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CINEMAS OF ENDURANCE

by

ADAM KILDARE COTTREL

Under the Direction of Angelo Restivo, PhD

ABSTRACT

Cinemas of Endurance begins by questioning the way in which critics and scholars have addressed art cinema over the last decade, specifically the films referred to as “slow cinema.” These films have garnered widespread attention since the start of the 21st century for how they deploy what many believe to be anachronistic and redundant formal techniques, often discussed in terms of nostalgia and pastiche. This dissertation argues that these films have been unfairly couched within this discourse that largely judges their validity based on their stylistic similarities to the art cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. Breaking from this direction, this project proposes we take these films and their aesthetic seriously, not for stubbornly refuting the prevailing formal trends in filmmaking, but for how it creates a critical optic that grants us a greater capacity to recognize some of the most prevailing social, political, and economic issues of the last decade. Further, by using stylistic techniques that can often register as out of place, or protracted, these

films can help us to understand the way our physical, mental, and affective coordinates have shifted in this historical moment. Each chapter of this dissertation takes an exemplary film from this subset of art cinema and addresses how the aesthetic works against established modes of viewing to render visible modalities of life that often escape critical ire because they are expected. This project relies on the theories and methodologies of film and media studies, aesthetic theory, realism, materialism, accelerationism, cultural studies, continental philosophy, and political philosophy. The films and filmmakers analyzed include: *The Limits of Control* (2009), dir. Jim Jarmusch; *Ossos* (1997), *In Vanda's Room* (2000), and *Colossal Youth* (2006), dir. Pedro Costa; *Dogville* (2003), dir. Lars von Trier; and, *2046* (2004), dir. Wong Kar-wai.

INDEX WORDS: ACCELERATIONISM, AESTHETICS, SLOW CINEMA, ART CINEMA,
STYLE, CORPOREALITY

CINEMAS OF ENDURANCE

by

ADAM KILDARE COTTREL

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2017

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2017

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December 2017

DEDICATION

For my parents, who have endured burning in order to give me light

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	V
1 POETS OF THE FLESH, JUGGLERS OF THE MUNDANE: SERIOUS ENDURANCE AND <i>THE LIMITS OF CONTROL</i>	1
1.1 The Forms of Endurance	6
1.2 Endurance and Sustained Action	14
1.3 Endurance and Sustained Thought.....	21
1.4 Action-Oriented Life.....	26
2 LIFE AT THESE SPEEDS: PEDRO COSTA, CINEMATIC CADENCE, AND THE FORMS OF FINANCIAL CAPITALISM.....	29
2.1 Globality, Finance, Style.....	43
2.2 Accelerationism.....	53
2.3 Desynchronization and Spatial Dissymmetry: <i>Bones</i>	68
2.4 The Pace and Space of Fontainhas: <i>In Vanda's Room</i>	91
2.5 From Economic Inclusion to Social Expulsion: <i>Colossal Youth</i>	110
2.6 Deceleration: Intended, Unintended	121
3 GOVERNING BY FACULTY: ON DEBT RELATIONS, DIAGRAMS, AND THE DOGMA OF <i>DOGVILLE</i>	127
3.1 Lars von Trier's "America".....	143
3.2 Dogville's Debt	154
3.3 Neo-subjects and Aesthetics as Human Faculty.....	173

3.4	Burning the Diagram.....	193
4	“TRACES OF TEARS”: ARCHITECTURES OF AFFECT IN WONG KAR- WAI’S <i>2046</i>	200
4.1	Spaces of Survival	217
4.2	Genre and Liquid Aesthetics	224
4.3	Wong Kar-wai’s Stylistic Plurality.....	233
4.4	Crystal Liaisons.....	247
4.5	Endurance, Speed, Aesthetics	261
	REFERENCES.....	268

1 POETS OF THE FLESH, JUGGLERS OF THE MUNDANE: SERIOUS ENDURANCE AND *THE LIMITS OF CONTROL*

Without question the most well rehearsed dispute about contemporary art cinema orbits the merit of its style.¹ For much of the last fifteen years art cinema has been both celebrated and decried for its explicit borrowing of techniques, most notably the long takes and deliberately slow editing patterns first made prominent during film's modernist period of the 1960s and 70s.² Representatives of this stylistic tendency include the films *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone* (2006), *In Vanda's Room* (2000), and *Satan's Tango* (1994), whose works have generally been referred to as "slow" or "contemplative" in an explicit attempt to pinpoint their value or lack thereof. The critical reception concerning this ongoing debate is generally represented by two camps: critics who condemn such films for their pointless preoccupation with studied homage, and those who laud this style for offering, at the very least, an alternative to commercial cinema's insistence on speed, post-continuity editing, and digital embellishment.³ It would seem that art cinema during

