of narrative drive in slow world cinemas defer 'what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible' until these absences of meaning become meaningful (Derrida 1973: 129). Similarly, Harry Tuttle, in response to James' criticism of slow world cinemas, contends that 'sometimes Art is not about WHAT is represented, but about what is NOT represented, or an abstract reflection on the effect of representational minimalism' (2010b; emphasis in original). Tuttle's claim points out materiality's limits regarding the reification of abstract concepts. Nevertheless, slow world cinemas approach this constraint by presenting absence

and postponing this non-presence until what was once not presented surfaces through the slow progression of insignificant plot line and long durational shots.

If Derrida's notion of *différance*, applied to the analysis of slow world cinemas, serves to deconstruct the trace where the meaning of a film is reflected in its own absence, one thing to bear in mind is that this revelation of meaning would not satisfy the kind of audience who are more used to conventional storytelling. Instead, the meaning that lies in cinematic slowness is fluid since it is produced through a chain 'that has no taxonomical, lexical, or ontological closure' (Ormiston 1985: 41). The details of a slow film are few because the film's meaning does not require any redundant editing in order to appeal to the audience's emotional attachment; however, the almost unnoticeable 'static' changes – happening in each moment of the process of differing and deferring through the use of long take or the minute, detailed observation of everyday banality – do demand that the spectators pay attention and have patience.

Nevertheless, as Duncan Wheeler suggests in his critique of 'austere Spanish cinema', this 'adulation predicated on negation' and the stance regarding the denial of 'traditional pleasures' are not proactive enough to 'illustrate and elucidate [such cinema's] strengths' (2014: 28). Moreover, Wheeler points out that there is an implicit 'performative dimension to [such] academic endeavour [in] not only comment[ing] on, but at times creat[ing] (or at least facilitat[ing]) a field of study (2014: 27). Drawing on Paul Julian Smith's concern over a teleological symbiotic relationship between avant-garde artists and critics, which I will address in more detail in Chapter 5, Wheeler (2014: 27–8) reveals 'the danger of this kind of self-endorsing critical endogamy in relation to art cinema' – a critique that is also picked up on in Jonathan Romney's (2010: 44) and Nick James' (2010: 5) articles concerning the debates around slow cinema. In order to respond to this critique, which (in)directly interrogates slow world cinemas' scholarship and spectatorship, it is

imperative for this thesis to further explore and theorise a number of things: the kind of philosophical idea that underpins slow world cinemas' minimalistic aesthetics; the kind of attention – sympathetic or empathetic, intellectual or intuitive – that such cinemas demand from spectators; and the kind of time – in a linear sense or in a true durational sense – for which the spectators' patience lasts.

1.3 Theorising Cinematic Slowness

In this section, I will explore Gilles Deleuze's formulation of the time-image, Henri Bergson's philosophical enquiry into duration and intuition and André Bazin's theorisation of cinematic realism to attempt to theorise cinematic slowness. It might be argued, given that this thesis' enquiry into slow world cinemas is informed by World Cinema's de-centring and de-Westernising tendency, that adopting these Continental European philosophies to examine a world of slow films runs the risk of being Eurocentric. This is an important consideration, and I will address it in the next section, where a more detailed discussion of the de-Westernisation of film studies will be provided. However, I will first reveal how these philosophical and theoretical formulations are engaged in slow world cinemas' representations of time and their realist tendency.

For Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge, the Deleuzian conceptualisation of the time-image and characterisation of modernist art films' features – 'observant and errant characters, elliptical and de-dramatised narrative structures, minimalist mise-en-scène, and/or the sustained application of elongated and self-reflexive temporal devices such as the long take' (2016: 9) – foreshadows the academic attention now being paid to contemporary slow world cinemas. In a similar vein, although not directly adopting Deleuzian theories, Angelos Koutsourakis regards the

global emergence of contemporary slow cinema as 'the revivification of modernism' (2019: 388), specifically 'postwar slow modernism […] which expressed a disenchantment with modernity and abandoned modernity's heroic narrative towards progress' (2019: 390). A problematic Eurocentric implication found in Deleuzian formulations of the time-image will be properly addressed in the next section, but it is worth a reminder here that both de Luca and Jorge's and Koutsourakis' readings of this 'modernist belatedness' (Koutsourakis 2019: 389) of contemporary slow films, rather than simply acknowledging, rethink such genealogical influences by incorporating World Cinema's discourse of polycentrism into their critical studies. For instance, de Luca and Jorge propose that:

> Rather than merely looking at contemporary slow cinemas as a means to examine how they rearticulate the structures and tendencies of the [post-war European and North American modernist] films and traditions, these films and traditions be themselves retroactively illuminated from today's theoretical vantage point of slowness. (2016: 9)

That is, it is imperative to perceive this revivification of slowness as 'the historical opportunity to rethink, or even challenge and reject, traditional genealogies of film history and teleological determinism' (de Luca and Jorge 2016: 10). For Koutsourakis, he looks at the global emergence of cinematic slowness by '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' (Koutsourakis 2019: 389). Koutsourakis proposes to see the revitalisation of the postwar modernist 'aesthetic practices and forms as a result of the re-emergence of social contractions analogous to the ones that first produced them' (2019: 390). In doing so, he argues that slow world cinemas' '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' (2019: 391). In this sense, both academic studies reveal a mutually inflected and dialogical dynamic, rather than a reductionist and determinist lineage, between contemporary slow films and their Modernist precursors – a productive dialogue that strips cinematic slowness' of a formulaic, teleological connotation.

Although Deleuze's formulations of the time-image are predominantly informed by the films produced in post-war Europe and North America, his insight into cinema's potential to directly present time still plays a monumental role in analysing the aesthetics of slowness. Deleuze maintains that a new type of cinema has replaced the dominance of action and movement in classical and Hollywood cinema with 'pure optical situations […] which are no longer sensory-motor and which bring the emancipated senses into direct relation with time and thought' (1997c: 17). That is, in a Deleuzian sense, to present a direct time-image is 'to make time and thought perceptible, to make them visible and of sound' (1997c: 18). Consequently, the representation of long take and long shot, the breakdown of the sensory-motor link commonly found in classical and Hollywood cinema, the indiscernible nature of a character's motivation and disposition, and the elliptical narratives all viewed through Deleuzian ideas, directly free the representation of time from being subordinate to movement. It is worth noting that, for Deleuze, there is no hierarchy between the movement-image and the time-image; however, the former cannot provide the latter for the audience because, in the movement-image, 'the past is a former present, and the future a present to come' (1997c: 270–1). Thus, Deleuze's idea of time does not conform to its traditional and linear meaning, and Deleuze mainly derives this cinematic and philosophical enquiry of the time-image from Henri Bergson's influential idea of *durée*, or duration.

In Bergson's view, duration is intensive, heterogeneous and a qualitative multiplicity as opposed to space, which is extensive, homogeneous and a quantitative multiplicity. Pure duration as states of consciousness permeating one another and organised into an organic whole cannot be enumerated, and 'as soon as we try to measure it, we unwittingly replace it by space' (Bergson 2001: 106). In other words, when we calculate and count time, we simply confuse it with space. For Bergson, duration is a form wherein different qualities of perception permeate one another and coexist as a whole, and this idea leads to his understanding of the nature of time. In pure duration, time is no longer a linear progression from past into present and then future. In this sense, Bergson posits that our intellect scientifically measures time and sees it only as immobile, and that our 'intuition' perceives duration as mobile change and as the 'uninterrupted continuity of unforeseeable novelty' (2007: 22). Bergson, by providing a simple fact – 'If I want to mix a glass of sugar and water, I must, willy-nilly, wait until the sugar melts' – reveals that this waiting 'coincides with my impatience […] with a certain portion of my own duration, which I cannot protract or contract as I like. It is no longer something thought, it is something lived' (Bergson 1944: 12–13). In *Bergsonism*, Deleuze further maintains that this new perspective from which to observe the material world encourages us to see the 'differences in kind' between multiple durations, where the sugar, the water and our own duration are not merely quantitative points in space (Deleuze 1997a: 31–2). However, Deleuze contends that although Bergson recognises the immanence of division, multiplicity and constant fluxes and changes between and within different durations, he tends to admit only '*a single Time, one, universal, impersonal. In short, a monism of Time*' (1997a: 78; emphasis in original). Bergson does acknowledge the multiplicity of duration, but Deleuze argues that Bergsonian multiplicity denotes differences in kind within 'the same virtual whole' (1997a: 82). To elaborate on this theorisation of one single time, or true duration, containing 'virtual

multiplicities that are continuous and qualitative', Deleuze takes Bergson's formulation of 'a fundamental triplicity of fluxes' further (1997a: 80). As Bergson puts it:

> Such is our first idea of simultaneity. We call simultaneous, then, two external fluxes that occupy the same duration because they hold each other in the duration of a third, our own…. [It is this] simultaneity of fluxes that brings us back to internal duration, to real duration. (1965: 52, 61; quoted in Deleuze 1997a: 81)

In this sense, intuition, as the method by which we understand the multiplicity of our own and others' durations, embodies an empathy that facilitates an ethical becoming-others.

Following this idea, I argue that slow world cinemas' use of long takes and their representations of de-dramatised everydayness are indifferent to the confinement of homogeneous space, because they reveal the unnoticed fluxes and changes that cannot be found in the kind of conventional narratives in which normalised, fast-paced, logical editing dominates. Consequently, slow world cinemas situate the audience in a duration wherein cinematic experience becomes more of an intuitive response than an intellectual one. For instance, as shall be examined, *Stray Dogs*' penultimate long take, lasting almost 14 minutes, and its final shot, lasting around 7 minutes, free the representations of time from movement by recording a man and a woman staring at a mural situated in a deserted building. In addition, the final 5-minute tracking shot in *Japón*, which presents a panoramic observation of a diegetic fatal accident with 360-degree camera movement, shows the natural and contingent profilmic details outside the narrative, and *Yi Yi* and *Solitary Fragments*' modernist representations, which show multiple seemingly unconnected banal events simultaneously happening in different places, potentially address Bergson's theory of the contraction and convergence of differences in kind within a single duration. All these shots or

sequences require not only the audience's focus and attention but also their intuition to feel into the dialectical images, where each image seemingly opposes the others but, in effect, aims to reach an empathetic understanding with them.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Bergson (1944: 331–3) in fact criticises cinema as a cinematographic illusion that projects false movement through a mechanical process. However, this critique of Bergson's is inadequate because it sees only the mechanism of the apparatus and considers cinematographic images as different immobile snapshots successively replacing and being replaced by one another. Deleuze, in *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, disapproves of Bergson's critique of cinema by maintaining that:

> Cinema does not give us an image to which movement is added, it immediately gives us a movement-image. It does give us a section, but a section which is mobile, not an immobile section + abstract movement. (1997b: 2)

Deleuze's contention is not that the mobility of movement can be cut up into immobile parts and instants; instead, he posits that:

> Through movement the whole is divided up into objects, and objects are re-united in the whole, and indeed between the two 'the whole' changes. We can consider the objects or parts of a set as *immobile sections*; but movement is established between these sections, and relates the objects or parts to the duration of a whole which changes, and thus expresses the changing of the whole in relation to the objects and is itself a *mobile section* of duration. (1997b: 11; emphasis in original)

Moreover, it is worth noting that the predominance of montage in the cinematic productions of Bergson's time impeded his recognition of cinema's potential to present true duration. The use of

montage provides an easily graspable and linear narrative that 'imitate[s] natural perception' (Deleuze 1997b: 3). However, Deleuze also believes that this imitation of reality is only a preliminary stage in the evolution of cinema, and that Bergson should have noticed that '[t]he essence of a thing never appears at the outset, but in the middle, in the course of development' (1997b: 3). This cinematic progression recalls André Bazin's formulation of a paradox. Bazin contends that '[e]very new development added to the cinema must, paradoxically, take it nearer and nearer to its origins. In short, cinema has not yet been invented!' (Bazin 2005a: 21). Although Bazin does not straightforwardly acknowledge the use of long take, he firmly contests the idea that montage is 'the very essence of the language of cinema' (2005a: 28).

Bazin differentiates between two types of cinematic trend in the two decades from 1920 to 1940: 'those directors who put their faith in the image and those who put their faith in reality' (2005a: 24). For Bazin, the former trend emphasises the 'plastics', including the setting, the lighting, the composition of a shot and the use of montage (2005a: 24). In contrast, directors who utilise shot in depth and long shot belong to the latter trend, and the cinema of this kind is hailed by Bazin as 'a respect for the continuity of dramatic space and, of course, of its duration' (2005a: 34). He posits that, '[t]hanks to the depth of field, whole scenes are covered in one take' (2005a: 33). This evolution of the shot in depth had challenged the prevalence of montage since 1940, and Bazin argues that, rather than presenting a series of shots in juxtaposition, the shot in depth can better manifest 'the significance of the scene' (2005a: 35). In this sense, Bazin believes that the shot in depth presents a more realistic cinematic image. Moreover, this kind of shot allows spectators to contribute their own interpretations of the image because they are no longer forced to follow the director's authorial control in montage (2005a: 36). Bazin further contends that the shot in depth results in a metaphysical effect (2005a: 36). Whilst montage logically links images in order to

express a particular meaning and thus 'rules out ambiguity of expression', the shot in depth contains an uncertainty that invites free interpretations from the spectators and thus complicates the objective sense of reality. In this sense, I argue that this Bazinian observation – a viewer's active participation in deconstructing a film's obscure representation – sheds light on the indescribable spectatorial experience that is mistakenly regarded as a sense of boredom demanding spectators' 'stoic patience'. Hence, the formulation of Bazinian realism potentially expounds on the combination of highly realist banality and contemplative ineffability of cinematic slowness.

In fact, by extending Bazin's view into dialogue with the Deleuzian reformulation of Bergsonian duration and intuition, I reveal a paradox: within the finite stretch of a slow film's running time – perceived and agreed by our intellects – lie infinitely multiple subjective perceptions and heterogenous intuitive understandings of duration. On the one hand, the entire film – as a complete and material visual production – is confined to a fixed period of screening time; on the other hand, the slowness and the temporal indiscernibility that lie in each shot and the whole film prevent time from being preconceived, finite and subordinate to logical continuity and linear narrative progression. It is thus tempting to ask how an amorphous, subjective and intuitive sense of duration can exist within a whole that is fixed, objective and intellectually determined to last a specific amount of time. I will address this formative paradox later in this introductory chapter by formulating my own critical framework that recognises the dynamic that exists between an ethics of hesitation and an act of resistance that lies in cinematic slowness.

This crucial paradox revolves around the interplay between the finite and the infinite, which, I argue, reveals that slow world cinemas foreground an intuitive and empathetic understanding of cinematic slowness. As mentioned earlier, intuition – as the method by which we understand the multiplicity of our own durations and those around us – embodies empathy's potential to connect an

individual's limited, finite, solipsistic scope of worldview with infinitely diverse perspectives that encompass different others' points of view. To this extent, this method of perceiving differences in kind in duration illuminates a new understanding of slow world cinemas' ability to transcend local and cultural specificity and achieve a transnational empathy. In fact, this key notion reflects the prominent idea of the de-Westernisation of film studies: departing from a centralised axiom and embracing the differences that keep the world incessantly in flux. To appreciate the fluidity of the aesthetic exchange between different films from differing historical, geographical and cultural perspectives is to empathise with individual subjectivities instead of intellectually establishing the facile, linear progression and genealogy of a certain cinematic movement. Likewise, to employ the intellect to understand the passage of time in long takes only ends up draining both patience and concentration. In this case, is the emergence of contemporary slow world cinemas an exemplar of this need to highlight the significance of empathy in fully recalibrating the value of this inexorably sped-up and teleologically orientated modern world?

In order to formulate this hypothesis, the thesis will first adopt a more in-depth theory of the de-Westernisation of film studies, which not only confronts the essentialist binary between the cinema of the West and its counterpart of the Rest, but also challenges the influence of neoliberal globalisation that homogenises the cinema of 'the other' in order to have it keep up with and conform to modern-day speed and hegemonic Westernised culture.

1.4 De-Westernising Cinematic Slowness

Responding a decade ago to the emergence of slow cinema, Nick James considered the movement as having been 'the clear alternative to Hollywood for some time', albeit one that was not active or

rebellious enough (2010: 5). Since then, the debates on slow cinema have circulated around in online news articles (see Romney 2010; Kois 2011; Dargis and Scott 2011) and film blogs (see Tuttle 2010a, 2010b; Shaviro 2010; Bordwell and Thompson 2011). Acknowledging James' assertion, Steven Shaviro claims that the aesthetics of contemporary slow cinema 'has become entirely routinized [… and lacks] originality and insight' (2010). Shaviro further maintains that:

> Slow-Cinema-As-Default-International-Style is profoundly nostalgic and regressive – and I think that this is a bad thing. It's a way of simulating older cinematic styles, and giving them a new appearance of life (or more precisely, a new zombified life-in-death), as a way of flattering classicist cinephiles, and of simply ignoring everything that has happened, socially, politically, and technologically, in the last 30 years. (2010)

From Shaviro's critique, it is clear that two entrenched traits of slow cinema have been the catalysts for all these debates: firstly, it is a reactionary cinematic form when compared with technologically advanced mainstream productions and, secondly, it is a nostalgic project striving to restore European modernist and realist aesthetics. The first quality resonates with the ingrained discourse of the binary between Hollywood and art cinema; the second invokes the dominance of Westernised and Eurocentric discourses in film studies and thus casts doubt on the originality and potentiality of slow cinema from around the world.

Recognising the impurity of art cinema (Galt and Schoonover 2010: 1–24) and adhering to the unstable and enriching flux and flow in World Cinema (Stone 2018: 267–87), this thesis rejects any rigid and fixed definition of slow cinema; instead, my aim here is to re-examine and enrich the debates by paying academic attention to the discourse of Art Cinema and World Cinema. Both scholarships have also dealt with the bifurcation between the centre and the periphery within the

film industry. The rethinking and retooling of this cinematic construct are evoked in Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's book *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (2014). Shohat and Stam notice that Eurocentrism divides the world into the 'West and the Rest' and:

> Organizes everyday language into binaristic hierarchies implicitly flattering to Europe: *our* 'nations,' *their* 'tribes'; *our* 'religions,' *their* 'superstitions'; *our* 'culture,' *their* 'folklore'; *our* 'art,' *their* 'artefacts'; *our* 'demonstrations,' *their* 'riots'; *our* 'defense,' *their* 'terrorism'. (2014: 2; emphasis in original)

In further exploring the infiltration of this ideology into culture and media studies, they contend that Western art 'is itself a collective heritage, an omnivorous mélange of cultures' (2014: 14). Non-Western or non-European influences are essentially a flux within which '"majorities" and "minorities" can easily exchange places', and which 'move[s] beyond the nation-state to explore the palimpsestic transnationalism left in colonialism's wake' (2014: 15). In a similar vein, Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim posit that film studies should also rid itself of the compulsion to praise the films of 'Hollywood and post-war Europe' as the origin of every aesthetic influence (2006: 6). Hence, they suggest 'theoris[ing] world cinema not in terms of "the West vs. the rest" but in relation to notions such as hybridity, transculturation, border crossing, transnationalism and translation' (2006: 6). This search for interconnectedness is also the aim of Lúcia Nagib's approach of looking at 'world cinema as a polycentric phenomenon with peaks of creation in different places and periods' (2011: 1).

Nagib's idea is a vital catalyst for the de-Westernising movement in film studies. For instance, in their co-edited *De-Westernizing Film Studies*, Saër Maty Bâ and Will Higbee maintain that the study of de-Westernisation 'seek[s] polycentric, multi-directional, non-essentialized alternatives to

Eurocentric theoretical and historical perspectives' (2012: 1). It is on the basis of this notion of de-Westernisation and non-Eurocentrism that David Martin-Jones points out a problematic Eurocentric tendency in the conclusions of Deleuze's *Cinema* books (1997b; 1997c), which regard the Second World War as a '[universal] dividing line between [a world of] movement- and time-image[s]' (Martin-Jones 2011: 10). As Martin-Jones puts it:

> To attempt to validate Deleuze's ideas through their application to films from around the world would run the risk of imposing already Eurocentric conclusions onto cinemas that belong to very different, context-specific cultures and aesthetic traditions. (2011: 2)

In the same vein, Nagib argues that this dichotomy between the movement-image and the time-image results in a Eurocentric generalisation, whereby one film is classified as the classical representation and another as the modern one without worldwide cinematic traditions being taken into account (2016: 26). Elaborating on this observation, Nagib finds an inadequacy in the Deleuzian interpretation of Yasujiro Ozu's films:

> All too often I have read that Ozu's 'curtain shots' or 'pillow shots' are randomly chosen images aimed at producing ellipses of time and space. For Deleuze (2005: 13), for example, they are pure optical and sound images. Such assessments, however, overlook their crucial narrative role which often includes self-commentary and reflexivity. (2016: 35)

Martin-Jones and David H. Fleming also notice a Eurocentric tendency that lies in Deleuze's approach to examining 'time and movement in cinema based upon his observation of primarily US and European examples' (2014: 93). Although Deleuze uses Ozu's and Akira Kurosawa's films as

case studies (he also regards Ozu as the inventor of the time-image), he seems to be ignorant of other Asian cinemas, Chinese language cinemas in particular. Recognising this omission in Deleuze's *Cinema* books, Martin-Jones and Fleming pose the question of how we can avoid imposing Deleuze's Eurocentric theorisation onto the Deleuzian study of Chinese cinemas. Responding to this methodological dilemma, Martin-Jones and Fleming first remind us that:

> This is not to suggest that Chinese cinemas necessarily have some sort of duty to interact with and develop a European thinker's work on cinema. After all, such a Eurocentric position inevitably reinforces the apparent 'centrality' of the European thinker in relation to a 'peripheral' cinema. Rather, we wanted to see the constructive impact on Deleuze's ideas (their questioning or reconsideration), wrought by an engagement with Chinese films […, and] what challenges, developments, and reinterpretations might Chinese films offer to Deleuze's concepts. (2014: 94)

Martin-Jones and Fleming's concern corresponds to my question in the previous section, about whether adopting not only Deleuze's but also other European or Western thinkers' and scholars' theories to examine a world of slow films runs the risk of reducing the de-centring mapping of world cinemas to a re-establishment of Eurocentrism. In their project of de-Westernising film studies, Bâ and Higbee disentangle such methodological conundrum by pointing out that the idea of 'the "West"' should not be treated as 'a fixed geographical location, nor bound to a specific historical period (2012: 1–2). As Bâ and Higbee argue:

> The "West" as a category is always (necessarily) shifting, in motion, and therefore unstable: one's geographical "West" is always another's "East." The "West" therefore becomes a geo-cultural or geo-political framework that one can subject to a range of theoretical analyses across disciplines that contemporary film studies encompasses or

> interconnects with: screen studies, (new) media studies, cultural studies, language studies, research methods, education, history, philosophy, and so on. (2012: 2)

Under this premise, Bâ and Higbee reject to read the idea of de-Westernisation as 'a straightforward inversion of Eurocentric binaries, diachronic histories or centers, or […] anti-Western' (2012: 2); instead, the act of de-Westernisation takes effect 'simultaneously outside of and *within* Western ideological, intellectual, academic, institutional, industrial, and cinematic territories themselves' (2012: 2; emphasis in original). In accordance with their pursuit of a polycentric approach to studying world cinemas, Bâ and Higbee argues that the discourse of de-Westernisation concerns more 'a shared attitude toward the need for a more diverse approach to film theory, film history, and film practice than a given geographical location, political/artistic affiliation' (2012: 3). Following Martin-Jones and Fleming and Bâ and Higbee, I argue that it is neither out of a teleological nor a mutually legitimating reason that we adopt, nor conforming to an essentialised, fixed geographical boundedness that we should avoid adopting European or Western critical frameworks to study a world of cinemas. Instead, it is the interconnectedness of thinking in flow and flux that groups these literary works and visual representations together to create a mobile, ever-shifting dialogue that propels the circulation on a global scale of the cultural uniqueness and specificity of all types of world cinemas.

In fact, more and more academic discussions of slow world cinemas are on the cusp of paying attention to the deconstruction of the power dynamic between the centre and the periphery. For instance, Matthew Flanagan discovers that, although the filmmakers of slow world cinemas outspokenly reject the Hollywood mode of production in interviews, it is misleading to say that Hollywood is the arch-enemy, 'not least because Hollywood represents only one centre of the cinema that almost all of the filmmakers under discussion here are working in exile from' (2012:

18). In other words, if Hollywood is not treated as the only focal point of global mass market films, slow world cinemas consequently can be free from the 'Hollywood/other binary' that reduces their complexity and plurality (Flanagan 2012: 18). This theory recalls what Nagib postulates, that if 'a single centre and primacies' no longer exist 'everything can be put on the world cinema map on an equal footing, even Hollywood, which instead of a threat becomes a cinema among others' (2011: 1).

Moreover, this strand of study also addresses and counters Shaviro's aforementioned criticism of slow world cinemas' nostalgic and retrograde tendency. For instance, for Emre Çağlayan, the fact that debates on slow cinema mostly appear on online platforms 'bears witness to how digital technologies and the new media meddle so swiftly in our affairs with cultural productions and intellectual matters' (2018: 3). Besides this virtual scholarly 'fandom', the most discussed topic in this debate is the intersection between digital filmmaking and the emergence of slow world cinemas. For instance, Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge argue that, because much more accessible digital recording equipment 'offers the ability to record much longer stretches of time', a new mode of recording 'based on duration and observation' is made possible (2016: 10). Consequently, they disagree with 'the accusation of nostalgic purism and technological backwardness' by indicating that the advent of this technological progress in film production enables slow cinema to proliferate internationally (2016: 10). Exploring a world of cinematic realism in the digital age, Nagib and Cecília Mello argue that digital filmmaking has facilitated 'the recording of real locations and characters, as well as [… expanding] the application of techniques traditionally identified with realism, such as the long take so cherished by Bazin' (2009: xv). Although their research project does not focus mainly on cinematic slowness, Nagib and Mello notice that this creative intersection between digital technology and the realist representation of

long take has manifested itself in the works of 'Tsai Ming-liang (Taiwan/Malaysia), Carlos Reygadas (Mexico), Béla Tarr (Hungary), Apichatpong Weerasethakul (Thailand), Jia Zhang-ke (China) and Manoel de Oliveira (Portugal)' – savvy filmmakers in the slow cinema movement (2009: xv).

1.5 Transnational Perspectives of Cinematic Slowness

Having explored the aforementioned discourse of the de-Westernisation of film studies in the academic discussion of World Cinema, I will now explore the discipline's critiques of the impacts of globalisation on the current film industry: specifically, the resistance of both 'the more valuable forms of cinematic transnationalism' (Hjort 2010: 15) and 'the cinema of sentiment' (Stone 2018: 271) to cultural homogeneity in the age of globalisation suggests this critical tendency of the transnational (co)production.

In Mette Hjort's view, the more valuable forms of transnational cinema resist 'globalization as cultural homogenization' and ensure that 'certain economic realities associated with filmmaking do not eclipse the pursuit of aesthetic, artistic, social, and political values' (2010: 15). Drawing on Hjort's categorisation of nine different forms of cinematic transnationalism, Deborah Shaw observes that Hjort's classification is 'marked by both a definitional and an ethical approach in which she identifies good and bad, and strong and weak transnationalism' (Shaw 2018: 294). It is worth noting that Hjort by no means suggest that these forms of cinematic transnationalism are 'necessarily mutually exclusive', and that some forms are inherently better or worse than others (Hjort 2010: 15). For example, 'opportunistic transnationalism', wherein 'monetary factors actually dictate the selection of partners beyond national borders', is in contrast to 'epiphanic', 'affinitive',

and ‘milieu-building’ transnationalism, which all ‘reveal a resistance to purely economic thinking’ (2010: 19). However, using Zentropa, a Danish film company founded by Lars von Trier and Peter Aalbæk Jensen, as the case study, Hjort argues that the practice of opportunistic transnationalism can simply be a strategy via which to seek the support and opportunities of investment (2010: 20). Combined with this preliminary finance-orientated motivation, Zentropa’s transnational coproduction with Glasgow-based Sigma Films manifests a strong tendency towards affinitive and milieu-building transnationalism. This is because their ‘mutual awareness regarding the problems [in] *small nation contexts* and minor cinemas’ (2010: 18; emphasis in original) and their promotion of ‘the social value of solidarity’ (2010: 30) outweigh the value of the economic concerns.

In fact, this idea of the mutual inclusivity of different forms of cinematic transnationalism debunks the accusation made against the institutionalised transnational production and distribution of contemporary world cinemas. Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim point out that ‘filmmakers from non-Western cultures are often accused – by critics both at home and abroad – of self-exoticisation and courting controversy in their bids to attain global recognition’ (2006: 3). Similarly, Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge postulate that, due to the financial support provided ‘by European agents and institutions [for the] slow films com[ing] from Iran, Asia and Latin America’, the questions asked by slow world cinemas’ detractors that ‘hing[e] on power relations and national authenticity come to the fore’ (2016: 12). Judged by this doubt about their originality and authenticity, most of the directors and films of slow world cinemas ‘are often accused of turning their backs on national audiences by aestheticising their own local cultures to a privileged international elite’ (2016: 12). Such an accusation, examined under the flexible and non-essentialist understanding of cinematic transnationalism, is a misleading one that treats the

representation of long durational shot and the detailed observation of the minutiae of everyday life as purely formulaic aesthetics. Three of the five films in the case studies and the Coda in this thesis, *Stray Dogs* (Taiwan/France), *Japón* (Spain/Netherlands/Germany/Mexico) and *Yi Yi* (Taiwan/ Japan), are pertinent to this intersection between transnational funding or distribution and the shared sensibility of an ethical, humanist stance on the subject of capitalist, neoliberal modernity. None of these films put their own national identity aside but, instead, they preserve the local and cultural specificities of the subjects they depict. Meanwhile, these specificities by no means hold solipsistic and nationalistic values that would limit the potential to receive transnational support and thus empathetically communicate with different cultures. As a result, this thesis recognises Will Higbee and Lim's call for 'a critical transnationalism' that:

> Does not ghettoize transnational film-making in interstitial and marginal spaces but rather interrogates how these film-making activities negotiate with the national on all levels – from cultural policy to financial sources, from the multiculturalism of difference to how it reconfigures the nation's image of itself. (2010: 18)

Moreover, Higbee and Lim suggest that this critical framework 'scrutinizes the tensions and dialogic relationship between national and transnational, rather than simply negating one in favour of the other' (2010: 18).

In the same vein, Rob Stone proposes a 'mutable framework [that] removes the limitations of thinking in terms of national cinemas [and…] stateless, accented, interstitial and non-cinemas, which are too fixed in their criteria, in favour of flux between cinemas of citizens and cinemas of sentiment' (2018: 277). Drawing on Georg Sørensen's formulations of communities of citizens and communities of sentiment (Sørensen 2004; cited in Stone 2018: 267), Stone suggests that there exist

‘cinemas of citizens’ and ‘cinemas of sentiment’ in a world of cinemas (2018: 267). According to Stone, whilst the cinema of citizens showcases ‘a subject with a historical, cultural and possibly linguistic identity that is legally binding’, the cinema of sentiment expresses the ‘subjectivity that exceeds a legalised or politically circumscribed identity’ (2018: 270–1). Stone contends that both types of cinema respond to globalisation, albeit in different ways. Drawing on Sørensen’s idea that communities of citizens are bound together by “political, social and economic rights and obligations”’ (Sørensen 2004: xiv; quoted in Stone 2018: 267), Stone argues that the cinema of citizens ‘hardens the core definition of national identity at a certain moment’ (2018: 271). By contrast, the cinema of sentiment ‘illustrates and gives voice to regional, ethnic and otherwise marginalised groups seeking a higher degree of autonomy [because it] seek[s] connections with the like-minded and reciprocally empathetic’ (2018: 275). In this sense, whereas the cinema of citizens can be ‘introverted [and] patriotic or nationalistic’ in the context of globalisation (2018: 275), the cinema of sentiment ‘transcend[s] the heterogeneity of localism’ through the support of international funding and distribution and resists globalising homogenisation ‘by highlighting diversity at home and transnational connections abroad’ (2018: 271–2). Stone, referencing Sørensen (2004: 91), thus reveals that ‘conceiving of itself as Other […] is an essential trait of the community of sentiment because empathy is how it looks and reaches beyond itself to “discover the reference points of collective identity”’ (2018: 275).

Nevertheless, recognising that world cinemas are in ‘an on-going, eternal becoming’ or flux (Stone 2018: 276), Stone contends that ‘communities and cinemas of citizens and sentiment have the capacity to morph into each other’ (2018: 273). For instance, a community of citizens can be equally as centrifugal as a community of sentiment by ‘enter[ing] into associations with other territories and/or populations that override internal policy, dilut[ing] the legal criteria for inclusion

and invest[ing] in cultural partnerships with others that erase differences between them' (2018: 273). Stone finds that several works of the Fifth Generation directors in Mainland China, such as *Da hong deng long gao gao gua* (*Raise the Red Lantern*, Zhang Yimou 1991) and *Ba wang bie ji* (*Farewell My Concubine*, Chen Kaige 1993), were funded by the government and 'mostly' sanctioned by the censors (2018: 275). However, the films secretly dissented from the 'totalitarian nationalism of the People's Republic of China' under the guise of 'period films that included characters who espoused Communist dogma and thus formally represented a Chinese cinema of citizens' (2018: 275). Because of their 'subtle cultural critiques' they received international praise and thus became 'evidence of a cinema of sentiment' (2018: 275).

Likewise, in Stone's view, the once resistant and 'anti-capitalist' cinemas of sentiment 'can in time become those of citizens if their values rigidify, thereby inspiring a new cinema of sentiment to rise up and challenge them (2018: 276). He takes the once revolutionary Third Cinema in Cuba as an example to reveal that the cinema of sentiment can be institutionalised and challenged by a younger generation that presents a much fresher and more resistant form of cinema with the help of easily accessible digital equipment and diverse distribution platforms (2018: 276). Stone's illustrations resonate with Sheldon H. Lu's view on Zhang Yimou's transformation from a peripheral independent or underground director to a mainstream and 'official' one (Lu 2010: 106–7). Lu maintains that Zhang's early films, including the aforementioned *Raise the Red Lantern,* 'are prime examples of what we call independent cinema at the periphery inside China and art house spectacles outside China'; nevertheless, his later martial arts films have the tendency to be both 'politically conformist' and entertaining-orientated (2010: 106). It is when this older generation stops engaging in unveiling the social issues in modern China that a new generation, the Sixth Generation, emerges. In Gary Xu's view, the directors of this younger generation, such as Jia

Zhangke, 'consciously resist the tendency of self-Orientalization in Fifth Generation filmmaking' and dedicate themselves to a realist representation that 'continues to reinforce impressions of China's differences, of China being the violator of human rights and the dark realm of communism' (2007: 48; quoted in Lu 2010: 107).

Similar to the cases in Cuba and China, the emergence of Taiwan New Cinema in the 1980s has illustrated the rise of a new form of cinemas of sentiment that responds to not only the domestic mainstream cinematic tradition but also the global art cinema circuit's attention to 'new waves'. However, it has lost its momentum not because it has become a cinema of citizens but because of its diminished viewership. As Chris Berry and Feii Lu aptly observe, the films of Taiwan New Cinema discard both the dramatic, entertaining and escapist narrativisation of the 1970s and 'the traditional Confucian ethics of the "Healthy Realist" cinema promoted by the government […] to pursue observational realism and modernist expressionism' (2005: 5). Moreover, Taiwan New Cinema received praise on the international film festival circuit just when the European, Japanese, Latin American and Indian new waves 'had begun to drop off' (Chris Berry and Feii Lu 2005: 5). Although these films gained international recognition and depicted Taiwan's everyday reality in a closer-to-life approach, their undramatic, 'more subtle and complex' realism did not attract the domestic audience, who were more familiar with commercial films (2005: 6). This 'financial non-viability' resulted in the end of this first wave of Taiwan New Cinema in 1987 (2005: 6).

After assessing these contemporary critical frameworks for addressing World Cinema, I contend that the strength of adopting such theories of World Cinema to respond to globalisation and cultural homogenisation lies in their adept dissection of the inadequacy of the binary generalisation. Consequently, World Cinema's resistance to the overgeneralising force of globalisation and

hegemonic cultural domination is never an end result but rather an ever-becoming and changing process that negates fixity and mutual exclusivity.

1.6 The Ethics of Hesitation in Cinematic Slowness

Following the above discussion of World Cinema, it is not far-fetched to link this cinematic resistance with the critique of capitalism's and neoliberalism's detrimental globalising forces. For the purpose of this thesis, I will not go into details of unpacking the differences between capitalism and neoliberalism; instead, I look at the roles they play in the history of the Western colonial, cultural imperialism – in particular their incessant pursuit of homogenising, standardising and monetising the calibration of time. Moreover, I approach the critique of these two economic, political mechanisms within the parameter of capitalism's impulse to build a well-functioned society of capital flows that is sustained by the pursuit of productivity, efficiency and fast-forwardness; and neoliberalism's fascination with establishing an illusion of ever-present modernity by ignoring or even effacing a world of histories that destabilise and challenge its hegemonic position in and dominant control over the world system. Drawing on David Martin-Jones' interpretation of the time-image, especially the crystal-image, as 'a hesitant cinematic ethics' (2019: 5), I will now explore how the aesthetics of cinematic slowness engages in this ethics of hesitation, which asks us to stop to question and rethink our own entrenched world views that are shaped and indoctrinated by the values of capitalist society and neoliberal modernity.

According to Deleuze, the crystal-image indicates time's nature of splitting into 'the actual image of the present which passes and the virtual image of the past which is preserved' (Deleuze 1997c: 81). Drawing on this concept of the 'distinct and yet indiscernible' (1997c: 81) dividing of

time, Martin-Jones maintains that the crystal of time 'is a potentially destabilizing, deterritorializing, ungrounding force within history[, and that its] purpose is to make us hesitate about the veracity of the present, by reminding us of alternative (or, lost) pasts' (Martin-Jones 2019: 5). According to Martin-Jones, a world of cinemas provides the viewers with an encounter with these alternative or lost pasts and thus offers them 'the chance to hesitate, and potentially to recognise *the relative centrality of their own place in world history*' (2019: 2; emphasis in original). However, he believes that there is a need to differentiate between the hesitation offered by the time-image and that which is evoked by Orwellian doublethink, and that the difference lies in their own distinct '*political intent*' (2019: 7; emphasis in original).

Doublethink, as Martin-Jones puts it, has long been used as a totalitarian political tool that provides alternative facts with cognitive dissonance to convince people that there is 'only one official story of history left, in spite of people's lived experiences to the contrary' (2019: 4). This authoritarian practice reduces 'the myriad pasts of the world history to a singular narrative' and hence obscures the inequality that results from the several-centuries-long domination of 'colonial modernity' (2019: 7–8), whose most recent phase includes neoliberal globalisation (2019: 3). In contrast, the ethics of hesitation in the time-image 'asks us to contemplate that history is multiple, labyrinthine, and potentially falsifying of the present (as opposed to fake)' (2019: 6). In this sense, Martin-Jones believes that:

> Neoliberalism suggests that if history cannot be known, all that remains is for people to adapt to the political status quo, accommodating themselves as best they can to a system which is the root cause of the quotidian exhaustion which distracts them from political engagement (Chandler and Reid 2016, 5). By contrast the time-image shows that people have the potential to react anew, to imagine a different future (different ways to inhabit

> society) by drawing on different ideas of history: hesitation, not to stultify, but to empower. (2019: 9)

That is, the neoliberal pursuit of a homogenised ever-present moment leaves out the unproductive and politically oppositional history in order to achieve the effectiveness of standardisation. In contrast, the cinematic time-images provided by a world of cinemas remind people of the uniqueness, subjectivities and contingency denied by neoliberalism.