¹ Readers interested in exploring both sides of the debate surrounding the value of art cinema's recycled modernist aesthetics will find good examples in Nick James, "Passive, Aggressive," *Sight and Sound* 2, no. 4 (April 2010); Danny Leigh, "The View: Is it OK to be a Film Philistine?" *The Guardian* May 21, 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2010/may/21/film-philistine>; Matthew Flanagan, "Towards an Aesthetic of Slow in Contemporary Cinema," *16:9*, no. 29 (2008), http://www.16-9.dk/2008-11/side11_inenglish.htm; Steven Shaviro, "Slow Cinema Vs Fast Films," *The Pinocchio Theory Blog*, <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=891>; and, Lara Thompson, "In Praise of Speed: The Value of Velocity in Contemporary Cinema," *Dandelion* 2, no. 1 (2011), <http://dandelionjournal.org/index.php/dandelion/article/viewFile/35/64>.

² Scholarship mapping art cinema's creation, transformation, and repetition of aesthetic techniques can be found in András Bálint Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007); Mark Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); and Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, eds., *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³ For a more detailed account concerning commercial cinema's reliance on sensorial confusion, see: David Bordwell, "Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in Contemporary American Film,"

this period has been defined almost solely by its style, which has reductively been discussed as either unoriginal and derivative, or important because of its oppositional correlation to commercial films. Without needlessly reproducing the entirety of this well-worn discourse, I want to locate the crux of this argument in a difference of opinion about the role style plays in film more generally. In order to do so, I turn to film theory to more fully articulate the stakes of this debate, not because it is exceptional to other forms of interpretation, but because it has overtly raised the question of interpretation as a valued practice of art cinema.

Exemplary of this line of questioning is the work of one of art cinema's most ardent critics, film theorist Steven Shaviro, who understands the phenomenon of "Slow-Cinema-As-Default-International-Style" as "profoundly nostalgic and regressive."⁴ Shaviro suggests that art cinema's adherence to slowness as an organizing principle is a retrograde practice, predicated solely on its adherence to style as a site of provocation. He elaborates further, writing, "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."⁵ For Shaviro, the futility of this style is largely based on its strict association with the 20th century, suggesting that film itself is undergoing a larger cultural shift and its major paradigms of style need to adhere to this change.

Film Quarterly 55, no. 3 (2002): 16-28; Steven Shaviro, "Post-Continuity: full text of my talk," <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=1034>; and, Matthias Stork, "Chaos Cinema Part 1," <https://vimeo.com/28016047>.

⁴ Steven Shaviro, "Slow Cinema Vs Fast Films," *The Pinocchio Theory Blog*, <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=891>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Specifically, Shaviro is concerned with the emerging digital media industry that has challenged cinema's institutional hegemony. One of the more provocative claims Shaviro makes concerning what he understands as 20th century aesthetics operating in the 21st century can be found in his study *Post-Cinematic Affect*.⁶ Through a diverse set of texts, ranging from Nick Hooker's music video "Corporate Cannibal" (2008) to Olivier Assayas' *Boarding Gate* (2007), Shaviro looks at how film and other media are adopting new formal strategies to coincide with how "[d]igital technologies, together with neoliberal economic relations, have given birth to radically new ways of manufacturing and articulating lived experience."⁷ Ultimately, Shaviro's frustration with art cinema's "outdated" style is suggestive of a larger change in how we interact with film under new economic (globalization), political (neoliberalism), and technological (digital) industries within capitalism. He goes on to argue this shift has by and large depoliticized the interpretation of film style, new or old, as a practice of resistance: "I certainly do not claim [...] that these media works, or my discussion of them, or the reception of them by others, could somehow constitute a form of 'resistance.' I do not think it is possible to make such a leap, because aesthetics does not translate easily or obviously into politics. It takes a lot of work to make them even slightly commensurable."⁸ Here, Shaviro makes a bold statement, suggesting not only that film has lost its salience in the world, but also that politically invested interpretations of film style amount to a questionable exercise without any easy or obvious connection to politics.

⁶ It should be mentioned that while I will refer to Shaviro's book length treatment this study was originally published as an essay in *Film-Philosophy* as, "Post-Cinematic Affect: On Grace Jones, *Boarding Gate* and *Southland Tales*." *Film-Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2010): 1-102.

⁷ Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect* (Winchester, UK and Washington, USA: Zero Books, 2010), 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 138.

If we take Shaviro at his word, what follows is “a lot of work” because it takes the politics of aesthetics as a serious practice for reading the value of style back into contemporary art cinema. To start, I want to question the self-evident nature of the above claims in order to complicate the ease with which critics like Shaviro have dismissed art cinema. My position refuses to accept that art cinema, let alone its interpretation, is somehow a lost or devalued project in the age of so-called post-cinematic affect. In my estimation, art cinema’s style is fully engaged with our present epoch for the very reason that its aesthetic demands our interpretation, and this act of interpretation is a serious political exercise moreover. In what reads as a response to the very interpretive practice Shaviro seems to denigrate, Eugenie Brinkema explains, “*Interpretation is indeed the long way round*. Tarrying with a text’s specificities is, in a manner, nothing but restless detours, strange delays, awkward encounters, and endless alternative routes.”⁹ Brinkema’s intervention, both unique and necessary amid the suffocating volume of work on affect theory, insists on interpretation as a means to confront the “myth of asignifying affective immediacy.”¹⁰ I want to suggest, with this intervention in mind, that the interpretation of art cinema today allows us to see how affect may “press back on theory” and how “a rigorous attention to form does not preclude other theoretical commitments” but instead elevates them through “an investment in the duration of closely interpreting the forms of texts.”¹¹

For what remains of this chapter, I argue that “endurance” is a key theoretical framework to understand the value of art cinema’s renewed interest in modernist style. In this regard, my study contributes to a growing number of texts concerned with affect, aesthetics, and the

⁹ Eugenie Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 30.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, xv, 237-38, 252.

profilmic body in order to better understand the value of contemporary art cinema.¹² This chapter is interested, specifically, in engaging with two such texts—Lauren Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism* and Elena Gorfinkel’s “Weariness, Waiting: Endurance and Art Cinema’s Tired Bodies”—for the purpose of taking seriously the challenge they pose to the tired criticism of art cinema today. In order to do this, I argue that it is only by expanding the concept of endurance that we are able to continue this valuable line of argumentation. In the first half of this chapter, I consider how Berlant and Gorfinkel understand “endurance” as a concept useful for locating the body as site of struggle and survival. Ultimately, this is a conception I find both productive and limiting. With their explicit attention to representations of exhaustion and exploitation, Berlant and Gorfinkel both demonstrate that the profilmic body is essential to contemporary art cinema’s preoccupation with style. My investment in the concept of endurance understands the latter as a reading strategy for interpreting style. It proposes that art cinema might also be invested in defining the body through capability rather than just survival. I analyze two sections of Jim Jarmusch’s film *The Limits of Control* (2009) in order to show how my conception of endurance allows us to repurpose the film’s use of style for the function of critique. Therefore, instead of solely reading endurance as a way to understand “capitalist cruelty” or “cruel optimism,” *The Limits of Control* offers through its formal attributes the opportunity to read endurance as a concept equally concerned with capabilities. I want to propose, in making this intervention, that it is only by pushing the analytical framework of endurance beyond films reliant on images preoccupied with exhaustion that we are able to continue this promising form of interpretation. I argue these points

¹² For further reading concerned with the relationship between art cinema, aesthetics, and the body, see Jennifer Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009); Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007).

not only to continue developing the concept of endurance for the important work of critiquing capitalism from new angles, but also to highlight the timeliness of contemporary art cinema's so-called return to modernism.

1.1 The Forms of Endurance

States of perpetual exhaustion—be they physical, mental, or even emotional—have become what a growing contingent of theorists, notably David Harvey and Jonathan Crary, describe as the principal provision of our digital, neoliberal, service driven global economy. In recent years, with the aid of this renewed attention to capitalism's effect on the body, film studies has seen a number of publications that challenge the claims Shaviro and others have made concerning art cinema's value. As I began to explain above, both Berlant and Gorfinkel argue that the significance of this cinema lies in the way it brings to our attention the diminished state of the body under contemporary capitalism. For Berlant, this is the opportunity to question, “What is life when the body cannot be relied on to keep up with the constant flux of new incitements and genres of the reliable, but must live on, maintaining footing, nonetheless?”¹³ Gorfinkel adapts Berlant's insight explicitly to the films of art cinema, suggesting they do “far more in their gestural and aesthetic economies than in their narratives to critique the institution of work itself and its regimes of social utility, placing emphasis on fatigue as a baseline symptom of survival, the constitutive condition of early twenty first-century modernity.”¹⁴ And, for Berlant as well as for Gorfinkel, the critical apparatus of endurance illuminates the body as a site

¹³ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 69.

¹⁴ Elena Gorfinkel, “Weariness, Waiting: Enduration and Art Cinema's Tired Bodies,” *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 34, no. 2-3 (Spring/Summer 2013), 342.

of continuity in order to make greater sense of an epoch enamored with accelerated and unpredictable change.