In this respect, Martin-Jones draws on Mary Ann Doane's critical study of the 'interdependence' between the homogeneous 'rationalization of time' and the heterogeneous 'structuring of contingency' in the late 19th and early 20th centuries through the mediation of cinematic time (Doane 2002: 11). Doane argues that time 'becomes uniform, homogeneous, irreversible, and divisible into verifiable units' so that it can measure the value of every labourer's movements and facilitate the operation of the modern transportation and communication industries (2002: 6). However, this impulse of modernity 'is also strongly associated with epistemologies that valorise the contingent, the ephemeral, chance – that which is beyond or resistant to meaning'(2002: 10). As a result, Doane maintains that the emergence of cinematic time, 'free in its indeterminacy, reducible to no system or hierarchy ([…] any event can be filmed)', helps to negotiate and alleviate the anxiety caused by 'an incessant rationalization' (2002: 10–11). Acknowledging this potential of cinema, Martin-Jones adds that cinematic time can also 'negotiate the much larger concern of the perpetual disappearance of contingent histories from world memory, due to the rationalisation forces of colonial modernity (the "counterrevolution on a global scale")' (Martin-Jones 2019: 12). Further elaborating on this potential of cinematic time, more specifically the time-image, Martin-Jones argues that cinematic time decentralises the perpetual 'present moment of the history [by

revealing] such a virtual world memory subsisting along with the official story of history' (2019: 66).

Nevertheless, it is worth recalling here that Martin-Jones addresses the Eurocentric tendency in Deleuze's approach and in his conclusions that regard the Second World War as the watershed in the history of cinematic representations of time. Martin-Jones suggests that this Eurocentric generalisation should be re-evaluated by recognising:

> The world's time-images – each being viewed as equally expressive of a shock to thought which has emerged for different reasons in various locations. For example, in Hong Kong in the 1980s due to globalisation, but in South Korea and Argentina in the 1990s and 2000s due to the resurgence of filmmaking after the end of Cold War dictatorships and the need to re-examine the role of the national past under neoliberalism. (2019: 68)

In this sense, instead of establishing a Eurocentric view, a world of time-images 'keeps open the possibility of encountering the multiple coeval histories of world memory' (2019: 75). For Martin-Jones, the viewers, when encountering this huge swathe of coevalness of world histories in cinema, are asked 'to hesitate in relation to the manner in which our past has been oriented by colonial modernity' (2019: 75). As a result, this hesitation 'encourage[s] us to reconsider ingrained habits which would typically have us deny the coevalness of the time of the other' (2019: 76).

In fact, some of the films discussed by Martin-Jones can be categorised as slow films. However, for Martin-Jones, '[to] term the diversity of films which follows "slow" would artificially homogenise a range of films which include fiction and documentaries', and he prefers to focus on the 'myriad "faster" and "slower" manifestations' of the ethics of hesitation in a world of time-images (2019: 77). It is now tempting to ask whether the limited scope of this thesis' enquiry into

slow world cinemas can productively reveal the imperatives of the ethics of cinematic hesitation. Indeed, this thesis from the very beginning recognises the inadequacy of overgeneralisation that is criticised by the discourse of the de-Westernisation of film studies and World Cinema. Nevertheless, its narrow attention to slow world cinemas does not aim to deny the multiple forms of the ethics of hesitation found in other cinemas; instead, it hopes to expound on an ethics of hesitation identified in the paradox of a complex matrix of ideas that underpins the simple, minimalistic aesthetics of slow world cinemas. More specifically, I aim to employ my four case studies to explore how a world of cinematic slowness leads to an ethics of hesitation to approach or even resist capitalist society and neoliberal modernity.

Further engaging with Martin-Jones' formulation of cinematic hesitation as an ethical spectatorial response, I will add that, not least in my case studies, this sense of hesitation is not only facilitated by long durational recordings and understated mode of narrativisation, but also thematically embodied in diegesis through characters' movements or reactions. Moreover, it is this dynamic between hesitation as spectatorial response and hesitation as theme – interacting with and informing each other through the aesthetics of slowness – that transforms the ethics of hesitation into an act of resistance. This cinematic hesitation can be invoked by the long durational and distant recordings of a worker's meander, labours and nearly motionless impassivity amidst Taiwan's capitalist urban settings in *Stray Dogs*, or those of a man's moment of indecision about ending his own life after he leaves the city life behind to live in a rural Mexican village with an elderly woman who unravels his instinct to reconnect with the world in *Japón*. The hesitation can be found also in films such as *Yi Yi* and *Solitary Fragments,* where the narrative of multi-threaded and interpersonal (chance) encounters in bustling and fast-paced urban spaces – the city of Taipei, Taiwan at the turn of the 21st century in the former's case and Madrid, Spain in the latter's – is de-dramatised through

the slow and attentive gaze at everydayness and banality. The former two films, by prolonging the hesitant moment through the long take, transform a hesitation with indeterminate potential into a resistance with finite political intent. In the latter two, the de-dramatisation of a contingent encounter full of potentiality in the metropolis causes a sense of hesitation in conforming to the fast-forward, utilitarian and goal-orientated values of neoliberalism – a sense of hesitation that gives way to resistance under the guise of nothingness or meaninglessness.

In this sense, this movement from cinematic hesitation to a form of resistance to neoliberalism might resolve the paradoxical enigma of an infinite time-image existing within a finite film. Hesitation is unsettled, indeterminate, and thus full of infinite potential. However, if this hesitation is prolonged or de-dramatised, it becomes a resistance that carries an oppositional and finite political meaning. As a result, a moment of hesitation that contains a limitless crystalline paradox is the becoming of, and a preliminary stage of, resistance. The resistance will ensue as soon as the hesitation moves from the infinite state of the time-image to assume a place within a finite film.

Nevertheless, one might wonder whether this movement from infinite potential to finite political intent runs the risk of overgeneralisation, and thus negates the all-inclusive and non-binary tendency of the World Cinema discourse on which this thesis heavily draws. Through a close reading of four case studies from different parts of the world, I will demonstrate that the resistance shown in slow films does not stagnate once its meaning transpires. I will argue that this form of resistance is a shared humanist sensibility encompassing and intermingled with, rather than distilled and filtered from, different viewpoints from individual cultures. Besides the critical, resistant stance on capitalism and neoliberalism found in each case study, the aim to reveal contemporary slow films' predilection to balance an intricate dynamic between the national and the transnational results in this thesis' criteria for grouping the films in question. As I have maintained earlier, the films

under discussion neither intend to aestheticise the representations of national, cultural specificities in order to circulate within the international film festival and art cinema circuit, nor aim to promote solipsistic, nationalistic values that alienate themselves from a polycentric, transnational view of the world. Indeed, it is this flux between different filmic representations, challenging as it does the dominance of capitalism and neoliberalism in different geopolitical and sociopolitical contexts, that prevents the resistance from being purely universalist, nationalist, fixed and absolute. Even though it is equipped with a specific scope of political intent, the resistance revealed by the aesthetics of slow world cinemas is never an end result because it is based on a malleable, inclusive and ever-becoming hesitant moment. I therefore add a coda that analyses *The Body Remembers* and compares it with the four main case studies: to acknowledge and contend with the complex and challenging dynamic that exists inside this moment at the nexus between hesitation and resistance. By examining *The Body Remembers*' almost one-shot recording of an encounter entangled with issues of intersectionality in East Vancouver between two indigenous women – one embodies a sense of hesitation and the other manifests an act of resistance – I will question the legitimacy of simply treating slow films from around the world as an ensemble of militancy that contends with hegemonic social mechanism and world system without its own internal conflicts. In doing so, I will reveal an ethical dilemma or challenge that lies in this thesis' enquiry into slow world cinemas but also the theory of World Cinema and De-Westernisation of Film Studies: how to avoid perpetuating and re-establishing the homogenising practices and essentialist centrism in the process of dismantling such regimes by seeking for a transnational consensus of resistance amongst different entities that are under the influence of those particular hegemonies in different ways.

Whilst holding that my four main case studies demonstrate that a coincidence of hesitation leads to a consensus of resistance, I will not posit an absolute reading of the dynamics of slow

world cinemas but, instead, will double back on my own critical framework, ethically so, in order to purposefully complicate its application by means of a fifth case study as a coda. Encompassing myriad worldviews from a diverse world of cinemas, the ethics of hesitation in slow world cinemas therefore resonates with the discourse of World Cinema – a never-ending pursuit of rethinking and retooling the Eurocentric framework of film studies.

1.7 Chapter Outline

I broadly arrange the four main case studies in two parts. Part I will focus on the ethics of hesitation resulting from the representation of long takes and long shots, in Chapter 2 on *Stray Dogs* and Chapter 3 on *Japón*. Part II will look at the ethics of hesitation informed by de-dramatisation and the cinematic focus on everydayness, in Chapter 4 on *Yi Yi* and Chapter 5 on *Solitary Fragments*. However, I do not intend to form a strict categorisation based on these aesthetic criteria since they more often than not overlap. Before the Conclusion, I will use *The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open* in the Coda to interrogate an ethical dilemma and a risk of overgeneralisation that reveals themselves in my hypothesis – slow world cinemas bring about a coincidence of hesitation that leads to a consensus of resistance. In fact, this rejection of overgeneralisation also informs my reluctance to group together the two case studies from Taiwan (*Stray Dogs* and *Yi Yi*) to form a comparative study that might potentially reduce this research's approach to a nationalistic one. Moreover, although as a Taiwanese I have the privilege to offer more insightful true-to-life perspectives of revealing *Stray Dogs*' and *Yi Yi*'s representations of cultural specificities, I am aware that my readings of these two films could be Eurocentric tunnel vision that results from my educational trajectory of Western film scholarships and Continental philosophy. It will also be naive

of me to claim that, without acknowledging the limitation of my knowledge in and cultural unfamiliarity with the national contexts of Mexico and Spain, my analyses of *Japón* and *Solitary Fragments* are immune to reductionist universalisation. In this sense, although this thesis recognises the importance of country and context of production, which reveals local and cultural specificities embedded in each case study, it does not aim to serve as an archaeological or ethnographical research project with either a nationalist attitude or an ethnocentric gaze. Instead, within the parameter of the aesthetics of slowness, this thesis juxtaposes the contexts of Taiwan with the ones of Mexico and Spain to not only highlight slow world cinemas' transnational significance of facilitating a polycentric worldview, but also foreground a philosophical theorisation of and an ethical enquiry into a sense of hesitation that is found in all these four films and leads to a consensual act of resistance.

Before moving on to each chapter's outline, I will first point out the absence in this thesis of a detailed discussion of the impact of authorship on the films in question. It by no means indicates my dismissal of the significance of a director's engagement in the creative process. In fact, I acknowledge that this thesis might benefit from adopting auteur theory to engage in each case study – specifically each director's consistent focus on a particular subject and aesthetic practice informed by each of their national background's local, cultural specificities. However, I do not set out this thesis as either a survey or a decipherment of a certain recurrent motif in a specific director's oeuvre. Due to its limited scale and scope, it is not in the interest of this thesis to adopt a biographical approach to understanding how the regional specificities are facilitated by authorial intent; instead, this thesis looks at how each case study's culturally, locally specific representation diversifies, problematises, destabilises and further de-Westernises an Eurocentric appraisal of cinematic slowness. I will only provide some background knowledge of each case study, mainly the

reception of each film in the film festival circuit and the standing of each director in world cinemas, to speak to the flux between Eurocentric cosmopolitanism and cultural particularism.

Chapter 2 examines *Stray Dogs*' protracted gaze at a single father and his two children living on the margin of a late-capitalist city in Taiwan. Instead of commenting on the issue of social inequality in a pitiful tone, the film foregrounds an observation of two contrasting ideas of temporality – standardised time and intuitive duration – thus informing the neoliberal fascination with monetising the value of, and excising unproductive stretches of, time. Throughout the film, different types of deserted urban space in Taiwan – a cluster of empty construction sites and derelict show homes – confront the urban fast-forwardness under the lens of long takes. By showing the long durational recording of the characters' impassivity against the backdrop of a neoliberal metropolis, *Stray Dogs* reveals slow world cinemas' potential to transform an ethics of hesitation into a resistance to the domination of neoliberalism. Moreover, with its characters meandering around these geographically and locally specific milieux in Taiwan, *Stray Dogs* sets itself apart from the European modernist canon and engages in the discourse of World Cinema, situating vernacular and national images on a global scale.

Chapter 3 explores *Japón*'s thematic depiction and formal presentation of an interconnectedness between Westernised modernity and marginalised indigenousness. Thematically, the film presents an unnamed man's journey from Mexico City to a rural Mexican village and his transformation from being indifferent and cynical to feeling a sense of connectedness with worldly carnality and corporeality. Formally, under the lens of observational long takes and the camera's autonomous movement and wandering gaze, the film presents a 'rhizomatic' dynamic (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 3–25) between realist vernacular specificity and modernist cosmopolitan universality. I will examine how this interplay between the film's obscure indigenous context and its

legible references to a modernist aesthetic reflects Lyotard's feeling of 'Sublime' (1994) and reveals a moment of hesitation. Moreover, this moment of hesitation can be found in the film's non-binary sensibility of rethinking the dialectics between transcendence and corporeality – a sense of in-betweenness that resists essentialist binarism, the capitalist code of filmmaking and the neoliberal calibration of the productive.

Chapter 4 explores *Yi Yi*'s slow and attentive gaze at the city of Taipei, caught between neoliberal modernity and conservative vernacularism at the turn of the 21st century. Presenting its eventful multi-strand narrative with de-dramatising effect, *Yi Yi* approaches realism by wavering between the dramatic diegesis and the undramatic non-diegetic referent to everyday reality. I will analyse how the film elicits the global or national audience's empathetic understanding of its culturally specific context, which is found in the film's dramatic diegesis, through a moment of hesitation that results from the film's realist and de-dramatising effect. My aim in this chapter is to reveal that this moment of hesitation leads to a transnational empathy – an empathy that rethinks and resists not only neoliberal globalisation's homogenising force but also neoliberal modernity's pursuit of fast-forwardness and utilitarian value.

Chapter 5 examines *Solitary Fragments*' understated representations of the life-changing events in two women's lives in Madrid. Through its attention to banal everydayness, the film examines the impact on everyday life of capitalist society and neoliberal modernity's impulse to promote the values of rationalisation, standardisation and the individualist good. I will explore how the film's intermittent use of split screen, which oscillates between the dramatic and the undramatic, results in a hesitant moment that leads to an act of resistance to the hegemonic capitalist and neoliberal mechanisms. Moreover, I will examine how the film, through its juxtaposition of images of death and everydayness, interrogates the media industry's problematic sensationalism and

reductionist pursuit of one single truth. I argue that, rather than aiming to provide a distant clinical view of reality, *Solitary Fragments*' de-dramatised depictions of the detrimental impacts of hegemonic capitalist and neoliberal mechanisms on everyday life bring about an ethics of hesitation that foregrounds the potential of empathy and the collective good.

By analysing the four case studies I will reveal a meeting ground between different slow world cinemas, that is, a coincidence of different moments of hesitation that leads to a consensus of resistance against the mechanisms of capitalist society and neoliberal modernity. However, in the Coda, I will analyse *The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open* in order to address an ethical dilemma that lies in my formulation, one that complicates the question of slow world cinemas' ethics of hesitation. This film's almost one-shot, real-time recording follows an encounter in East Vancouver between two indigenous women from different socioeconomic backgrounds. I will examine how the film's illustration of intersectionality engages in the interplay between one woman's hesitation and the other's resistance – an encounter that problematises a coincidental hesitation's transition to a consensual resistance. In this sense, I adopt *The Body Remembers* as a counterpoint in order to question whether searching for a universal consensus of resistance amongst different entities against a capitalist, neoliberal regime, regardless of how differently they are influenced by that particular hegemony, repeats the same overgeneralising, homogenising actions that capitalist society and neoliberal modernity have themselves been executing.

Following this coda, the Conclusion will contend that slow world cinemas' consensus of/on resistance, resulting from a coincidence of a world of hesitant moments, does not stagnate once its political intent transpires. Instead, this resistant politics is poised to be challenged. Indeed, it avoids becoming a stagnant political tool precisely because it is equipped with a non-essentialist, non-

binary, de-centring sensibility that addresses the impacts of capitalist and neoliberal hegemonic mechanisms in different sociopolitical and geopolitical contexts.

2. AWAKENING:
STRAY DOGS

Stray Dogs was the Grand Jury Prize winner at the 70th Venice International Film Festival. With its minimalist narrative and long durational recordings of a family living on the margin of modern society and drifting around deserted urban spaces in Taiwan, *Stray Dogs* provides a productive intersectional reading of slow cinema and a critique of the impact of capitalist society and neoliberal modernity. In this chapter, I will explore how *Stray Dogs* encompasses both a narrative that requires the audience's sympathetic and intellectual understanding and a durational perception of time that calls for empathy and intuition. Furthermore, this chapter will examine how the film's temporal illegibility, resulting from its radical use of long takes and unresolved differentiation between the past and the present, transforms an ethics of hesitation into an act of resistance – resistance to the ignorance of the histories and cultures of the others, the ongoing globalising homogenisation of the others and the neoliberal hunt for the next lucrative exploitation of the others. By exploring the potentials of ethical hesitation and political resistance, underscored by long takes and representations of local specificities, this chapter aims to make the case for a specific, local and unique understanding of slowness as a cultural, philosophical and ethical signifier.

2.1 Hesitant Pasts and Resistant Presents

Stray Dogs centres around the impoverished life of an unnamed single father, played by Lee Kang-sheng, and his two children. They shower in a public toilet and seek shelter in an abandoned ruin. The children spend their day exploring in a forest, standing still before a gully and wandering

around a supermarket whilst their father works as a human billboard. Three women play the role of the mother of the family in different scenes: the first woman (Yang Kuei-mei) appears in the opening long take and inattentively looks after the sleeping kids; the second woman (Lu Yi-ching), a supermarket manager, tries to take the children away from Lee; and the third woman (Chen Shiang-chyi) engages with the family as a caring mother but distances herself from Lee. The ambiguous relationship between the family and the three women renders problematic the distinctions throughout the film between reality and dreams and between past and present. *Stray Dogs* positions the three women in separate sequences without either providing their names or explaining their motivations for getting involved with the family. In fact, the film confounds the audience by rendering the identities of the three women 'distinct and yet indiscernible' (Deleuze 1997c: 81). For instance, the room where Yang (the first woman) appears seems to be located in the flat where Chen (the third woman) resides; nevertheless, an obvious difference between their physical appearances (one has long hair and the other short) suggests that they are not the same person. There is another moment when the film obscures the differentiation between Lu (the second woman) and Chen. After Lu manages to take the children away from Lee in heavy rain, the film cuts to a shot showing Chen and the children singing a birthday song to Lee in a candlelit flat. The two shots seem to conform to continuity editing, with the two women sharing similar physical features and the children being by both mother figures' sides. However, due to temporal ellipsis and spatial disjunction between the shots, the effect of continuity editing is at stake. In fact, as Jonathan Rosenbaum observes:

> As a rule, continuity editing is maintained in *Stray Dogs*, but only within sequences and not between them. And the status of individual sequences in relation to what we regard

> as ‘real’ or plausible or consistent with the others is chiefly a matter of how we choose to arrange them all to compose a coherent narrative of our own. (2018)

Following Rosenbaum’s Bazinian reading of spectatorial emancipation from linear editing and authorial intent, I will add that the juxtaposition of documentary-style shots and oneiric sequences in *Stray Dogs* challenges the facile decoding of the distinction between the real and the imaginary and between the past and the present on-screen. Accordingly, it seems impossible to clarify which woman is the real mother and which is only a recollection, reflection or projection. In this sense, the film’s manipulation of temporal indiscernibility slows down the narrative progression by protracting the viewer’s awareness of the coexistence of and the constant exchange between different temporalities.

In fact, I will argue that this temporal illegibility situates the whole film’s approach to a direct representation of time at what Gilles Deleuze (1997c: 98) calls ‘peaks of present’, rather than at ‘sheets of past’. Without the characters ‘[making] the leap’ (Deleuze 1997a: 62) into the past and searching for memories that serve as flashbacks to explicate the obscure relationship between the family and the three women, *Stray Dogs* grounds its temporal referent in the present rather than in the past. However, it is not my intention to maintain that the film focuses only on the present and ignores the legitimacy and existence of ‘alternative (or, lost) pasts’ (Martin-Jones 2019: 5). As Deleuze argues:

> What the crystal reveals or makes visible is the hidden ground of time, that is, its differentiation into two flows, that of presents which pass and that of pasts which are preserved. Time simultaneously makes the present pass and preserves the past in itself. There are, therefore, already, two possible time-images, one grounded in the past, the other in the present. Each is complex and is valid for time as a whole. (1997c: 98)

Following Deleuze, I argue that the film's foregrounding of the present reveals that plunging into infinite sheets of past leads to a sense of hesitation that, at peaks of present, will become an act of resistance against a force of modernity that homogenises the heterogeneity of myriad pasts in order to establish the present's hegemonic position as the only legitimate truth. Moreover, the film extends this ethics of hesitation and resistance to the critique of capitalist and the never-ending neoliberal exploitation of the underprivileged. I will discuss this critical discourse in due course after exploring and repurposing Deleuze's formulation of these two types of direct representation of time.

Drawing on Henri Bergson's idea in order to expound on sheets of past, Deleuze argues that, when we search for memory, we have to make the leap into the past and place ourselves in a particular region and 'on a particular level which, in a kind of Reminiscence, we assume corresponds to our actual needs' (Deleuze 1997a: 62). Integrating this idea into the time-image, Deleuze posits that the past, or memory, does not exist within us; instead, 'it is we who move in a Being-memory, a world-memory' (1997c: 98). In this sense, there is a pre-existence of the past and consequently the present 'exists only as an infinitely contracted past which is constituted at the extreme point of the already-there' (1997c: 98). For Deleuze, between the pre-existing past and the becoming present lies the coexistence of sheets of past, each of which has its own 'tones', 'aspects', 'singularities', 'shining points' and 'dominant themes' (1997c: 99). This Deleuzian formulation indicates a paradox: 'the successive is not the past but the present which is passing' (1997c: 98). Because the present is constantly passing and the past never disappears, time is not chronological and it has these paradoxical natures – 'the pre-existence of a past in general; the coexistence of all the sheets of past; and the existence of a most contracted degree' (1997c: 99).

Deleuze further maintains that the use of flashback is a common cinematic device of presenting a character's leap into a particular region of the past to actualise a virtual recollection or memory and turn it into a recollection-image, as he terms it. Nevertheless, Deleuze also contends that the use of flashback does not necessarily create a time-image when it serves only as 'a conventional, extrinsic device […] a sign with the words: "watch out! recollection"' (1997c: 48). As a result, for Deleuze a flashback is 'still analogous to a sensory-motor determinism, and, despite its circuits, only confirms the progression of a linear narration' (1997c: 48). In fact, Deleuze still sees the potential of the use of flashback to present temporal disjointedness and multiplicity without its being reduced to a teleological purpose for a logical and linear narrative. He takes *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941) as the prime example with which to illustrate this idea. The investigation into 'Rosebud' in *Citizen Kane* navigates through different characters' reminiscences of and flashbacks to their past relationships with Kane. For Deleuze, although these flashbacks are shown chronologically and are evoked in order to solve the mystery of 'Rosebud', each one only 'collects […] the totality of Kane or his life as a whole as a "vague nebulosity"' (1997c: 105–6) and does not actually solve the puzzle. Consequently, these flashbacks not only fail to respond 'to the actual present where the quest begins' (1997c: 106) but also '[cast] suspicion on all the sheets of past which have been evoked by the various characters' (1997c: 111).

Another example can be found in *Zerkalo* (*Mirror*, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1975), whose use of flashback does not offer a cause-and-effect scheme for the narrative. This effect of indiscernibility in *Mirror* results from its arbitrary use of colour and monochrome. The transition from a colour shot to a monochromatic one is commonly deemed to be a shift between the diegetic present and the past recalled, namely the recollection-image or flashback. However, *Mirror* does not follow this well-established cinematic rule; instead, it randomly allocates this colour code to different sequences that

refer to either the characters' memories or their dreams (if there is a logic behind this decision, the reason is unclear and this thesis will not focus on Tarkovsky's creative process)[1]. Following Deleuze's analysis of *Citizen Kane* and my reading of *Mirror*, I maintain that plunging into the sheets of past does not necessarily clarify what is happening at the present moment. On the contrary, it potentially creates a hesitant moment that questions the legitimacy of treating a single region of the past as the only cause of what is happening or is about to happen. In David Martin-Jones' words, this ethic of hesitation 'indicate[s] the very fact that there *is* such a virtual world memory subsisting along with the official story of history' (2019: 66; emphasis in original).

The other flow of time's perpetual splitting towards the present, as Deleuze contends, should be distinguished from that which succeeds the past and is replaced by the future (1997c: 100). As mentioned earlier, the present is always passing since it is the most contracted form of the past. The present does not replace the past and, in this regard, will not be replaced by the future; instead, they are 'simultaneous and inexplicable' (1997c: 100). The present, which Deleuze refers to, is not the 'presence of something' but a single event that is simultaneously 'in preparation, arrives and is over' (1997c: 100). Adopting an idea of St Augustine's to formulate the notion of peaks of present, Deleuze maintains that 'there is *a present of the future*, *a present of the present and a present of the past*' (1997c: 100; emphasis in original), and he writes:

> It is the possibility of treating the world or life, or simply a life or an episode, as one single event which provides the basis for the implication of presents. An accident is about to happen, it happens, it has happened; but equally it is at the same time that it will take place, has already taken place and is in the process of taking place; so that,

[1] A possible reading of this choice is that Tarkovsky condemns the use of colour as an artificial and mechanically reproduced 'commercial necessity', and that this 'effect of colour should be neutralised by alternating colour and monochrome sequences' (Tarkovsky 1987: 138).

> before taking place, it has not taken place, and taking place, will not take place … etc. (1997c: 100)

For Deleuze, in *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year at Marienbad*, Alain Resnais, 1961), the encounter between the man, X, and the woman, A, reveals this potential of perceiving the coexistence of (at least) three presents. In the film, it seems that X has known A but A does not know or recognise X. Rather than explicating the relationship between the two characters, the film leaves the uncertainty unresolved and thus renders plausible both X's present, grounded in the past, and A's present, grounded in the unknown possible future. In this sense, Deleuze postulates that:

> Thus narration will consist of the distribution of different presents to different characters, so that each forms a combination that is plausible and possible in itself, but where all of them together are 'incompossible', and where the inexplicable is thereby maintained and created. (1997c: 101)

This idea holds true in the inexplicable relationship between Lee's family and the three women in *Stray Dogs*. Each woman seems to assume her own position in different and valid peaks of present, but, at the same time, each existence disturbs the veracity of the others. Consequently, the three women 'are constantly revived, contradicted, obliterated, substituted, re-created, fork and return' (1997c: 101). Having no intention to resolve the indiscernibility of the three female characters' temporal coordinates, *Stray Dogs* places the diegetic present tense (Lee, his children and the second woman) in both conflict and harmony with a chronological past (the first woman) that neither determines nor is determined by any narrative development, and also with a chronological future (the third woman) whose indeterminacy is haunted by unknown and unexplained histories. Instead of constructing its narrative as a linear progression from a beginning to an end, or vice

versa, the film leads the temporal logic astray by rendering the past unresolved, the present unstable and the future uncertain in diegesis. This is the creative force of the time-image of peaks of present – a manifestation of true duration in which time ceases to be divided into separate units and then sutured by causal links, and temporalities coexist as a flux that results in a real change.

In this sense, by treating the present as a single event that contains different peaks of temporality, we are able to bring the virtual present – the stored sheets of past and the present yet to come – into contact with the actual present without compartmentalising the temporal flow and dividing duration into discrete moments. In the absence of this spatialisation of time, the past preserved will never be reduced to an established, fixed historical determinant; instead, this virtual depository of myriad histories and memories, either collective or private, is constantly reshaping and being reshaped by the ever-passing present and the ever-becoming present of the future. Indeed, as Bergson believes, this durational flux 'is difficult to be conceived and expressed' due to our accustomed intellectual and scientific measurement of time, which fails to perceive time as a mobile flow (2007: 2–3). Elaborating on Bergson's call for intuition to recognise this true duration, Alia Al-Saji maintains that 'intuition enacts a return to life by means of a detour; its contact with life is mediated by the effort to work on and suspend objectifying habit' (Al-Saji 2012: 358). If our habitual and intellectual understanding is problematised and suspended by this 'power of the false which […] poses the simultaneity of incompossible presents, or the coexistence of not-necessarily true pasts' (Deleuze 1997c: 131), it is our intuition that transforms that sense of hesitation into an act of resistance – resistance to any preconceived reading of the past or dominant positioning of the present. In this sense, the time-image of sheets of past reveals a virtual whole of pasts preserved that creates a sense of hesitation for our intellect, whose habitual understanding of an established truth is challenged by the existence of a plethora of collective and personal histories. The time-image of

peaks of present encompasses this temporal flux between the past preserved and the present intellectually perceived and thus embodies the intuitional understanding of duration, which resists a facile and entrenched way of differentiating the present from the past, the actual from the virtual. Through the process of this transformation from hesitation to resistance in the time-image of peaks of present, the past will never be defined as a fixed historical determinant; the present's hegemonic status will be constantly challenged and dismantled; and the potential of the present yet to come will never be reduced to an ending in the narrative of linear development determined by rigid cause-and-effect logic.

In fact, *Stray Dogs* extends this resistant politics of the time-image to its critical observation of the impact of capitalist society and neoliberal modernity. This critique can be found in the film's long durational recordings of Lee's physical labour and impassivity in a city governed by the standardisation of time and filled with incessant construction and demolition. Through the use of long takes, the film foregrounds the physical endurance of Lee's job, a human billboard advertising luxury apartments. Furthermore, Lee's emotionless and motionless reaction to the urban cycle of developing and destroying manifests a sense of hesitation. This hesitation results from a flux between the intellectually measured time and the intuitively rooted perception of time, between the productive time and the unproductive one. For the audience, the prolonged recordings of Lee's hardship also reveal a sense of hesitation that questions the problematic way of knowing the other's suffering purely through sympathetic understanding. Whilst situating the film's resistant politics as addressing the worldwide issue of capitalist society and neoliberal modernity's calibration of time, I will also look at the film's depictions of Taiwan's local and everyday urban scenery that is under the impact of global economic and political mechanisms.

2.2 Global and Vernacular Anxiety over Unproductive Time

Human billboards advertising luxurious real estate, a derelict building that previously served as a show home and Lee having his lunch on a muddy construction site all reveal the impact of capitalism on Taiwan's modern landscape – the exploitation of labour and a building discarded after losing its profitable value. In fact, although this thesis does not address a comparative analysis of Tsai Ming-liang's collection of works, it is worth noting that this social comment on a metropolitan city like Taipei is not an unfamiliar trope in his oeuvre. A few film academics have provided well-informed interpretations of this discourse. For instance, Tiago de Luca posits that *Qing shao nian nuo jha* (*Rebels of the Neon God*, 1992) is a case study of 'Taipei's marginalised districts and underprivileged inhabitants'; *Ai cing wan suei* (*Vive L'Amour*, 1994) 'highlights the social disparity [that] resulted from an unequal economic distribution in the city'; *He liu* (*The River*, 1997) presents a 'dystopian view of postmodern life'; and *Bu san* (*Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, 2003) and the short *Tian qiao bu jian le* (*The Skywalk is Gone*, 2002) evoke the '[n]ostalgia for rapidly disappearing places due to urban expansion and industrialisation' (de Luca 2014: 96–8). Similarly, James Tweedie maintains that Tsai's works are the cinema 'of a microcosm of urban space on-screen at a time when global capitalism was constructing a very different city, with Taipei as one of its principal staging grounds' (2013: 205). Furthermore, this predilection of consistent motif, the approach of shooting on location and the documentary style reinforce the verisimilitude of Tsai's films and also invite the study of the New Wave movement, the auteurist signature and the European modernist aesthetics. Undoubtedly, these theoretical frameworks can offer some illuminating readings of *Stray Dogs*; however, as I have mentioned in the Introduction, they invoke a problematic Eurocentric genealogical tracing that reduces the film's aesthetics of slowness to unoriginal, nostalgic and

regressive cinematic representations. This Eurocentric appraisal potentially overlooks the film's geographically specific critique of the impact of neoliberalism and late-capitalism. In this sense, it is imperative to deconstruct these not only paradoxical but also reciprocal dynamics between a Westernised aesthetics and a localised sensibility. This deconstruction will prevent cinematic slowness from being a formulaic aesthetics that homogenises representations of local and cultural specificities. This is the case when, for Lúcia Nagib, 'different cinemas of the world can generate their own, original theories', and she prefers to search for 'interconnectedness' between cinemas rather than a hierarchical relationship that results in a difference between 'the us' of the West and 'the other' of the Rest (2011: 1). This chapter likewise does not aim to overturn the well-established critical framework but, instead, hopes to rethink the cinematographic features shared by European modernist cinema and contemporary slow world cinemas as a dialogue that shapes the aesthetics of slowness and keeps it evolving and rolling.

The first time the film shows Lee holding a signboard at a junction, a static long take lasting 2 minutes and 27 seconds captures Lee's stillness and physical labour whilst incessant gusts of wind and the movement of scooters, cars and buses interrupt the scene (see Figure 2.1). In this single shot, at least two different layers of temporality are at work and in flux. On the one hand, the traffic flow from different directions is controlled by the clock-time based traffic light – an indication of the standardisation and rationalisation of time in modern society – whilst on the other hand, Lee's motionless and emotionless presence is physical endurance and experience in true duration, in which time is not quantifiable. In fact, there are also two conflicting temporalities manifesting themselves on Lee. On the one hand, his job as a human billboard serves as one part of the 'assembly line [whose goal is] to eliminate unproductive time from the system' (Doane 2002: 6). Mary Ann Doane argues that, in Taylorism, which is obsessed with the efficiency of production,



Figure 2.1 – Lee holding a signboard at a junction with a gust of wind and the movement of traffic interrupting the scene

'each of the labourer's movements must be meaningful [, and that] ideally there is no loss or excess in the system' (2002: 10). On the other hand, through the lens of the long take, the supposedly productive working hour – a standardised period of time – is protracted to the extent that productivity becomes non-teleological and meaningless. In the same vein, Louis Lo scrutinises this ongoing rationalisation of capitalising human labour in 2010s Taiwan, where the neoliberal economy dominates, by pointing out that Lee 'is reduced to being merely an attachment to the advertising board, worse than human refuse, an invisible by-product' (2019: 8). Moreover, Lo compares Lee, a 21st-century sandwich board man, with his counterparts in 19th-century London, as depicted in Charles Dickens' *Sketches by Boz* (1836), and in 1960s Taiwan, as depicted in Hou Hsiao-hsien's *Er zi de da wan ou* (*The Sandwich Man*, 1983). According to Lo, although these counterparts are also deemed marginalised figures in urban spaces, they have more freedom of 'leisurely walking', in Dickens' words (1999: 246; quoted in Lo 2019: 8) and 'at least an opportunity for [social] upward mobility' (Lo 2019: 8). Nevertheless, the human billboard depicted in *Stray Dogs* can only stand still and 'is not supposed to attract attention in the first place – the size of the advertisement overshadows his bodily existence' (Lo 2019: 8). Moreover, noticing that

‘billboards are too exposed in the everyday-life of the cityscape’, Lo further questions the legitimacy of resorting to spectatorial ‘empathetic identification by showing the hardship experienced by a sandwich-man [… and] the suffering of the same trade by the 2010s’ (2019: 8). Consequently, he calls for ‘[a] new attentiveness’ when dealing with the suffering of the others on screen (2019: 8). He offers this new attentive gaze by first pointing out an illuminating interpretation of the different meanings of the film’s title in Chinese and English. The Chinese title, *Jiaoyou*, which literally means ‘excursion’, does not correspond to the English one (or the French one, *Les chiens errants*). The Chinese title might give the impression that the cityscape shown in the film is filled with ‘loitering adventures’ for the *flâneur* whilst the English suggests marginalised figures (Lo 2019: 4). Through the film’s non-sympathetic or, in Lo’s view, non-empathetic gaze at the other’s suffering under the influence of neoliberalism, Lo contends that the film, rather than ‘comparing the stray dogs with the *flâneur*’, in fact reveals that the figures of *flâneur* ‘are no more than the stray dogs, though unchained and strolling, always returning to the same ruined buildings for feeding’ (2019: 4). In this sense, by not simply presenting the wandering characters as either the figures of *flâneur*, ‘who consider themselves privileged observers of the commodity culture’, or as sufferers who beg for sympathetic attention, the film ‘emphasize[s] […] the forms of mutual becoming between the city’s human and animal residents marginalized by urban modernity’ (Lo 2019: 4).

Although this thesis has a different understanding of ‘empathetic identification’ from Lo’s, which I will elaborate later in this chapter, it shares his dedication to illuminating a new way of understanding neoliberal suffering through a slow but comprehensive progress of critical thinking. Furthermore, I argue that this long take showing Lee’s physical labour reflects not only a social issue on a national scale but also a global concern and anxiety that occur when a sense of slowness

of intuitively perceived time outweighs the normalised speed of mechanically structured time both on-screen and in reality. Measurable time, for Homay King, like a clock with hands, reminds us of the passage of time, but it also creates 'the illusion that we know how much time we have left, that we can quantify, tame and control it as if it were a natural resource' (2015: 82). As opposed to this calculable time, time without numerical indication, 'the handless clock [, …] is a more radical reminder of time [since] it lacks the means of measuring and manipulating it [and hence, in this circumstance] we may experience time's passing in a more durationally rooted, intuitive fashion' (King 2015: 82). In this sense, the on-screen slowness raises the spectator's awareness of the Bergsonian idea of duration, which is repressed under the control of standardised and rationalised scientific time. For Bergson, 'this duration which science eliminates, and which is difficult to be conceived and expressed, is what one feels and lives' (2007: 3). In this sense, the anxiety about not being able to intellectually grasp time's passing implies that we are actually chased and ruled by time instead of living in it.

This anxiety occurs again when a static medium shot lasting 4 minutes shows Lee eating his lunch from a bento box (see Figure 2.2). This depiction of a worker on his lunch break is a further illustration of the rationalisation and fragmentation of time that permit only a limited period for being unproductive under the capitalist system. Nevertheless, the long take renders this certain period of time unbearably lengthened and thus disturbs the spectator's perception of this scene and its duration. The long durational gaze at Lee, at times munching and at others nibbling, invokes a spectatorial anxiety about having no attachment to such an undramatic diegetic event or, in Matthew Flanagan's words, such an 'observational disclosure of human activity and gestural detail' (2012: 109). Besides the de-dramatised recording of eating, Lee's disorientating gaze at the camera and wandering observation of the surrounding area further problematise the narrative drive of this scene.