Through a series of different readings, Lauren Berlant makes clear that contemporary experiences of life are defined by an unhealthy relationship to objects and people. She defines this relationship as “cruel optimism,” which as she explains, “is the condition of maintaining an attachment to a significantly problematic object.”¹⁵ Berlant describes this point as a “relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or too possible, and toxic.”¹⁶ “What’s cruel about these attachments,” she continues, “and not merely inconvenient or tragic, is that the subjects who have X in their lives might not well endure the loss of their object/scene of desire, even though its presence threatens their well-being, because whatever the content of the attachment is, the continuity of its form provides something of the continuity of the subject’s sense of what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world.”¹⁷ For Berlant, then, our contemporary condition is defined by a damaging determination to endure a compromised form of life. Her argument rests on the pervasiveness of this situation, which subsumes a conceptual shift in our understanding of crisis from extraordinary to commonplace.

Gorfinkel, by way of addition, investigates how “art cinema presents a boundless corporeal lexicon of figures, gestures, and affects of exhaustion.”¹⁸ Directing her efforts explicitly toward the Dardenne brothers’ *Rosetta* (1999)¹⁹ and Kelly Richardt’s *Wendy & Lucy*

¹⁵ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 24.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Gorfinkel, “Weariness, Waiting,” 311.

¹⁹ For Lauren Berlant’s reading of *Rosetta* see *Cruel Optimism*, 161-189.

(2008), Gorfinkel argues that these films “ask what fatigue allows or conditions us to endure.”²⁰ In staking out this territory, Gorfinkel determines, “tiredness is a problem of work expended and strain made manifest, a bending under weight, a bulging distension, a flexing shape. It is a question of endurance, how much a body can endure as a condition of its continuous survival, set against the entropic and deteriorating force of gravity, decomposition, decay.”²¹ The body, understood through these films, becomes a pliable product of work’s demanding forces. The body archives temporality and becomes an index of physical experiences, such that “the temporal processes of recent contemplative cinema ask us to observe a waning and fluctuating corporeal, material energy.”²² For this reason, Gorfinkel explains the importance of slow cinema’s stylistic form as one that reinforces its critical function: to frame the stakes of exhaustion as the defining marker of lived experience.

In my estimation, the value of Berlant and Gorfinkel’s respective arguments resides in how they understand film style as a form that helps us make social reproduction intelligible in the 21st century. “We understand nothing about impasses of the political,” Berlant explains, “without having an account of the production of the present.”²³ The slow, deliberate pace of art cinema, with its heavy use of long takes and fixed framings, helps to highlight that our present, more times than not, is produced by “fast-paced editing, or narrative hydraulics.”²⁴ It has long been the argument that intensified continuity evacuates the occasion for spectators to think, and conversely, that a return to deliberate, slow editing, long takes, and static shots may in fact lead

²⁰ Gorfinkel, “Weariness, Waiting,” 314.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 313.

²³ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 4.

²⁴ Gorfinkel, “Weariness, Waiting,” 313.

to a more active, critical spectator.²⁵ For both Berlant and Gorfinkel, then, endurance suggests one way to examine that possibility by attending to the tired and weary bodies on screen. That is, the slow form of art cinema invites us to think about the weary, tired bodies on screen through its plodding, exhaustive rhythm and aversion to cutting at a more stimulating pace. What is gained from the slow, deliberate style of slow cinema is a reflection of the phenomenal experience of exhaustion that more fully articulates this affect as a predominant social concern.

Despite the interpretive work Berlant and Gorfinkel accomplish with endurance in order to resuscitate the importance of style for politics, and argue for the specific value of contemporary art cinema, they curiously end up in a place not altogether divorced from Shaviro. This coincidence is not immediate; the implications of their arguments do not concern interpretation as I have already outlined, nor do they advocate for a particular stylistic form, as Shaviro does when he insists, “accelerationism is a useful, productive, and even necessary aesthetic strategy today.”²⁶ However, towards the end of *Post-Cinematic Affect* Shaviro suggests something closely related to their arguments, writing, “in the post-cinematic age emerging today, media works like the ones I have been discussing can be valued for what could perhaps be called their *intensity effect*. They help and train us to endure.”²⁷ I don’t want to suggest that we can easily reduce these three thinkers to one and the same project in the end. After all, I’ve spent the first half of this chapter working to distinguish their various understandings about what cinema is and what it can do. And yet, for each, the question or evocation of endurance always circles back to a position or strategy to *endure* in the world they define as cruel (Berlant), exhausting (Gorfinkel), or complex (Shaviro). In my view, Shaviro’s distaste for art cinema as retrograde is

²⁵ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2009) 1-25.

²⁶ Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*, 137.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 137-138.

both too quick and too dismissive of the many unique and promising formal gestures Berlant and Gorfinkel articulate as the changing nature of subjectivity defined by a body ensnared in a perpetual state of exhaustion. Nonetheless, all three arguments render the body from a defensive position, calling for viewers to witness its degradation on screen, or to subject themselves more fully to the “intensity effect” of today’s infatuation with acceleration and ensuing complexity. This strikes me as a very odd way to conceive of the body, and moreover, a misidentification of *endurance* with *stamina*.²⁸ By way of an alternative route, then, I want to outline a different conception of endurance that helps us rethink art cinema’s contemporary value. In order to do so, I push back against Berlant’s and Gorfinkel’s overlapping conceptualizations of endurance in order to circumvent Shaviro’s fatalistic reading of art cinema style.