Figure 2.2 – Lee's lunch break

For Flanagan, this type of observation or '*vision*' in slow cinema attests to the Deleuzian idea of the 'seer' (Flanagan 2012: 100; emphasis in original). Deleuze maintains that 'a new race of characters was stirring' in the age of post-war cinema, a period when 'deserted but inhabited, disused warehouses, waste ground, cities in the course of demolition or reconstruction' dominated the cityscape across Europe, and he calls them 'seers [who] saw rather than acted' (Deleuze 1997c: xi). Inspired by Pascal Augé's idea of '*any-space-whatever* [*espace quelconque*]' and translating it into film philosophy, Deleuze contends that the aforementioned '*deconnected or emptied spaces*' are 'any-space-whatevers' where, in films, 'the characters [a]re found less and less in sensory motor "motivating" situations, but rather in a state of strolling, of sauntering or of rambling' (Deleuze 1997b: 109, 120; emphasis in original). Indeed, Lee's reaction and behaviour in this shot are illustrative of the characteristics of a seer and the emergence of time from the lack of action. Due to this collapse of action, 'the determinant locations, […] where the modern effects of fear, detachment, but also freshness, extreme speed and interminable waiting were developing', are replaced by an upsurge of any-space-whatever (Deleuze 1997b: 121). In short, as Deleuze writes, any-space-whatever 'no longer has co-ordinates, it is a pure potential' (1997b: 120). In Rob Stone's

view, this ‘indeterminacy’ and potentiality constitute ‘the virtue’ of any-space-whatever, wherein ‘the traveller can potentially choose to go in any direction whichever’ (2013: 21–2).

Undoubtedly, these Deleuzian formulations of seer and any-space-whatever, having already been applied to readings of cinema across the globe and the history of art cinema, can provide an insightful analysis of this shot’s lack of dramatic action and Lee’s disorientating gaze. However, if there is no repurposing of the Eurocentric underpinning of Deleuze’s cinematic philosophy, there exists the risk of overgeneralisation in imposing Deleuzian ideas on the readings of the social, cultural, aesthetic and historical traditions of different cinematic representations. Although Deleuze regards Yasujiro Ozu as one of the early presenters of any-space-whatever in cinema (1997c: 15–16), most of his case studies are limited to the European modernist canon (Italian neorealism, French New Wave and New German Cinema) and US independent cinema of the 1970s and 80s (1997b: 121). Here, I will again bring *Mirror* into the discussion to reveal the differences between the representations of two different eras and geographical specificities of the potential of any-space-whatever through the agency of a seer’s indeterminate and wandering gaze.

In the final sequence of *Mirror*, a close-up of the pregnant Maria’s face shows a mixture of expression and indecisive gaze. After Maria turns her head away and looks at the bushes behind her, a leftwards tracking shot reveals the presence of her old self and her two children – the characters that should appear only in the diegetic future. The ensuing two tracking shots show the old Maria and the children walking through the debris of a demolished house. The next shot, cutting back to the young Maria, again shows her ambiguous mix of emotion and disorientating gaze. The temporal convergence of the present and the possible future is introduced and guided in an any-space-whatever by Maria’s indeterminate gaze, which captures the virtual and the potential. By contrast, what Lee is staring at is unknown, due to the absence of another shot that reveals his gaze’s

orientation. Without showing what the gaze is aimed at, this one long take radicalises the effect of the interminable waiting. Although the construction site in this long take, compared with the field, bushes and debris seen in *Mirror*, is more reminiscent of Deleuze's description of any-space-whatever, the juxtaposition of Lee's indeterminate gaze with the utilitarian and profit-orientated potential of the space offers a different reading of the Deleuzian formulation. It is worth noting that whilst Lee's gaze can wander anywhere, he is still physically confined in an any-space-whatever whose potentiality is now only calculated in relation to, or even reduced to, its capitalist and investment value. The weed-filled ground behind the barbed wire fence will be the site of one of many luxury residential projects – an indication of a booming real estate market rather than of a debris-strewn site. Unlike Maria's gaze, which captures her potential future, Lee's wandering gaze and the disconnect between his monadic life's and the lucrative future of the construction site seem to suggest a different type of seer. A seer like Lee not only no longer knows how to react to the alienated modern landscape but also fails to see any of the potential that lies in this kind of any-space-whatever in relation to his marginality.

Another depiction of this different kind of seer and any-space-whatever can be found in the sequence where Lee breaks into a desolate show home through a gap created between two wooden boards. He enters the building and goes up a spiral staircase placed diagonally by the tilted composition of the shot. The interior walls composed of multiple pieces of mirror further mystify this derelict space (see Figure 2.3). The following shot, lasting 1 minute and 30 seconds, begins with Lee standing still and looking out of the window for a little while before turning around and sitting on a bed. After a cutaway shot showing Lee's daughter wandering around the supermarket, a close-up, lasting 40 seconds, and another medium long shot, lasting 30 seconds, capture him asleep (see Figure 2.4). The show home is furnished in a way that potential buyers can visualise their



Figure 2.3 – A mystified derelict display house



Figure 2.4 – A medium long shot of Lee asleep

future home. Ironically, Lee 'visits' the property at the point at which it has been discarded and is waiting to be demolished. This space in transition reveals the utilitarian and commercialised usage of urban spaces, and the seer, like Lee, can no longer react to this hybridisation of exhibiting and housing purposes. The sequence juxtaposes these two distinctive features of the show home by first showing Lee's exploration in this aestheticised and stylised space and later his being sound asleep on the bed under a clean white duvet.

Along with their hesitation in confronting their anxiety over the intellect's failure to grasp the on-screen slowness, the audience might also find sympathetic understanding problematic and incomplete in relation to identifying with the extended recordings of Lee's monadic life. In fact, there are two long takes, the poem sequence and the cabbage sequence, that show Lee's emotional

outburst and seem to exploit this performance to achieve spectatorial identification. Meanwhile, the long duration of both shots challenges the audience's endurance of extended and uninterrupted periods of time. The poem sequence lasts almost 6 minutes and shows a close-up of Lee reciting and singing a poem and weeping whilst holding an advertisement board; the cabbage sequence lasts slightly over 10 minutes and shows Lee tearing apart and devouring a cabbage and bursting into tears. It is worth comparing the poem sequence with the aforementioned long shot, which shows Lee working as a human billboard.

The poem sequence seems to offer the audience a more productive reading of Lee's emotion due to the effect of close-up. However, the contrast between Lee's physical labour and the patriotic underpinning of the poem he sings is 'savagely extreme' (Neil Young 2013) and thus 'incommensurate and exaggerated' (Lo 2019: 6). Moreover, the unintelligible source of Lee's emotional outpouring problematises the audience's compassionate attachment to the character. In fact, at the beginning of this sequence, the audience encounter Lee's indecipherable expression and silence for nearly 1 minute. In contrast to Lee's muteness, the sound of gusts of wind and the noise of off-screen traffic are amplified. Although the close-up directs the narrative focus onto the character's expression, the foregrounding of natural and everyday contingent sounds dilutes the dramatic effect of the close-up. In fact, this dialectics between diegetic stillness and contingent mobility not only blurs the boundary between the diegetic and the non-diegetic but also reveals a twofold critique of the capitalist impulse to rationalise.

On the one hand, the magnification of the contingent and ambient sounds of blowing wind and moving traffic reverses the conventional logic of editing that minimises or even eliminates the disruption caused by unwanted background noises. Moreover, the cacophony of sounds in this sequence cannot be reduced to a certain Foley sound effect that mimics natural noises only for the

purpose of building the mood or atmosphere of narrative. Under the influence of the established codes of sound editing and reproduction, the spontaneous nature of natural and everyday sounds becomes excessive and gratuitous. It is only when these undesirable noises are repressed and rationalised to contribute to narrative cohesion and dramatic development that they are deemed legible, logical and productive. Nevertheless, I have no intention of ignoring sound editing's craft of bringing the aural sensation of watching a film closer to real-life experience and enriching cinema's auditory imaginings; instead, my aim is to reveal that this habitual way of manipulating, reproducing and perceiving sound, either realistic or fantastical, in films is predicated on the suppression of unwanted and superfluous discordance, and that this erasure of unassimilable contingence implicitly reflects the rationalising force of narrativisation that is governed by the capitalist industry's pursuit of mass appeal. In this sense, this cinematic resistance to rationalisation resonates with Jean-François Lyotard's critical formulation of 'acinema'. For Lyotard, under the capitalist system films are made to present legible and orderly narratives that have a greater potential of reaching a wider audience and hence of maximising the return (2017: 34, 36). That is, filmmaking has to be productive in a way that satisfies profitable consumerism. It is not a coincidence that this code of filmmaking translates its tendency to deduct into a creative process of editing or mise-en-scène that oppresses and removes 'aberrant movements, useless expenditures, differences of pure consumption' (Lyotard 2017: 36). Comparing this cinematic selection and oppression to the discrimination against disorder exercised by political activities, Lyotard argues that:

> This is why mise-en-scène, a technique of exclusions and effacements, a political activity *par excellence*, and political activity, which is mise-en-scène *par excellence*, are the religion of the modern irreligion, the ecclesiastic of the secular. The central problem

> for both is not the representational arrangement and its accompanying question, that of knowing how and what to represent and the definition of good or true representation; the fundamental problem is the exclusion and foreclosure of all that is judged unrepresentable because non-recurrent. (2017: 39; emphasis in original)

This idea can also be found in Lo's critique of conventional editing's tendency to commodify the others' suffering on-screen through the superficial, facile and entrenched pursuit of spectators' emotional responses (2019: 2). In order to cater to spectatorial identification, commercial narrative films more often than not refrain from wandering away from a legible and graspable narrativisation of human experiences that takes the viewer only a short time to digest.

However, on the other hand, it is impossible not to notice that the traffic flow here is in fact the product of rationalisation since its movement is coordinated and standardised by the mechanical-time based traffic control system. In juxtaposition with this regulated movement, Lee's stillness reveals a different kind of temporality that is free from the capitalist teleological calibration of productive and meaningful time. It is also worth noting that, as mentioned earlier, Lee's hourly paid job, another product par excellence of the capitalist mechanism of commodifying and standardising time, becomes unproductive through the camera's protracted duration of pure recording. In this respect, this coexistence of and flux between the pursuit of productiveness and the sense of meaninglessness attests to Mary Ann Doane's claim that:

> The rationalization of time characterizing industrialization and the expansion of capitalism was accompanied by a structuring of contingency and temporality through emerging technologies of representation – a structuring that attempted to ensure their residence outside structure, to make tolerable an incessant rationalization. (2002: 11)

Compared with Lyotard's radical stance, Doane's idea might better explain how the film transforms a sense of hesitation into an act of resistance by repurposing, instead of denying, spectatorial sympathetic understanding.

2.3 From Sympathy to Empathy

It is now clear that *Stray Dogs*' portrayal of a marginalised family does not aim to generate sympathetic looks at the family's nomadic life; rather, the film requires our empathy in recognising its illegible but more imperative philosophical and political enquiry, which underpins the aesthetics of slowness that challenges the capitalist mechanism's pursuit of productivity and efficiency. Whilst sympathy results in spectatorial identification with the film's ostensible depiction of the family's living conditions, empathy allows us to perceive a true duration, a spectrum permeated by perceptions and feelings and on which the sympathetic feeling is just one of the shades. In this sense, sympathy, like intellectual analysis, can only reach an understanding that remains on a single outer layer of multifaceted reality and 'reduces the object to elements already known' (Bergson 2007: 135). In contrast, in a Bergsonian sense empathy is an intuitive understanding of this heterogeneity – an understanding that 'is transported into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what there is unique and consequently inexpressible in it' (2007: 135).

This ever-changing permeability or transition of qualitatively heterogeneous perceptions resists a cut-and-dried analysis because it is all about change and mobility. However, this form of change and mobility cannot be misunderstood as being one that keeps up with the speed of the modern fascination with change in progressive innovation and the neoliberal pursuit of incessant upwards mobility; rather, it is a flux that exactly challenges the fast-forwarding and teleological

social mechanism. In *Stray Dogs*, this mobile and durational flux can be found in each long take, whose protracting stretch of time actualises if not materialises on-screen this virtual and qualitative change of senses.

Here, I will bring into the dialogue Louis Lo's analysis of *Stray Dogs*' non-sympathetic representation, or even non-empathetic in Lo's view. For Lo, *Stray Dogs*' social critique on suffering under neoliberal modernity does not provide 'an empathetic identification for the audience'; instead, it dedicates its representation to 'pure affective transmission' and a Benjaminian '[dialectical] tension between the audience's endurance and fascination towards' long takes (Lo 2019: 2). Furthermore, Lo argues that, due to its ineffable affect and oppositional tension, *Stray Dogs* can be deemed 'a cinema of resistance', and he maintains that:

> It resists ideological domination by making everyday images strange; it resists audience's expectation of identifying with the characters; and lastly, it resists seeing images simply as the representation of the city, instead viewing them as containing multiple layers of meanings. (2019: 2)

Nevertheless, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, there is a difference between my understanding of empathy and Lo's. It is important to note that the empathy Lo refers to is one that is intentionally induced by the traditional use of montage and continuity editing. In fact, he uses 'sympathy' and 'empathy' interchangeably simply to accentuate the film's resistance to facile spectatorial identification with the struggles that the characters experience. He contends that this kind of sympathy or empathy turns the suffering depicted on-screen into 'a commodity of consumption' (2019: 2) and that this 'is worse than not identifying with the victims of neoliberalism, because it only creates a false understanding of the issue' (2019: 6). According to Lo,

this false identification, resulting from montage 'where contradictory images collide synthetically', does not create what Walter Benjamin calls 'a moment of the "arrest of thoughts"'(Lo 2019: 8). Benjamin postulates that:

> To thinking belongs the movement as well as the arrest of thoughts. Where thinking comes to a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions – there the dialectical image appears. It is the caesura in the movement of thought. Its position is naturally not an arbitrary one. It is to be found, in a word, where the tension between dialectical oppositions is greatest. (1999: 475)

In this sense, Lo argues that it is the aesthetics of slowness that:

> Reject[s] the politics of sympathetic identification [and] opens up perceptions during the endurance of the boredom of watching, allowing the 'caesura' to cut through thoughts [; accordingly,] [w]hen the tensions between thinking and non-thinking, understanding and non-understanding are at work, an arrest of thoughts happens. (2019: 8–9)

This idea of 'caesura' or the 'moment of the arrest of thoughts' corresponds to the moment of hesitation, which situates our intellect in a liminal state between actual thoughts and virtual unthoughts and calls for empathy when we encounter the ineffable or a plethora of destabilising temporal fluxes in a long durational recording. Since intellectual analysis is suspended, the ensuing emotional response and sympathetic identification are also problematised. Nonetheless, I contend that the spectatorial sympathetic feeling is not outright kept at bay. In fact, the film encompasses not only the intellectual synthesis of legible narrative that evokes a feeling of sympathy but also the unassimilable suffering and ineffable impassivity of the other that calls for an empathetic understanding.

As seen in the aforementioned long takes (Lee holding a property advertisement signboard, his lunch break and his impassivity and stillness in a deserted show home), our sympathetic feeling towards Lee, albeit problematic and not complete, is elicited because his physical labour and the bleak urban surroundings contribute to the narrative of his hardship. Nevertheless, when the film prolongs these moments of suffering and struggle, the narrative progression is suspended and is gradually dwarfed by a protracted sense of endurance and indeterminacy in an extended passage of time. It is worth noting that our sympathy for Lee is not magnified by the camera's enduring gaze at his life on the margins of society; instead, the extended recording of Lee's impassivity brings about a spectatorial anxiety over our sympathy's inability to grasp, attach to and identify with the non-narrativised and de-dramatised representation within the frame. Meanwhile, this does not mean that sympathetic feeling is entirely excised. Rather, it is caught in the interval between the sensible and the obscure, waiting for a more comprehensive understanding with which to rethink its incomplete and habitually structured emotional and intellectual response. This interval, lag or liminality between 'affect and action', as Alia Al-Saji puts it, suggests a moment of hesitation 'in which thinking can take place' (2012: 352). Al-Saji argues that this sense of hesitation 'is not simply the negative consequence of the resistance of habit; it is a positive expression of the duration to which intuition belongs and that it seeks to make visible' (2012: 359). Accordingly, the ethics of this philosophical intuition lies in this hesitant interval, which 'allows the weight of the past to be felt in the present without reducing that past to determination or presence' (2012: 359). In this sense, this moment of hesitation recalibrates the habitual, predetermined and ingrained ideas of the past by constantly reshaping them through contact with the indeterminate and ever-becoming present. Following Al-Saji's Bergsonian elaboration on this philosophical ethics, Martin-Jones maintains that an ethical hesitation 'has the ability to enable a reconsideration of routine actions based on

ingrained habits, including our reactions to others who are unlike ourselves' (2019: 70). To engage in this dialogue, I will bring into the discussion my argument that *Stray Dogs*' temporal illegibility situates the film's direct representation of time at 'peaks of present'.

As previously mentioned, a sense of hesitation appears when our intellect's accustomed belief in an established truth is confronted by infinite sheets of past. It is intuition, whose understanding of a true duration is embodied by peaks of present's embracing of this temporal flux, that transforms a hesitant moment into an act of resistance against the denial of the ignored past, the hegemonic homogenising force of the present and the determinist view towards the future. Moreover, I argue that intuition carries with it a resistant politics that challenges capitalist society's entrenched way of standardising time and neoliberal modernity's globalising force of commodifying time. Both these pursuits, of the efficiency and productivity of time spent, indicate a modern fascination with a perpetual present that aims to establish hegemonic control over the waste of labour time and domination over the destabilising force of the untamed durational flux, a present in which we *live in* time rather than *spend* it. These unproductive, unwanted and dissonant variables undermine the system of capitalist accumulation and neoliberal maximisation of profits. In order to maintain its privileged status in the current system, the mechanism of capitalist society and neoliberal modernity attributes those aberrant variables to a primitive, regressive and unregulated mishandling of the pre-industrial past. In contrast to this mechanism of perpetual present, the time-image of peaks of present reveals that the actual present is not an actualised and intellectualised state of temporality that tries to remove the unintelligible static or the noise of virtual sheets of past. Accordingly, living in the actual present, where the preserved past is prolonged, indicates that we should recognise the illusive hegemonic position of our current actual state, acknowledging, rather than dismissing, the

fact that a plethora of collective histories and private memories coexist but are oppressed or falsified by the present regime, whether political or economic.

Looking at the aforementioned long takes from this point of view, we no longer let our sympathy delimit the scope of what is already known and comprehensible to our intellect; instead, our habitual and preconceived knowledge is poised to be confronted and destabilised by a sense of hesitation that underscores the film's critical resistance to the force of industrial rationalisation, cultural overgeneralisation and neoliberal valorisation of productivity. In this respect, the film suggests that to reveal the impacts of capitalist society and neoliberalism is not simply to put the depiction of suffering under the spotlight in order to render it intellectually legible and sympathetically relatable. Rather, the film provides a laborious observation of multiple moments of hesitation, when our overgeneralising intellectual interpretations or habitual emotional responses alone fail to correspond to the protagonist's inexplicable emotionlessness and motionlessness in the face of his surrounding mobility – a mobility, in both a literal and a figurative sense, that is driven by neoliberal modernity's incessant pursuit of progressiveness and profits. It is through intuition that we are able to repurpose our habitual understanding as a preliminary step towards contact with the true duration, where we find that both our perceptions and those of others and multiple layers of temporality coexist. Albeit obscure at first glance, perceiving time in a durational sense allows us to truly understand the others.

2.4 Slow Awakening: The Ethics of the Long Take

If each of the long durational recordings of Lee's impassivity analysed in this chapter can be viewed as a miniature version of universal awakening from neoliberal modernity, the final sequence,

composed of two long takes, encapsulates this slow awakening process of transforming the hesitant moment found in sheets of past into an act of resistance against the neoliberal domination at peaks of present.

The penultimate long take, lasting 14 minutes, starts with a tracking shot slowly moving towards Lee and Chen and gradually positioning them in a medium close-up shot (see Figure 2.5). During the first half of this long take, whilst Lee is seen drinking a bottle of alcohol, getting distracted by a passing train, fidgeting and hesitating to take any action, Chen fixates her gaze on the off-screen space and sheds tears. Later, sometime halfway through the shot, Lee subtly steps a bit closer to Chen and starts staring at the off-screen space much more attentively. Near the end of the shot, Lee tries to embrace Chen from behind and later rests his head on her shoulder. Unlike the aforementioned gaze in the bento box scene, where the gazed object is not shown, this second-to-final shot later cuts to the film's last long take, which shows the two characters standing in front of a mural situated in a ruined space. Now the camera is positioned at a slightly higher angle of the frame that shows the silhouette of both characters' backs and the torchlit mural (see Figure 2.6). Not long after the shot begins, Chen walks out of the space and leaves Lee alone in the ruins. A few minutes later, Lee leaves the frame and the camera lingers on this empty space until the film cuts to black. I will now examine this final sequence by offering three different levels of analysis: the first level deals with the contrast between Lee and Chen's emotions and reactions; the second level concerns the juxtaposition of a deserted space that has resulted from the urban cycle of construction and demolition and a mural that depicts a 19th-century Taiwanese rural scene; and the third level engages with the paradoxical dynamics between the hyperbolic use of long takes – directly presenting the infinite time-image – and the use of shot/reverse shot – editing two long takes into a finite stretch of screening time.



Figure 2.5 – Lee and Chen looking at an off-screen space



Figure 2.6 – The silhouette of Lee and Chen and a torchlit mural

Starting with the first level of analysis, I will look at Lee's and Chen's gaze. During the first long take of this final sequence, Lee's indecisive and wandering gaze, like the one seen in the bento box scene, gradually gives way to a more focused one. In contrast with Lee, Chen has been determinedly staring at the off-screen space since the beginning of the shot. Besides the differences between their gazes, the juxtaposition of Lee's fidgeting body and compulsive desire to drink and Chen's almost static body with tears being shed suggests that Lee represents a hesitant figure and Chen a resistant one. For instance, it seems that Lee keeps fidgeting and cannot help drinking because he encounters a situation in which he does not know how to act or react. The reason behind his hesitation in moving closer to Chen is unknown in a narrative sense. As argued earlier, it is

precisely this unknown or untold history of Lee and Chen's relationship that situates the hesitation in sheets of past. The transition from the virtual lost pasts to the awakening in the actual present occurs when Lee attempts to step closer to Chen and embrace her. The hesitant Lee finally decides to take action in order to reconcile with Chen, but the next shot shows Chen walking away from Lee, who again plunges alone into the sheets of past. A few moments later, Lee finishes the last drop of alcohol, throws the bottle onto the ground and leaves the space. Presenting the interaction between Lee and Chen through the lens of long take, this final sequence reveals an interplay between hesitation and resistance. Whilst hesitation is grounded in the past and attempts to bring the virtual past into dialogue with the actual present in order to take action, resistance assumes its place at the peaks of present where myriad un/solved, un/settled or un/reconciled pasts leave their marks and thus make the act of resistance a never-ending pursuit of an ethical stance of rethinking the current state.

Due to the ellipsis of the narrative of Lee and Chen's relationship, the sheets of past that Lee plunges into and Chen resists reconciling with remain unattainable at peaks of present. In this sense, the analysis of this sequence will resort to the second level of representation – the temporal aspect of the ruins and the mural – which might potentially inform what affects the two characters', and even the audience's, awareness of different layers of time. Similarly, Asbjørn Grønstad examines this scene's 'literalisation, or an externalisation, of the durative poetics of slow cinema, a poetics perhaps uniquely equipped to capture temporal presence as spatial form' (2015: 282). The deserted space is actually located in the ruins of the Taiwan Motor Transport Co. Ltd's maintenance depot, abandoned in 1995. The mural was drawn by Taiwanese artist, Kao Jun-Honn, and is an enlarged version of a photograph taken in 1871 by Scottish journalist, John Thomson (Lo 2019: 10). The mural was not specifically made for the film; it was part of Kao's 'The Ruin Image Crystal

Project' (Kao 2013). In the crystal-image in this project, Kao adopts Deleuze's idea of mutual reflection between the virtual and the actual, incorporating historic photographs and paintings into derelict spaces, the by-products of the neoliberal cycle of construction and demolition in Taiwan that began in 1980 (Taishin Arts Award Archive 2013). Tsai Ming-liang unexpectedly discovered the mural whilst searching for shooting locations. According to Lo, the demolition of the ruins took place in 2017 and thus:

> The film serves as an archive of the disappeared mural which itself records layers of alternative histories, reminding the audience that understanding has to be informed by a sense of historical co-existence which allows different historical narratives in dialogue with each other. (2019: 11)

Both art projects facilitate an awareness of duration and of the temporal flux between the past and the present by juxtaposing the preserved history with the ruins, whose industrial past is replaced by the neoliberal pursuit of new economic values. Lo examines this juxtaposition of different layers of temporality by drawing on Benjamin's formulation of *Erfahrung*, '"long experience" […] associated with antiquity, a continuous accessible narrative', and *Erlebnis*, '"isolated experience" […] associated with modernity, belonging to an instantaneous, disconnected, disintegrated moment of shock experience' (Benjamin 1996–2003: 329, cited in Lo 2019: 11). Lo contends that there are at least three temporalities contained in the film's final sequence. The first concerns the reproduction of the 'pre-colonial, orientalized image of the "beautiful island" via the eye of a western photographer' (2019: 10). Because the mural carries this problematic and 'critical post-colonial discourse' of history, it belongs to the temporal layer of *Erfahrung* (2019: 13). Moving on to the second temporality, Lo argues that the ruined space serves as not only Lee and his family's

shelter but also ‘a phantasmagorical space packed with irreducible narratives, constituting a modern vision of Taipei, an *Erlebnis*’ (2019: 13). Finally, he points out that the debris and the gravel on the ground look like an extension of the cobblestones in the mural. In this sense, the ruined space becomes a reflection of the still mural, and when it is left without human activity or movement, ‘the film-world [is transformed] into a photograph-like flat surface’ (2019: 13). Consequently, this transformation from the moving image to stillness forces the audience to actively participate in the objective camera’s gaze, and ‘this meta-moment of film-watching affects thinking, empowering the viewer to encounter the Benjaminian arrest of thoughts’ (2019: 3).

Due to the coexistence of different layers of temporality, it is impossible, or perhaps just not important anymore, to look at one aspect of sheets of past to determine why Lee hesitates and what Chen resists. The narrative of the film and the *Erfahrung* of Lee and Chen’s relationship become secondary when the two long takes encompass different temporalities and bring them into dialogue to shed light on the discourse of neoliberalism. In this sense, I argue that Lee’s hesitation and Chen’s resistance and the transformative dynamics between the two can *only* be read as the materialisation of the intuition, which perceives and understands the validity of different layers of temporality. Without this intuitive and empathetic awakening, the ethics of hesitation and resistance will be reduced to ‘Eisensteinian montage dialectics’ and fail to ‘offer a potential awakening of the revolutionary possibility of real social change’ (Lo 2019: 13).

If the first-level analysis’ focus remains on the interaction between the two characters within a finite screening duration, and the second level expands the former’s scope by examining the infinite layers of temporality in the time-image, the third level will reflect how the time-image, where duration is perceived intuitively and reveals its infinite potentials, can be contained within the finite period of screening time, determined by the standardised and mechanical time. As mentioned

previously, slow cinema has a predilection for encompassing this paradoxical filmic representation of time in order to challenge the well-established linear editing, which offers cause-and-effect logic and a tolerable span of narrative time. Indeed, this ethics of questioning can also be applied to analyse the final sequence, but the shot/reverse shot transition between the two long takes seems to meet the viewer's expectation of seeing the gazed object and thus to ameliorate the anxiety caused by the long stretch of endurance. However, taking the unclear relationship between the two characters and the coexistence of myriad temporalities into account, I will argue that the shot/ reverse shot in this final sequence is stripped of its traditional effect of suturing two separate images; instead, it counterintuitively reveals the resistant nature of the time-image: the direct representation of time resists the stabilising and homogenising force of rationalisation and standardisation by revealing the destabilising hesitant moments of undecidability and indiscernibility. In this sense, this final sequence treats the rational editing as an interruption. To situate this final analysis in a broader context is to realise that the shot/reverse shot's impulse to rationalise and standardise narrative time is similar to the neoliberal judgement on the unproductive and the globalising pursuit of homogenisation. Hence, *Stray Dogs* and other films of slow world cinemas that tackle issues of neoliberal exploitation or hegemonic cultural domination find their political *tour de force* through the aesthetics of long take. They prolong the duration of the infinite hesitant moments until the hesitation is equipped with a finite scope of political intent and becomes an act of resistance.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has set out to explore how *Stray Dogs* demands the audience's understanding, not only intellectual and sympathetic but also intuitional and empathetic. On the one hand, the film's realist depictions of Lee's physical endurance, hardship and nomadic life indeed elicit a sympathetic spectatorial response. On the other hand, the film's temporal illegibility, its use of long takes and Lee's emotionless and motionless reactions problematise such sympathetic identification. I have first looked at the film's temporal illegibility, which situates the film's temporal referent in what Gilles Deleuze calls 'peaks of present' in contrast to 'sheets of past'. Drawing on and repurposing Deleuzian ideas, I have maintained that plunging into sheets of past leads to a sense of hesitation that, at peaks of present, will become an act of resistance against modernity's force of homogenising myriad pasts in order to establish the present's dominant position as the only legitimate existence. Since *Stray Dogs* leads its temporal logic astray by rendering the past unresolved, the present unstable and the future uncertain in diegesis, it manifests a true duration where time is not compartmentalised into discrete units and then put together in a chronological sense. In this respect, the past preserved – a virtual depository of collective and personal histories and memories – will never be defined as a historical determinant; instead, it is constantly in flux with the ever-passing present and the ever-becoming present of the future. It is when we plunge into sheets of past that our intellect's habitual tendency to establish a single truth is challenged by the existence of a virtual whole of private and public histories and thus experiences a moment of hesitation. It is at peaks of present, which encompasses this encounter between the past preserved and the present intellectually perceived, that this hesitant moment becomes an act of resistance against an entrenched way of separating the present from the past and differentiating the actual from the virtual.

I have then explored how *Stray Dogs* employs this resistant politics to address not only a worldwide issue of capitalist and neoliberal standardisation of time but also Taiwan's local and everyday urban scenery, which is under the impact of such economic and political mechanisms. I have argued that the long durational recordings of Lee's hardship and impassivity, along with the effect of de-dramatisation, cause a spectatorial anxiety, on both a national and a global scale, over the inability of intellect and sympathy to identify with the on-screen slowness. This anxiety occurs when the sense of slowness outweighs the speed of mechanically structured and intellectually perceived time, not only on screen but also in reality. Moreover, by paying attention to the film's representations of cultural and local specificities, I have regarded Lee as a new type of 'seer' who, unlike his Deleuzian counterpart, not only no longer knows how to make sense of the deserted modern landscape but also is unable to relate his marginality to the lucrative and capitalist developing potential that lies in this kind of disconnected any-space-whatever of modernity. In doing so, I have deconstructed the dynamics between a Eurocentric aesthetics and a vernacular sensibility to prevent cinematic slowness from being formulaic and homogenising the variety of local and cultural specificities seen in different slow films around the world. In this sense, the film problematises cinematic representations of and spectatorial responses to the other's suffering purely through sympathetic identification. Further elaborating on this argument, I have applied Jean-François Lyotard's idea of 'acinema' to examine how the poem sequence, a relatively more emotional sequence than others in the film, challenges the capitalist film industry's rationalising force, which aims for logical narrativisation and spectatorial identification in pursuit of mass appeal and profits. However, I have also pointed out that the film's use of long take turns a productive period of time into an unproductive one and reveals that modern society is, in fact, as Mary Ann Doane observes, caught between the intellectually calibrated and the intuitively perceived time.

Accordingly, instead of arguing that a sympathetic and intellectual understanding is kept at bay due to this slow aesthetics, I have contended that it is caught in the interval between the legible and the obscure – a hesitant interval that waits for an empathetic understanding in order to rethink the entrenchment and incompleteness of sympathy and intellect. This moment of hesitation thus embodies a true duration, a spectrum along which different perceptions and senses are in flux and sympathy is just one shade of this qualitative change. I have brought Louis Lo's reading of Walter Benjamin's idea of 'arrest of thought' into the dialogue and have argued that the moment of hesitation situates our intellect and our sympathetic feeling in a liminal state between the legible narrative and the unassimilable suffering and ineffable impassivity of the other. By further drawing on Alia Al-Saji's and David Martin-Jones' ideas of ethical hesitation, I have maintained that the moment of hesitation recalibrates the pre-established and ingrained ideas of the past by constantly bringing them into contact with the indeterminate and ever-becoming present. Elaborating on this idea, I have brought my repurposed notion of Deleuzian 'peaks of present' into the discussion. In doing so, I have laid out the contrast between a modern fascination with a perpetual present and the time-image of peaks of present. The former maintains its hegemonic and privileged status by controlling the waste of labour time and attributing the destabilising force of durational flux to an unregulated mishandling of pre-industrial history. By contrast, the latter reveals that we should recognise the illusive hegemonic position of our current actual state, acknowledging the fact that a plethora of collective and private histories coexist but are oppressed or falsified by the present political or economic regime. Accordingly, I have proposed that, through intuition, we are able to repurpose our habitual and intellectual understanding as a first step towards contact with the true duration, where we find the coexistence of different temporalities that contain our and the others' perceptions, that is, an empathetic understanding in a true duration.

Finally, I have examined the film's closing sequence, composed of two extreme long takes, by providing three layers of analysis. The first level designates Lee as a hesitant figure and Chen as a resistant one and reveals that, whilst hesitation is grounded in the past, resistance assumes its place at the peaks of present where myriad un/reconciled pasts leave their marks and thus make the act of resistance a never-ending pursuit of an ethical stance of rethinking the present state. The second level concerns the sequence's juxtaposition of different temporal layers – a ruin that is the by-product of the urban cycle of construction and demolition and a mural that depicts a 19th-century Taiwanese rural scene. Recognising this temporal coexistence, the analysis of the second level corresponds to the argument that situates the film's resistant politics at peaks of present. The third level engages in a paradox: how the infinite time-image can be contained within the finite period of screening time. I have especially pointed out that the sequence's problematic suturing effect of shot/reverse shot seems to contradict the intuitively rooted representation of time of the two long takes. To address this paradox, I have argued that the shot/reverse shot in this final sequence is stripped of its editing effect and the impulse to rationalise; instead, it counterintuitively reveals that the direct representation of time resists the force of rationalisation and standardisation by foregrounding temporal indiscernibility.

By revealing the paradox between the intuitive time and rationalised time in *Stray Dogs*, this chapter has emphasised an understanding of – or at least empathy with – the fact that contemporary slow world cinemas create a fresher and more insightful critique of capitalist society, and neoliberal modernity, where time is standardised, commercialised and oppressive. In the next chapter, I will explore how slow world cinemas transform the ethics of hesitation into an act of resistance in a rhizomatic way in the case of *Japón*.

3. EXCHANGE:
JAPÓN

Japón gained international recognition by receiving a Caméra d'Or special mention at the 2002 Cannes Film Festival. Since then, the film has been circulating around the international film festival circuit and praised for its naturalist representation, facilitated by the use of long takes, long shots, undramatic narrative and non-professional actors. For Steven Shaviro, this type of visual reference to Italian neorealist or European modernist aesthetics in contemporary slow films not only 'flatter[s] classicist cinephiles [but also becomes a] default international style that signifies "serious art cinema" without having to display any sort of originality or insight' (2010). As I have argued in the Introduction, this ambivalent reaction invokes the domination of a Westernised and Eurocentric discourse in film studies. Slow cinema is often deemed a cinematic movement that both inherits and restores the aesthetics of the European modernist and realist canon. However, this cinephilic and academic recognition inevitably reduces slow world cinemas to the level of satellite or imitation of the European canon. Moreover, the culturally specific representations that are embedded in and enrich the diversity of slow world cinemas are overlooked by a formalist analysis. This ambivalence is clear both in and in relation to *Japón.* In this chapter, I will argue that, through both its theme and form, *Japón* rhizomatically, in a Deleuzian and Guattarian sense (2005: 3–25), presents a deterritorialising and reterritorialising dynamics between the Mexican national specificity and the universality of cosmopolitan art cinema. Moreover, I will contend that the de/reterritorialisation between the pleasure found in the familiar art cinema references and the displeasure resulting from the illegible indigenous contexts reflects Jean-François Lyotard's calibration of the sublime (1994). It is this feeling of the sublime that produces a moment of hesitation when a clash between the finite

perceptibility of the pleasure and the infinite formidability of the displeasure entails an act of resistance. Finally, by rethinking the film's representation of the dialectics between transcendence and obscene and mortal corporeality, this chapter will reveal *Japón*'s political intent to recognise and encompass the excessiveness and unprofitability that are deemed meaningless, and are hence eradicated, under the capitalist film industry and the neoliberal pursuit of the productive.

3.1 Rhizomatic Encounter

Japón depicts the journey of an unnamed middle-aged man (Alejandro Ferretis) from Mexico City with a plan to end his own life in the rural Mexican village of Ayacatzintla. There, he meets an old lady, Ascen (Magdalena Flores), who is a native of the village and provides him with a place to stay. Instead of revealing the protagonist's death drive, the film frequently shows the banal everydayness of the village, follows the man's wandering and records his interaction with the villagers and with Ascen. At first, the contrast between the man's interest in art and the villagers' rudimentary lifestyles seems to suggest an unpleasant encounter. The man is indifferent to and even annoyed by the village's primitiveness and Ascen's attentive hospitality. Meanwhile, the man's libidinal awakening and sexual desires are gradually reinvigorated by both the rawness of the natural phenomena and the landscape and, counterintuitively, by Ascen's sincerity and naiveté. He also becomes protective of Ascen when he knows that her nephew, Juan, is claiming as his inheritance the stones that comprise her hut. The film later shows the man attempting to commit suicide by shooting himself with a gun only to find himself unable to do so and then collapsing both physically and mentally. After this pivotal scene, the man asks Ascen if they can have sex in order for him to gain spiritual peace. Ascen agrees to the man's request, and this agreement leads to the film's

controversial sex scene. The following scene shows Juan and a group of men arriving at the hut and beginning to knock down its walls. The man tries in vain to reason with them to stop the demolition. Just when the group of men finish loading the stones onto a tractor and are preparing to leave, Ascen decides to join them on the journey down the mountain. The film culminates in an uninterrupted tracking shot lasting 5 minutes and 22 seconds and revealing the tragic aftermath of the overturning of the tractor and the death of Ascen.

Japón encapsulates a man's transformation from acting nonchalantly towards rustic everydayness to gradually being awakened by worldly carnality and corporeality. The film thus presents an encounter, a conflict and finally an interconnectedness between Westernised modernity and marginalised indigenousness. Indeed, it is this very notion of interconnectedness that invokes the preeminent idea of the De-Westernisation of film studies and resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's formulations of the rhizome. Before moving on to the film text, I will first detail how the idea of rhizome informs my enquiry into slow world cinemas and why *Japón*, at least amongst my four case studies, exemplifies this theoretical framework. Applying botanical terms to their critical formulations of a rhizomatic way of thinking, Deleuze and Guattari argue that, whilst an arborescent or root system is based on genealogical, hierarchical and binary logic (2005: 5–6), a rhizome is an acentred and anti-genealogical multiplicity (2005: 21). Unlike the arborescent system, 'which plots a point, fixes an order', they believe that 'any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be' (2005: 7). In other words, whilst the roots and branches of a tree grow and stretch out vertically from the trunk, the rhizome, without a centre, spreads out not only horizontally but also transversally. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari maintain that the binary logic and hierarchical tracing that result from the arborescent system of thoughts '[have] dominated Western reality and all of Western thought' (2005: 18).