As I have tried to demonstrate above, critics have cast the concept of endurance as an affective state one tolerates, even suffers, with growing regularity; in other words, endurance is about a subject’s ability to “endure” the diminished state of subjectivity under capitalism. In contrast, I want to distinguish between *endurance* and the *capacity to endure*. In my view, the potential to orient our understandings of the enduring body toward the question of abilities, as opposed to subsistence, opens up a line of thinking that takes us back into the world, allowing us to construct a ground where the work of the political can take place. This opening subsequently shifts our conception of the enduring body from an index of exploitative burdens to a corporeal vessel of effective potential. My primary concern with the former interpretation is that we risk

²⁸ The distinction I am making between endurance and stamina understands the latter as a capacity of the former. In other words, stamina is a component of endurance. We can understand stamina as the capacity of a subject or human being to exert herself, mentally or physically, for a given period of time. The various faculties that would determine one’s stamina earned through training or practice is part of a larger process of developing and refining capabilities I understand as endurance. My move away from Berlant and Gorfinkel’s conception of endurance, to put it simply, renders their conception as “stamina.”

losing sight of our own potential to think and act beyond the dictates of capitalist labor. Recently these points concerning the “capacity to endure” have most often been understood as a condition suffered due to a confrontation with social lack or phantasmatic excess beyond the subject’s determined tolerance of it. We could say that enduring is unbearable because, and in the words of Berlant: “‘We’ seem to be folks of leisure, of the endless weekend, of our own exploitation off-screen, where a consumer’s happy circulation in familiarity is almost all that matters.”²⁹

What distinguishes my theory from Berlant’s and Gorfinkel’s is not our starting point—I agree with Berlant’s summation above—but our conclusion. How, I ask, have we been habituated to accept this defensive position of survival? And why do we insist the body can’t actively engage the world by expanding its capacity to act?

The Limits of Control could be interpreted as a rejoinder to these questions, an extended series of images that poses the question of what is possible or made possible by reorienting our conception of the body away from an ethos of exhausted failure, and toward a practice of cultivating new possibilities. The plurality of circulating and immanent ideas surrounding us at any one time exposes and exploits a fissure in the human subject, relegating the body to a spurious divide in relation to the mind. Endurance, when understood strictly as the practice of “enduring,” is in fact a failure of the mind to imagine the body as unrealized virtual potential. Endurance is more productively conceived as the practice of cultivating a larger sum of faculties. Put another way, endurance is not about what is done to the body, but what the body does to expand potential and increase its possible abilities. In *The Limits of Control*, the deliberately slow pace, repetitive plot, and lack of contextualizing scenes or action—in line with art cinema’s current aesthetic fascinations—demands viewers, and the profilmic bodies represented, to

²⁹ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 32.

concentrate for long periods of time on little more than a single thought or action. In my view this demand, placed on the viewer by the film's style, stages a struggle between concentration and our proclivity to escape and embrace the exhilaration of techno-driven distraction. The glacial quality of the film's rhythmic design, with its endless repetition of wordplay and representational motifs, is predicated on the idea that action is the end result of sustained, intentioned thought. Similarly, the film's protagonist, the Lone Man (Isaac de Bankolé), refigures the body as action-oriented—a site where movement, time, and decision making are measured by long term goals established in advance—and uninterested in distractions that would force him to deviate from the work he commits himself to accomplishing. For this reason, my rendering of endurance suggests the pedagogical significance of representational resistance is a condition of thinking its value through the film's aesthetic proclivities.

With this initial conception of endurance in mind, then, let us consider Jim Jarmusch's *The Limits of Control* as a test case. If we take the critical reception of this film to heart we might easily side with Shaviro's critique of art cinema, so that Jarmusch's effort places us right in the middle of the misguided idea of resuscitating a style long past its expiration date. For example, Manohla Dargis, writing for *The New York Times*, describes Isaac de Bankolé's portrayal of the Lone Man as having a "determined gait and inscrutable gaze that initially reveal almost as little as the elliptical storytelling."³⁰ Similarly, Dana Stevens' review for *Slate* emphasizes, "He [Bankolé] has the carved, iconic features of an Easter Island statue and, at least in this role, about the same dynamic range."³¹ Peter Bradshaw of the *Guardian* takes a more direct approach in his criticism writing, "This shallow conundrum is at once a dull thriller and a humourless comedy,

³⁰ Manohla Dargis, "Mystery Man on a Mission in Spain, Meeting Other Mystery People," *The New York Times*, April 30, 2009. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/01/movies/01limi.html?_r=0.