In the case of linguistics, Deleuze and Guattari denounce Noam Chomsky's linguistic tree and grammaticality – 'the categorical S symbol that dominates every sentence' and the dichotomous division into a noun phrase and a verb phrase – as 'more fundamentally a marker of power than a syntactic marker' (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 7). Accordingly, this linguistic system fails to '[connect] a language to the semantic and pragmatic contents of statements, to collective assemblages of enunciation, to a whole micropolitics of the social field' (2005: 7). In contrast, a rhizomatic mode of linguistics 'establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles' (2005: 7). In this sense, the rhizomatic system de-centres a hegemonic and homogeneous semiotic chain. As Deleuze and Guattari put it, 'there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages' (2005: 7).

In the same vein, Deleuze and Guattari criticise psychoanalysis for '[subjecting] the unconscious to arborescent structures, hierarchical graphs, recapitulatory memories, central organs, the phallus, the phallus-tree' (2005: 17). For Deleuze and Guattari, this way of exploring the unconscious 'confines every desire and statement to a genetic axis or overcoming structure' (2005: 13). They illustrate this type of tree system in psychoanalysis by pointing out how the Oedipus complex is diagnosed. In order to cure an abnormal sexual desire, psychoanalysis searches for the origin of this unconscious drive through the familial lineage of daddy–mummy–child. As Damian Sutton and David Martin-Jones aptly explicate, psychoanalysis 'functions by perpetually imposing the image of thought of the tree. If you have a sexual "problem", this is because you did not develop correctly as a child' (Sutton and Martin-Jones 2008: 8). Analysing the unconscious through pre-established linear tracing, psychoanalysis 'bases its own dictatorial power upon a dictatorial conception of the unconscious [and, in the process,] there is always a general, always a leader

(General Freud)' (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 17–18). By contrast, Deleuze and Guattari propose schizoanalysis, which 'treats the unconscious as an acentred system' rather than interpreting it as offshoots of a main dominant trunk (2005: 18). Unlike psychoanalytic tracing along a pre-established course, schizoanalysis 'rejects any idea of pretraced destiny, whatever name is given to it – divine, anagogic, historical, economic, structural, hereditary, or syntagmatic' (2005: 13).

Nevertheless, contrasting the entrenched tree or root system with the rhizome might in turn run the risk of establishing another binary logic that Deleuze and Guattari aim to abolish. Responding to this undesirable possible reading, they point out that the comparison is not based on the 'axiological dualism between good and bad' (2005: 20). In fact, the two schools of thought are not entirely incompatible since '[t]here are knots of arborescence in rhizomes, and rhizomatic offshoots in roots' (2005: 20). Moreover, the dualism, if there is one, that results from this comparison is never the final product of rhizomatic thinking since the rhizome is always in the process of de-centring, dismantling and reconstructing. That is, the rhizome does not aim to reach a finality through a facile linear logic; instead, it reveals, excavates and explores every potential that can connect our thinking with infinite fields of knowledge. As Deleuze and Guattari contend:

> It is a question of a model that is perpetually in construction or collapsing, and of a process that is perpetually prolonging itself, breaking off and starting up again. No, this is not a new or different dualism […] We invoke one dualism only in order to challenge another. We employ a dualism of models only in order to arrive at a process that challenges all models. Each time, mental correctives are necessary to undo the dualisms we had no wish to construct but through which we pass. (2005: 20)

Following Deleuze and Guattari, Sutton and Martin-Jones add that the rhizome system does not aim to establish an opposite stance, but, instead, reveals the incomplete, monotonous and single-sided

(or single-lined) way of thinking that is entrenched in the tree system (Sutton and Martin-Jones 2008: 4). Sutton and Martin-Jones provide an example by illustrating a straightforward relation between a forest and a tree (2008: 4). It is clear that, if we treat every single tree as individual cause or truth, there is not one single origin or truth in a forest. Every tree has its own origin and is 'a product of an assemblage, of water, sunlight and soil' (2008: 4). However, this observation does not encourage us to focus on only one tree and claim that its history is irrelevant to other trees in the same forest; instead, we should see the entire forest as a rhizomatic system that comprises myriad complex assemblages, rather than a single lineage, residing in each tree. As Sutton and Martin-Jones aptly put it:

> To consider a tree in isolation, then, is erroneous, because everything is in fact the product of an assemblage with various different elements, and is not simply attributable to one cause. Everything is, in this sense, rhizomatic, and to think in the manner of the tree is only to use one aspect of the rhizome. (2008: 4)

The term 'assemblage', according to Deleuze and Guattari, manifests the 'increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections' (2005: 8). In this respect, through its expanding connection with other multiplicities, the rhizomatic thinking is constantly forming and constructing a map that is 'detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification [and] can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation' (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 12). This idea is embedded in Deleuze and Guattari's criticism of linguistics and psychoanalysis.

Throughout their critiques, Deleuze and Guattari regard the fascination of linguistics and psychoanalysis with, and developments on the basis of, the arborescent system as a problematic 'logic of tracing and reproduction':

> In linguistics as in psychoanalysis, its object is an unconscious that is itself representative, crystallized into codified complexes, laid out along a genetic axis and distributed within a syntagmatic structure. Its goal is to describe a de facto state, to maintain balance in intersubjective relations, or to explore an unconscious that is already there from the start, lurking in the dark recesses of memory and language. It consists of tracing, on the basis of an overcoding structure or supporting axis, something that comes ready-made. The tree articulates and hierarchizes tracings; tracings are like the leaves of a tree. (2005: 12)

That is, in contrast to the tree or root system, the rhizome creates a map that searches for the new, unknown possibility instead of following a tracing that always tries to find a familiar way back to the origin. The rhizome's nature of making infinite connections is further applied in Deleuze and Guattari's formulation of an ever-becoming movement of de/reterritorialisation. Each connection in a rhizome system indicates a change, a becoming and an in-betweenness. According to Deleuze and Guattari, '[between] things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away' (2005: 25; emphasis in original). Deleuze and Guattari use the orchid-wasp symbiosis as an example to clarify this dynamic exchange:

> The orchid deterritorializes by forming an image, a tracing of a wasp; but the wasp reterritorializes on that image. The wasp is nevertheless deterritorialized, becoming a piece in the orchid's reproductive apparatus. But it reterritorializes the orchid by

> transporting its pollen. Wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome. (2005: 10)

It is worth noting that, unlike the tree or root system's logic of one-way tracing and mimetic reproduction, the orchid's resemblance to the wasp is not a simple copy or imitation; instead, the orchid and the wasp form a '[t]ransversal [communication]' that connects or 'scramble[s]' the two genealogical variations and renders the differences between them indiscernible, that is, a true mutual becoming (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 11). Moreover, this de/reterritorialising exchange expands this kind of encounter of mutual becoming into further connections with other assemblages. As Deleuze and Guattari put it:

> A becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp. Each of these becomings brings about the deterritorialization of one term and the reterritorialization of the other; the two becomings interlink and form relays in a circulation of intensities pushing the deterritorialization ever further. (2005: 10)

This idea of becoming, along with the non-binary, anti-hierarchical and anti-genealogical underpinning of the rhizome, epitomises this thesis' enquiry into a de-centring remapping of slow world cinemas' resistance against the dominant force of neoliberal globalisation. As I have argued in the Introduction, the study of the resistant politics of a world of slow films should recognise that this political intent is informed by a transnational humanist sensibility that is intermingled with rather than distilled from different cultural and national viewpoints. Since it is based on this malleable flux between the national and the transnational, slow world cinemas' potential to transform a hesitant ethics into a resistant act never aims to reach a finite fixed conclusion; instead, it creates a rhizomatic map 'that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has

multiple entryways' without a starting point or a destination (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 21). In this sense, a rhizomatic mapping resists the primacy of reading the world based on the overgeneralising global North/South and West/East divide. It reveals how two extremes that form a seemingly binary relation are always remodelling each other through the de/reterritorialising exchange.

Following the critical formulation of rhizome, I will propose that this rhizomatic interplay between deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation not only accounts for the aforementioned ambivalent reception of *Japón* and other contemporary slow films but also strips this ambivalence of a dominant Eurocentric connotation. That is, slow world cinemas' depictions of national specificity and its modernist aesthetic tendency should be treated as two rhizome systems – multiplicities or assemblages – that are in a constant contact and flux with each other. To claim that one system is more established and superior and thus has more influence than the other is to reduce the de-centring potential of hybridisation to a centred hierarchisation, to misconstrue a rhizomatic map as the logic of tracing. The risk of establishing a new power dynamic through an encounter between two systems is both great and vivid. As Sutton and Martin-Jones remind us, the de/ reterritorialising exchange can be unequal due to 'the power imbalance' that entails 'war, massacre, genocide, slavery, concentration camps, taxes, land clearances, disease and numerous other such abuses' in the brutal history of colonialism (2008: 7). It might seem far-fetched to compare the danger of cultural hegemony in the context of cinema to the violent history of colonialism; however, it is also an undeniable fact that the impact of Western and Eurocentric discourses on global media and the cultural landscape has been the lingering effect of cultural imperialism, which is not only a historical by-product of colonialism but also an ongoing dominance in the age of globalisation. Filled with images of dichotomy throughout – the urban and the rural, the modern and the primitive, the transcendental and the corporeal – *Japón* exemplifies not only the potential but

also the risk of a de/reterritorialising encounter between a dominant figure and a submissive one. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the film itself – in terms of the dynamics between its depiction of a marginal society, its own peripheral status in the industry, its modernist aesthetics and its cosmopolitan spectatorship – also deals with this kind of encounter, in which a de/reterritorialisation exchange can have a double-edged effect. To elaborate on this idea, I will now proceed to an analysis of the film's opening sequence, in which a series of tracking shots travel between two locations that are geographically contrasted within a national context (Mexico City and the village of Ayacatzintla) but at the same time genealogically connected by cinematic tradition (Mexican art cinema and European art cinema).

3.2 De/Reterritorialising Exchange between the Vernacular and the Cosmopolitan

The film's opening sequence problematises the de-centring and anti-genealogical discourse by not only inviting a dichotomous interpretation but also invoking a genealogical reading of the impact of European modernist aesthetics. Lasting 2 minutes and 50 seconds and composed of ten tracking shots, the opening sequence represents the perspective of the unnamed protagonist. Travelling from a busy bustling road tunnel and stretches of motorway in Mexico City to pastoral, rustic country roads, the opening sequence suggests a recurring contrast between the city and the countryside. This opposition, for Tiago de Luca, reflects 'the contrasting realities of a country in which geography stands as one of the markers of ethnic and socio-economic disparities' (2014: 68). Indeed, de Luca's interpretation of a nation's image in this scene reveals *Japón*'s ethnographic sensibility. However, as the narrative progresses, this opposition between the modern and the primitive, seen from a national perspective, is gradually deterritorialised by a humanist awareness. For Deborah Shaw, the film is

not entirely ethnographic; instead, it emphasises 'the individual man and how he evolves in intensely local surroundings' (2011: 127). In this sense, Shaw posits that *Japón* is more concerned with 'existential, universal (masculine) questions [than] the social state of the country', and hence, that the film 'despite its local setting could be set in any country in any village' (2011: 129). Consequently, the enquiry into Mexico's domestic social and economic inequality is deterritorialised across national borders.

Furthermore, a few academic interests in this opening sequence lie in genealogical interpretations. For instance, Demetrios Matheou (2003: 10–12) points out that both the sequence and the film's title evoke the car sequence, which was shot in Japan, in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solyaris* (*Solaris*, 1972). Similarly, Robert Efird (2014: 22) also recognises Tarkovsky's presence in *Japón* by identifying the film's production company as Solaris Film. Despite acknowledging Tarkovsky's influence, Efird maintains that *Japon*'s 'montage-like condensation of several hours into little more than a minute' is different from *Solaris*' take on much more prolonged 'manipulation of time and space' (2014: 22). Moreover, he contends that the shot in the tunnel in the opening sequence in fact reminds him more of Federico Fellini's *Otto e mezzo* (*8 1/2*, 1963), another prime example of the European modernist canon (2014: 22). For Shaw, this 'grafting of European and Russian canonized cultural forms onto this Mexican landscape [indicates] the high art tradition [that director] Reygadas utilizes to create his form of art cinema' (2011: 128). Indeed, the reference to and influence of European modernist films in *Japón* and other contemporary slow films is decipherable. It is also this cinematic homage that facilitates works under the banner of slow cinema to circulate around the international film festival and metropolitan cinephile circuits. For instance, Song Hwee Lim posits that the international reception of slow cinema has 'been initiated by film critics and editors who review and program films [, have a] globetrotting lifestyle [and] hobnob with directors and

producers at these sites of exhibition and consumption' (2014: 25). As a result, there is a hint of 'metropolitan-cum-cosmopolitan' taste within this cinephilic circuit (Lim 2014: 25). Using the works of Tsai Ming-liang as his case study, Lim further argues that what invokes these cinephiles' interest in contemporary slow films is 'the intertextuality […] and the notion of authorship within the art cinema' (2014: 60). According to Lim, the tradition of 'intertextuality, authorship, and art cinema' helps to move slow cinema from 'a national cinema mode to that of an international art cinema' (2014: 60). It is worth a reminder that rather than intending to deny that informativeness and validity lie in such analyses and appreciation of slow world cinemas, I set out with the aim of searching for a more flexible and non-essentialist framework that avoids reducing the mapping of a world of cinematic slowness onto an unoriginal tracing of a Eurocentric tradition and origin. Following Shaw's and Lim's ideas, I will add that, in the absence of a linear and genealogical root system, the relation between the European modernist tradition and a world of slow films becomes an interconnecting and heterogeneous one, just like the rhizome. As Deleuze and Guattari maintain:

> There is neither imitation nor resemblance, only an exploding of two heterogeneous series on the line of flight composed by a common rhizome that can no longer be attributed to or subjugated by anything signifying. (2005: 10)

In order to discard the arborescent genealogical tree and search for this rhizomatic interconnection, I contend that *Japón*'s modernist and universalist art cinema trope, which deterritorialises Mexican vernacular and cultural specificity on a global scale, is in turn reterritorialised by this very specificity of a realist and documentary take on national images.

Thanks to its use of realist cinematic devices, such as shooting on location, the use of long takes, handheld camera shots and non-professional actors, the film accentuates the harshness and

indigenousness of the rural village. For de Luca, these naturalistic depictions also reveal 'the physical exertion to which both actors and film crew were subjected during the shoot' (2014: 69). These traits and representations of realism, in Lúcia Nagib's view, commit to 'the truth of the unpredictable event' and are 'faithful to the profilmic phenomenon' (2011: 11). Following de Luca and Nagib, I will add that this profilmic unpredictability and contingency also resonates with the rhizome's nature of ever-becoming and having no fixed, predictable point to be recorded. In this sense, the contrast between the city and the countryside, the modern and the primitive, is no longer dichotomous; instead, the two different national and geographical contexts become heterogeneously interconnected and pertain to a much broader humanistic sensibility that is shared and understood universally. This is potentially how *Japón* and other slow world cinemas that depict specific cultural and national themes are able to appeal to an international audience, especially on the film festival circuit. Although the non-binary and anti-genealogical rhizomatic nature of *Japón* is unveiled only after a thorough reading of the entire film, the opening sequence already embodies this de-centring tendency as it flows between the city and the countryside, the modern and the primitive, and the national and the transnational.

Indeed, this filmic representation of rhizomatic heterogeneity and flux also reflects the discourse of cinematic transnationalism that I have addressed in the Introduction. In a similar vein, Joanne Hershfield analyses and rethinks the tendency of *Japón* and other contemporary national cinema to encompass both modernist aesthetics and cultural specificities 'through the lens of the post-national' (2014: 30). Hershfield proposes a phenomenon of post-national cinema by drawing on Arjun Appadurai's formulation of post-nationalism. According to Appadurai, post-nationalism indicates different types of transnational formation that are 'more diverse, more fluid, more ad hoc, more provisional, less coherent, less organized, and simply less implicated in the comparative

advantages of the nation-state' (Appadurai 2005: 168). In this sense, post-nationalism destabilises and 'challenges the myth of the homogeneous nation and exposes ways in which notions of collective identity are being reformulated' (Hershfield 2014: 30). Hershfield thus adopts the concept of post-nationalism to remap contemporary national cinema whose modernist representation transcends national boundaries and whose attentive gaze at the local specificity accentuates the uniqueness of and differences between nations. In Hershfield's view, which she shares with de Luca, the long take, the long shot and the shooting on location in *Japón*, along with the slow progression of the narrative and the minimalist depiction of the characters, foreground the landscape of the village (2014: 33–4). In fact, bringing the natural landscape to the fore is one of the modernist signature traits shared by Rossellini, Antonioni and Tarkovsky. However, in the case of *Japón*, the landscape of the village is shown 'not as a bucolic realm but as a crude and cruel force' (de Luca 2014: 69). Consequently, Hershfield maintains that *Japón*'s foregrounding of a rural Mexican village's landscape is familiar to not only 'art cinema audiences who are conversant with the history of modernist cinema', but also 'Mexican audiences [who] are acquainted with [the landscape that is] cinematically recognizable because [it] literally and stylistically reference[s] the representation of landscapes throughout the history of Mexican cinema' (Hershfield 2014: 34–5). Due to this mix of transnational and national sensibility, Hershfield questions the 'purely formalist analyses [or] analyses concerned only with the institutional and economic parameters of film production and distribution' of contemporary national cinema that adopts modernist practices (2014: 38). She maintains that this problematic form of analysis results from an unfamiliarity or an opaqueness in the vernacular specificity and a lack of 'capacity to make sense of cultural and local references' (2014: 38). As a result, she calls for attention to be paid to 'the geo-political and historical specificity' in contemporary national cinema that is tinted with modernist aesthetics

(2014: 38). Her approach thus potentially addresses the aforementioned ambivalent reception of *Japón* and other contemporary slow world cinemas – a reception that reduces the emergence of cinematic slowness to a mere satellite of the European modernist canon.

By re-evaluating the ambivalent reception of contemporary slow cinema in the case of *Japón*, I argue that it is the rhizomatic embodiment of two heterogeneous differences – indigenous specificity and metropolitan universality – that opposes essentialist and binary differentiation and genealogical tracing. Until now, it has been clear that the ambivalent reception in fact results from this de-centring nature of in-betweenness that potentially calls forth an ethics of hesitation. In *Japón*, this ethics of hesitation acknowledges the destabilising force within the incessant relay between deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation that leads to an act of resistance against the purely Eurocentric gaze at the film's manifestation of both modernist and vernacular sensibility. I will further argue that this hybrid of cinematic modernism, in which a sense of cinephilic pleasure can be found, and national specificity, wherein cultural unfamiliarity impedes pleasure and hence results in an anxious and fearful feeling of incomprehensibility, reflects Jean-François Lyotard's enquiry of the sublime.

3.3 The Sublime Resistance of Cinematic Slowness

Lyotard's critical idea of the sublime is based on his analysis of Immanuel Kant's aesthetic politics. For Lyotard, the beautiful and the sublime 'belong to the same family [of] aesthetic reflection' (1994: 50). Nevertheless, Lyotard argues that the sublime feeling, compared with the feeling of the beautiful, 'is faced […] with quantities capable only of suggesting a magnitude or a force that exceeds its power of presentation' (1994: 52). Consequently, it is possible that, within its

'powerlessness' in making sense of excessive greatness, 'thinking becomes impatient, despairing, disinterested' (1994: 52). Paradoxically, the thinking of the sublime feeling is also awakened by this 'magnitude, force, quantity in its pure state, a "presence" that exceeds what imaginative thought can grasp at once in a form' (1994: 53). In this sense, the sublime feeling implies that our imagination is 'at the limits of *what* it can present' but, at the same time, defies this limit 'in order to present *that* it can no longer present' (1994: 55; emphasis in original). Furthermore, Lyotard argues that, in the sublime feeling our reason also 'unreasonably' tries to defy this limit of 'finding objects corresponding to its concepts in sensible intuition' (1994: 55). Due to this 'double defiance' against the limit (the finite) and the 'desire for limitlessness' (the infinite), feelings of both pleasure and displeasure emerge in the sublime (1994: 55). Consequently, the feeling of the sublime engenders an oxymoronic thinking within us – 'the limit […] immediately implies both the limited and the unlimited' (1994: 59). Unlike the feeling of the beautiful, which solely pleases our understanding of the limitation or 'the form of the object', the sublime feeling applies both imagination and reason to see beyond 'the without-form' (1994: 58). As a result, to bring Hershfield's recalibration of the dynamics between cinematic modernism and geographical particularity into dialogue with Lyotard's critical analysis, it is clear that *Japón*'s hybridisation of legible modernist aesthetics and obscure vernacular representation attests to the feeling of the sublime and results in a hesitant moment when both pleasure and formidability emerge.

Now, I will examine a hesitant moment in *Japón* when the feeling of the sublime dominates modernist '[t]aste, which is a judgement of the beautiful' (Lyotard 1994: 58). This hesitant moment can be found in the sequence where the unnamed man climbs up to a mesa with a gun and attempts to commit suicide. This sequence, mostly comprising long shots, juxtaposes the sublime landscape of the village with the narrative of a suicide attempt. During the sequence, we see a long shot cut in



Figure 3.1 – A long shot cut in half, with stone-scattered grassland dominating the lower half of the frame and crooked mountain ridges the upper half



Figure 3.2 – A backlit long shot showing the man walking towards a savanna with the overcast sky occupying most of the frame

half, with stone-scattered grassland dominating the lower half of the frame and crooked mountain ridges the upper half (see Figure 3.1); a backlit long shot showing the man walking towards a savanna with the overcast sky occupying most of the frame (see Figure 3.2); and a series of ascending and widening aerial shots capturing a panoramic view of the village's amorphous topography. However picturesque these shots are, they are inevitably haunted by an ominous feeling of death – both the man's intention to end his own life and the carcass of a horse.

It is worth noting that the onscreen natural environment in this sequence does not simply serve as the setting. As Martin Lefebvre argues, when the natural space in cinema is independent of diegetic narrative – 'autonomous' in other words – it becomes a landscape and separates itself from a mere setting (2011: 64). Moreover, Lefebvre contends that 'landscape [might] interrupt the

forward drive and flow of narrative [by] replacing narrativized setting with visual attractions and unwanted moments of pictorial contemplation' (2011: 65). Although Lefebvre does not specifically examine the representation of landscape in the context of slow cinema, in the case of *Gerry* (Gus Van Sant, 2002), which is widely recognised as a slow film, he points out that '[the autonomous landscape] is reinforced by the narrative looseness […], the use of *temps morts*, long takes and relative stillness in the depiction of often empty natural spaces' (2011: 66; emphasis in original). In this sense, Lefebvre notices that:

> Such 'bounds' – the ability to esthetically hold something like nature in thought, to *contemplate* it – have been essential to the development of the *idea* of landscape (in art and *in situ*) in the West, even when they appear in a state of crisis as with the Kantian notion of the sublime, according to which nature may excite ideas that exceed the limits of both sense and imagination, and yet still be reined in by reason and a 'higher finality'. (2011: 69; emphasis in original)

Drawing on Lefebvre's formulation, I argue that the juxtaposition of the narrative of suicide and the magnitude of the landscape creates a hesitant moment when the terrifying and respectable vastness of the landscape engulfs the frame, dwarfs a sense of foreboding that is underpinned by the impending death and further halts the suicide attempt. In fact, in this sequence, there is a literal hesitant moment when the camera captures only an overexposed sky for a little longer than 10 seconds within a 1-minute single take. This single take first shows the man revealing a gun and the camera later panning upwards with the man pointing the gun to the sky. After being static and fixing its gaze on the sky for 10 seconds, the camera pans down and we see the man failing to shoot himself and gradually collapsing beside the carcass of a horse. The final series of aerial shots in this sequence progressively ascend and hover over the vast range of mountains, thus rendering the man



Figure 3.3 – An aerial shot rendering the man and the carcass of the horse more and more insignificant

and the carcass of the horse more and more insignificant (see Figure 3.3). The sequence finally ends with the frame gradually blending into the clouds and turning completely white. Indeed, the cinematography and the accompanying score (Johann Sebastian Bach's *The Passion of St. Matthew*) can be interpreted as a filmic representation of the man's rebirth (Shaw 2011: 128; Tompkins 2013: 162). I will add that it is at this hesitant moment, when both fear and the realisation of his infinitesimal existence emerge in the face of infinite greatness, that the man discovers an act of resistance against death – an awakening that defies the finite limit and desires an infinite limitlessness.

The film's ending, a continuous tracking shot lasting 5 minutes and 22 seconds, also encapsulates this dynamic between death and the feeling of the sublime. The final shot begins with the camera slowly moving forwards on a railway track and showing the aftermath of what might have been a train crash (see Figure 3.4). The camera at times makes 360-degree pans to reveal not only the corpses and the remnants of broken stones and the tractor but also the vastness of the surrounding fields and mountains (see Figure 3.5). Four minutes after the shot begins, the camera tilts downwards and fixes its tracking gaze on the railway track. The shot culminates in revealing Ascen's death. It is worth noting that the 360-degree pan of this ending shot seems to pick up the



Figure 3.4 – A tracking shot slowly moving forwards on a railway track and showing the aftermath of what might have been a train crash



Figure 3.5 – A 360-degree pan revealing the vastness of the surrounding fields and mountains

spiralling and ascending aerial shot from the aforementioned suicide scene. Moreover, the score in each of these scenes, albeit the one for the ending shot (Arvo Pärt's *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten*) being more elegiac, provides a metaphysical and transcendental soundscape. However, unlike in the previous case, where a suicide attempt is suspended by a moment of hesitation, this ending shot captures the tragic aftermath of the death of Ascen and a number of the villagers. As mentioned earlier, the man's botched suicide is preceded by a literal hesitant moment when the camera fixes its gaze on the murky sky for 10 seconds, followed by a series of aerial shots that foreground the magnitude of the canyon. By contrast, the final tracking shot is preceded by a 15-second long shot overlooking a vast lush plain against which patches of shadow cast by moving clouds brush, and it ends by gradually moving towards Ascen's body and finally turning into a

freeze frame. Although the camera's position in the long shot and its movement in the tracking shot can be interpreted as an omnipresent and omniscient existence, the back-and-forth 360-degree pan seems to bring this 'out-of-body' experience back down to earth. However, this earthly element at the same time is caught between the infinitude of the natural landscape and the finitude of mortal corporeality. That is, the feeling of the sublime transforms the dialectics between the transcendental and the corporeal into a de/reterritorialising exchange. Whilst the man's resistance to death is foreshadowed by a literal moment of hesitation and denotes a rebirth or an awakening that is engendered by the feeling of the sublime, Ascen's death suggests that mortal physicality and metaphysical transcendence are no longer in contrast with each other.

Besides mortal physicality, *Japón* also brings the representation of erotic corporeality into this de/reterritorialising relation between the transcendental and the corporeal. This representation can be found in the man's libidinally charged behaviours and his obscurely intriguing request for sexual intercourse with Ascen.

3.4 De/Reterritorialising Exchange between Transcendence and Corporeality

The man's libidinal drive is first revealed in a scene where he points the gun at his chest but later starts masturbating. What follows is another scene showing the man's dream or fantasy about a young woman kissing Ascen. As William Rowlandson aptly observes, this sequence disturbs the viewer's attachment to the man by presenting his eroticised private moment and 'uncustomary desire' (2006: 1029). Another manifestation of the man's sexual desire happens when he returns to the village after the botched suicide attempt on the mesa. A point-of-view (POV) shot shows a newspaper page displaying an explicit picture of a nude woman; another POV shot shows the

buttocks of Sabina, an elderly lady and a friend of Ascen's. Besides the erotic gaze of the man, this sequence also presents his offensive and drunken behaviours by applying a tottering and blurred POV shot. Furthermore, the film later shows an uninterrupted 1-minute shot recording the copulation between a stallion and a mare. This long take then cuts to a close-up of the man's back. Mirroring the stallion, which sniffs the mare after mating, the man is seen smelling Ascen's blouse. Rowlandson rightly contends that these shots represent '[a]n urgency for sexual contact', and that the subjective shots suggest the viewer's complicity in the man's sexually charged and blunt behaviours (2006: 1029–30). Recognising Rowlandson's argument and further drawing on Lyotard's conceptualisation of 'acinema' (Lyotard 2017), I will add that these shots in fact challenge the entrenched code of filmmaking of capitalism and mass entertainment that excludes shots of incongruity and excess to achieve a comprehensive order of narration and a legible sense of resolved closure. Indeed, the aforementioned libidinally driven moments can be explained as the man's increasing primal desire, which culminates in his sexual encounter with Ascen; however, more importantly, this series of presentations of onscreen eroticism in effect reveals a hesitant moment that recalibrates the onscreen incongruity and excessiveness that are deemed unmarketable and unproductive by the profit-orientated film market and industry.

To expound on this interpretation, I will first contend that the incongruity lies in the sequence where masturbation ensues after a suicide attempt and another in which an erotic gaze follows a botched suicide. The incongruity can also be found in the scene where the mating of two horses is witnessed by a group of giggling children. Furthermore, the excessiveness of these shots is underlined by the long durational and observational recordings of both onscreen taboos and the unpleasant. With the exception of the shots of the man gazing at the nude picture and at Sabina, other shots in this series of libidinal representation last long enough to disturb the spectator. For

instance, in the masturbation shot, the camera statically records the man's nudity for 20 seconds. The stillness of the frame, the quietude contrasted with a cacophony of nature sounds and the theatricality of the man's dimly spotlit body result in a similar effect to that of a tableau vivant, which, according to Lyotard, attests to his formulation of 'acinema'. As I have mentioned in Chapter 2, Lyotard views logical and legible narrative as a code of filmmaking that, under the capitalist film industry system, aims to reach a wider audience and thus maximise financial return; that is, films are made to propagate, reproduce and be productive in a consumerist sense. To present logical and intelligible narrative means to 'eliminate aberrant movements, useless expenditures, differences of pure consumption' (Lyotard 2017: 36). In this sense, Lyotard draws an analogy between this cinematic 'oppression of orders' and 'a normal genital sexuality' that forces the libido to 'renounce its perverse overflow to propagate the species' (2017: 36). Lyotard finds that some underground and experimental films have rebelled against this capitalist code of filmmaking by embracing a tableau-vivant type of extreme immobilisation (2017: 40). As he argues, 'instead of good, unifying and reasonable forms proposed for identification, the image [of immobilisation] would give rise to the most intense agitation through its fascinating paralysis' (2017: 40). Although not every shot under discussion in this section is immobile and lasts extremely long, the naturalist and documentary style of cinematography infuses the images with an observational and contemplative edge and thus slows the narrative progression down, potentially paralysing it. Consequently, the series of eroticised shots in *Japón* unleashes the libidinal excess that is supposed to be subdued and disturbs the conventional spectatorial identification, problematises the legibility of the narrative and hence challenges the capitalist film industry's pursuit of mass appeal and profits. Moreover, it is this inclusion of excess that reveals *Japón* and other contemporary slow films' political and ethical stance of observing and encompassing incongruity, excess and

unprofitability in a long durational and detailed way. Accordingly, Lyotard's equation drawn between mise-en-scène and political activity can be applied to the politics of cinematic slowness that challenges 'the fundamental problem [of] the exclusion and foreclosure of all that is judged unrepresentable because non-recurrent' (2017: 39). By recognising the unrepresentable and the unproductive, *Japón* therefore challenges the consumerist film industry and further resists the neoliberal eradication of unprofitability. To further explore this cinematic resistance, this chapter will now examine the film's more disturbing and controversial sex scene and, more specifically, rethink the overarching dialectics between the transcendental and the corporeal in both this scene and the film itself.

One noticeable controversy regarding this sex scene is the contrast between the man's authority and Ascen's submissiveness. If the copulation between the two characters can be regarded as a metaphorical de/reterritorialisation of the spiritual and the corporeal, this controversy reminds us of Sutton and Martin-Jones' warning about the power imbalance in the process of this kind of encounter (2008: 7). It is clearly the man who gives the instructions and commands. Some existing literature has pointed out how the old lady is asked by the director to undress in front of the camera and follow the instructions given by the man (Matheou 2003; Smith 2003: 50; Shaw 2011: 129). It is worth noting that Paul Julian Smith interprets this off-screen and on-screen exploitation as a betrayal of *Japón*'s 'avowed aim of [… showing] the superiority of the elderly, uneducated woman' (Smith 2003: 50). Indeed, Smith's analysis hints at the unconventional nature of this sexual encounter of an aged woman and also reveals an ethical debate about *Japón*'s naturalist and unrehearsed representation of intimate and sexual physicality at the expense of exposing the actor to voyeurism. Similarly, de Luca recalls Bazinian 'ontological obscenity' in the context of *Japón*'s realism and maintains that the onscreen reproduction of sex problematises the film's 'transcendental

connotation' and 'spiritual forthrightness' (de Luca 2014: 38–9). In fact, de Luca posits that the clash between Ascen's 'religious fervour' and the man's 'scepticism', along with the film's overarching dialectics between spirituality and carnality, formulates an 'obscene metaphysics' that reveals the inextricability of 'transcendental forces [and] sexual desire, flesh and blood' (2014: 42, 46). Acknowledging Smith's and de Luca's analyses, I will further contend that it is the slow, detailed, mechanical and unglamourised way of presenting the sex scene that ameliorates the power imbalance and sanitises the arguable voyeuristic eroticism, and that this naturalist onscreen sexual intercourse between the older Ascen and the man not only reveals a world caught between spirituality and corporeality but also recognises the existence of the unrepresentable and the unproductive. To elaborate on these two ideas, I will examine the last shot of this sex scene, a long shot that remains static for 26 seconds.

The framing of the shot is minimalist and clinical, with damaged walls enclosing a bed and a side table at the centre and some clothes on the floor. Both characters lie on the bed, and their nude bodies are not clearly shown due to their distance from the camera. Towards the end of the shot, a vast beam of light comes through the door on the right side of the frame and brightens up the room (see Figure 3.6). The sudden radiance is so bright that it renders the frame overexposed. This shot does not show any explicit onscreen sex; no eroticised voyeurism is found in this shot, not because there is no actual sex going on but because the camera simply records what is happening both diegetically and non-diegetically. With the uninterrupted documentary style of pure recording, the shot captures a sudden and vast beam of natural light. This unexpected radiance can in fact be viewed as profilmic contingency. According to Mary Ann Doane, profilmic contingency makes time visible, 'heterogeneous and unpredictable'; however, the danger of contingency 'resides in [its] alliance with meaninglessness, even nonsense. The vast continuum of a nonhierarchizable



Figure 3.6 – A contingent vast beam of light captured by the camera

contingency can overwhelm' (Doane 2002: 11). In this sense, Doane's argument reflects Lyotard's critique on the capitalist film market's impulse to oppress any excessive onscreen meaninglessness in order to rationalise and further commercialise the moving images. Drawing on Doane's and Lyotard's ideas, I argue that *Japón*'s inclusion of this contingent radiance of light, which renders the shot overexposed (a useless expenditure in Lyotard's view), neutralises the controversial eroticism with a sense of insignificant everydayness and embodies slow cinema's predilection for problematising and suspending the narrative progression by accentuating the presence of the unrepresentable and the meaningless.

In fact, the act of incorporating the unmarketable and unproductive contingency into the narrative provides a different reading on *Japón*'s dialectics between transcendence and corporeality. I argue that the cinematic metaphysical transcendence in *Japón* is less informed by spiritual and religious signifiers (Ascen as the embodiment of saintly attributes for instance) than by the 'intervention' of contingent everydayness in the narrative, which is captured by the protracted recording time and emphasises the unrepresentable presence of ineffability, excessiveness and meaninglessness. In this regard, the transcendental underpinning of the film shares the same discourse of the film's corporeality, eroticism, onscreen sex and nudity that, as I have discussed earlier, emancipates the oppressed unproductive excess, incongruity and meaninglessness.

Accordingly, transcendental spirituality and corporeal physicality no longer form a dialectical relation; instead, they present a rhizomatic and de-centring flux wherein the signified and the signifier of transcendence and obscenity deterritorialise and reterritorialise each other's excessiveness, unrepresentability and unproductivity. That is, the transcendental and the corporeal form a rhizomatic exchange in which a true mutual becoming takes place. This in-between mutual becoming results in a hesitant moment when the dialectical tension between transcendence and corporeality becomes blurred. Prolonged and deferred through the film's observational, detailed and long durational recordings, this moment of hesitation is equipped with resistant politics against not only the overgeneralising binary logic but also the capitalist and consumerist code of filmmaking.

3.5 Conclusion

I have begun this chapter with an enquiry into a Eurocentric reception of slow cinema that foregrounds a genealogical tracing of European modernist aesthetics and overlooks the cultural specificities embedded in a world of cinematic traditions. This reception can be found in *Japón*'s representation of an encounter between the urban and the rural and between Westernised modernity and marginalised indigenousness. In order to reveal a sense of interconnectedness in such a conflictual encounter and deconstruct the ambivalent reception of contemporary slow world cinemas, I have first explored Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's formulations of the rhizome, which challenge the dominant arborescent system's genealogical tracing, hierarchisation and binary logic. Within this ever-connecting rhizomatic system, each encounter between different ideas forms a de/reterritorialising exchange that indicates a real change, a heterogenous mutual becoming and a sense of in-betweenness, rather than a homogeneous amalgamation. Following Deleuze and

Guattari's idea of the rhizomatic system as an acentred cartography, I have further argued that this way of mapping resists the primacy of reading the world based on the overgeneralising global North/South and West/East divide. Applying this critical analysis to the enquiry into the Eurocentric reception of slow world cinemas, I have maintained that the representation of national specificity and the European modernist tendency should be regarded as two rhizome systems that form a de/reterritorialising exchange. In this sense, claiming that one system is more influential than and superior to the other runs the risk of reducing the de-centring potential of such an exchange to a centred hierarchisation, hence an establishment of a new power dynamics. Recognising Damien Sutton and David Martin-Jones' observation of a potential power imbalance in the de/reterritorialising exchange, I have pointed out how the double-edged effect of this kind of encounter lies in *Japón*'s images of dichotomy – urban/rural, modern/primitive and transcendental/corporeal – and also in the film's production and reception – the dynamics between its vernacular specificities, its peripheral status in the industry, its European modernist aesthetics and its cosmopolitan spectatorship.

Bearing this caveat in mind, I have then set out to examine *Japón*'s opening sequence, which encapsulates a contrast in a national context between the city and the village, and a genealogical connection between European art cinema and the art cinema traditions of different eras and regions. I have argued that, on the one hand, the film's enquiry into the national issue of Mexico's social and economic inequality is deterritorialised across national borders by the modernist art cinema trope of existentialism; on the other hand, the cinematic homage and reference to the tradition of European art cinema, which facilitates slow world cinemas' circulation around international film festival and metropolitan cinephile circuits, is in turn reterritorialised by the film's realist and documentary take on national images. Due to the realist effect of shooting on location, long takes, handheld camera

shots and non-professional actors, the film foregrounds profilmic contingency, which resonates with the rhizome's ever-becoming nature that has no fixed, predictable point. Drawing on Joanne Hershfield's analysis of 'post-national cinema' – contemporary national cinema that adopts modernist practices – I have further argued that the aforementioned ambivalent reception of *Japón* and other slow films reveals that a pure formalist analysis is impeded by this rhizomatic exchange and de-centring in-betweenness, caught between unfamiliar and opaque cultural specificities and familiar cinematic devices of modernist art cinema. I have thus revealed an ethics of hesitation in *Japón* that rethinks this kind of ambivalent reception by acknowledging the destabilising force within the incessant relay between deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, which leads to an act of resistance against the purely Eurocentric gaze at the film's manifestation of both modernist and vernacular sensibility.

I have further pointed out that this hybrid of a sense of cinephilic pleasure and illegible cultural unfamiliarity, which impedes that pleasurable feeling, reflects Jean-François Lyotard's formulation of the sublime. Bringing Hershfield's idea into dialogue with the idea of the sublime, I have argued that this hybridisation of legible modernist aesthetics and obscure vernacular representation results in a moment of hesitation, in which both pleasure and formidability emerge. This hesitant moment can be found in the botched suicide scene. The scene's juxtaposition of the man's suicide attempt and the immense natural landscape brings about a moment of hesitation when the sublimity of the magnitude of the canyon dwarfs a sense of foreboding and further suspends the death. Furthermore, by examining the camera angle and movement of the film's final tracking shot, which bring the metaphysical 'out-of-body' back down to earth and situate the earthly element between the infinitude of the natural landscape and the finitude of mortality, I have revealed that the feeling of the sublime embodies a de/reterritorialising exchange between the transcendental and the

corporeal. I have then moved on to examine how *Japón* brings the representation of erotic corporeality into this de/reterritorialising relation between the transcendental and the corporeal.

Drawing on Lyotard's conceptualisation of 'acinema', I have argued that the film's libidinally charged scenes embody hesitant moments that recalibrate the unmarketable and unproductive onscreen incongruity and excessiveness within the capitalist film market and industry. I have further maintained that, due to the observational and contemplative effect of long takes and realist cinematography, the series of eroticised shots in question emancipates the libidinal excess that is supposed to be subdued and thus disturbs a conventional sense of spectatorial identification and legible narrative. In this respect, by observing and encompassing the incongruous, the excessive, the unrepresentable and the unproductive in a long durational and detailed way, *Japón* therefore resists the discrimination against unprofitability exercised by the capitalist film industry and neoliberal modernity. I have then applied this resistant politics to rethinking *Japón*'s overarching dialectics between the transcendental and the corporeal by examining the film's controversial sex scene. I have firstly pointed out the power imbalance that lies in the two characters' sexual encounter, which can be regarded as a de/reterritorialising exchange between the spiritual and the corporeal. However, I have argued that the film's slow and unglamorised way of showing the copulation ameliorates the power imbalance and sanitises the arguable voyeuristic eroticism. Moreover, this naturalistic onscreen eroticism not only reveals a world caught between transcendence and corporeality but also recognises the existence of the unrepresentable and the unproductive. Elaborating on this idea, I have pointed out that the last shot of the sex scene neutralises the controversial eroticism with a sense of insignificant everydayness by capturing a contingent radiance of light. This incorporation of profilmic contingency embodies slow cinema's tendency to defer and suspend the narrative progression by accentuating both the presence of the

unrepresentable and the absence of meaning. Following this idea, I have argued that *Japón*'s transcendental implication is less informed by spiritual and religious signifiers than by the ineffability of this intervention of excessive and meaningless contingency. In this respect, the transcendental underpinning of the film is similar to the elements of erotic corporeality that unleash the oppressed and subdued unproductive excess, incongruity and meaninglessness. That is, the transcendental and the corporeal form a rhizomatic exchange wherein a true mutual becoming takes place and results in a moment of hesitation when the transcendence/corporeality dialectics becomes indiscernible. Through the film's observational recordings of this kind of fluid exchange, this hesitant moment becomes an act of resistance against overgeneralising binarism and the dominant commercial code of filmmaking.

By navigating and analysing *Japón*'s attentive and long durational recordings of a variety of encounters – the marginalised and the cosmopolitan, the national and the transnational, pleasurable modernist aesthetics and opaque cultural specificities, the transcendental and the corporeal – I have revealed that slow world cinemas depart from a centralised axiom of both national and European art cinema discourse through transforming a paradoxical and contrasting difference between two extremes into a rhizomatic exchange that keeps the world incessantly in flux. In the next chapter, I will turn to the de-dramatising effect and the focus on everydayness in the case of *Yi Yi* to further explore this de-centring potential of slow world cinemas.

4. AWARENESS:
YI YI

In this chapter, I will situate contemporary slow world cinemas' representations of de-dramatisation and their focus on everydayness within the sociopolitical and geopolitical specificity of Taipei, Taiwan in the case of *Yi Yi*. The film won director Edward Yang the Best Director Award at the 2000 Cannes Film Festival. Besides the appraisal received within the film festival circuit, the film has also been regarded by several press, including *Sight & Sound* and BBC, as one of the best films of the 21st century. With its slow and attentive gaze at Taipei at the turn of the 21st century, *Yi Yi* encapsulates the city's dialectical tension between neoliberal modernity and conservative vernacularism. This tension is also informed by the film's multi-strand narrative concerning the individual members of a family and their interpersonal (chance) encounters in the bustling and fast-paced metropolitan city. The film ostensibly displays a series of eventful occurrences: a pregnancy, a wedding, a house move, new neighbours, love affairs, an old flame, first love, an illness, an identity crisis, a bankruptcy, a scam, a newborn, a murder and a funeral. Whilst on the one hand, as the film's title suggests (in both Mandarin and English, *A one and a Two*), the urbanising force compresses the city's temporal lapse and the spatial distance between one and another incident or accident, on the other hand the way in which *Yi Yi* approaches this dramatic narrative is unhurried and understated. It is this tension between the dramatic and the undramatic that leads to a moment of hesitation that slows down the narrative progression and foregrounds the film's liminality between the diegetic representation of and the non-diegetic referent to everyday reality. Furthermore, this chapter will posit that this hesitant moment, under the guise of quotidian and banal everydayness, leads to a transnational empathy that rethinks and resists the hegemonic, fast-

forwarding, utilitarian and teleological value of neoliberal modernity. This critique addressed by *Yi Yi* is pertinent to not only the film's setting at the turn of the 21st century but also the current Taiwanese identity in the world system. By dissecting *Yi Yi*'s Taiwan-specific discourse of late-capitalism and neoliberal globalisation, this chapter argues that cinematic slowness facilitates the transnational impact of a localised voice rather than simply acknowledging the Eurocentric and globalising influence on regional and vernacular aesthetics.

4.1 Realist Drama or Dramatised Realism

Yi Yi's delicate familial tale comes across as dramatic. The film portrays the individual lives of the members of the Jian family. The father, NJ (Nien-Jen Wu), along with a group of old friends, runs a computer company that is in a period of transition from manufacturing to game development. He is unhappy with his partners' exploitative and dishonest ways of working with Mr Ota (Issei Ogata), the owner of the eponymous game design company, with whom NJ shares common values and befriends. Meanwhile, NJ reconnects with his old flame, Sherry (Su-Yun Ko). By secretly spending time with Sherry in Japan on a business trip, NJ relives his youth and recalibrates the current state of his life. NJ's wife, Min-Min (Elaine Jin), is distraught by the condition of her comatose mother. Through speaking to her mother about her day-to-day existence, she finds herself leading a meaningless life filled with repetitive routines. She later decides to temporarily leave her family and seek spiritual support. The couple's youngest son, Yang-Yang (Jonathan Chang), is misunderstood as a rascal and ridiculed by the dean of students for his 'avant-garde' photography. Whilst having trouble at school and experiencing his first crush on a girl, Yang-Yang also tries to figure out some of the philosophical meanings of life and death. The daughter, Ting-Ting (Kelly Lee), studying at a

top-ranking girls' high school, blames herself for her grandmother's stroke and, at the same time, engages in a complicated teenage relationship involving an unexpected murder.

In fact, the first 18 minutes of the film in particular can be viewed as a dramatic sequence filled with incidents – a pregnancy, a wedding, a failed relationship, a new neighbour, an old flame and a fatal stroke. The first dramatic moment happens when Yun-Yun (Hsin-Yi Tseng), the ex-girlfriend of NJ's brother-in-law, interrupts a wedding banquet and mentally breaks down. Another dramatic moment happens when NJ's old flame, Sherry, emotionally, although in a restrained way, reveals a sentimental episode from her past with NJ. However, there is an absence of any close-up shot that magnifies the characters' emotionally charged expressions. Furthermore, albeit eventful, *Yi Yi*'s settings and narrative predominantly centre around commonplace everydayness – a flat packed with miscellaneous items, offices, a classroom, busy street food vendors and so on. Moreover, as Nick James observes, in *Yi Yi* '[s]cenes are often viewed at a distance, through windows, half-closed doors, slender openings, in reflections or even from way off' and the prevalence of long shots creates a distance, in order to 'give as much weight to the environment as to the characters' state of mind' (James 2001: 15). In the same vein, Tony Rayns aptly points out *Yi Yi*'s complex mix of the drama of a Taiwanese family, universal 'psychological stress [and…] elements of soap opera and melodrama integrated as skilfully as its sense of the interconnectedness of things' (Rayns 2001: 53). Following Rayns' analysis, I will add that, rather than resulting solely from the common understanding of human emotions presented through dramatic and narrative elements, *Yi Yi*'s universalist force also emerges from the materiality of everyday objects and the realist effect of de-dramatisation, which together lead to a transnational empathy. To further elaborate on this argument, I will now turn to the relation between everydayness and cinematic realism. It seems natural that the cinematic depiction of everyday life has been associated with realism by scholars.

However, cinematic realism is a contested term that suggests that reality can be either *represented* through narrativisation or *presented* through pure recording onscreen; moreover, the significance of the idea of everydayness varies between different sociopolitical and geopolitical contexts. In this sense, it is worth exploring how these two malleable concepts find a meeting ground, and how a non-fiction film, such as documentary, and a fiction film, such as a slow film like *Yi Yi*, both achieve a sense of real by engaging in this meeting ground. Contending with this non-binary nature of cinematic realism, I will reveal that not only documentary or non-fiction films but also fiction films, slow films in particular, approach the real by navigating an oscillation between subjective narrativisation and objective observation.

4.2 Cinematic Realism in Non-Fictions

I will turn in this section to the immediate result of the debate taking place in the field of cinematic realism: the dichotomous reading between documentary and fiction, between literal presentation and mimetic representation of reality – a Lumière/Méliès binary. Indeed, this binary has been regarded as 'pernicious in its oversimplifications of fact and fiction' (Sarris 1968: 108). Andrew Sarris examines the Lumière/Méliès binary by reminding the reader of the evocative argument made by Guillaume (Jean-Pierre Léaud) in *La chinoise* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967): Lumière's literal recordings of Impressionist 'painterly subjects' are no more real than Méliès' fantastical representation of historical and current events of its time (1968: 108). Despite its acute awareness of the fallacy of a facile differentiation between fact and fiction, Sarris' essay falls short of rethinking binarism when it denounces cinema's 'impulse to seem real' as futile and documentary's inability to '[record] the [characters'] inner reality' whilst at the same time privileging the influence on and

dominance over cinematic realism of theatrical and dramaturgical naturalism (1968: 108, 111). Moreover, Sarris reveals a Eurocentric view when he attributes a romanticised impulse and an exoticised gaze to the documentary movement, to *Nanook of the North* (Robert J. Flaherty, 1922) in particular (1968: 110). For Sarris, since 'Nanook's *routines* and *rituals* [and] the Eskimo's *day-by-day* existence [belong to a] relatively primitive society', they are too exotic and hence only serve as 'picturesque subject[s] for the camera' (1968: 110; my emphasis). Following John Grierson's criticism, Sarris further contends that *Nanook of the North* is 'irrelevant to' and not contemporaneous in the context of 'the problems of modern industrial civilization' (Sarris 1968: 110). Sarris' assertions imply that, firstly, cinema's documentary and recording tendency is reduced to a mechanical observation of the outer layer of the real world with no subjective interference; secondly, that the filmic focus on '[non-]distinct, [non-]superior, [non-]specialized, and [non-]structured' everydayness is regarded as extraneous to the modern social fabric (Lefebvre 1991: 97); and finally, that if this cinematic attention is beyond the grasp of Western modernity, it fails to provide any progressive social criticism. I will now address the first implication by analysing João Moreira Salles' illuminating, but also problematic, evaluation of documentary, a genre that supposedly comes closest to the real.

Salles rethinks the entrenched idea that documentary draws an 'emphasis on objectivity, on uncontaminated access to reality, [and] on the film as a mirror held up to the world', and he further maintains that:

> It is important to emphasize that such concepts have rarely been defended by documentarians themselves. They are primarily the result of received wisdom, of a certain kind of journalistic approach, of misinformed reviewers who are alien to the

> painstaking process of choosing lenses, defining framing and especially selecting, discarding and splicing hours and hours of raw footage. (2009: 225)

Salles' words emphasise the subjective intervention of directing, cinematography and editing in the camera's indiscriminatory recording nature on which the objectivity of a documentary is believed to be predicated. For Salles, this interplay between subjectivity and objectivity reveals that documentary is both a 'record of something that took place in the world [… and] a narrative, a rhetoric drawing on recorded data' (2009: 228). It is on the basis of this characteristic 'oscillation between document and representation' (2009: 229) that Salles contends that *Nanook of the North* is 'the first documentary in film history' (2009: 225). Salles points out that, regardless of having being proved to contain staged content, *Nanook of the North* narrativises 'the record of Nanook' and, in doing so, achieves 'the relevant reality […] which is crafted by the author's imagination and expressed both during the shoot and the editing process' (2009: 228). Salles' ideas rightly prove that documentary approaches reality not only objectively but also subjectively; however, his belief in and emphasis on authorial intent fail to complement his insightful view on what defines a good documentary film. Salles argues that 'the ethical issue central for' documentarians is to keep in mind that 'the person filmed has a life of their own, regardless of the film' (2009: 232). In Salles' view, some of the best documentaries are about this encounter with the other's history, achieved through 'transform[ing] the formula "I speak about him/her to us" into "*He/she* and *I* speak about *us* to *you*"' (2009: 233; emphasis in original). Elaborating on this ethics of an encounter, he concludes that:

> Such films do not intend to speak about the other, but about an encounter with the other. They are open films, hesitant in relation to categorical conclusions on the essence of

> others. They do not abandon the pursuit of knowledge, but merely do not aspire to know everything. (2009: 233)

Indeed, as David Martin-Jones maintains, the cinematic encounter with the other 'offers [the viewer] the realisation that such a person, or even species, has a history [and] the chance to hesitate, and potentially to recognise *the relative centrality of their own place in world history*' (2019: 2; emphasis in original). Nevertheless, if this ethics of hesitation leads to a de-centring of the hegemonic view of the world, to foreground the authorial intrusion in this encounter is only to legitimate another dominant voice – that of the director. Of course, the encounter with a true event or a real person provided by documentary will not be an effective, or affective, one without authorial control of shooting, narrativising and even editing; however, it is also true that this manoeuvre of the auteur does not necessarily direct and guide the audience to a predetermined reality. For instance, *Sans soleil* (Chris Marker, 1983) encapsulates documentary's realist hybridisation of objective recording and subjective narrativisation charged with authorial ideologies, but the end result offers the viewer an encounter with a labyrinthine and malleable reality in which the director's voice is only part of many other personal histories and memories. In this sense, *Sans Soleil*'s realism lies in its understanding and awareness of the multifaceted nature of the reality crafted by a world of memories rather than by authorial imagination or interpretation. Hence, I argue that documentary's realist tendency does not rule out the subjective rendition of reality; nevertheless, this subjectivity should not privilege the dominance of a single voice but, instead, dismantle its potential centrality by maintaining an objective and critical distance from the recorded subjects. With this intricate balance between subjective selection of and objective distance from their subjects, documentary and other non-fiction films can reach the core of the real without

hegemonising the dominance of solipsism and homogenising different ways of approaching the fluid reality. In fact, it is worth noting that not only documentary and other non-fiction films but also fiction and narrative films – slow cinema in particular – achieve realism by exploring this oscillation between the subjective and the objective. Moreover, I will venture that this wavering between staged narrativisation and pure recording is where cinematic realism and the discourse of everydayness find a meeting ground. It is also this meeting ground that opposes the aforementioned Sarris' criticism, which claims that the everyday or the quotidian is not special or specialised enough to offer any urgent social critique relevant to the modern world.

4.3 Cinematic Everydayness in Fictions

Unlike non-fiction, fiction films do not require 'filmmakers and spectators [to] establish a contract' that guarantees the real-life existence and authenticity of what is shown on screen (Salles 2009: 224). Without this mutual agreement, science-fiction and superhero films are able to create futuristic and non-referential settings and characters. Of course, this does not imply that these films are less real because they do not alienate the emotional and psychological aspects of the characters in order to achieve the audience's identification; in short, they make the unfamiliar familiar. On the contrary, there are other types of films, like slow cinema, approaching the real by downplaying or even obscuring both the characters' psychological responses and the dramatic effects. They do this through maintaining an objective distance from their subjects by not psychoanalytically interpreting them and by maximising the presence of ordinary and banal everydayness; consequently, they find the unfamiliar in the familiar. In fact, this impulse to defamiliarise resonates with Henri Lefebvre's

critical study of the everyday in response to the incessant homogenising, standardising and exploitative force of modernisation and capitalism.

Lefebvre argues that 'it is in the most familiar things that the unknown – not the mysterious – is at its richest, and that this rich content of life is still beyond our empty, darkling consciousness' (1991: 132). Lefebvre's formulation of everyday life reveals that our research in specialised activities concerning the evolution of human minds and society – technology, science, politics and sometimes even philosophy – 'takes us too far, too "deep", we seek [them] in the clouds or in mysteries' (1991: 132). These activities, according to Lefebvre, do not necessarily inform and communicate with each other, and thus there is a 'technical vacuum' left between them (1991: 97); it is everyday life, 'in a sense residual, defined by "what is left over"' that fills the gap. Lefebvre elaborates on this idea by maintaining that:

> Everyday life is profoundly related to *all* activities, and encompasses them with all their differences and their conflicts; it is their meeting place, their bond, their common ground. And it is in everyday life that the sum total of relations which make the human – and every human being – a whole takes its shape and its form. In it are expressed and fulfilled those relations which bring into play the totality of the real […] (1991: 97; emphasis in original)

In this sense, Lefebvre formulates everyday life's 'dual character': 'the *residuum* (of all the possible specific and specialized activities outside social experience) and the *product* of society in general; it is the point of delicate balance and that where imbalance threatens' (1971: 32; emphasis in original). Indeed, in an era of relentless pursuit of teleological modernisation, everyday life is disregarded due to its non-specialised nature and interstitial presence. However, for Guy Debord, it also happens that

everyday life is ‘the stake in any revolutionary renewal of culture and politics’ (2006: 92). Debord argues that everyday life, ‘policed and mystified by every means, is a sort of reservation for the good natives who keep modern society running without understanding it’ (2006: 93). Consequently, although everyday life, compared with specialised activities, is closer to us and has a richer potential to elucidate reality, it is viewed as a threat by capitalist modernity, which misleads people into believing that their everyday lives are passive leisure times that are dedicated only to consumption; that non-everyday and specialised activities, such as advanced technological development and groundbreaking scientific research, are rational thinkings that improve and keep human conditions in uniformity, whereas, according to Lefebvre, they only consolidate the hierarchy for those who already possess these sets of special knowledge (Lefebvre 1987: 7). Albeit enlightening and revolutionary, specialised fields gain momentum by rationalising everyday living’s variability between ‘region[s] and countr[ies], levels and classes of the population, available natural resources, season, climate, profession, age, and sex’ (1987: 7). Under this homogenising force, the diversity of everyday life is reduced to ‘the repetitive gestures of work and consumption’ (Lefebvre 1987: 10). Furthermore, this repetition of work and consumption, as Lefebvre puts it:

> Is manipulated by producers: not by ‘workers’, but by the managers and owners of the means of production (intellectual, instrumental, scientific) [… In this sense,] the everyday constitutes the platform upon which the bureaucratic society of controlled consumerism is erected. (1987: 9)

Drawing on Lefebvre’s critique on everyday life’s ‘underdevelopment’, Debord condemns the ‘introduction of technology into everyday life [for establishing] the framework of modern

bureaucratized capitalism and reduc[ing] people's independence and creativity' (Debord 2006: 94). As Debord puts it, everyday life is 'colonized' (2006: 93) by:

> The totalitarian tendency of modern capitalism's organization of life: the isolated inhabitants (generally isolated within the framework of the family cell) see their lives reduced to the pure triviality of the repetitive combined with the obligatory consumption of an equally repetitive spectacle. (2006: 94)

In sum, everyday life, due to not only its richness in connecting diverse sectors but also its poverty of capitalist values for institutionalised and specialised activities, has been falsely turned into a politicised tool with which capitalist society is able to maintain its social order and function, supported by the never-ending cycle of work and consumption. In contrast, specialised activities and their purporters are offered a privileged position to rule and shape the grand narrative of a society that devalues the presence of everydayness. It is not far-fetched to contend that cinematic focus on everydayness encounters a similar difficulty in obtaining appreciation from a commercial standpoint – harking back to Lyotard's critique, which I have addressed in the two previous chapters, of the film industry's sole purpose of maximising the return under the capitalist system (Lyotard 2017: 34, 36).

It is worth noting that Lefebvre also points out that cinema turns away from everyday life by providing 'the spectacle of the distinctly noneveryday; violence, death, catastrophe, the lives of kings and stars – those who we are led to believe defy everydayness' (1987: 11). This spectacle – marketed, advertised and propagandised by the film industry's capitalist pursuits – immediately reveals slow cinema's resistance to the institutionalised commercial venue since the slow aesthetics heightens a sense of 'nothing happens' by employing an attentive and long durational gaze at the

insignificant and quotidian realm of reality. For Ivone Margulies, this 'resistance to institutionalization' is 'the utopian dimension of the everyday', but it also happens that the focus on the everyday, excluding specialised events, inevitably 'brushes against the conventional sense of everydayness as repetitious routine' (1996: 26). Since we cannot deny the existence of specialised activities in reality, the everyday, or 'the quotidian' in Margulies' view, paradoxically 'stands […] both for material reality and for the impossibility fully to account for it, to represent it' (1996: 26). Drawing a connection between this paradox of the everyday and cinema's attempt to record reality, Margulies maintains that:

> Hence the desire to represent materiality either concretely, by exacerbating cinematic elements, or thematically, by inscribing the signs of this reality (banal events, mundane gestures, actions irrelevant to the plot), becomes the trademark of a realist impulse. (1996: 26)

Following Margulies, along with the aforementioned critical formulations of the everyday, I will add that this paradox implies cinematic realism's incompleteness in fully presenting and representing the real world. Nevertheless, this imperfection does not render realism's ambition of faithfully approaching reality futile; instead, it equips realist aesthetics with a more acute awareness of extracting the unfamiliar from the familiar, balancing between the subjective and the objective, and combining the dramatic with the undramatic. It is on the basis of this formulation that *Yi Yi* oscillates between the dramatic and the undramatic without both maintaining an objective distance and de-dramatising at the expense of subjective emotions and dramatic narrative, and vice versa. In fact, this interplay between subjectivity and objectivity is illustrated by Yang-Yang's photography of the backs of people's heads. Being unable to capture that person's expression, a photo of the back of

someone's head supposedly obscures the subject's emotional response and thus reveals its own objective distance from subjectivity. However, when the photo is presented before the subject's eyes, it is an encounter between the photographed and his/her familiar but also unfamiliar – the uncanny – self. 'I would like to tell people what they don't know and show them what they cannot see', says Yang-Yang. This claim thus implies that a photo of the back of someone's head serves as an index of an ignored aspect of one's everyday reality, and that it reflects the realist impulse to provide people with a faithful record of and an encounter with an unfamiliar reality, a hidden reality that is neglected by a self-centred obsession with fast-forwardness – a ceaseless individualist pursuit of neoliberal and capitalist values of success. In this respect, cinematic focus on everydayness, like Yang-Yang's photography that is undervalued by capitalist society, addresses the issues of modernity by facilitating a hesitant moment when we encounter an unfamiliar perspective of reality that challenges the hegemonic capitalist values and system of modern society.

Of course, there are other examples in film history of achieving this balance between subjective narrativisation and objective recording. To be more specific, it is Italian neorealism that introduces a series of academic and critical interests in and debates on the onscreen (re)presentation of the reality we are both familiar and unfamiliar with.

4.4 The Dramatic and the Undramatic: The Meeting Ground of Realism and Everydayness

As mentioned in the Introduction, André Bazin hails those directors 'who put their faith in reality' (2005a: 24). Moreover, Bazin specifically regards the kitchen sequence from *Umberto D.* (Vittorio De Sica, 1952), which lasts around 4 and a half minutes and shows a maid getting up, lighting a match, doing chores and grinding coffee, as the epitome of cinematic realism (2005b: 81).

The physicality of the maid's gestures and the materiality of the mundane and everyday objects are given equal significance as the film's grand narrative. For Bazin, this disinterested and unbiased attention to 'the succession of concrete instants of life' undermines the drama, the dramatic (2005b: 81). In this sense, based on Bazin's formulation, realism is antithetical to the dramatic or the melodramatic[2]. Although Bazin aptly points out that Italian neorealism faithfully (re)presents reality through de-dramatisation, in Louis Bayman's view there is no doubt that this cinematic movement still 'is pervaded throughout by melodrama' (2009: 47). In his essay, Bayman examines and challenges an entrenched antithetical relation between realism and melodrama in neorealist films. He concludes that:

> Neorealism shows how the interaction of realism with melodrama is one way to reveal the suffering of ordinary people with vividness and authenticity, establishing the common realist concern to encourage empathy with the protagonists of a fiction, while maintaining a questioning focus on the reality outside of its frame. (2009: 60)

If Italian neorealism, whose aesthetics has been believed to have a huge impact on European modernism and slow cinema, encompasses both realism and melodrama, how does the similar effect of oscillating between the dramatic and the undramatic seen in contemporary slow films differentiate itself? Answering this question requires a differentiation between slow cinema's approach to the representation of the everyday and the de-dramatisation of neorealist films. Despite the fact that Italian neorealism established a realist tendency of de-dramatisation that influenced European modernist cinema of the late 1960s and the 1970s, to apply its dominant aesthetics to the

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[2] The term 'melodramatic' is applied here to respond to Louis Bayman's analysis, in which he refers to melodrama as 'the pathos of the expressive elevation of fundamentally ordinary feelings' (2009: 48).

reading of contemporary world cinema – slow films in this case – can be anachronistic. As Bayman rightly argues:

> Realism is not simply that which is 'realistic', nor is it one single set of properties, but rather a claim (open to argument and dependent on the conventions an audience is used to) that a particular artwork reaches closer to an important, otherwise neglected, aspect of reality. Realism then is not a fixed attribute, but a relationship between text, reality and audience that changes as does the culture in which it operates. (2009: 47)

Indeed, neorealism's predilection for non-professional casts, filming on location, long takes and the depiction of the poor's struggle during the post-war period brings to the fore both what is on the margin of society and what is outside the realm of narrative and dramaturgical attention. Nevertheless, if we look at the films of the European modernist canon in the late 1960s and the 1970s, cinematic realism is achieved by heightening the effect of reflexivity, radicalising shot durations and raising 'acute awareness of 70s' micropolitics, and of feminism in particular' (Margulies 1996: 41). Employing *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Chantal Akerman, 1975) as one of her case studies, Margulies contends that the attention given by neorealism 'to the marginal discourse is a certain idealism', whilst, in *Jeanne Dielman*, the weight of the mundane and 'a minimal-hyperrealist style' shift the neorealist humanistic or 'romantic connotations' to a literal and stylised form of 'social attention' (1996: 23). According to Margulies, this new cinematic attention to 'nonspecialized labor, private life, [and] unstructured or extrainstitutional activity or thought' provides a meeting ground for 'modernism, realism and politics' (1996: 23). Similar to Bayman's and Margulies' objectives, this chapter aims to search for a diachronically and demographically renewing and diverse politics of realism and everydayness that interacts either in tandem or in conflict with narrativised or dramatised moving images.

After examining the differences between the realist impulses of neorealism and European modernism, I will now return to realism as presented in contemporary slow cinema. Unlike with neorealism, contemporary slow films' focus on the neglected aspect of reality does not necessarily reflect the suffering of poverty. Although some examples, such as the two preceding case studies – *Stray Dogs* and *Japón* – do provide social critiques on the neoliberal exploitation of the poor and of people living on the margins, we also see depictions in both *Yi Yi* and *Solitary Fragments* (the case study in the following chapter) of the everyday struggles and conflicts of the middle class under the influence of capitalist society. In *Yi Yi*, NJ is affected by the industrial transition under a changing globalised economy; Min-Min is trapped in lifeless routines informed by the capitalist impulse to standardise and rationalise time; Yang-Yang's artistic and humanistic sensibility is devalued by both an education system and societal expectation that appreciate utilitarian values and lucrative careers; Ting-Ting's innocence is confronted by teenage angst that reflects the influence of mediated violent images on the younger generation. Although Nick James regards *Yi Yi*'s depiction of an 'ordinary technocrat's middle-class family' as a 'universal context' (2001: 16), some issues in the film regarding Taiwan and its social transformation at the turn of the 21st century can be related to only by a domestic audience. For instance, as Ling-ching Chiang aptly observes:

> NJ's marriage with [*sic*] Min-min reflects the most common mode of inter-marriage in Taiwan: native Taiwanese and second generation mainlanders. Min-min's mainlander mother is represented as a symbol of the Old China (she still wears the traditional *qipao*) that Taiwanese people have to confront on a daily basis even in an era of globalization. Throughout the film we never hear Min-min's mother speaking because she is in a coma, but the impact of her absence on the whole family is a forceful metaphor for the interlaced relationship between Taiwanese society and Chinese tradition. (2013: 170)

Nevertheless, the realist device of de-dramatisation – the use of long takes and long shots and the equal attention to both the diegetic drama and the materiality of reality's intervention – results in a sense of hesitation that places the audience at a liminality between their own cultural understandings and those of the others: an in-betweenness of ourselves and the other, a potential becoming-other. It is worth noting that Margulies' idea of 'the hesitation between the literal and the symbolic registers' found in *Jeanne Dielman* and other hyperrealist films is slightly different from mine (1996: 46). On the one hand, according to Margulies, the hesitant moment found in the hyperrealist and defamiliarising effect of recording 'excess of detail' for a long duration reminds the viewer of a reflexive corporeality: 'of cinema, of the actor/performer, of the spectator' (1996: 46). This thesis, on the other hand, argues that the dramatic elements situate *Yi Yi* in a socially and culturally specific context, whilst the realist and de-dramatising tendency creates a hesitant moment that allows the global audience to empathetically make sense of the foreign, *the other's*, issue by de-centring *us*. That is, the dynamic between the dramatic narrative and the focus on realist everydayness in *Yi Yi* leads to a transnational empathy. Consequently, this cross-border empathy responds to slow cinema's potential to de-centre and resist the solipsistic and hegemonic view of knowing the world.

4.5 Empathy in Technological Intervention in Everyday Life

This empathetic understanding can be found not only at the level of transnational spectatorship but also in the film's exploration of empathy in an age of digital and technological intervention in everyday life. It can be found in the sequence where A-Di (Hsi-Sheng Chen), NJ's brother-in-law,

accompanies his pregnant wife, Hsiao-Yen (Shu-Sheng Hsiao), to a foetal ultrasound. Meanwhile, a female voice is heard saying, 'It begins to acquire signs of human life. It begins to think'. The shot then cuts to the screen displaying the sonogram of the baby, and the voice continues: 'It then matures into a living entity and becomes our most devoted companion'. The audience might assume that the voice-over is commenting on the journey of growing up; however, the voice continues to say: 'That's the limitless future for computer games. We haven't yet surpassed fighting and killing games. Not because we haven't fully understood computers. But because we haven't fully understood ourselves: human beings'. The audience will not realise that the voice comes, in fact, from Mr Ota's interpreter until they see the next shot, which shows NJ and his business partners in a meeting with Mr Ota. This dissonance between the visual and the oral is disorientating at first glance, but it reveals how empathy engages in the modern discourse of the interdependence between human beings and technology and, moreover, between humanity and the ethics of mediated images. According to Ivy I-chu Chang, the variety of screens and monitors (ultrasound scan, CCTV, projection screen, camcorder, etc.) shown in the film suggests that 'optical technologies substitute for our physical eyes for us to see what was previously invisible' (2019: 35). Chang also dissects this sequence by arguing that:

> Suturing the ultrasonic-scanned image of unborn baby and the demonstration of video game with off-screen sounds suggests that media and virtual reality technologies not only simulate the formation and destruction of life, but also intervene everyday reality, shaping modern people's structure of feeling [*sic*]. (2019: 36)

Indeed, two decades later, the film's comment on computer games, expressed through Mr Ota, is still relevant. Although the games industry nowadays provides its customers with categories other

than killing and fighting, its impacts, both good and bad, on modern society and human interaction have grown exponentially thanks to the advent of the internet, smart phones and tablets. Moreover, in recent years, an unprecedented level of monitoring and analysis of consumerist patterns with the help of online algorithms and big data problematises Mr Ota's concern with the lack of understanding of ourselves, of humans. The supply of this new form of customised and tailored content provides and advertises an abundance of products catering to consumers' preferences. In other words, this capitalist mechanism monetises human participation in technology under the guise of offering 'user-friendly' services. An ethical conundrum thus comes to the fore: the more we invest our understanding of human behaviours in technology, the more likely we are to be controlled and surveilled by it. Nevertheless, the dissonant and parallel juxtaposition of the image of a sonograph and the voice-over describing the limited future of computer games suggests that to overturn this technological exploitation and breach of humanity requires us to empathetically recalibrate the interdependence between technology and ourselves. Although the ultrasound turns the foetus, a living entity, into a simulacrum, and the voice-over, which believes in the animate features of computer games, transforms the unborn baby into a humanoid, human emotion (the married couple's joy brought about by the mediated image of their baby) and telepathic understanding of the other (NJ's silent but approving agreement with Mr Ota's outlook for computer games) show that the interdependence between human beings and technology is built not on capitalist interest but, instead, on a humanistic and empathetic sensibility.

It is now clear that *Yi Yi*'s attitude towards technology and digitalised mediated images is positive overall, as long as the purpose and usage take ethics, humanity and empathy into account. However, it seems that, amongst the aforementioned modern screens and optical technologies, the CCTV footage and news broadcasting (i.e. Taiwanese TV news media, within the scope of this

chapter) shown in the film are the most problematic when it comes to searching for empathy in technological intervention in modern society. Whilst the former's pervasive surveillance implies technology's lack of ethical justification for its invasion of privacy, the latter's sensationalism insinuates its excess of psychological or emotional manipulation in pursuit of a wider viewership.

In fact, it is worth noting that *Yi Yi* addresses the ethical issues concerning both types of image by questioning whether the problems lie in the technological intervention itself or in our usage of and response to it. For instance, in an early scene, a shot shows a monitor displaying live footage of Ting-Ting and her grandmother entering the lobby of the apartment building. The next shot cuts to another monitor showing footage from another security camera in a lift; it shows Ting-Ting and her grandmother walking into the lift. After the lift door closes, the camera (not the security camera) moves upwards and shows the monitor seen in the last shot, which now reveals Fatty attempting to enter the building but being locked outside. The effect of incorporating the surveillance screens into the narrative focus on everyday banality in this scene is twofold: due to the synchronicity across the two CCTV monitors, the scene reveals a missed encounter between Ting-Ting and Fatty and thus injects an aestheticising and dramatising effect into the everyday; and the uneventfulness of the scene foregrounds the surveillance apparatus's mechanical and indiscriminate nature of pure recording. The coexistence and convergence of two narrative strands (a missed encounter in this case) is a common modernist or postmodernist literary and cinematic narrative device, which Fredric Jameson terms 'synchronous monadic simultaneity' (SMS) (1995: 115). For Jameson, this device brings a 'purely aesthetic' effect that:

> Is conceivable only in conjunction with the work of art, cannot take place in real life, and has something to do with the omniscient author. These occurrences remain disjoined, unknown to each other, their interrelationship, causal or other, being a non-

> existent fact, event, or phenomenon, save when the gaze of the Author, rising over miniature roof-tops, puts them back together and declares them to be the material of story-telling, or Literature. (1995: 114)

Consequently, Jameson argues that the 'Irony' of this device is that 'no human subject has ever known it as an existential experience (save in reading a book), nor has ever witnessed it as an observing eye' (1995: 115). However, this aesthetic effect by design becomes a record of real-life experience through the lens of the surveillance medium's nature of capturing profilmic contingent events. Although Ting-Ting and Fatty are still ignorant of their ephemeral missed encounter, an episode that aestheticises their crossed paths later in the film, the CCTV cameras' recordings serve as diegetic proof that enables the two characters to discover their brief co-presence if the narrative progression requires them to do so. In this sense, the scene inscribes the narrative and aesthetic device of SMS with an extra-diegetic referentiality of real-life events and experiences. In fact, albeit implicitly, the film's narrative suggests that the recorded images from CCTV cameras can be resorted to to reveal whether the grandmother does take the bin bag to the waste collection point because Ting-Ting forgets to do so – an omission that indirectly causes the grandmother's stroke; it also indicates that the images can be used to provide visual aids for the police in solving, and the news media in reporting, the murder committed by Fatty – a dramatic episode that takes place towards the end of the film. However, the film never shows the CCTV footage of these two incidents. For instance, regarding the cause of the grandmother's sudden stroke, the film only shows NJ and Min-Min wondering why she has fainted on the driveway by the waste collection point and Ting-Ting feeling guilty about not remembering – if she does forget – to take the bin bag out. Although an earlier shot shows Ting-Ting's negligence and hints that the grandmother might indeed carry the bin bag downstairs to the waste collection point, it is far-fetched to blame Ting-Ting for

this dramatic and life-changing event. Just like the characters, the film does not resort to the CCTV footage to figure out how the accident happens, but instead focuses on each family member's re-evaluation of day-to-day life through their talking to the comatose grandmother, and even confessing to her their own 'frustrations, gilts [*sic*], and hidden secrets' (Chang 2019: 38). The film seems to suggest that every family member except Ting-Ting chooses to bypass the blame game that results from either knowing or not knowing the facts recorded in the CCTV footage. In this sense, although surveillance technology's borderline between privacy intrusion and the preservation of useful records is debatable, it is also critical to take into account our sensible participation in and decisions about the usage of technology when it comes to the discussion of technological intervention in our daily lives. It is worth a reminder here that the film's decision to include the CCTV footage showing that the grandmother is accompanied by Ting-Ting also responds to this discussion. The film reveals a humanistic aspect of surveillance technology by presenting a familial bond and a banal interaction between the two generations captured by CCTV cameras (the multigenerational family is a common household type in Taiwan).