³¹ Dana Stevens, "The Limits of Boredom," *Slate*, May 1, 2009. http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/movies/2009/05/the_limits_of_boredom.html.

the sort of colossally self-indulgent and boring film that only a successful and revered director could make—or be allowed to make,³² while *The Daily Mail* likewise adds, “This may well be the most longwinded, boring and pretentious film ever made.”³³ Despite being praised for its use of color and Christopher Doyle’s breathtaking cinematography, *The Limits of Control*, as these reviews make clear, has largely been criticized for its deliberately slow pace, repetitive plot, stiff acting, and lack of contextualizing scenes or dialogue. In other words, on appearance alone there seems to be very little to distinguish this film from any other in the slow cinema canon.

However, for all its superficial similarities to slow cinema, I argue that *The Limits of Control* prompts us to recognize a key distinction between different ways of interpreting its emphasis on the body—one that further elaborates my alternative notion of endurance. In keeping with this provocation, the analysis that follows foregrounds aspects of on-screen labor that have been frequently overlooked by contemporary commentators. My analysis treats these aspects as the opportunity to theorize the body defined through its adherence to the cultivation of action and thought as constitutive elements of a theory of endurance for determining “what [a body] can do.”³⁴

³² Peter Bradshaw, “The Limits of Control,” *Guardian*, December 10, 2009, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/dec/11/the-limits-of-control>.

³³ “Guaranteed to test the limits of our patience,” *The Daily Mail*, December 11, 2009, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/reviews/article-1234916/The-Limits-Of-Control-review-Guaranteed-test-limits-patience.html>.

³⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 257. Despite the nod to Deleuze and Guattari, my understanding of the body is far removed from their theorization of a “Body without Organs.”

1.2 Endurance and Sustained Action

The Limits of Control opens with an out-of-focus exterior shot dotted with artificial light, then cuts to an upside down shot of the Lone Man reflected from a bathroom mirror. The Lone Man, adorned in a brilliant blue suit, cycles through the studied motions of Tai Chi. The movements of the Lone Man throughout this scene are slow and intentional; his demeanor is focused and expressionless. When the camera cuts we see the Lone Man walk out of a public bathroom stall. Standing in front of the restroom mirror he carefully puts on his suit jacket, adjusts the sleeves, and quietly studies his appearance before exiting into the terminal of an airport. The scene continues with the Lone Man calmly walking through the terminal holding a small carry-on bag, shining his shoes, and eventually taking a seat next to a man credited as the Creole (Alex Descas) and his associate (Jean-François Stévenin). Up to this point the Lone Man has been the sole focus of the film, rendered in a combination of close-up and medium close-up shots. The tight focus of the Lone Man in these shots emphasizes his body, limiting the opportunity to contextualize his actions or motives. The dialogue that follows between the Lone Man and the two men he sits next to is equally ambiguous. It is unclear exactly what is being communicated during this conversation, although it seems certain there is definitely something afoot. At one point during the conversation the Creole declares, “Everything is subjective,” which reads like a cautionary warning for viewers looking for narrative exposition to fill in the blanks. Like the movements of Tai Chi, the dialogue serves no immediate end; we watch and wait, readying ourselves for the film to announce its purpose.

The slow, indistinct nature of this scene is precisely what Shaviro finds wrong with contemporary art cinema—a simulation of older style attempting to appease cinephiles. Despite its apparent ambiguity, the film’s opening is essential because it emphasizes the body as a point

of orientation. The film's narrative presents very little help to spectators trying to make sense of this scene, or the film more generally. And yet, if we leave the expository dialogue and cause-and-effect narrative aside, we might begin to find the structural glue holding the pieces of this film together in the figural and gestural forms of the Lone Man's body. Seen this way, the repetition of Tai Chi practice serves as a way to conceive of the body as the film's chief emphasis. What I want to argue in this section, then, is that the film's treatment of Tai Chi provides a structuring principle for understanding endurance more generally in terms of a body trained to sustain action. My emphasis on Tai Chi also aids my discussion of endurance as an active practice expanding the body's capabilities to redefine how we might conceive of the subject of endurance away from exhaustion and survival. Tai Chi puts into practice the effective oscillation between action and rest. Accordingly, my discussion of endurance eventually seeks to present the body of endurance as "action-oriented." The action-oriented body suggests a human subject defined by her capabilities, her capacity to act and effect action within the very difficult milieu Berlant and Gorfinkel describe so well. But, as I will go on to explain, action does not rule out rest. In fact, it is the latter's recuperative potential that makes good on the former's concerted effort in the account of Tai Chi I offer here—and in the conception of endurance that follows from it.

Tai Chi is a Chinese martial art practiced for its health benefits and as defense training through a variety of slow, measured actions. The foundational training of Tai Chi involves the dual premise of "taolu" or solo forms: a slow, methodic sequence of exact movements emphasizing a straight spine, breathing from the abdomen (a more efficient means to fuel the body's muscles with oxygen than by breathing from the chest), and an exacting range of motion; the second emphasizes various styles of "tuishou" or pushing hands, which adheres to disciplined

movement as corporeal form. In this way, Tai Chi functions as a physical index of temporal and corporeal being brought about by physical control and mental acuity. One could thus compare its slow, contemplative movement coincides with Jarmusch's use of aesthetic "slowness" in *The Limits of Control*. But when read in the context of debates about the aesthetic politics of "slow cinema," the film poses a very different way of thinking about the nature of endurance than Berlant, Gorfinkel, or even Shaviro suggests: it places the viewer's orientation of a laboring body away from the operating logic of flexible labor and fluid work time. Tai Chi is a voluntary engagement with work, it is a self-practice, and is not determined by anyone else. The disciplined, programmed stability of Tai Chi frames the body laboring in this style as oppositional to the kinds of work Gorfinkel describes, where "fatigue formally becomes an end in itself, a wearying loop."³⁵ In contrast, looking at the statuesque body of Bankolé working through the strict and programmatic nature of this routine in long form provides a durational experience unencumbered by distraction. Bankolé's masterful yet understated performance during these scenes demonstrates an even more nuanced examination of filmic corporeality. Specifically, Tai Chi offers the image of a committed, disciplined subject training the body to withstand the very conditions of fatigue, temptation, and distraction Gorfinkel discusses.

From this point of view, what makes this film particularly interesting is not only its attention to a body unencumbered by the brutalities of capitalist labor, but also its interest in imaging a body as a product of closely controlled practice, a corporeal possibility first described by pathologist Karl Weigert's law of supercompensation and later by endocrinologist Hans Selye's general adaptation syndrome.³⁶ Both Weigert and Selye, generally speaking, understand

³⁵ Gorfinkel, "Weariness, Waiting," 320.

³⁶ Hans Selye, *Stress Without Distress* (Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 1974); and, *The Stress of Life*, 2nd ed., (Blacklick, Ohio: McGraw-Hill, 1978).

the body as adaptable under the right combination of action and recovery. For each, the body is a canvas to paint the forces of stress. Stress, properly understood, encompasses the varying intensities of force applied to the body that either positively adjust the body's ability to act or hinder it through exhaustion. Selye's discovery repositioned stress as a two-fold form: negative stress, called "distress," and positive stress, called "eustress." The latter form is depicted through Tai Chi, where the body adapts and grows to meet new challenges; the former develops as a result of physical labor being sustained at too high an intensity for too long of a duration. While stress is necessary for training a body to perform at higher levels, it can quickly break the latter down and result in compromised modes of being—exhaustion, injury, even mental disinterest and apathy. Capitalism's violence, as it concerns this point in the work of Berlant and Gorfinkel, can thus be located in its unrelenting demand of the body to perform tasks for too long in the same rote manner while denying adaptation, which effectively keeps body and mind imprisoned in a cycle of fatigue. By managing stress, or taking "down time" in order to adapt to stress stimuli, our bodies are modified in ways that provide new capabilities for us to handle the stressors we face and ultimately allow us to perform tasks that go beyond what our day-to-day labor fails in preparing us to do.

This is where I take issue with Gorfinkel's construction of "tiredness" as a "reflexive holding in abeyance, the body waiting for itself to recharge, reenergize, or waiting for a shifting desire, drive, event, or an approaching relation to the world."³⁷ This seems to me to describe rest, to borrow Berlant's phrase, as "a condition of being worn out by the activity of reproducing life, agency," which is to say, as "an activity of maintenance, not making," as opposed to a

³⁷ Gorfinkel, "Weariness, Waiting," 342.

complementary endeavor to action.³⁸ In fairness, Gorfinkel and I are looking at two very distinct forms of labor, but each is predicated on the idea of reproducing one's self. The problem to which Gorfinkel's conception of tiredness points is compelling, and I want to make that clear. In fact, it is the urgency of the problem Gorfinkel isolates that motivates my own desire to expand this discussion further. What I suggest in taking this step is that we can develop an understanding of endurance that also recognizes this concept as a set of formal qualities essential to the hard work of reading the critical value of political theory back into film studies. Now that the body as site of capitalist cruelty has been rightfully articulated, I want to suggest that endurance, defined differently, can offer us much more than a way to signify this problem. Physical restoration, construed as an intentioned and active recovery rather than a form of passive waiting, warrants its own consideration as a valuable addition to the theorization of endurance.