There is another sequence that includes a series of CCTV footage capturing Yang-Yang running back to the campus after he skips school during the noon recess (a 40-minute siesta-time after the lunch break). The sequence begins with Yang-Yang sneaking out of the classroom with a film camera and visiting a photography studio to buy a new roll of film and collect his developed photos. The film then cuts to an extreme close-up of a corner of a CCTV screen that shows a pixellated recording of Yang-Yang running back towards the campus. The following shot shows a slightly wider angle of the same screen, where four different images captured by different surveillance cameras are simultaneously displayed. The CCTV screen shows Yang-Yang running along the wall outside the campus, through the entrance and into the school building. He is later

sent to the staffroom where the dean of students derides his photographs as expensive avant-garde art. It seems that Yang-Yang's creativity is criminalised by the black-and-white judgements of both the surveillance camera and the education system. Nevertheless, as Ling-ching Chiang aptly points out, it is 'the teacher and the rigid educational system in Taiwan' rather than the CCTV images that pass judgement on Yang-Yang's photography (2013: 177). Despite catching Yang-Yang in the act, the CCTV footage is equipped with a judgemental gaze only when it serves the didactic purpose of disciplining Yang-Yang and establishing the dean of students' authoritarian pedagogy. Furthermore, the shot of the CCTV screen is accompanied by an off-screen sound of students learning Mandarin by reading from a textbook – a traditional spoon-feeding way of teaching. The voice-over of recitation – a sound representing a sense of obedience – hints that Yang-Yang's interests in photography is deemed anomalous by an education system that discourages independent thinking and creative expression, and that his mobility, which is driven by this anomalous passion, leads him to break a school rule. Without the judgement made by the authoritative and institutional regulations set by the dean of students and the rigid education system, the CCTV recordings of Yang-Yang's mischief do not necessarily have connotations of discipline and control. Moreover, the film suggests that the CCTV footage can be as fragmented and abstract as Yang-Yang's photographs. Both types of image, regardless of the mechanical differences between the two apparatuses, record physical reality in an obscure and incomplete way. For instance, the CCTV recordings, pixellated and flickering, respectively gaze at certain corners around the campus, whilst Yang-Yang's photos are out of focus and capture illegible segments of everyday spaces and objects. This comparison by no means implies that the security camera recordings distort the truth; instead, it is a reminder that the impact and intention of a technological intervention can be shaped or manipulated for specific purposes and by specific users. That is, although both images present only partial aspects of

physical reality, in the view of the school's authorities the footage serves as compelling evidence of Yang-Yang's misconduct whilst the photographs are derided as unintelligible and meaningless.

The film's critical stance on technology's intervention in everyday life is also applied in the sequence containing a TV news report on the murder committed by Fatty. As mentioned earlier, CCTV footage can be helpful to the police in investigating crime and to the news media in producing authentic reports. Nevertheless, Taiwanese mass media's reports are often shaped by sensationalism and consumerism even though access is provided to the neutral and factual information recorded by CCTV cameras. The sequence starts with Ting-Ting, whilst being interrogated in a police station, watching the news about Fatty killing the English tutor of Lili, the daughter of Ting-Ting's new neighbour. A series of footage from the news report shows Fatty being handcuffed in a police station; a close-up of his dimly lit face; a photo of Lili's tutor; Mrs Jiang, Lili's mother, being surrounded and interviewed by a crowd of reporters; bloody handprints on a pillar and bloodstains on the ground outside the apartment building; and an animated image of a fighting game simulating and recreating the moment of killing. Although there is no CCTV footage in this sequence, it is still worth comparing the images recorded by CCTV cameras and those in the news report to reveal *Yi Yi*'s critique of technological intervention in our daily lives. If we look only at the mechanical aspect of both types of camera, the images recorded by them are the products of pure recording and are thus essentially unbiased; however, the news footage is likely to be edited, or even manipulated, to create finger-pointing and construct black-and-white moral judgements. Indeed, CCTV footage that records the whole process of a murder is more graphic and probably more unsettling than news footage that shows only the bloodstained crime scene. Nevertheless, it is this unfiltered and unedited recording of an event that renders CCTV footage objective. By contrast, a TV news report is like a montage sequence composed of a series of footage that contains objective

recordings of real events; however, the way in which this is edited or narrativised and its subject choice are based on a reporter's or a journalist's subjectivity and ethical sensitivity. In this sense, it can be argued that a news report, like a documentary film or a film of slow cinema, approaches reality by oscillating between objective recording and subjective narrativisation. Hence, it has the potential or even the responsibility of offering its viewer an ethical journalistic and investigative interpretation of objective and factual information that leads to an empathetic rather than a biased understanding of an event. Seen from this critical perspective, the news report sequence reveals how Taiwanese TV news media fail to enlighten the public nowadays.

In the TV news report sequence, we hear a reporter's off-screen voice saying that Fatty's motive for the murder is that he suspects the tutor and Lili of having a sexual relationship. When the off-screen voice mentions that the intimate relationship between the tutor and Lili's mother further complicates the case, the film shows four shots of Mrs Jiang being surrounded by cameras, microphones and tape recorders and getting annoyed by a crowd of reporters who chase and follow her closely. In his article concerning Taiwanese media culture, Chris Fuchs rightly observes that this type of 'in-your-face, no-holds-barred reporting that manages to be simultaneously sensationalist and mundane' has dominated the media landscape in Taiwan (2014). Thanks to the lifting of martial law in 1987, Taiwanese media today are to enjoy 'the freedom they possess (and arguably abuse)' (Fuchs 2014). The end of martial law has meant that the Taiwanese cultural and media sectors have been freed from heavy censorship, have moved away from 'politically dominated cultural production and [have accelerated] the emergence of a new cultural field already increasingly subject to market forces and the effects of globalization' (Chang 2005: 13). On the one hand, Taiwan has for the past two decades boasted one of the most liberal media cultures in the world; on the other hand, the privatisation and corporatisation of the media industry encourage

market-driven competition in pursuing a wider viewership. In this regard, Taiwanese media critics maintain that the growing domination of '[t]he macabre, salacious, and ridiculous stuff' in Taiwanese media also results from its popularity amongst the public (Fuchs 2014). In fact, the animation of the fighting game, simulating the murder scene, manifests this problematic consumer-driven media culture. At first glance, this animated image can be viewed as a response to Mr Ota's feeling that video games are failing to exceed the scope of killing and fighting. For Ivy I-Chu Chang, this simulation:

> Not only suggests the inter-permeability and mutual influence between simulacra and reality but also makes parody of Taiwan's journalism turning to entertainment business, a phenomenon arising in Taiwan in the '90s, following the Hong Kong mass media's invasion into Taiwan [*sic*]. (2019: 37)

Accordingly, the sequence reflects the film's overall stance on the discussion of technological intervention in modern society – it is the way in which we use technology and our ethical response to the impacts this usage might have that should be taken into account. Moreover, as Chang's observation of the relationship between simulacra and reality suggests, not only video games but also films might potentially have had an impact on Fatty's violent action. This reading can be found in the shot where Fatty says to Ting-Ting, 'We never killed anyone, but we all know what it's like to kill. That's what we get from the movies'. However, it is worth noting that Fatty is also aware that cinema can portray the everyday landscape in both a realist and an aestheticised way. Here, again, the film engages with the ethical issue of mass media's influence on message dissemination by foregrounding human participation in, and the exploitation of the neutrality of, media technology.

In this sense, this attitude towards technology and media's intervention also responds to the aforementioned question as to whether realist films, especially those that focus on or come from places outside the West, advocate traditional values and ways of living by ignoring and criticising the enhancement of technology and modernisation, thus failing to offer any urgent or progressive views on modern society. In fact, this entrenched idea can also be dismantled by looking at cinematic realism's 'respect for the unity of space' (Bazin 2005a: 46) and duration. Although realist cinema presents images that are direct referents to the real world, this characteristic, which is absent in digitally made images, does not 'prevent [realist films] across the world from resorting to the digital for realistic ends', especially shooting on location and longer takes (Nagib 2011: 7). Moreover, slow cinema, all my cases studies included, has been dealing with the urgent tension between the globalising force of neoliberal values and conservative vernacularism exactly through focusing on the local specificity of one single city, region or country. In the same vein, Ling-ching Chiang also opposes this facile formula of 'technological equals purely global/Western':

> Not only because globalization has been integrated extensively into Taiwanese identity, while technology has been a defining element of Taiwan's economy as *Yi Yi* reflects realistically, but also because this ideology is still operated under an assumption that for a film to be 'Taiwanese', it must have a certain look. (2013: 172)

Chiang's idea epitomises *Yi Yi*'s sensibilities of exploring the identity of a city, and even a nation, caught between its traditional roots and the impact of globalisation. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Chiang views the comatose grandma, who belongs to the generation that emigrated from mainland China, as a metaphor for the diminishing influence of traditional Chinese values. Meanwhile, we see the force of globalisation dotted around every corner of the city, especially in

the consumerist/mass entertainment (McDonald's, Hollywood blockbusters and multiplexes) and technology (the computer industry's transition period) sectors. For Chiang, *Yi Yi* captures this interaction right from the start of the film, when it shows the Grand Hotel, where the wedding banquet is being held. The decision to include this building, whose 'architectural design combining Chinese classical style and modernism [, …] describe[s] the story's contemplation of Taiwan as a unique site interweaving local consciousness, Chinese tradition and global capitalism' (2013: 174).

4.6 Localised Everydayness, Transnational Awareness

The film carries this exploration of Taiwan's identity into another intricate sequence of parallelism, crosscutting back and forth between Tokyo and Taipei; between the colonial past and the modernised present; and between the virtual past and the actual present. It begins with a static long shot of a Tokyo cityscape, where multiple parallel train tracks dominate two thirds of the lower frame and converge at a vanishing point. The off-screen conversation between NJ and Sherry is reminiscent of their first date. The sequence next cuts to a series of shots showing, in Taipei, Ting-Ting getting out of a lift and bumping into Lili's English tutor, who looks anxious and apologetic; trying on her outfits in front of the mirror in her bedroom; going out of the lobby of the apartment building and leaving frame left whilst Mrs Jiang coming into the frame from the right; meeting Fatty outside the building, as he getting on his bike, and going on her first date with him. The ensuing slow tracking shot cuts back to NJ and Sherry on a busy platform, each talking about their own family life. When NJ is speaking about Ting-Ting, a train is coming into the platform from the right side of the frame. The shot then immediately cuts away to Ting-Ting and Fatty, walking alongside an array of backlit film poster displays. After Ting-Ting asks Fatty the time and he

replies, ‘Nine [pm]’, the off-screen voice from Sherry says, ‘It’s almost 10 [pm here in Japan] … that’s 8 am in Chicago’. The shot cuts again and now shows NJ and Sherry walking across a level crossing that reminds them of a long gone equivalent in Taipei. NJ starts recounting the first time he held Sherry’s hand at this level crossing in Taipei’s Ximending district on their way to the cinema. The following shot cuts away to Ting-Ting and Fatty; he slowly takes her hand whilst they are waiting at a pedestrian crossing with a busy pedestrianised precinct and a backlit film poster display in the background. The next shot soon jumps back to NJ and Sherry, now holding hands and waiting for the train to pass through the level crossing. ‘Now I’m holding your hand again. Only it’s a different place…’, says NJ. The following shot cuts to Ting-Ting and Fatty, crossing the road hand-in-hand, with NJ’s voice-over saying, ‘A different time… a different age…’. The shot ends with Sherry replying, ‘But the same sweaty palm’.

The parallel editing immediately resonates with a Proustian sense of involuntary memory and a Deleuzian understanding of the crystal-image. Although not straightforwardly applying both theories, Ivy I-Chu Chang contends that this spatiotemporal parallelism ‘signifies that NJ and Sherry’s sense of “the present” in Tokyo is permeated by their memory of their “past” in Taipei’ (2019: 32). Nevertheless, her ensuing analysis seems to deviate from both theorists, in her argument that ‘the disappearance of railroad crossing [*sic*] in Taipei exemplifies that the past cannot be undone; though “here and now” can invoke “there an [*sic*] then,” the present and the past cannot be interchanged’ (2019: 32). Clearly, since Chang focuses only on the physical disappearance of a material object, she regards the characters’ reminiscence as an intangible and irretrievable nostalgic sentiment that completely detaches itself from the present; however, I will maintain that the sequence’s parallelism sees beyond this absolute temporal detachment and distinction by capturing

time in a crystalline, ever-splitting and mutually informed division between the actual present and the virtual past. As Gilles Deleuze puts it:

> What we see in the crystal is therefore a dividing in two that the crystal itself constantly causes to turn on itself, that it prevents from reaching completion, because it is a perpetual *self-distinguishing*, a distinction in the process of being produced; which always resumes the distinct terms in itself, in order constantly to relaunch them. (1997c: 81–2; emphasis in original)

In this sequence, each shot picks up where the previous one has left off – a relay or a circuit that brings the preserved memories into dialogue with the passing present. The shots of NJ and Sherry, representing a relived past, and the shots of Ting-Ting and Fatty, serving as a sense of déjà vu, together form a crystal-image, 'the point of indiscernibility of the two distinct images, […] the very distinction between the two images which keeps on reconstituting itself' (1997c: 82). It is worth noting that there are two transition effects between one shot and the other in this sequence: the quantitatively synchronised time differences between time zones and the qualitatively multiplied durational flow between the actual present and the virtual past. Despite connecting the different parts of the world through synchronisation, the rational calculation of time differences only serves as a reminder for our intellect, which is what maintains homogenised temporal continuity. By contrast, the graphic match between the virtual recollections and the actual present, instead of homogenising two nations' temporal and spatial individualities, interweaves Japan and Taiwan through both their similarities, induced by the characters' memories, and their differences, diversified by their respective local and cultural specificities. Based on this formulation, this thesis acknowledges Ling-ching Chiang's analysis of 'the affinity between Taiwan and its ex-colonizer,

Japan' (2013: 171). For Chiang, the sequence's parallelism suggests that, on the one hand, NJ and Sherry's reminiscence elicited by the resemblance between the two cities responds to Taiwan's previous colonised status and 'residuals of its colonial past when NJ and Sherry were young' (2013: 171); on the other hand:

> The highly frequent transnational flow of the East Asian region still needs to be placed with local experiences in order to generate meaning, and in the case of Taiwan, the national history is still a crucial part in people's identity formation that has not yet been replaced by globalization. (2013: 171)

However, a less discussed comparison between Taiwan's past and its modern landscape in an age of globalisation problematises Chiang's argument. NJ's memory of a film date in Ximending district, which was and still is famous for its cinema street, is followed by the shot where Ting-Ting and Fatty are standing in a busy pedestrianised precinct and in front of a backlit film poster display. Guided by parallel editing, the audience might assume the place where Ting-Ting and Fatty have a date is in Ximending district; nevertheless, the setting is actually located in Xinyi district, a sought-after capitalist district of urban regeneration that boasts a modern multiplex. Although the cinema street in Ximending district still remains iconic and popular, the whole district is in decline compared with the regeneration and increasing commercialisation of Xinyi district. In this sense, the sequence reveals a neoliberal cycle of rise and decline: the disappearance of the Ximending district level crossing is suggestive of an urban renewal project in the area's past; however, Ximending's once prosperous status will be gradually replaced by another district undergoing a more modern regeneration plan. Two decades after the film was released, Xinyi district is now a hotspot for foreign investment and is filled with department stores, high-end retail, skyscrapers,

high-rise modern offices and luxurious penthouses. Consequently, the parallelism in this sequence not only reveals the Japan–Taiwan transnational history and sentiment but also examines how neoliberal globalisation engages in and destabilises both the actual and virtual interdependence of two nations. Moreover, the sequence's intricate wavering between the diegetic spatiotemporal parallelism and the non-diegetic perceptibility of urban everyday politics slows down the rhythm created by crosscuttings and cutaways. Instead of hastily alternating between the two spatially distant places, the sequence encompasses a true duration in which time infinitely splits into the actual present and the virtual past within a finite number of shots.

So far, this chapter has revealed that *Yi Yi* approaches reality through realist and de-dramatising devices and achieves a transnational empathetic understanding due to its impartial and balanced presentations of the interplay between the subjective narrativisation and non-diegetic materiality of the everyday, between the neoliberal prioritisation of modernisation and the conservative preservation of cultural specificities. Through the film's slow and attentive recording of these complicated dialogues, the unbiased observation at first situates the audience at a liminal hesitant moment that later leads to resistance to a purely solipsistic and hegemonic view of the world. However, similar to its adoption of long takes and de-dramatisation, the film's disinterested stance of recording everydayness in an era of late-capitalism, globalisation and neoliberalism might run the risk of becoming formulaic and generalising the local specificity of both Taiwan and the city of Taipei in order to achieve universal understanding.

This possible reading is informed by the scholarly attention paid to the film's international circulation. For instance, Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang maintains that *Yi Yi* and most of the films of Taiwan New Cinema find success on the international film festival circuit, and that '[t]his subject[s] the filmmakers to the creative standards, rules, and conventions governing what is generally

understood as the international art film' (2005: 23). Chang further discovers that *Yi Yi*'s modernist themes that address the 'information-technology-based global capitalis[t]' issue of 'rampant materialism and lack of spirituality' bring forward the film's 'global rather than purely domestic set of determination' (2005: 24). Indeed, addressing social critiques on global issues can attract the attention of a wider international audience. However, this critical subject should not silence the voice of the heterogeneous local and cultural individualities but rather question whether the global community, the one that tends to centralise Western domination and cultural colonisation, is aware of and recognises the discourse brought forward and discussed by the cinema of periphery. In this regard, it is the geopolitical, spatial, temporal and cultural specificity that diversifies and destabilises any fixed and 'core definition of national identity' (Stone 2018: 271) established under the homogenising influence of globalisation. For James Tweedie, in choosing as its subjects and settings Taiwan – 'becom[ing] integral to global economy' – and the city of Taipei – 'a central concern in new wave cinema' – at the turn of the 21st century, *Yi Yi* captures the nation's 'provisional centrality and its political marginality' and the city's 'enormity and its impermanence' (2013: 192). The dual status of centrality and marginality manifests itself in the fact that whilst Taiwan's economy thrives on the capitalist and neoliberal free market, and the nation's political system shares much with Western democratic values, the country is politically excluded from most multilateral international organisations due to its de facto status. However, this marginalised status leads Taiwan down a new path, towards breaking away from its old Chinese values and searching for its new identity. Further elaborating on Taiwan's unstable identity as depicted in *Yi Yi*, Tweedie contends that the film's prominent aesthetics of superimposing reflecting surfaces on the filmed buildings reveals an interaction between 'structures and reflections' – between the architectural quality of 'presence, structure, stability' and the reflecting image's

'tendency toward disappearance, flux, and instability' (2013: 193). This interplay, according to Tweedie, shows that:

> Taiwan's hub of international commerce extends as far as the eye can see and dissolves into pure image. Suspended between screen and substance, enveloping us in the most undeniable physical presence and the most disorienting optical illusions, these reflections glimpsed in passing are the image of the economic miracle, the economic miracle in its own image, the miracle itself. (2013: 193)

Following Tweedie's illuminating analysis, I will further add that this interplay can also be found in the film's acute awareness of a fluid cityscape exchanging between the public and private space and extending one into the other. In *Yi Yi*, this malleable exchange between spaces epitomises the living conditions of not just any modern city but of Taipei specifically.

Throughout the film, communal spaces – a waste collection point, a pocket park under a flyover, an auditorium and a swimming pool – become emotionally charged with the characters' private and affectionate moments, whilst the personal spaces – balconies and bedrooms – and private moments in public spaces – alone in the office or passing through spaces that connect the private and the public – are extended to the open realms due to city dwellers' close proximity to each other, the translucent glass surfaces commonly used in modern office buildings, and modern surveillance technology (i.e. CCTV). Although this kind of cityscape can be seen anywhere, it is the culturally specific narratives taking place in this problematic mix of spaces that reveals Taiwan's ambiguous relation with its local conservative values and the impact of modernisation. The film's critiques of urban living and the clash between the traditional and the modern in Taiwan at the turn



Figure 4.1 – Multilayered framing

of the 21st century can be found in one of the early scenes, which is presented through the interplay between the private and the public.

The scene begins with a shot where Ting-Ting collects the bin bags strewn across the balcony whilst dressed to attend a wedding in her traditional qipao dress; the following long shot shows Mrs Jiang talking on a mobile phone by the window, dressed in casual homewear. It is worth noting that, due to the absence of the eyeline match, this scene does not create a sense of voyeurism when the shot cuts from Ting-Ting to Mrs Jiang, but it does suggest that the urban living space is so condensed that eavesdropping becomes the norm. This sense of compression also manifests itself in the shot's multilayered framing: a corner of the balcony at the front; a curved road, a flyover and the window frame enclosing Mrs Jiang at the middle; a cluster of mid-rise and high-rise buildings at the far end (see Figure 4.1). In fact, the following two shots in this scene reveal both the compactness and the omnipresent voyeurism of urban spaces.

A high-angle slow tracking shot shows Lili and Fatty crossing the road to a pocket park under the flyover. The next shot shows Ting-Ting looking at the couple from the balcony. The shot of the couple is also shown through a meticulous and multilayered composition. The couple is positioned at the middle of the frame in the pocket park, which is squeezed between the crossroads and the

flyover, running parallel to each other and diagonally cutting the frame. Similar to the previous shot, where a personal phone call is boxed-in by a mix of public and other private spaces, this shot surrounds a couple's intimate moment with an open space and concrete surfaces. Ting-Ting's gaze from a distance is not only voyeuristic but is also in contrast to Lili's more direct and open-minded attitude towards taking action and doing new things. In this particular scene, although Ting-Ting's qipao dress, only worn for special events, is not necessarily indicative of her embodiment of conservatism and obedience, her contemplative and slightly confused gaze at the teenage couple displays the beginning of the awakening of her adolescent transition from being good and nice to finding her true self. Throughout the film, Lili and Ting-Ting, of similar age, respectively embody two different groups amongst Taiwan's younger generation: the one is more straightforward, self-aware and opinionated, and the other is more timid and subservient to parental, educational and social expectations. In this sense, the differences between Ting-Ting and Lili also reflect Taiwanese identity in flux between traditional belief and Westernised values.

A second example of the interplay between private moments and public spaces can be seen in the shot that shows Min-Min alone in the office contemplating her mother's illness and her own identity crisis. The shot, lasting 1 minute and 18 seconds, first shows Min-Min standing alone by the window of a dark room. Her silhouette and expression are obscured by the reflection of the luminous night-time streetscape in the glass window. After a few seconds, the fluorescent lights in the background are turned on and Nancy, Min-Min's colleague and friend, comes into the frame with other co-workers. The shot now reveals that Min-Min is standing in a dark, empty meeting room, caught between the bright office and the reflected streetscape lit by lampposts, traffic lights and moving cars (see Figure 4.2). Although Min-Min's expression is not shown clearly, her confession to Nancy that she does not know where else to go reveals her emotions and vulnerability.



Figure 4.2 – Min-Min in a dark, empty meeting room caught between interior light and exterior streetscape

The fact that Min-Min has an emotional release in the office can be further analysed in two ways, both concerning the hybrid identity that is shaped by the clashes between the old and the new, between local conventions and the influence of globalisation and Westernised values. Firstly, it is worth noting that, in an earlier shot in the film a male co-worker refers to Min-Min as Min-Min *jie*, a title literally meaning 'older sister' and indicating Min-Min's senior position in the office. On the one hand, her seniority reflects Taiwanese women's capability of gaining the upper hand in the workplace, a capability that was once unappreciated by Taiwan's traditional patriarchal society; on the other hand, the appellation *jie* recalls conventional office etiquette in Taiwan (there are also equivalences in other East Asian countries). Secondly, by placing Min-Min's personal sentiment and fragility in the office space, *Yi Yi* injects a feminine sensibility into a traditionally male-dominated public setting; however, this juxtaposition of personal emotion and public workplace also reflects modern city dwellers' imprisonment and entrapment in the inseparability of life and work. In effect, this sense of being confined in a repetitive cycle of everyday life is expressed in an earlier scene where Min-Min cries and confesses to NJ that she feels a void and a repetitiveness in her daily life.



Figure 4.3 – Multiple exposure

It is also noteworthy that the final two shots in this scene bear a strong resemblance to the aforementioned office shot.

The first of these shots shows Mrs Jiang and her partner having an argument, and its composition reminds the audience of another aforementioned shot where Mrs Jiang is seen talking on the phone. This particular shot, however, is set at night-time and the camera is positioned inside NJ and Min-Min's bedroom. Similar to the office shot, the glass window mediates between the indoor light and the outdoor luminous night-time streetscape. The next shot, recorded from the balcony, cuts to NJ and Min-Min in the bedroom whilst the noise of the argument is still heard. Again, the view of the flyover at night is reflected in the window and it creates a multiple exposure effect that obscures the characters' expressions (see Figure 4.3). Towards the end of the shot, NJ shuts the blinds and the whole frame becomes a black screen dotted with reflecting and shimmering light, whilst the sounds of cursing, shouting and crying continue.

By examining and comparing the two shots, I will maintain that, in forming a kind of shot/ reverse shot, they encapsulate modern discourses on urban living and the film's de-dramatising effect of integrating dramatic private moments into disinterested public spaces. The juxtaposition of the two households and the cacophony of noise indicates that, on the one hand, the compressed and

condensed city living spaces bring the neighbourhood spatially closer and potentially dismantle the sense of alienation that exists in every metropolis; on the other hand, this proximity is problematised by the omnipresent voyeurism and the inevitable intrusion on one another's privacy. Moreover, the visual similarities between the office shot and these two shots, together with Min-Min's confession and mental breakdown, imply that work and home can be the same place under the impact of a city's modernisation planning – both the office building and the residential tower are next to busy roads and the flyover. However, although gradually homogenised, Taipei's modern landscape is also diversified by individual dramatic events taking place in different sets of mundane private or public spaces. By adopting long shots to encompass the mix of personal moments and collective realms, *Yi Yi* intricately maintains the balance between the dramatic elements and the referents to material reality. The film therefore approaches realism by reinvigorating Lefebvre's and other situationists' critiques of everyday life, debunking the simplified and reductionist interpretation of everydayness as repetitiveness under the capitalist world system and rediscovering everyday life's potential to elucidate the neglected aspects of reality, left out by specialised or institutionalised activities.

4.7 Conclusion

By firstly exploring the contested definitions of cinematic realism in non-fictions and fictions, this chapter has recognised the inadequacy of a reductionist binary between presentation and representation, between subjective and objective. Instead of approaching reality from a single perspective, a non-fiction film, documentary in particular, often oscillates between subjective narrativisation and objective recording. However, it is worth noting that the intrusion of

subjectivity, more often than not resulting from authorial intent, should not dominate over and further silence a film subject's unique and real voice. Without foregrounding the authorial intrusion, a documentary film has the potential to provide the audience with an ethical encounter with a mediated reality that still carries the weight of and the referent to the malleable and fluid nature of the real. Moreover, this realist tendency can also be applied to fiction films. In the case of slow cinema, its affectless narrative and disinterested observation foreground the materiality of banality and everydayness and thus defamiliarise the familiar. This visual attention to everyday life is often reduced to gratuitous boredom and meaningless repetitiveness. However, according to Henri Lefebvre and other situationists, such as Guy Debord, this negative impression of everydayness is misleading and is proffered by the capitalist pursuit of teleological values in specialised activities, such as politics, scientific research and technological invention. Whilst specialised activities are hailed as a rational enlightenment and a drastic improvement for our society, the variability between nations, regions, ages and sexes in everyday life is devalued since it has no capital value. In this sense, the diversity of everyday life is standardised and rationalised as a never-ending cycle of work and consumption – a repetitive passivity. Drawing on this sociological observation, as well as Ivone Margulies' formulation of the incomplete representation of reality in cinematic everydayness, I have maintained that it is because of the awareness of this oppression, deduction and imperfection of the everyday that cinematic realism's attention to everyday life is able to equip itself with a non-binary sensitivity.

Following this line of thought, I have thereby argued that *Yi Yi* embodies this understanding of the fluidity of everyday reality by resorting to dramatic narrativisation whilst also maintaining an objective distance through applying the realist and de-dramatising effect. However, although this interplay between the dramatic and the undramatic also appears in the works of Italian neorealism

and European modernism, *Yi Yi*'s approach to and focus on the presentation of neglected everydayness are locally and culturally embedded in the specificity of Taiwan's social reality under late-capitalism and globalising modernity's influence at the turn of the 21st century; it cannot be generalised to be the same as its predecessors. In this sense, I have argued that the film's socially and culturally specific context is found in its dramatic elements, whilst the realist and de-dramatising tendency creates a moment of hesitation that places the global or even national audience at a liminality between their own cultural understandings and the others'. This hesitant moment allows the audience to intuitively make sense of the foreign, or *the others'* issues, by de-centring *us*. In other words, *Yi Yi*'s oscillation between dramatic narrative and realist effect leads to a transnational empathy; an empathy that responds to not only the film's critique of the late-capitalist, globalised and homogenised modern landscape, but also slow world cinemas' de-centring resistance to the solipsistic and hegemonic Eurocentric worldview.

In the next chapter, I will further explore how this tendency to waver between the dramatic and the undramatic can be materialised on screen through the use of split screen in *Solitary Fragments*.

5. RECONCILIATION:
SOLITARY FRAGMENTS

Consisting of four chapters and an epilogue, each chapter ending with a life-changing or dramatic event (moving from a village to a big city; a deadly bus bombing; a confrontation and reconciliation between a couple splitting up; and an unexpected but natural death), *Solitary Fragments* addresses the impact of capitalist society on everyday life by using split screens and de-dramatising effect. In this chapter, I will first rethink a Eurocentric reading and a teleological understanding of the film's de-dramatising effect and focus on everydayness. In doing so, I hope to reveal an ethics of hesitation that is under the guise of everyday banality and the absence of meaning. Furthermore, I will explore how the film's use of split screen oscillates between dramatic and undramatic moments, how it embodies a moment of hesitation that recalibrates capitalist society's and neoliberal modernity's pursuit of rationalisation, standardisation and individualist good. I will further expound on a political intent concerning the modern cinematic and media landscape by analysing the film's juxtaposition of representations of death and everydayness. To wit, the film's de-dramatising impulse results in an ethics of hesitation that foregrounds the often-underappreciated everyday potential of empathy and the collective good.

There are two main narrative strands, one centring around Adela (Sonia Almarcha) and the other around Antonia (Petra Martínez). Adela splits up with her partner, Pedro (José Luis Torrijo), and moves from the countryside to Madrid with her toddler, Miguelito. She shares a flat with Carlos (Lluís Villanueva) and Inés (Miriam Correa) and works as a trade fair receptionist. Antonia, a widow with three daughters, Helena (María Bazán), Nieves (Nuria Mencía) and Inés, owns a corner shop and leads an ordinary life with her partner Manolo (Jesús Cracio). Although Adela seems to be

well adapted to her new life in Madrid, she has underlying financial difficulties due to raising her child alone with no substantial help from Pedro. Halfway through the film, an unexpected bus explosion takes her son's life, and she suffers from not only grief but also guilt about the loss. Meanwhile, Antonia accompanies Nieves, who is diagnosed with cancer, through her treatment. Antonia's simple life becomes further complicated when Helena asks her for financial help with the deposit on a seaside flat in Torrevieja. Inés gets irritated when she finds out that Helena has suggested that Antonia sells her own flat to contribute to the purchase of the fancy property. Just when the family drama is almost settled and her life is back to normal, Antonia suddenly collapses in her bedroom and dies alone.

5.1 Cinephilic Decoding of Everyday Banality

It was a surprise when the 22nd Goya Awards' Best Film went to *Solitary Fragments*. Nuria Triana-Toribio construes the film's victory in this category over *El orfanato* (*The Orphanage*, Juan Antonio Bayona, 2007) as the Spanish film academy's 'recalibration, a correcting of a potential bias towards the commercial' (Triana-Toribio 2016: 103). Indeed, compared with *The Orphanage* and the previous year's Goya winners, *Volver* (Pedro Almodóvar, 2006) and *El Laberinto del fauno* (*Pan's Labyrinth*, Guillermo del Toro, 2006), *Solitary Fragments* has not been a commercial success and does not boast 'skilled and complex art design, wardrobe and make-up, as well as costly special effects' (2016: 102). This contrast, according to Triana-Toribio, indicates *Solitary Fragments*' anomalous identity within '[Spain's] hegemonic film culture [that] has always concentrated on strengthening commercial cinema and supporting a national industry in the face of foreign competition, particularly from Hollywood' (2016: 104). Triana-Toribio rightly points out Goya's

significant shift in acknowledging an independent '"small" film' (2016: 102). On the one hand, she maintains that the film's 'formal experimentation and aesthetic risk' is endorsed by the awards (2016: 101); on the other hand, she attributes this academician recognition to 'cinephilic values from a director who declared his admiration for and influence by canonical European art cinema – Godard, Antonioni and Pasolini, among others' (2016: 101). It is clear that the experimental formal device Triana-Toribio mentions refers to the film's unique intermittent use of split screen, and that the film's sparse narrative, unhurried pace and de-dramatised focus on everydayness are believed to be reminiscent of the European modernist canon. Nevertheless, Triana-Toribio's evaluation runs the risk of subordinating the film's originality to a Eurocentric lineage – a problematic reception that this thesis addresses throughout.

This cinephilic and auteurist reading of the use of split screen and cinematic everydayness also manifests in Paul Julian Smith's analysis. Smith maintains that the film's use of split screen 'lends the everyday activities so minutely depicted a gloss of self-conscious avant-gardism' (2012: 73). For Smith, *Solitary Fragments* deliberately discards conventional editing logic and instead adopts 'ostentatious distancing techniques which tend to alienate the spectator from the fictional world' (2012: 73). In this sense, Smith raises a question that also responds to slow cinema's spectatorship: 'How is it, then, that critics speak so consistently of the emotional effect of a film that relies so heavily on the negative qualities of absence, distance, and ellipsis' (2012: 73). Smith attempts to answer this question by pointing to the joint effort between the director and the 'elite spectators' who are inspired by the film's 'uncompromising (or "determined") refusal of gratification' (2012: 74). Elaborating on this idea, Smith takes another example: '"empty shots" […] (depopulated rural and urban landscapes) which are "filled" by competent viewers who recognize them as an homage (in Bourdieu's word a "wink") to Ozu' (2012: 73–4). Moreover,

Smith claims that 'such [competent] spectators deserve some kind of reward for surviving [director] Rosales's punishingly long takes' (2012: 74). Employing Freud's idea of the uncanny, Smith further maintains that '[p]rolonged and repeated exposure […] confirms that unpleasurable sensations can become a reliable source of pleasure for some spectators, if only they are repeated often enough' (2012: 74). This excruciating slow aesthetics, according to Smith:

> Requires a lengthy, if self-regarding, apprenticeship in cinephilia […] to transform [the] minimalist version of the everyday into an aesthetic which is 'privileged' in both the artistic and the social sense of the word. (2012: 74)

Although, unlike Triana-Toribio's list of genealogy, Smith's analysis does not run the risk of being Eurocentric, it is worth discussing and rethinking its implication of complicity between the director and elitist cinephiles in praising *Solitary Fragments* and other slow films. As Smith critically puts it:

> The symbiosis, or, to put it more plainly, collusion, between avant garde creators and specialist critics (also treated by Bourdieu), was also much in evidence, with some academics proudly proclaiming their own elitism in a game of mutual legitimation with the artists on whom they are dependent and who themselves rely on critics to complete the social meaning of their studiously enigmatic works. (2011: 186; quoted in Wheeler 2014: 27–8)

Indeed, as Smith rightly observes, this 'collusion' is a symbiotic relationship between an artistic trend or phenomenon and its critical and academic supporters. Nevertheless, in contrast to Smith's insinuation of a teleological and elitist mutual recognition, this symbiosis reveals how this interdependence between visual representations and analytical critiques can best illuminate the

philosophical underpinning of banal everydayness. On the one hand, slow cinema's long durational gaze at undramatic everydayness demands an active, critical spectatorial evaluation in order to reveal its potential to reimagine the fast-forwarding modern landscape; on the other hand, philosophical enquiry needs these kinds of visual tool to reconnect its specialised knowledge with everyday life, to reclaim its 'lost concrete universality' (Lefebvre 1991: 98). However, Henri Lefebvre also reminds us that the reconnection between philosophy's specialised knowledge and mundane, ordinary everydayness 'run[s] the risk of turning into an aberrant activity and an irrelevant by-product' (1991: 98).

As I have mentioned in Chapter 4, Lefebvre (1991: 97) points out that a 'technical vacuum' is left between specialised activities and knowledge in such areas as technology, science, politics and even philosophy. These specialised activities do not necessarily communicate with each other, due to each field's 'specialization and […] technicality' (Lefebvre 1991: 97). Lefebvre contends that it is the critique of everyday life that fills the gap (1991: 97). For Lefebvre, when philosophy, or a philosopher, 'is *committed to life*, [… it, or he/she,] will discover what is hindering or blocking the march forward [… and] remain a witness to alienations, and their judge' (1991: 97–8; emphasis in original). In fact, Lefebvre does not elaborate on what kind of aberration or what degree of irrelevance this reconnection between philosophy and everyday life will lead to, but I maintain that his concern responds to Smith's critique of the elitist director–cinephile symbiosis. To elaborate on this correlation, it is necessary to examine Lefebvre's observation of the underdevelopment of everyday life.

Although Lefebvre recognises everyday life as a meeting ground of all fields of activity and knowledge, he also realises that the diversity of everyday life is reduced to a repetition of work and consumption by modernity's pursuit of rationalisation and standardisation. In fact, Lefebvre does

not ignore the fact that repetition is a rhythmic pattern in the natural world, and he contends that, in the age of modernity, everyday life is caught between two types of repetition – cyclical and linear (1987: 10). He relates the former to natural cycles between 'nights and days, seasons and harvests, activity and rest, hunger and satisfaction, desire and fulfilment, life and death' and the latter to the rational linearity of production and consumption (1987: 10). Furthermore, he contends that cyclical repetition is 'connected to profound, cosmic, vital rhythms', and linear repetition 'to knowledge, reason and techniques; [it] correlate[s] not with vital rhythms and processes, but rather with processes of economic and technological growth' (Lefebvre 2002: 231–2). However, in a highly industrialised and capitalist modern society, 'the [linear] repetitive gestures tend to mask and to crush the cycles' (Lefebvre 1987: 10). That is, the rationalising force of specialised activities not only dominates over but also homogenises and monotonises a variety of repetitive rhythms that diversify everyday life. As Lefebvre aptly observes:

> The everyday imposes its monotony. It is the invariable constant of the variations it envelops. The days follow one after another and resemble one another, and yet – here lies the contradiction at the heart of everydayness – everything changes. But the change is programmed: obsolescence is planned. Production anticipates reproduction; production produces change in such a way as to superimpose the impression of speed onto that of monotony. (1987: 10)

This observation faithfully points out how everyday life, along with our awareness and critique of everydayness, is underdeveloped and often neglected and marginalised by modernity's fascination with and pursuit of fast-forwarding progressiveness. However, this critical stance by no means suggests that society should privilege a system that works on the basis of natural cyclical repetition; instead, it demands an enhancement of the symbiotic relationship between the repetitive but

interconnecting nature of everydayness and the propelling but fragmented knowledge of specialised activities. Without this symbiosis, as Guy Debord puts it:

> Modern society is viewed through specialized fragments that are virtually incommunicable; and so everyday life, where all questions are liable to be posed in a unitary manner, is naturally the domain of ignorance. Through its industrial production this society has emptied the gestures of work of all meaning. And no model of human behaviour has retained any real relevance in everyday life. (2006: 93)

Following Debord's idea, I will argue that the caveat that Lefebvre points out – the aberrance and irrelevance that reconnection between everydayness and philosophy might entail – reflects a botched mutually informed relationship between repetition and change. More importantly, it questions whether philosophy, as a specialised knowledge in Lefebvre's view, is able to rediscover the diversity of everyday life without reducing its critique of everydayness to a mere decoding of absence and meaninglessness. Likewise, it remains questionable whether the repetitive patterns of everydayness do indeed require a philosophical underpinning in order to be present and meaningful. That is, besides an unequal power dynamic in the process of de/reterritorialisation (see Chapter 3), there is also a concern about, in Smith's words, a teleological mutual legitimation in a symbiotic relationship.

To see beyond this interpretation, it is necessary to recognise that the major factor problematising this symbiotic balance is the way in which capitalist and neoliberal values shape our perception and awareness of the repetitive rhythm and banality of everyday life. As Lefebvre has already pointed out, industrialised and capitalist modern society has been replacing cyclical natural patterns with linear production lines and a repetitive 'daily passivity' of production and consumption (Debord 2006: 96). Everyday life's routinised repetition connotes an absence of

meaning only because it is under the force of rationalisation, standardisation and commodification. In this sense, the symbiotic relationship between everyday life and philosophy does not simply re-evoke the potential of both parties to interconnect different fields of knowledge; instead, it reveals a slow and deferred process of deconstructing the diversity of everydayness that is chronically masked by the capitalist and neoliberal system. The same applies to the criticism of the reading of slow cinema. As argued in the Introduction, the correlation between cinematic slowness and the absence of meaning should not be purely constructed on a negative subjective response leading to a sense of boredom; instead, it should be deconstructed as a deferral of meaning that slowly reveals its underlying critique of the commodification and standardisation of time under the influence of capitalist and neoliberal modernity. In this sense, the film's use of split screen, along with dead time and de-dramatisation, cannot be generalised and simplified as a cinematic device satisfying the need of cinephiles and elitists.

5.2 The Screen that Splits and Hesitates

Solitary Fragments is certainly not the only film in film history to have adopted the technique of split screen. *Napoléon* (Abel Gance, 1927) is arguably the first film to introduce what Émile Vuillermoz terms 'Polyvision' (Brownlow 1970: 647), a technique that provides a horizontal and panoramic image or creates a cinematic triptych effect through the simultaneous projection of three different reels. *A Place to Stand* (Christopher Chapman, 1967) adopts what the director calls a 'multi-dynamic image technique' (Konder 2004), which further radicalises the use of split screen. The 18-minute film is able to encompass 1.5-hour-long footage by splitting and separating the shots and distributing them to different screen panes. *A Place to Stand* later inspires the visual style of



Figure 5.1 – The foreshadowing of the banal nature of the film's use of split screen

The Thomas Crown Affair (Norman Jewison, 1968). Other notable examples of using the split screen as a stylised visual or narrative device include *The Virgin Suicides* (Sofia Coppola, 1999), *Timecode* (Mike Figgis, 2000), *Requiem for a Dream* (Darren Aronofsky, 2000) and *Kill Bill: Volume 1* (Quentin Tarantino, 2003) amongst others. If split screen is an oft-used style, in what ways does *Solitary Fragments*' use of the device differentiate itself from other works? I will argue that it is the aesthetics of slowness, the effect of de-dramatisation and the attention to everyday banality that radicalise the representation of split screen.

The opening shot of *Solitary Fragments* foreshadows the leisurely and banal nature of its use of split screen. The static long shot shows a pastoral view, with mountains and village houses in the background, cattle on the grass and a telegraph pole separating the frame from the middle (see Figure 5.1). There are 13 split screens in the film, and each can be viewed as a single scene containing different angles of the same space or different rooms in the same building. A character completes a continuous flow of movement across two split frames, or two or more characters interact and traverse them (there is one exception where two split frames indicate two discrete spaces). Although some split frames alternate or cut between shots, the spatiotemporal continuity

and the simultaneity between the two frames give the audience an illusion of the effect of one scene/one shot. It seems that there is no fixed pattern or timing for a split frame changing from one shot to another. In general, it is either an alternation between the same character's medium close-up profile and frontal shots or a cut to another dramatic space or moment (here, the idea of the dramatic is referred to by the diegesis, the narrative). The former happens when two characters are talking to each other, whether it be an argument or a chat – a seeming shot/reverse shot. It is tempting to deduce that, when the shot changes from profile to the frontal angle of a character who looks at and speaks directly to the camera, the dramatic focus is also shifted. However, this is not necessarily the case in this film. Similarly, when one split frame cuts to another dramatic space, the film seems to direct the audience's attention to a new dramatic event; nevertheless, the audience is also aware of the other split frame where the camera still lingers on the undramatic and depopulated pro-filmic space. In this sense, both editing approaches, rather than dramatising, result in the effect of de-dramatisation. As José Miguel Burgos Mazas aptly observes, '[t]he picture is divided into two parts without any hierarchy, offering two views of the same reality' (2011: 121). He further maintains that the film's use of split screen 'is a way to break the actions, movements and characters in order to get an emotional distance that highlights the constructed nature of any narrative' (2011: 122). Following Burgos Mazas, I will add that *Solitary Fragments*' use of split screen accentuates this construct of narrative by exposing the illusion of invisible editing.

This reflexive moment of deconstructing the edited and constructed nature of narrative manifests itself in the film's first split screen. Lasting 2 minutes and 53 seconds, the split screen first shows in the right split frame an empty hallway and in the left a kitchen space enclosed by a window; Adela's entrance into the hallway marks the potential beginning of the narrative (see Figure 5.2). It is when Adela moves to frame right that the film destabilises conventional editing



Figure 5.2 – Left: An empty kitchen space enclosed by a window/ Right: Adela's entrance into the hallway

tactics. The match on action confirms Adela's movement from the hallway to the kitchen, but the spatial continuity is disturbed – she leaves the hallway (the right split frame) frame right and enters the kitchen (the left split frame) also frame right. A few seconds later, both frames become depopulated after Adela puts her baby boy in the other room and walks up the staircase that is situated at frame right in the right split frame. After 8 seconds, an off-screen sound of breaking glass is heard and the left split frame cuts to another hallway where Adela comes out of a room in the background and leaves frame left. The sound of footsteps suggests that Adela walks downstairs but stops at one point. She reappears in the left split frame with a dustpan and brush. For around 8 seconds, both frames are again empty with only the off-screen noise of Adela sweeping up the glass. Following the sound of her descending the stairs, Adela is seen appearing in the right split frame. Not long after Adela moves into the kitchen, the left split frame cuts back to the kitchen shot and shows Adela preparing food in the foreground. The right split frame's ensuing cut deliberately reveals a trace of editing; it cuts to a medium close-up of Adela speaking on the phone after the left split frame shows her walking to the background and picking up the phone in a medium long shot (see Figure 5.3). Instead of leaving out the medium long shot to shift the focus onto the medium



Figure 5.3 – Left: A medium long shot of Adela speaking on the phone/ Right: A medium close-up of Adela speaking on the phone

close-up, the split screen simultaneously shows two different shot angles and sizes. In this sense, it problematises the conventional editing strategy of seamlessly directing spectatorial attention to a more dramatic moment when a character's expression or movement is magnified.

The scene ends with Adela hanging up the phone and continuing with the food preparation. Whilst the left split frame captures Adela's entire movement from the background to the foreground, the right one lingers on a banal image composed of a kitchen wall, utensils and a sink after Adela leaves frame left (see Figure 5.4). This encapsulation of the dramatic and the undramatic thus reflects slow cinema's tendency to oscillate between the diegetic drama and the indexicality to the material and everyday reality. In fact, the camera's fixed gaze at the empty kitchen space and the effect of wavering between the dramatic and the undramatic are reminiscent of the sustained long take in *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, which lingers on a depopulated kitchen space filled with miscellaneous kitchen utensils (see Figure 5.5). Nevertheless, the dynamic between the dramatic and the undramatic in *Jeanne Dielman*'s sustained single take is created by Jeanne's irregular exit from and entrance into the frame. What distinguishes *Solitary Fragments* from its predecessor is a use of split screen that materialises this liminal and hesitant wavering by



Figure 5.4 – Left: Adele continues the food preparation/ Right: An empty shot of a kitchen wall, utensils and a sink



Figure 5.5 – Depopulated kitchen space in *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*

literally juxtaposing both effects. In fact, the fourth split screen scene of the film presents this hesitant moment in a more literal way.

Lasting 2 minutes and 19 seconds, the fourth split screen scene includes two interior shots in Manolo's flat in Madrid (see Figure 5.6). In the right split frame, Antonia carries a potted plant, walks in from the balcony in the background towards the camera and leaves frame right. The left split frame remains empty until Antonia appears from frame left on the other balcony in the background. After a few seconds of emptiness, the right split frame captures Manolo's movement from the foreground to the sofa in the middle ground. Antonia reappears in the right split frame after leaving the left one. She travels four times between the two split frames and exchanges a few words with Manolo whenever they are both in the right split frame. It is worth noting that Antonia's almost



Figure 5.6 – Left: An empty balcony/ Right: Antonia traverses two screens with a potted plant

ritualistic and repetitive gestures are accompanied by Manolo losing track of time and attempting to recount the dream he has had during his siesta. The fact that Manolo loses track of the passage of clock time seems to inflect Antonia's repeated and undramatic movement with a sense of uncertainty; however, this episode is depicted in a mundane and insignificant manner, and is hence a subdued narrativisation. Similarly, although Manolo's mention of his dream potentially dramatises the monotonous tone of the scene, the full content of the dream remains unknown and thus banality reclaims the scene's focus. Instead of expanding dramatic spaces, the use of split screen in this scene, in tandem with the effect of de-dramatisation, augments the materiality of the everyday reality that extends the spectatorial space, either in an auditorium or at home, to both frames – augmented reality in both a cognitive and a literal sense. This amalgamation, not confusion, between the spectator's experience of the subjective real and the diegetic referentiality to the objective real repurposes the effect of split screen as a sense of hesitation: a liminal state between the actual and the virtual. This realist effect is further corroborated by Manolo's indecision about whether to drive to Alcobendas, a city north of Madrid, to pick up a table, because he fears he will get caught in rush hour traffic. Manolo's hesitation reflects the impact of urban sprawl and the capitalist standardisation of working hours on daily decisions. 'Go today then. It shouldn't take you

too long. And you'll have got it over with', says Antonia. Her suggestion might come across as inconsiderate and indifferent to the 'norm' of city living; however, it recalibrates the influence of the rationalisation and standardisation of time on the most mundane decisions we have to make in everyday life. In other words, it turns a moment of hesitation into an act of resistance against the impulse of rationalisation and standardisation. In fact, this act of resistance lies in not only the film's use of split screen but also its attention to the impact of capitalist society and individualist pursuit on banal everyday life.

5.3 Capitalist Everydayness

This attention to everydayness under the influence of capitalism can be found in the narrative strand of Helena's problematic and manipulative individualist pursuit of wealth and comfort. The scene begins with a medium long shot showing Antonia and Helena in a kitchen enclosed by a doorframe. Helena mentions that she and her husband, Alberto (Luis Bermejo), plan to buy a three-bedroom seaside flat in Torrevieja, a coastal city in southeastern Spain. Antonia seems uninterested but respects Helena's decision. When Helena later reveals that she does not have enough money for the deposit, Antonia simply tells her to keep on saving and wait for the price to possibly, 'with luck', come down one day. Helena, with a patronising tone, dismisses Antonia's response as wishful thinking and replies that it would be nice to purchase the flat now. Although Antonia's response sounds naive and anachronistic, it demonstrates a utopian belief that is (mis)led by the free market's supply and demand system. In an idealistic scenario, the real estate market finds an equilibrium or 'reasonable' price thanks to the interdependence between supply and demand. We submit ourselves to this system because we are taught to believe that it is a well-balanced regulation. House prices

have indeed gone down at several points over the past few decades; however, as Helena's reply might suggest, the scale of the drop is never as drastic as that of the rise, and this disproportion is more often than not in favour of the rich.

A moment of conflict creeps in when Helena suggests that Antonia could ask Manolo to help her out with the deposit. Antonia refuses Helena's request and calls the property a fantasy. Helena refutes this by arguing that the purchase is an important investment (the price is good; her husband knows people in Torrevieja; their daughter will have friends there; the flat is not only for holidays but also for weekend getaways). Helena reluctantly ends the conversation after Antonia tells her to just keep saving. It is worth noting that, after Helena leaves the kitchen to check on her baby girl, Antonia seems to go through a hesitant moment of deciding whether to help Helena. In fact, Helena's disillusionment over Antonia's refusal to help insinuates that the aforementioned reasoning behind the investment is indeed based on an individualist pursuit of wealth and comfort; moreover, it foreshadows her exploitation and manipulation of Antonia's decision to sell her own flat. Here, again, a potential dramatic development is set against the backdrop of an ordinary setting (the kitchen) and the undramatic gestures of the characters (making paella, setting the table, searching for ingredients and preparing infant formula). In this sense, the film presents the impact of the dysfunctional interdependence of supply and demand and market-orientated individualism on our everyday decision making and family dynamics.

The tension within Antonia's family builds up again later in a split screen scene where Antonia discloses to Inés that she has decided to move in with Manolo and sell her flat to help Helena out with the deposit. Both split frames cut from medium long shots (left: Inés, Helena and Manolo play cards; right: Nieves uses the laptop) to medium close-ups (left: Inés; right: Helena) when the conflict escalates. The use of split screen juxtaposes Inés' bewildered look and wry smile

with Helena's content and reassuring smile. When Inés asks Helena how she feels about Antonia's decision, Helena replies that she is happy that Antonia and Manolo are going to live together. Nieves says that she does not mind the decision as long as it is what Antonia wants. However, Inés thinks that it makes more sense to rent out the flat instead of selling it. She is also angry that she is not involved in the decision making and is always the last to be told anything. It is worth noting that, instead of focusing on the characters' expressions, both split frames cut back to medium long shots when Inés gets furious and expresses her discontent. The dramatic moment is again de-dramatised by this distant observation.

Although the effect of de-dramatisation can be viewed as a distancing device, it also provides a panoramic view across two split frames that intricately capture each sister's reaction to this family disharmony. With Antonia and Alberto blocked by the doorframe and Manolo not facing the camera, the left split frame puts Inés and Helena, both disgruntled, in frontality and signposts the undercurrent of discordance between the two. The right split frame shows Nieves, like an onlooker, witnessing how Antonia's altruism is challenged and manipulated (see Figure 5.7). In fact, Nieves' empathy with Antonia is visually materialised by the scene's spatially disorientating ending. From the direction of Nieves' gaze and Antonia's movement across two split frames at the beginning of the scene, the audience can extrapolate the spatial relation between the two medium long shots (the space where the characters play cards is actually located to the right split frame's off-screen right). Whilst the card playing continues after the commotion, Antonia leaves frame left from the left split frame. When Nieves turns her head and gazes at frame left, the left split frame cuts to another room framed by a window. Antonia later enters the room frame right and lights up a cigarette (see Figure 5.8). Following the spatial relation between the two frames explicated earlier, the room is supposed to be located further away from the right split frame's off-screen right; however, the split screen



Figure 5.7 – Left: Inés and Helena are positioned in frontality/ Right: Nieves witnesses the argument happening



Figure 5.8 – An empathetic gaze travels across two frames and physical distance

creates the illusion that Nieves is looking at Antonia. Commenting on the film's use of split screen, José Miguel Burgos Mazas contends that:

> The loneliness that lives in us is to be found both in the solitude in which the characters find themselves and in the relationship we have with the images. We are alone because we live between images. (2011: 121)

I maintain that, on the contrary, this split screen suggests that an empathetic gaze can travel across two frames or even across physical distance. In this sense, Nieves does not simply look at but looks

across at and empathises with Antonia. However, this scene's ending does not imply that Inés and Helena's hidden discontent towards each other is settled.

In another split screen scene, Inés picks an argument with Helena and implies that she is selfish and manipulative. The scene begins with two split frames, both in medium long shots. The left split frame shows Inés, sitting on a sofa and facing frame right, accusing Helena, who is blocked by the wall, of forcing Antonia to sell the flat. Meanwhile, the right split frame shows Antonia in the kitchen. Both split frames later cut to medium close-ups (left: Helena; right: Inés) when the two sisters start arguing. Moreover, both frames alternate between each character's frontal and profile shots. As I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, there seems to be no fixed pattern in this alternation between camera angles. When the shot shows the character looking at and speaking directly to the camera, the dramatic focus is not entirely shifted onto that particular character. Instead, the other character in profile shot also says something that is central to the narrative. For instance, after Helena speaks directly to the camera, saying that she does not care whether Antonia sells the flat, Inés, shown in profile, sarcastically concludes, 'Great. So we don't need her to sell it'. After Helena, still shown in frontal angle, asks Inés what this has to do with her, both split frames change the shot angles. The right split frame now shows the frontal angle of Inés, who is answering that she also has the right to discuss what can be done with the flat. Moreover, after Inés suggests that Antonia would be much better off renting out the flat, the left split frame cuts to Helena in frontal angle, and she counters this by saying that Antonia would be much better off selling the flat. Inés, again shown in profile, immediately responds, 'Sure. To buy you a place to spend your summer holidays. As if you were royalty'. Helena becomes furious, accuses Inés of only being jealous and tells her to leave her alone. In this respect, both split frames send out equally important messages from which the audience can deduce whether Helena's pursuit is predicated on

individualism. In fact, the frontal shot gives the impression that Helena's reaction and motivation are put under the spotlight, whereas the profile shot seems to portray Inés as an investigative journalist. Both split frames cut back to medium long shots when the two sisters swear at each other. After Inés sprints out of the flat, the left split frame lingers on the empty lounge for a few seconds whilst the right split frame records Antonia's banal kitchen routine. This return from a quick-fire argument to mundane everydayness slows down the narrative progression. Helena later appears in the left split frame from frame right, walks across the lounge and leaves frame left. The right split frame later captures Helena's movement from frame left to the kitchen in the background, hidden by the wall. The scene ends with the camera maintaining its gaze on the depopulated lounge and on Antonia, who continues her kitchen chores. Here, the lingering effect seems to suggest that, although the quarrel caught between individualism and collectivism is temporarily over, its residual impact stays with Antonia, with everyday life.

The conflict continues in a later scene where every family member, except Inés, gathers to celebrate Antonia's birthday. Helena is unhappy about Inés' absence whilst Nieves accuses Helena of being bossy. Trying to ease this tension between her daughters, Antonia suggests that, instead of selling the flat to pay the deposit, she can rent it out and contribute to the monthly mortgage payments. Helena becomes more agitated and blames Antonia for being indecisive. 'What I can't keep doing is talk to the developer and the bank about a flat I'm not sure I'm going to be able to buy', says Helena. Helena's speech not only contradicts her alleged open-mindedness towards Antonia's decision but also reveals how dependent the investment is on capitalist society. Moreover, it is not until the car journey to the seaside flat that Antonia realises that she is not well-informed about a change in Helena's plan.

The car journey scene begins with a tracking shot showing a motorway leading to an array of tower blocks at the far end. The next shot cuts to a medium close-up of Antonia, siting in the back seat and speaking to Helena and Alberto, who are in the front seats and slightly cut out of the frame. The scene then alternates between exterior and interior shots. In fact, the exterior view seems to counteract the positive outlook that the seaside family home represents. For instance, a tracking shot shows the monotonous view of a motorway junction when we hear Helena's voice-over, promising Antonia that she will love it when she sees the flat. Antonia only replies, 'I expect it's like the others'. In this respect, the generic and soulless concrete surfaces, along with Antonia's response, cast doubt on the justification for the investment that has begotten the familial disharmony. The scene further accentuates this scepticism when Helena reveals that the flat they have eventually purchased is a different one, something Antonia is not aware of. The flat now boasts four bedrooms and has a large terrace and a communal pool. Helena tries to justify the size by allocating each family member a room, including Alberto's mother and brother but (un)intentionally leaving out Inés. Here, it is tempting to question whether the uncertain purchase Helena mentions in the earlier scene is the original three-bedroom flat or the much bigger and fancier four-bedroom one. If the latter is the case, it is not far-fetched to maintain that Helena's stance on Antonia's decision to sell the flat is manipulative and exploitative. Moreover, with the fact that Helena excludes Inés from her 'guest list', the film insinuates that the individualist pursuit not only fulfils its unrealistic desire at the expense of the other's loss but also discriminates against the resistant force of the collective good. The scene ends with another exterior tracking shot showing the bleak view of an endless motorway with dusty roadworks on both sides. Instead of showing what the seaside flat looks like, the film shifts the focus back onto Antonia's everyday life – living with Manolo; opening up her

corner shop for business; doing laundry – and her unexpected but natural death. Ironically, the reconciliation between Helena and Inés takes place only after Antonia's death.

From ordinary language and landscapes to the de-dramatising effect of the split screen, the way in which *Solitary Fragments* approaches the issue of capitalist society and the neoliberal pursuit of individualist good is understated and does not aim to provide outspoken criticism. In other words, the film is not interested in the dramatic consequences of such a manipulative, exploitative and even corrupted force; instead, it explores how this kind of influence is embedded in the micropolitics of everyday life rather than in the macropolitics of specialised economic, social and political activities. This exploration reflects that the 'technical vacuum' between different specialised activities and technical knowledge 'is filled up by everyday life' (Lefebvre 1991: 97). As Henri Lefebvre argues:

> The substance of everyday life – 'human raw material' in its simplicity and richness – pierces through all alienation and establishes 'disalienation'. If we take the words 'human nature' dialectically and in their full meaning, we may say that the critique of everyday life studies human nature in its concreteness. (1991: 97)

This foregrounding of the undramatic but intimate influences of the market-orientated personal contract on everyday life can be found in the other strand of the film. As Jonathan Holland observes:

> The carefully wrought script allow[s] the parallels to accumulate so that each becomes a commentary on the other, dealing with issues such as selfishness, greed, ambition and emotional manipulation. Beneath all of these lie the familiar themes of solitude and

> incommunication, here handled with rare intensity. All the drama is under the surface. (2007)

This parallel is found between Helena's request for money from Antonia and Pedro's ask of Adela. In fact, the film makes the parallel more apparent by showing another split screen scene where Pedro visits Adela's new flat in Madrid and asks her for financial help right after the scene where Helena asks for help from Antonia.

The split screen scene begins with the left split frame showing an empty lounge enclosed by a doorframe, and the right one showing Pedro walking through a hallway towards the camera and then leaving the frame through a doorway frame right. Each space is partitioned by doorways, doorframes, window frames and walls. This disorientating architectural composition is later decoded when Pedro, now in the left split frame, is seen in the lounge and walks towards a window frame in the foreground. When he walks through the doorway, the camera on the right split frame captures him walking towards frame left in the background. Adela later enters the right split frame's foreground from frame left and leaves the frame from the doorway at frame right. The camera in the left split frame then captures Adela, walking through the lounge from frame right and towards Pedro, who is now at off-screen left. Both characters gradually move to the left split frame's off-screen right whilst talking about the minutiae of the flat. On the one hand, the constant shifting of the dramatic space, which more often than not is blocked by different types of partition, distances the spectator from recognising and identifying with any narrative development; on the other hand, the undramatic small talk provides a realist effect that brings the diegetic world closer to everyday reality. This oscillation between the unfamiliar and the familiar seems to suggest that this former

couple is caught between a sense of alienation and an undetachable connection. The conversation follows when both frames cut to the medium close-ups of the two characters.

The left split frame shows Adela in frontal angle, and the right one shows Pedro in profile. The conversation is peaceful at first. They talk about Miguelito and about how Adela is adapting to her new life in Madrid. When Adela asks how Pedro is doing back in the village, the left split frame cuts to Adela's profile shot, and the right split one cuts to Pedro's frontal shot. It seems that the change of angle suggests the dramatic focus is now on Pedro, who mentions how the business that he and his father own is suffering badly and any investment is always unprofitable. However, both frames cut back to each character's previous angle when Pedro reveals that, if they do not receive the grant they have applied for, the business might be shut down. A few seconds after the right split frame cuts again to Pedro in frontal angle, Adela asks him about what he plans to do in the time before hearing the outcome of the application. 'Wait', replies Pedro. In this sense, Pedro's financial predicament and the uncertain future of his business are rendered understated both formally and thematically. A potential drama emerges when Pedro, now shown in profile, asks whether Adela could lend him some money. Adela finds the request unjustifiable and wonders whether Pedro is using this as an excuse not to pay her the money he owes her.

In fact, in an early split screen scene, Adela asks Pedro for the money he owes her and for the child maintenance for Miguelito. In this early scene, it is worth noting that Adela strikes up this conversation after she leaves the left split frame from frame left. Meanwhile, Pedro follows Adela, stops at the edge of frame left, confesses to her that he is short of money and finally walks out of the frame. The dialogue continues for another few seconds whilst both split frames linger on uninhabited domestic spaces: a playroom in the left split frame and a kitchen in the right. Although this early conversation implies an unresolved conflict between the two characters, due to the de-

dramatising effect a sense of tension is subdued. In a similar vein, when Adela becomes annoyed by Pedro's request for money, both split frames cut from medium close-ups of both characters to medium long takes of two empty spaces. Pedro, now off-screen, tries to drop the conversation. For 28 seconds, both frames sustain their gaze at depopulated spaces whilst the conversation ends with Pedro saying that he will figure something out. Again, an escalation in drama is formally and thematically stopped short. Here, the parallel between Pedro's and Helena's requests becomes divided. Unlike Helena's outright disappointment at Antonia's refusal to help, Pedro's acceptance of Adela's rejection suggests that his request for money is a desperate attempt to save his and his father's business – his only income source from which to pay Adela the maintenance for raising their son. Despite being a selfish and abrupt one, since Adela is also struggling to eke out a living in a big city, Pedro's request is underpinned by a sense of collectivism as opposed to Helena's individualist pursuit. It seems that the parallel between Adela and Antonia is more consistent throughout the film. Both of them are annoyed at first when they are asked for money, but they also seem to experience a sense of hesitation when they try to understand Pedro's and Helen's situation. In the case of Adela, after accusing Pedro of effrontery, she pauses for few seconds and asks how much money he actually needs.

The intensity of the dramatic undercurrent of selfishness and miscommunication in this former couple's relationship increases again later when they confront the death of their son. In fact, it is worth noting that the parallel between the two narrative strands is found again in the context of death. In the next section, I will turn to two rather dramatic scenes concerning death. The first, an unexpected bus explosion, is composed of long takes and long shots; the second, the abrupt death of Antonia, is the film's final use of split screen. Each representation juxtaposes an unexpected deadly

incident with an ordinary and ritualistic daily activity to bring about a moment of hesitation that questions modern mediated images' narratives of death.

5.4 Death and Everyday Images

The first of the scenes in question starts with a single long take that records Adela on the bus with Miguelito for 3 minutes and 3 seconds. Throughout the journey, passengers get on and off the bus and a man strikes up a kind and brief conversation with Adela. The long take is followed by a long shot, a cutaway to a bus approaching a bus stop. The next shot cuts to Adela talking to the man on the bus. The following shot, lasting 48 seconds, cuts back to the long shot; another bus arriving at a bus stop and stopping behind the bus shown earlier. After recording people getting on and off both buses for 18 seconds, the shot captures the sudden explosion of the bus that was first to arrive, the one on which Adela is travelling; the camera keeps its gaze on the aftermath of the explosion for 30 seconds. The following shot, a long shot lasting 43 seconds, situates the smoking bus in the background and shows people in the distance running and screaming.

The film's incorporation of the unexpected bus explosion has been viewed as an indirect commentary on the deadly 11-M train bombings in Madrid. In what might seem a contradiction to this thesis' attention to the indexicality of local specificities, I argue that the reference to a national tragedy does not necessarily reflect the film's realist impulse. In fact, the scene approaches the real through rethinking the way in which mediated images depict a real event. On the one hand, the film refuses to apply the actual, detailed and graphic narrative addressed or shaped by news media to underscore this reference to a real terrorist attack; on the other hand, it negates the dramatic fascination with re-presenting or re-living the tragic event. As Smith aptly puts it:

> While the shooting style denies the material reality of a terrorist attack (shown all too graphically in TV footage of the real life 11-M) and avoids the perhaps coercive emotivity of the fictional recreation of mutilated bodies, it attempts to reinsert the deadly, exceptional event into the flow of everyday temporality. (2012: 75)

Later in the film, Adela mentions an acquaintance offering her condolences on Miguelito's death. 'She said she saw it all on TV and it was horrible', says Adela. This reflects the contrast between the explosion scene's de-dramatisation of a devastating event and news media's sensational portrayal and graphic depiction of an event that induces the audience's emotional response, attracts their attention and thus increases viewership. Nevertheless, the scene's disinterested observation of a moment of death does not imply that cinema should provide a clinical view of reality; instead, it questions the industry's and other media platforms' impulse to disseminate politically biased and fixed didactics through superfluous and sensational representation. Furthermore, the lingering gaze of the camera, the scene's attentive observation of the banal routines of urban residents (through a brief episode of an interaction between two strangers) and the delaying cut staying on the tragic aftermath at a distance call for an ethics of hesitation, a hesitation that is in contrast to mass media's pursuit of the consumerist values of up-to-dateness and immediacy. This idea also resonates with one of Smith's readings of the film. Smith maintains that 'the city is not held responsible for urban isolation or, indeed, for a terrorist violence that seems more a random force of nature than a politically motivated act' (2012: 75–6). Rather than simply accusing the city as being the site where social problems emerge, the film displays both its kindness and cruelty. Moreover, instead of simply acknowledging the reference to a real tragedy, the film reminds the audience of the importance of ruminating on what they witness on the theatre or TV screens, recalibrating the provocative and



Figure 5.9 – Left: An empty balcony/ Right: Antonia's natural death

shock-inducing tactics commonly seen in contemporary mediated images, and resisting a facile, unilateral and cursory generalisation that demands only one version of the truth to restore the social order that suppresses different political and ideological opinions.

In fact, it is arguable whether the second death scene, another split screen, is more graphic than the first. For the first 54 seconds of this final split screen scene, which lasts 6 minutes and 26 seconds, the right split frame shows Antonia taking the laundry out of the washer and drinking a glass of water in the kitchen; the left split frame shows an empty balcony on a sunny day. For the next 63 seconds, the two split frames respectively show the empty kitchen and Antonia hanging the laundry out to dry on the balcony. The right split frame later cuts to a bedroom that sits in the background and is enclosed by a doorframe. The camera lingers on the empty room for 20 seconds until Antonia moves from the balcony into the bedroom. For the last 4 minutes and 7 seconds of the scene, the camera in the left split frame gazes at the empty balcony whilst the right one records Antonia's natural death (see Figure 5.9). In the middle of removing the pillowcase and sheet, Antonia suddenly halts whilst bending over the bed. Since her face is blocked by the doorframe, it is uncertain what happens to her. She straightens herself up slowly with her breath becoming heavy, sits on the bed and gradually lies down. With her body hidden behind the doorframe, the audience

can only see her legs going into spasm for 27 seconds. Antonia later collapses onto the floor with a sheet covering her body. For 1 minute and 33 seconds the audience witnesses her struggling to get up, with her arms and legs outstretched. The scene ends after the camera lingers on Antonia's motionless body for 14 seconds.

As mentioned earlier, the film's use of split screen does not expand dramatic spaces; instead, it introduces a moment of hesitation when the diegetic referentiality to the objective real and the non-diegetic spectatorial subjectivity of the real are interconnected. Here, Antonia's undramatic daily gestures and the mundane settings faithfully reflect the material reality. As Smith observes:

> There is no camera movement, no music, and (because of the discreet distance kept the camera once more) no view of her face. This 'natural' death, which is once more integrated into the sights and sounds of the everyday life that unthinkingly continues around it. (2012: 76)

However, the long durational recording of a natural death seems to problematise the subjective spectatorial experience of watching someone dying either on screen or through mediated images, or even in person. This split screen scene thus creates a moment of hesitation when the audience is asked whether this voyeuristic and disinterested gaze is more sensational, dramatic and provocative. Whilst the bus explosion scene challenges the problematic sensationalism and consumerism of mediated images concerning the depiction of a public tragedy, the scene of Antonia's death sets this questionable portrayal of death against a private and anonymous natural demise. In this sense, does the de-dramatised narrativisation of death run the risk of detaching itself from the real? I argue that the de-dramatising effect does not distance itself from the reality in which everyday life interconnects every kind of event (specialised or banal), and that, instead, it moves away from the

reality that is influenced and shaped by mass media culture's dramatised narrative, which disconnects itself from the undramatic everydayness. In fact, Smith's reading of the film's reinsertion of a deadly event into everyday temporality also responds to this question. He argues that 'the temporality of the everyday is implicitly dignified by the awareness of mortality, in acknowledgement of the inevitable loss of loved objects, whatever their age' (2012: 76). Indeed, if cinematic everydayness and de-dramatisation achieve the realist effect, it is because of their disinterested and unbiased attention to the different scales (national or personal; public or private) of everyday events, including death.

In fact, the parallel between the two narrative strands is found again when each family finally has a reconciliation conversation after the loss of a loved one. I will now examine two scenes, and a hesitant moment that resides in their undramatic and unhurried depictions of reconciliation that confronts the traumatic and, to some extent, dramatic aftermath of deadly events. Moreover, like the film's disinterested observation of death, the de-dramatised representation of reconciliation also equips a moment of hesitation with a resistant intent.

5.5 Reconciliation

The first reconciliation scene in question is a split screen that focuses on how Adela and Pedro deal with Miguelito's death. The left split frame shows Pedro making coffee in the kitchen, and the right one shows Adela sitting in the dining room with only her back being seen (See Figure 5.10). Pedro later leaves the left split frame from frame left, enters the right split frame from frame right and sits exactly opposite Adela at the table, with the wall blocking his figure. For 30 seconds, the left split frame remains with the empty kitchen, with miscellaneous utensils dominating the background and



Figure 5.10 – Left: Pedro in the kitchen/ Right: Adela in the dining room

the partitions blocking a panoramic view of the space. Meanwhile, in the right split frame, Adela talks about her experience of seeing a psychologist, which does not help her to get over the pain. When Adela asks whether Pedro is seeking help from anyone, the left split frame cuts to a profile shot of Pedro, sitting at the other side of the table. After a few seconds' silence, Pedro confesses that he is pretending nothing has changed, and that he is reminded of the family life he and Adela once had whenever he walks around the village. Both frames then cut to medium close-ups of the two characters: the left split frame shows Pedro in profile angle, and the right split one shows Adela in frontal angle. Unlike most other split frames showing medium close-ups of two people conversing and alternating between the shot angles, here each split frame remains at the same angle of the two characters. Moreover, it is Adela who always speaks to and looks directly at the camera. Adela explains why she has not responded to Pedro's calls since the accident, and that she feels moving to Madrid has caused all the bad things that are breaking up the family. It turns out that they both blame themselves for Miguelito's death and for destroying their relationship. They are finally reconciled through empathising with each other's shame and guilt. It is worth a reminder that, before this reconciliation conversation scene, Pedro runs into Adela at a restaurant and accuses her of being selfish by not talking to him after the accident. This episode reflects Pedro's eagerness to

communicate and suggests that his previous request for money was not made with the aim of exploiting Adela. After Adela reveals that she still misses their son and is not used to sleeping alone, both split frames cut back to the previous medium long shots of two different angles of the dining room. Again, the silence creeps in for a few seconds. Pedro changes the subject and tells Adela that he will check on her dad from time to time. A few seconds after the left split frame cuts back to the kitchen, Pedro asks whether Adela needs more coffee. He later leaves the dining room from frame right and enters the kitchen from frame left. The scene ends whilst Pedro is pouring coffee. It is worth noting that the conversation in this split scene is all about the impact of the bus explosion on both characters' private and day-to-day lives. In this respect, the dramatic and life-changing private and public events – the suffering business, the national tragedy and the loss of a loved one – are de-dramatised.

This de-dramatisation of a traumatic event also manifests in the reconciliation between Helena and Inés. Near the end of the film, all the family members gather around the table in Antonia's flat to discuss what to do with the furniture and Antonia's belongings. 'It all seems so callous dividing mum's things up this way', says Helena. Inés replies that it is better to sort things out now before the flat is sold. Helena suddenly gets upset because she thinks that Inés' response insinuates her continued opposition to selling the flat. Nieves weighs in and stops the escalation of the conflict. The three sisters finally reach an agreement and choose which furniture and which of Antonia's belongings they want to keep. 'You see? It's easier than we thought, isn't it?', says Nieves. Helena later asks if anyone needs more coffee, leaves the table and goes into the kitchen. Inés follows and leaves Nieves alone at the table. Nieves looks around the house and starts sobbing. This emotional response is cut short and the scene comes to an end after Nieves leaves the table and joins her sisters in the kitchen.

In both reconciliation scenes, the gestures of making, pouring and asking for coffee, albeit fleeting moments, seem to round off the potentially dramatic familial conflicts. However, instead of providing a linear sense of concealment, or in Thierry de Duve's words, 'time as entropy, as irreversibility' (1982: 89; quoted in Margulies 1996: 78), these gestures '[reach] out beyond an ending to the continued flow of life or with an insistence on movement as opposed to stasis' (Mulvey 2006: 72). Moreover, the film's de-dramatised representations of reconciliation do not suggest that these personal and shared traumatising histories should be overlooked and forgotten; instead, they result in an ethics of hesitation that reveals the often-neglected interconnecting potentials of everyday life. These hesitant moments foreground both the collective good, which opposes capitalist society's and neoliberal individualism's valuing of free market competition that exacerbates inequality, and empathy, which brings the unpleasant virtual past into the reconciling dialogue with the everyday actual present.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored how *Solitary Fragments* dissects the impact of capitalist society on everyday life through the use of split screens and de-dramatising effect; how empathy engages in the dramatic dynamics and conflicts within a family and between a couple in a broken relationship; and how the juxtaposition of representations of death and everyday images transforms a moment of hesitation into an act of resistance that challenges modern cinematic and media narratives of death.

I have firstly examined a Eurocentric reading and a cinephilic and auteurist study of the film's use of split screen and its focus on everyday life. I have specifically re-examined Paul Julian Smith's observation of a mutual legitimation between the aesthetics of slowness and its academic

critics. Instead of regarding such a symbiotic relationship as purely teleological and elitist, I have argued that this interdependence between visual aesthetics and analytical critiques unveils the philosophical underpinning of banal everydayness. In fact, Smith's critique of the director–cinephile symbiosis reflects Henri Lefebvre's concern over the reconnection between philosophy's specialised knowledge and the underdeveloped study of everyday life. Drawing on Lefebvre's and Guy Debord's critical observation of the underdevelopment of everyday life, I have pointed out that the marginalised status of everydayness and its connotation of meaningless repetition result from capitalist society's and neoliberal modernity's prioritisation of the rationalising force and accelerating progressiveness of specialised activities. I have thus revealed a symbiotic relationship between the repetitive but interconnecting nature of everydayness and the propelling but fragmented knowledge of specialised activities. Lefebvre's concern over and Smith's critique of such a symbiosis reflect the doubts that exist about whether philosophical thinking is able to rediscover the diversity of everyday life without reducing its critique of everydayness to a mere decoding of absence and meaninglessness. To see beyond such doubts, I have argued that it is necessary to realise that what disturbs this symbiotic relationship is the way in which capitalist and neoliberal values shape our perception and awareness of everyday life's repetitive rhythm and banality. Consequently, the interdependence between everyday life and philosophy does not simply mutually legitimise their potential to interconnect different fields of knowledge. Instead, like the deconstructing reading of cinematic slowness as a deferral of meaning, this symbiosis reveals a slow and deferred process of deconstructing the diversity of everydayness that is chronically masked by the capitalist and neoliberal system's impulse to commodify, standardise and rationalise.

After deconstructing the political intent of everydayness, I have moved on to explore how the cinematic focus on the everyday and the de-dramatising effect radicalise *Solitary Fragments*'

representation of split screen. I have first pointed out that the split screen's encapsulation of the dramatic and the undramatic reflects slow cinema's tendency to oscillate between the diegetic drama and the indexicality of non-diegetic everyday reality. I have further maintained that, instead of expanding dramatic spaces, the film's use of split screen and the effect of de-dramatisation augment the materiality of the everyday reality that extends the spectatorial space to both split frames, hence an augmented reality in both a cognitive and a literal sense. It is this amalgamation, not confusion, that repurposes the effect of split screen as a sense of hesitation caught between the actual and the virtual. Moreover, displaying the impacts of the rationalisation and standardisation of time on the most mundane decisions that the characters have to make in everyday life, the film turns this ethics of hesitation into an act of resistance against the modern capitalist and neoliberal mechanism.

I have then analysed how the film carries this resistant politics into its depiction and critique of capitalist society and neoliberal individualism. I have looked at the film's parallelism between the two narrative strands, which reveals the impact on family dynamics and everyday decision making of capitalism's misleading fair and balanced supply–demand system and market-orientated individualism. It is worth noting that, from ordinary everyday settings and the characters' undramatic gestures to the de-dramatising effect of the split screen, the way in which the film approaches the aforementioned issues is understated. That is, the film explores how this kind of manipulative and exploitative influence is embedded in the micropolitics of everyday life rather than in the macropolitics of specialised economic, social and political activities.

The parallel between the two narrative strands can also be found in their representations of death. I have pointed out that in each representation there is a hesitant moment resulting from the juxtaposition of an unexpected death and an ordinary, ritualist everydayness. The two hesitant

moments question the narratives of death in modern mediated images in different ways. Whilst the bus explosion scene rethinks the problematic and sensational way in which mediated images depict a real national tragic event, Antonia's death scene sets this questionable portrayal of death against a private and anonymous natural demise. I have argued that the bus explosion scene rejects an actual and detailed narrative addressed or shaped by news media and negates the dramaturgical fascination with re-presenting or re-living the tragic event. With the camera's lingering gaze and its distant observation of both urban residents' banal routines and the tragic aftermath, the scene transforms a moment of hesitation that is in contrast to mass media's pursuit of immediacy into an act of resistance against the provocative sensationalism and cursory generalisation of contemporary mediated images, which demand only one version of the truth in order to restore the social order that suppresses different political and ideological opinions. In the case of Antonia's death scene, the long durational and de-dedramatised recording of a natural death problematises spectatorial responses to watching someone dying on-screen, through mediated images or even in person. The scene thus creates a moment of hesitation when the audience is asked whether this voyeuristic and disinterested gaze is more sensational, dramatic and provocative and thus detrimental to the film's realist impulse. However, I have argued that this scene does not distance itself from the reality in which everyday life interconnects every kind of event; instead, it detaches itself from the reality that is influenced and shaped by mass media culture's dramatised narrative. In this sense, it is due to their disinterested and all-encompassing attention to everyday events of different scales, including death, that cinematic everydayness and de-dramatisation can faithfully reflect reality.

Finally, I have related the film's disinterested observation of death to its de-dramatised representation of reconciliation. I have argued that the film's distant gaze at a moment of death does not suggest that we can see reality through a clinical view; instead, it questions the industry's and

other media platforms' impulse to propagate one single truth through sensational representations. Likewise, the film's de-dramatising reconciliation does not suggest that the private and public traumatic memories should be ignored; instead, it results in an ethics of hesitation that foregrounds not only the collective good, which resists neoliberal society's fascination with praising the free market competition that results in inequality and broken relationships, but also empathy, which reconciles everyday actual reality with the unpleasant virtual memories.

By analysing the four case studies, I have revealed that contemporary slow films coincidentally bring about different moments of hesitation either through the use of long take or the de-dramatised representation of the everyday and turn these hesitant moments into a consensus of resistance. I have further proved that the meeting ground of these cinematic representations of resistance lies in their criticism against capitalist society's and neoliberal modernity's homogenising force and impulse to rationalise and standardise. However, before concluding this thesis, I will address a dilemma that lies in this consensual resistance: how to resist and dismantle a dominant, centred essentialist ideology whilst claiming that this resistant act of de-centring requires a universal consensus of different groups that have different issues with that particular hegemonic regime?

6. CODA:
THE BODY REMEMBERS WHEN THE WORLD BROKE OPEN

Premiered at the 2019 Berlinale and subsequently receiving an honourable mention in the competition for Best Canadian Feature Film at the Toronto International Film Festival, *The Body Remembers When the World Broke Opens* becomes an exemplar of the increasing global awareness of indigenous filmmaking. Besides one of the co-directors Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers, a Blackfoot and Sámi descendant, there are other 11 indigenous young crew members, under the guidance of the film's mentorship project, involved in different stages of production. Loosely based on Tailfeathers' personal experience, *The Body Remembers* is shot in a seemingly uninterrupted 90-minute long take that intimately follows an encounter between two indigenous women with a heightened sense of real-time immediacy. In this chapter, I will adopt *The Body Remembers* as the standpoint, or even counterpoint, from which to address an ethical dilemma that exists in the thesis' hypothesis that a coincidence of hesitation leads to a consensus of resistance. I argue that this search for a consensus runs the risk of resulting in the same detrimental consequence as witnessed in the hegemonic capitalist and neoliberal grand narrative that this consensual resistance attacks, that is, the ignoring or overgeneralising of the individuality of different socioeconomic and cultural specificities. To see beyond this dilemma, as I have briefly discussed in the Introduction, is to view this consensual resistant politics of slow world cinemas as a common humanist sensibility that encompasses and is intermingled with, rather than distilled and filtered from, different political and cultural points of view. It is on the basis of this formulation that this chapter will look at *The Body Remembers*' illustration of how intersectionality is engaged in a coincidence of two women's hesitations that

later becomes a consensus *on* respecting each other's view on resistance, rather than reaching a consensus *of* resistance, to violence and unfair treatment embedded in social inequality and institutionalised discrimination.

6.1 The Present Hesitates When the Past Resists

Except for the initial 12-minute vignettes of both characters' lives, *The Body Remembers* is the unfolding of an encounter between two indigenous women, Rosie (Violet Nelson) and Áila (Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers), in an almost uninterrupted 90-minute long take. Rosie, a member of the Kwakwaka'wakw First Nations, is pregnant and lives with her boyfriend and his mother. Áila, half-Blackfoot and half-Sámi, is visiting the doctor to have an IUD (a contraceptive device) inserted and, on her way home, sees Rosie, barefoot, bruised and soaked to the skin, being shouted at by Rosie's boyfriend from across the street. Áila weighs in to the situation and takes Rosie back to her apartment. Inside the apartment, the camera at times follows Áila, who tentatively tries to help Rosie to open up and experiences a brief episode of anxiety whilst alone in her bedroom, and at others it follows Rosie, who is defensive, remains vigilant and steals Áila's wallet and a bottle of her medication. Rosie insists that she does not want to report the domestic abuse to the police, but Áila suggests that they should at least contact the safe house for women and check whether there is a room where Rosie can stay the night. Albeit reluctant at first, Rosie agrees and they take a taxi to the shelter. On their way there, Rosie makes a stop, and Áila secretly follows her and sees that she is dealing drugs. In contrast to the first half of the taxi ride, when Áila and Rosie are complicit in jokingly telling the driver that they are sisters and that Áila is going into rehab, the two women's relationship in the second half of the journey turns sour when Áila accuses Rosie of using drugs.

Upon their arrival at the safe house, Áila refuses to leave the car until Rosie confesses that she sells rather than uses 'stuff'. Rosie pays the taxi fare since Áila cannot find her wallet. Inside the safe house, Rosie reveals how her boyfriend has been physically abusing her. Moreover, the reason she insists on not calling the police is that her boyfriend has been placed on bail and she has experienced institutional racism within the justice system before. Although she is offered a room and support from the social workers, Rosie decides to go home, claiming that she exaggerated the extent of her boyfriend's abusive behaviour. On their way out of the safe house, Cat (Charlie Hannah), one of the social workers, gives Áila a chit to pay for the taxi and tells her that it is normal for it to take six or seven tries before a victim is ready to leave an abusive relationship. During the cab journey back to Rosie's, the two women remain in silence until Rosie asks Áila if she is mad about her decision. Áila assures Rosie that she is not; she tells her that she is going to be a good mum and starts sobbing when Rosie tells her that she will be a good mum too. After saying goodbye, Áila tearfully watches Rosie walking towards an apartment complex. The film ends with Áila crying on the taxi ride home and looking at East Vancouver's streetscape in the twilight.

At first glance, the film seems to characterise Áila as being helpful and sympathetic whilst showing Rosie as defensive, stealing and getting involved in drug dealing. It is tempting to ask what reasons are behind, and what ethics is implied by, this dichotomous representation. Moreover, it is crucial to analyse how the film's almost real-time recording engages with the interplay between Áila's hesitation in agreeing with how Rosie deals with experiencing abuse, Rosie's initial hesitation in opening up to Áila and Rosie's constant resistance to the saviour–victim trope.

Áila's hesitation – whether to help Rosie by calling the police and finding a shelter or to accept Rosie's own way of dealing with her life and protecting her baby – suggests the privileges of her lighter skin colour and higher socioeconomic status, which prevent her from experiencing social

inequality and institutionalised discrimination. In contrast, Rosie's guardedness and resistance embody the accumulation of her past experiences of both personal and collective social and racial trauma. In this respect, the conflict between Áila's hesitation and Rosie's resistance implies that the present's dominant status is confronted and destabilised by a depository of unresolved and oppressed pasts. In fact, this conflict between hesitation and resistance is reminiscent of that in the final two long takes of *Stray Dogs*, in which Lee, a hesitant figure, and Chen, a resistant one, gaze at a mural. However, it is worth noting that in *Stray Dogs* hesitation is grounded, in Gilles Deleuze's terms (1997c: 98), in *sheets of past* and transformed by an intuitive and empathetic understanding into resistance at *peaks of present*. By contrast, in *The Body Remembers* a sense of hesitation is the present's response to an act of resistance that is engraved with the marks of myriad unreconciled pasts.

Although it is telling that *The Body Remembers* deals with historical colonial trauma, it is not necessarily correct to deduce that the film mainly fixes its gaze on sheets of past. In fact, the film's nearly real-time recording, the camera's tracking movement and the intimate close-ups create a sense of immediacy and urgency that keeps reminding the audience of the uncertain, precarious relationship that is developing between the two women in the present continuous tense – a potential resistance against each other is/is not growing in the *present of the present* and will/will not continue in the *present of the future* (Deleuze 1997c: 100). Nevertheless, unlike in *Stray Dogs*, the film's narrative progression is slowed down not by the indiscernible temporal referents but, instead, by the hesitant silence resulting from the discrepancy between the two indigenous women's different experiences of discrimination and privilege – experiences that are not only preserved in sheets of past but also linger on in the *present of the past* (Deleuze 1997c: 100). Rosie's awareness of this disparity is subtly captured when she sees a photo of Áila's boyfriend and asks her if she

prefers white guys. When Áila reveals that her boyfriend is also Native, Rosie replies, 'Everybody's Native these days, hey?'. Rosie's remarks might come across as rude, but they unwittingly reveal a critical reading of intersectionality. As Karrmen Crey aptly observes:

> Class is just one node in the broader social (and colonial) matrix within which Indigenous women's lives are constrained, the complexity of which is revealed by Áila and Rosie's individual motivations as well as in their nuanced interactions with one another. (2020: 110)

In this sense, it is equally important to take into account the fact that Áila's history of abortion and her ongoing depression and anxiety might have resulted in not only her sympathetic eagerness to help a young pregnant woman but also her hesitation in believing in the potential of the survival instinct. For Crey, the film busts stereotypes by revealing that 'Áila, driven by her self-awareness and a sense of responsibility, actually needs Rosie[, who] is equipped to deal with crisis and danger in adaptive and canny ways outside of Áila's experience' (2020: 110). Accordingly, the film de-centres the facile saviour–victim relationship between Áila and Rosie through a rhizomatic interplay between the dominant *us* and the marginalised *other*.

6.2 When Hesitation and Resistance Collide

I will now further explore the film's reading of intersectionality and its representation of mutual interdependence through a Deleuzian and Guattarian (2005: 3–25) rhizomatic analysis of the encounter between the two women. In fact, this rhizomatic encounter between a dominant figure and a marginalised one resonates with that seen between the unnamed man and Ascen in *Japón*. As

I have argued in Chapter 3, *Japón*'s representation of an encounter between the dominant and the marginalised reveals a rhizomatic exchange of de/reterritorialisation wherein a sense of mutual becoming and in-betweenness, rather than a homogeneous amalgamation, takes place. That is, to claim that one party is superior to the other in such an exchange re-establishes a centralised hierarchisation and creates a new power relation. In a similar vein, although *The Body Remembers*' observational tracking shots seem to contrast Áila's helpfulness and positive images with Rosie's defensiveness and negative traits, the film does not settle on an essentialist, universalist, binary designation of the morally good and bad, superior and inferior. Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas' view on ethics as the 'calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of Other' (Levinas 1979: 43), Lisa Downing and Libby Saxton argue that ethics 'is framed from the outset as a process of interrogation, rather than a set of rules or theory of the basis for moral choices' in the face of alterity (Downing and Saxton 2010: 3–4). Pointing out the problematic, reductionist, 'corrective stereotype analysis and concomitant discussions of "positive images"' (Saxton 2010: 51), Saxton maintains that:

> From the perspective of a postcolonial ethics the concepts of 'positive' and 'negative' images are inherently problematic, since they rest on the ethnocentric assumption that all cultures judge the good and the bad by the same universal criteria […] Used without reference to specific cultural or ideological contexts, these designations obscure the distinctions between different sets of values and systems of morality. Moreover, the quest for affirmative images of historically oppressed racial, ethnic or cultural groups may disavow or distract from this history of oppression and the role that cinema has played in it. What are needed, then, are representations which critically interrogate this legacy and forms of criticism which take account of cultural context and point of view without imposing Western value judgements. (2010: 52)

Saxton's critique of this essentialist binarism – a construct that is found in both Hollywood and European cinema – resonates with Levinas' view that the Western school of thought tends to reduce 'the other to the same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being' (Levinas 1979: 43). Accordingly, Levinasian ethics confronts this Eurocentric impulse to homogenise the other by foregrounding the imperative of 'a responsible welcoming of the Other which does not violate its alterity by incorporating it into a pre-existing totality' (Downing and Saxton 2010: 3–4).

Following Levinas' and Downing and Saxton's ethical enquiry into the response of dominant Western values to the irreducibility of the marginalised other, I will argue that *The Body Remembers* further complicates this ethical stance by exploring the socioeconomic disparities and hesitation–resistance dynamic between two people who are to some extent similar in terms of their racial and gender identities.

As I have mentioned in Chapter 3, both potential and risk are involved in the process of a de/reterritorialising exchange between a more dominant party and a weaker one. In the case of *Japón*, this double-edged effect can be found in the film's representations of an encounter between the modern and the primitive and between the film's production and its reception – regarding the dynamic between its vernacular specificities, modernist aesthetics and cosmopolitan spectatorship. I have argued that it is *Japón*'s use of realist devices – location shooting, long takes, handheld camera shots and non-rehearsed acting – and its respect for profilmic contingency that formulate an ethics of hesitation. This ethical hesitation recognises the ever-becoming, destabilising, incessant relay between deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, and it is thus equipped with a resistant politics against any form of hegemony that homogenises the other by reducing the differences to the same,

such as the purely Eurocentric gaze at the mix of modernist and vernacular sensibility found in cinematic slowness.

In the case of *The Body Remembers*, a potential White Saviour narrative is dismantled. Moreover, a seemingly essentialist dichotomy between Áila's impulse to help and Rosie's defiant responses – a dichotomy that implies the former's light-skin privileges and the latter's dark-skin disadvantages – is transformed into a de/reterritorialising exchange. However, this rhizomatic exchange is facilitated through the film's slow, attentive and realist real-time recording of a constant dialogue between hesitation and resistance, rather than a progressive transformation from coincidental hesitation to consensual resistance, as seen in the analyses of my other four case studies. For instance, the film's rejection of the oversimplified and overgeneralised triumphant White Saviour trope – a rejection not simply informed by Áila's Native heritage – manifests itself in a tracking-shot moment that follows for slightly longer than 6 minutes the journey during which Áila takes Rosie back to her apartment. The hand-held camera shot's tottering effect and unstable movement seem to not only coincide with Áila's heavy breathing but also reflect the uncertain and precarious nature of her rescue plan. When Áila once again asks Rosie to confirm that she really does not want to go to the police, Rosie bluntly answers by saying, 'Are you fuckin' deaf or something?'. Áila pauses for a few seconds and then says sorry to Rosie, and this apologetic attitude suggests her willingness, albeit in a hesitant way, to accept Rosie's refusal to get help. It is also worth noting that the camera's tendency to stay behind and follow the two characters embodies the gaze of a perpetrator chasing after them and thus further disturbs the women's agency through an implicit male gaze (see Figure 6.1). Moreover, the camera's tight framing, which, at the expense of showing the surroundings, emphasises the two women's journey of escape, along with the cacophony of background noises – Rosie's boyfriend shouting and swearing, car alarms, horns,



Figure 6.1 – The camera's embodiment of a male gaze that disturbs the women's agency

sirens and construction noise – creates a heightened sense of uncertainty and unease. Although once inside the apartment the unpleasant noises gradually give way to the gentle sounds of rain and birds, the camera, following Áila into her bedroom, picks up her shortness of breath and slight tremors. Through the lens of the uninterrupted real-time recording, Áila's socioeconomic privileges, which supposedly render her a resourceful saviour in this encounter, are outweighed by her hesitation, apologetic attitude and anxiety-induced physical responses in the face of Rosie's refusal to call the police – a resistance that bears the mark of Rosie's bitter experience of institutionalised discrimination. In this sense, Áila's impulse to help seems to be deterritorialised from a black-and-white moral standard to a nuanced, ambiguous and non-binary ethical hesitation.

Although the film strips Áila of the saviour complex, the problematic, patronising saviour–victim narrative is still rooted in Rosie's personal experience and potentially results in her hesitation in fully trusting Áila's motivation. In contrast to Áila's hesitation, which reveals the destabilisation of the present's illusive dominant position and remains until the end of the film, Rosie's hesitation is, in effect, the particular destabilising force that confronts Áila's inexperience in handling

domestic abuse and systemic discrimination and which turns into an act of resistance when Rosie is reminded of being characterised as an inferior victim by the social care system. In fact, the conversation between Áila and Rosie provides a glimpse of Rosie's unpleasant history with her former case worker. It is also worth noting that, when Áila confronts Rosie with her suspicions about drug dealing and implicitly questions her ability to take care the baby in her harsh living condition, Rosie instantly picks up on Áila's unwittingly patronising tone and argues back by saying, 'You think you're better than me? […] You don't know anything about me'. Moreover, it is worth a reminder that the film confronts the problematic White Saviour trope by presenting a role reversal between rescuer and victim during the two women's taxi ride to the safe house. Jokingly telling the driver that Áila is going into rehab and that they are sisters, Rosie claims the role of a saviour who has her sister's back. Although told in a comic way, Rosie's made-up story not only deterritorialises Áila's role as a support provider but also reterritorialises that sense of empowerment onto herself.

6.3 Silent Hesitation, Unsettled Resistance

It is now clear that *The Body Remembers* addresses the complex issues of social inequality and post-colonialism through a mundane and de-dramatised dialogical interplay between the two characters. Moreover, although the film is underpinned by discourses of intersectionality and post-colonialism, it spends most of its time in everyday indoor settings and focuses on the rather undramatic and minute details of everyday conversation. Accordingly, the film's de-dramatising tendency in dealing with dramatic moments and its attention to the impacts of personal and collective historical trauma on everyday reality sets it apart from its more adrenaline-charged, action-packed, one-shot

contemporaries, such as *Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2014), *Victoria* (Sebastian Schipper, 2015) and *1917* (Sam Mendes, 2019). It is this de-dramatising tendency and the focus on everydayness that align the film's ethics of the single nearly uninterrupted long take with *Yi Yi* and *Solitary Fragments*' oscillation between the dramatic and the undramatic.

As seen in *Solitary Fragments*, approaching the detrimental impact of capitalism and neoliberalism in an understated and de-dramatised way by focusing on the micropolitics of everydayness rather than the macropolitics of specialised events does not suggest that the film provides only a detached clinical view of reality; instead, through paying attention to these minute and intimate moments of daily life, the film transforms everyday life's connotation of meaninglessness into an ethics of hesitation. This ethical hesitation reveals both collectivism's resistant politics in the face of neoliberal individualism and an empathy that reconciles everyday reality with unpleasant private and public historical trauma. In the case of *The Body Remembers*, the real-time recording's de-dramatising effect manifests itself most obviously in its uninterrupted display of silent intervals in the conversations between Áila and Rosie. One telling moment is the two's intense dialogue in the taxi, when Áila confronts Rosie with her suspicions about her drug dealing and substance abuse. When Áila asks Rosie if she uses drugs, Rosie redirects the question back to Áila and asks, 'Are *you* taking something?', referring to Áila's medication history of combating anxiety and depression. Still convinced that Rosie has taken drugs, Áila asks her if she is aware of how such substances could harm the baby. Rosie immediately responds by questioning whether Áila thinks that she knows better and is superior. After Áila denies thinking in that way, Rosie declares that she can take care of herself and her baby. The two remain silent for a few seconds until Rosie asks the driver to stop the car.

Any second in the two women's argument could turn dramatic and violent due to the conflict between Áila's inquisitiveness and frustration and Rosie's defensiveness and cynicism. However, the interstitial silent moments, which are captured and retained by the camera's continuous recording, not only cool down this intense build-up but also create moments of hesitation when the problematic, essentialist, didactic reading of Rosie's behaviour is exposed. As I have argued in Chapter 4, *Yi Yi*'s representations of social and cultural specificities are displayed through dramatic narrativisation, whilst the film's use of de-dramatising effect creates a hesitant moment that positions the audience in a liminal state between their own cultural understandings and those of others – a liminality or interval that allows the audience time to empathetically make sense of *the others'* issues by de-centring *us*. That is, a moment of hesitation leads to empathy – a consensus of resistance against any solipsistic and hegemonic worldview. Similarly, in the case of *The Body Remembers*, whilst the diegesis shows a conflict between two different socioeconomic backgrounds, the undramatic, silent, hesitant moments situate the audience at an ethical intersection where the essentialist, binary, moral designation of good and bad is challenged, and where a more democratic, unauthoritative rethinking of morality is called for. Drawing on Jean-Luc Godard's dictum – 'tracking shots are a question of morality' (Domarchi et al. 1959: 5; quoted in Saxton 2010: 22) – and its underpinning of a Kantian criticism of works of didacticism, Saxton argues that:

> If […] morality is determined by the choices involved in mise-en-scène, then one of the principal criteria by which these choices are to be evaluated is the degree of autonomy they grant to viewers. Viewed through a Kantian lens, tracking shots and other formal techniques would serve as a 'propaedeutic' for morality if they afford viewers an experience of the freedom they possess as moral agents, however problematic such a conception of agency may be for twenty-first-century critics. (2010: 27–8)



Figure 6.2 – Together but silent

Applying Saxton's idea to the analysis of the dynamic between Áila's hesitation and Rosie's resistance, I will add that these silent moments of hesitation provide the two women with just this kind of democratic, liberal autonomy and freedom, with which they can empathise with and respect each other's vulnerability. More importantly, this is a freedom that facilitates the conflict between Áila and Rosie's hesitations in reaching a consensus on acknowledging the reasons behind each other's resistant impulse. In other words, it is a resistance to a consensual resistance.

In fact, the film's final 10-minute recording of the two women's cab ride back to Rosie's apartment captures this transformation of a hesitant moment into a resistance to resistance. It is worth noting that the two characters are now in the frame together instead of being picked up individually by the camera, as seen in the episode of the taxi ride to the safe house (see Figure 6.2). The two characters remain silent for 1 minute and 20 seconds until Rosie asks whether Áila is mad about her decision to go home. A few seconds after replying that she is not mad, Áila, who is still worried about Rosie's safety, suggests that she take a bus to her grandparents' and stay with them for a while. Unlike the quick defensive responses shown earlier in the film, Rosie declines the suggestion and assures Áila that she will be fine. In the course of another silence lasting 1 minute and 45 seconds, Áila turns her head, looks at Rosie and hesitates to speak several times before

finally telling her that she is going to be a good mum; Rosie then says the same thing to Áila. Rosie's reply seems to imply that this is the first time both women truly agree on something – a consensus *on* acknowledging the resistance with which Rosie is equipped to fight in her own way and with her own will against any form of violence she is subjected to, rather than a consensus *of* resistance against a single hegemonic force whose impact on each individual, regardless of their socioeconomic, cultural or gender differences, is overgeneralised as an experience shared universally.

The closing remark of the film, contrasting Rosie's reticence and restrained smile with Áila's tearful response, might imply that the former's life is not affected as deeply as the latter's by this brief but problem-laden encounter. However, it is also worth noting that, under the lens of the camera's uninterrupted recording, Rosie's hesitation in returning home is subtly but well documented – she fidgets and looks around when getting out of the taxi and saying farewell to Áila. Of course, just as it refuses to reveal the reason why Áila cries, the film does not provide any explanation for Rosie's seemingly hesitant movement. In this sense, the audience are tempted to conclude that the film leaves this encounter adrift and the problems unresolved in an open ending. Nevertheless, I argue that it is ambiguity and unsettledness that embody this encounter's resistance to and deferral of a consensus of resistance. As with what Cat says to Áila – 'It's a start' – the film does not suggest that problems of social inequality and systemic racism should be dealt with by the oppressed single-handedly; rather, it exposes how such problems are embedded in everyday life and calls for an ongoing dialogue to begin the formation of an ensemble of transcultural and transnational empathy.

This chapter's reformulation of coincidental hesitation and consensual resistance might problematise the arguments that I have laid out throughout this thesis. However, it is this

destabilising force of contradiction that reveals how the resistant politics of slow world cinemas is poised to be challenged and reshaped. Since this consensus of resistance comprises a world of representations of hesitant moments, its political intent to rethink modernity's hegemonic and homogenising impulse is an unsettled, ever-connecting and never-ending pursuit.

7. CONCLUSION

At the start of this thesis, I have recognised that to define cinematic slowness – to pin down different individuals' subjective responses to slowness or even boredom – runs the risk of reducing a diversity of intuitive perceptions of time to a pre-established, fixed agreement on the speed or the passage of time, of which our intellect can make sense. In fact, this reductionist reading of cinematic slowness potentially results in the accusation that the aesthetic devices of contemporary slow world cinemas have become formulaic. Moreover, to categorise a film as slow cinema based only on the oft-cited characteristics of slow aesthetics that post-war European modernist cinema shares unwittingly imposes a Eurocentric genealogical reading on such a criterion. In this sense, instead of simply focusing on how slowness is informed by formal devices, I have aimed to identify contemporary slow world cinemas' ethics of hesitation that lies in their use of long take, their tendency towards de-dramatisation and their focus on everyday banality. I have explored how this ethics of hesitation not only provides an entry point into an empathetic understanding and appreciation of the aesthetic exchange and flux between different traditions of cinematic slowness, but also leads to a resistant politics against the entrenched discourse of the Hollywood/Art Cinema binary and the dominance of Westernised and Eurocentric discourses in film studies. It is not far-fetched to attribute this ethical and political reading of contemporary slow world cinemas to film studies' increasing attention on transnationalism and polycentrism. Moreover, it is imperative to recognise that the contemporary global emergence of both the production of and cinephilic debates on cinematic slowness coincides with the incipience of film studies' shift towards World Cinema's de-Westernising, de-centring and transnational standpoint at the turn of the 21st century. In this

respect, I have aimed to engage with the existing scholarly discussions of slow cinema by redirecting attention to the anti-essentialist, anti-binary, theoretical framework of World Cinema.

I have already set out in this thesis an enquiry that reveals the transformation of the ethics of hesitation into an act of resistance – a hesitation in reading contemporary slow world cinemas from around the world in a reactionary, nostalgic, reductionist and essentialist way leads to a resistance to teleologically orientated cinematic Eurocentrism and universalism. For instance, in Chapter 2, I have argued that *Stray Dogs* presents a new type of 'seer' who, unlike his/her Deleuzian counterpart (1997c: xi), no longer knows how to react to the empty modern landscape or how to relate his/her life on the margin to the lucrative development potential that lies in this kind of disconnected 'any-space-whatever' (Deleuze 1997b: 109) in Taiwan's latest phase of capitalist society and neoliberal modernity. In Chapter 3, I have applied Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's formulations of the 'rhizome' (2005: 3–25) to an enquiry into *Japón*'s representation of national specificity and the European modernist tendency. Although the Deleuzian and Guattarian idea of de/reterritorialisation (2005: 3–25) provides a productive reading of the exchange between marginal vernacularism and dominant cosmopolitanism, I have pointed out that this encounter sometimes runs the risk of establishing a new power relation and a centralised hierarchisation. In Chapter 4, I have revealed that *Yi Yi*'s representations of the everyday are locally and culturally informed by the specificity of Taiwan's social reality under the influence of late-capitalism and globalising modernity at the turn of the 21st century. In this respect, the film's approach to and focus on cinematic everydayness cannot be reduced to an imitation of the aesthetics of Italian neorealism and European modernism. In Chapter 5, I have re-examined a Eurocentric and teleological reading of *Solitary Fragments*' slow aesthetics of de-dramatisation and its focus on everyday life by rethinking the doubt concerning the mutual legitimation between slow world cinemas and their academic critics. I have

expanded on Henri Lefebvre's (1987: 10) and Guy Debord's (2006: 93–4) observations of the underdevelopment of everyday life in order to address this enquiry. In doing so, I have argued that to see beyond the aforementioned doubt is to view the interplay between everyday life and its philosophical underpinning as a slow and deferred process of deconstruction that reveals the diversity of everydayness that is reduced to repetitiveness and meaninglessness by the capitalist and neoliberal systems' commodifying and rationalising impulses.

Besides applying the transformation of hesitation into resistance as a methodological approach to the study of slow world cinemas, I have also tried to reveal that this ethical and political underpinning of cinematic slowness foregrounds empathy rather than sympathy and addresses the impacts of capitalist neoliberal modernity on both a global and a local scale.

In Chapter 2, I have looked at how *Stray Dogs* elicits spectatorial sympathetic identification with its protagonist's physical endurance and hardship, problematises this spectatorial response through the illegibility of the film's temporal referent and the long durational recording of the character's emotionless and motionless performance, and further creates a moment of hesitation that calls for an empathetic understanding in order to rethink the incompleteness of a sympathetic understanding of the other's suffering. This qualitative change from sympathy to empathy reveals this hesitant moment's embodiment of a true duration – a spectrum along which different shades of perception and different senses are in flux. Moreover, I have maintained that the film's use of long take, which extends the recording of a worker's productive period of time into an unproductive one, reveals that modernity is caught between the intellectually calibrated passage of time and its intuitively perceived duration. By revealing the paradox between intuitive time and rationalised time in *Stray Dogs*, Chapter 2 has emphasised an understanding of – or at least empathy with – the

fact that contemporary slow world cinemas create an insightful critique of capitalist society and neoliberal modernity, wherein time is standardised, commercialised and oppressive.

In Chapter 3, I have argued that *Japón*'s libidinally charged and eroticised scenes embody an ethics of hesitation that recalibrates the unmarketable, unproductive onscreen incongruity within the capitalist film industry. By encompassing the incongruous, the excessive, the unrepresentable and the unproductive in a long durational and detailed way, *Japón* resists the discrimination against unprofitability displayed by the capitalist film industry and neoliberal modernity. Moreover, due to the contemplative effect of long takes and realist cinematography, along with the film's incorporation of profilmic contingency, *Japón*'s onscreen eroticism reveals a de/reterritorialising exchange between transcendence and corporeality. I have further maintained that this rhizomatic encounter results in a moment of hesitation, when the transcendence/corporeality dialectics becomes indiscernible. It is through the film's observational recordings of this kind of rhizomatic exchange that this hesitant moment becomes an act of resistance against essentialist binarism and the dominant consumerist commercial code of filmmaking.

In Chapter 4, I have contended that *Yi Yi* situates its socially and culturally specific context in its dramatic narrativisation, and that the film's de-dramatising tendency results in a moment of hesitation that places the global and even the national audience in a liminal state between their own cultural understandings and those of others. I have maintained that this oscillation between dramatic narrative and realist effect leads to a transnational empathy that responds not only to the film's critique of the impact of the homogenising force of late-capitalism and globalisation on Taiwan's modern landscape, but also to slow world cinemas' de-centring resistance to the solipsistic worldview.

In Chapter 5, I have pointed out that, in its ordinary everyday settings, its characters' undramatic gestures and the de-dramatising effect of the split screen, *Solitary Fragments* explores the detrimental impact of capitalism's misleadingly balanced supply–demand system and neoliberal individualism in the context of the micropolitics of everyday life rather than in the macropolitics of specialised economic, social and political activities. I have further argued that the film's disinterested gaze at moments of death does not imply that we should see reality only through a clinical view; rather, this distant gaze challenges the media industry's impulse to seek out one single truth and disseminate it through sensational representations. Similarly, the film's de-dramatised narrativisation of reconciliation does not downplay private and public traumatic memories; instead, it results in an ethics of hesitation that foregrounds not only the collective good but also the empathy which resist neoliberal society's fascination with free market competition that brings about social inequality and broken relationships and reconcile everyday actual reality with unpleasant virtual memories.

Through the analyses of the four case studies, I have explored the hypothesis that whilst it is a coincidence that different representations of cinematic slowness bring about different hesitant moments, there is amongst them a consensual act of resistance against an established hegemonic worldview or system, as seen in this thesis in relation to capitalist society and neoliberal modernity. However, there is one caveat regarding this consensual resistance: how can an ideological or political hegemony be dismantled by means of a search for a consensus of resistance between different entities that have differing issues with the particular hegemonic regime, without ignoring or overgeneralising the individuality of different socioeconomic and cultural specificities? I have thus compared *The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open* with my four main case studies,

in the hope of adopting the film as the standpoint, or even counterpoint, from which to address the aforementioned ethical dilemma.

I have first looked at the differences between the representations in *Stray Dogs* and *The Body Remembers* of the conflict between a hesitant figure and a resistant one. Whilst the former situates a sense of hesitation in what Deleuze (1997c: 98) terms *sheets of past* and an act of resistance at *peaks of present*, the latter presents hesitation as the present's response to an act of resistance that bears the marks of a depository of unreconciled, unresolved and oppressed pasts. Moreover, unlike *Stray Dogs*, whose narrative progression is slowed down by its illegible temporal referent, the slowness of *The Body Remembers* is found in the hesitant silence that results from the disparity between the two indigenous female characters' different socioeconomic status. However, I have argued that *The Body Remembers* does not settle on a facile saviour–victim trope and an essentialist binary designation of morally good or superior and morally bad or inferior. The film de-centres the dichotomous narrativisation by showing a rhizomatic encounter between the dominant *us* and the marginalised *other*. This rhizomatic exchange is reminiscent of the potential power imbalance that has been seen in *Japón*'s representations of the de/reterritorialising encounters between the modern and the primitive, and between the film's production and its reception. Nevertheless, *The Body Remembers*' depiction of the de/reterritorialising exchange is a slow, attentive, real-time recording of a constant dialogue between hesitation and resistance, rather than the progressive transformation from coincidental hesitation to consensual resistance seen in my other four case studies. Although the film deals with discourses of intersectionality and post-colonialism, its mundane indoor settings, attention to undramatic everyday conversation and de-dramatising effect bring its ethics of the almost one-shot recording in line with *Yi Yi* and *Solitary Fragments*' tendency to oscillate between the dramatic and the undramatic. In the case of *The Body Remembers*, the real-time recording

captures the silent intervals in the conversations between the two main characters. I have argued that these interstitial silent moments bring about moments of hesitation that expose the problematic reading of essentialist didacticism. That is, the undramatic, silent moments of hesitation situate not only the two characters but also the audience at an ethical intersection where the essentialist, binary, moral judgement is problematised. In this sense, I have concluded that these silent moments offer the two characters a democratic, liberal autonomy and freedom to reach not only an empathetic understanding of each other's vulnerability but also a consensus *on* acknowledging the reasons behind each other's resistant impulse, rather than a consensus *of* resistance against a hegemonic force whose impact on each individual, without taking into account the intersectional disparity, is overgeneralised as a universally shared experience.

I have summarised each chapter's analysis of the politics of cinematic slowness in the face of the hegemonic and homogenising force of the current phase of modernity – a political agenda unveiled through the transition from coincidental hesitation to consensual resistance. I have also revealed how this consensus of resistance amongst the slow films of my choice is poised to be challenged by myriad representations of the slow, or even deferred, process of hesitation's transformation into resistance. Following this observation, I will bring into discussion with this thesis a hypothesis that I have raised in the Introduction: how can an amorphous, subjective and intuitive sense of duration – the infinite time-image – exist within a finite running time of a film whole that is fixed, objective and intellectually determined? Throughout my analyses, I have tried to respond to this question by revealing that, when a sense of slowness is viewed as a sense of hesitation, it carries with it an infinite potential, albeit unsettled and indeterminate, and also that when this hesitation is prolonged or de-dramatised it is transformed into a resistant impulse that is equipped with an oppositional and finite political agenda. In other words, a moment of hesitation

provides an entry point into an act of resistance, and the resistance will emerge once the hesitation moves from an infinite state to assume a place within a finite stretch of time. However, I have also posited that this movement from infinite potential to finite political intent does not stagnate once its resistant politics transpires; rather, this act of resistance avoids being fixed and absolute by recognising the malleable nature and ever-becoming tendency of the hesitant moments from which it draws its political intent.

Regarding this thesis as a project of philosophical enquiry, I am aware of its lack of performative and practical application in proving any existing theory. Adopting *The Body Remembers* as an interrogation of this thesis' critical framework and of my analyses in the four main chapters is only the beginning of an exploration of the applicability of this research and of pushing this philosophical enquiry to a practical end. I hope that the hypothesis of the transformation of an ethics of hesitation into an act of resistance and the consequential question about how the infinite time-image exists in a finite duration of film can be a productive framework for any future research that aims to unveil slow world cinemas' de-centring potential and their non-essentialist, non-binary tendency – a cinematic excavation of a mix and intersection of sociopolitical, geopolitical and cultural substrata that are buried under an almost static, slow-moving glacier.

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