Part of Gorfinkel's project in "Weariness, Waiting" is extending Gilles Deleuze's project of cataloging body language as a means to tie postwar cinema to tiredness in *Cinema 2*. Deleuze's intent was to trace the body's ability to archive temporality, a means, in other words, to account for the transformation of the movement-image for the emerging cinema of the time-image. Gorfinkel's expansion of Deleuze's method demonstrates the efficacy of this approach for defining contemporary art cinema as a meditation of the exhausting nature of capitalist labor. My approach retains the emphasis on the body, but does so in order to reach an altogether different conclusion in *The Limits of Control*, which I argue partakes in a new cinematic form focused on an action-oriented body to index acts of work that demonstrate endurance as a form of capability. In our culture, which both encourages and nurtures the production of reserve labor, it can be hard to be physically still without sensory stimulation, let alone to watch a film working

³⁸ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 100.

toward an elaborate image of something in particular. The long takes of Tai Chi challenge viewers with this point, providing no context, non-diegetic sound, or other filmic comforts to “fill the time.” Unlike commercial cinema’s prescribed method of representing training—bombastic montage—Jarmusch demands his viewers patiently experience the temporal passing the body needs to absorb and make good on the stress these movements place on the body. For this reason, we might dismiss these cinematic choices too quickly since they aren’t immediately gratifying. The slow, methodical pace interferes with our accustomed sense of viewing action as a means of stimulation as opposed to disciplined control. Action as sustained effort as opposed to immediate reaction, in other words, feels irritatingly sluggish, a purposeless slowing of time where we miss out on the world’s stimulating excitement.

Endurance, accounting for the alternation between action and recovery, could be described as an ongoing process without end. It is a form of corporeal becoming, in the Deleuzian sense; it orients bodies in particular ways, determining what each one can do by influencing how they engage and traverse space. Orientations, as Sara Ahmed argues, are about how we begin to act, how we proceed from a moment, a time, a place in space.³⁹ As a point of orientation, then, thinking about endurance starts by placing emphasis on understanding the body in a specific relation to the world. The body offers us a starting point, a “here and now” that demands we think seriously about its next action. This orientation is not the product of happenstance, as I have just explained; rather, it reveals how we might train to perform in a given social state. For as Ahmed further suggests, “What you come into contact with is shaped by what you do: bodies are orientated when they are occupied in time and space.”⁴⁰ Bodies are

³⁹ Sara Ahmed, “A phenomenology of whiteness,” *Feminist Theory* 8 (2007): 149-168.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 152.

thus wrought in ways dependent on their contact and transformation with/from objects, affects, and varied modes of corporeal stress. What is available, even possible, is largely determined by how we find ourselves in spaces constructing any number of potential horizons: where we might go, who and how we might interact with, or even what and when we will do next. And when seen from this perspective, the invigorated concept of endurance enacted by Jarmusch's film suggests that the possible is determined precisely by how we train our bodies in preparation for encounters of the everyday—what we choose to expose ourselves to, or not. Thus, we could say that endurance is about the virtual capacities we have banked that make some possibilities and not others viable.

Along these very lines, Tai Chi becomes one of the film's hallmark images, repeated four times, to emphasize its importance in structuring our interpretation of art cinema's slow form. In addition, the long takes and slow pace of these scenes help to demonstrate the sustained effort this type of action requires. The Lone Man's training is represented in real time through these details, the meticulous movements; unhurried decision-making; and measured control over his body's ability to engage an environment. Likewise, the scenes make clear that the endurance of movement in play here is not automatically adverse to rest; it can exist with and compliment its vast potential, even if it prepares the body for action through the recuperation of our virtual potential. The sustained action of endurance is contemporaneous with recovery, a provision for its evocation. Action is dependent on the physical reserve recovery makes possible. Action and recovery are not diametrically opposed, then. On the contrary, action is constituted by rest in reverse: one must first expand the capacity to act, to push the virtual threshold to a point where it serves the body's capacity to act through its attention to this active recovery.

1.3 Endurance and Sustained Thought

In the previous section the Lone Man's consistent and deliberate practice of Tai Chi served as an illustration for thinking of endurance as a form of sustained action. More commonly the link between action, the body, and film have been discussed in relation to the "Hard Bodies"⁴¹ of the Reagan era. In contrast, my theory of endurance is not gender specific, or advocating the type of action associated with action films. Tai Chi is a far cry from the kinds of action we normally associate with these films. Endurance, cultivated through persistent training, is not entirely the province of action either. Although my argument relies heavily on the body to frame my concept, endurance itself is equally a model to engage with the activity of thinking as a sustained effort. For as much as slow art cinema seems to privilege the body, *The Limits of Control* suggests that an action-oriented body is also a condition of the mind prepared to work. This section attempts to outline endurance as a practice of sustained thought by analyzing how the accumulation of knowledge allows physical capabilities to manifest that press back against the habituation of action. To engage this point more directly, let us examine the adamant demand the Lone Man makes concerning the translation of his coffee transaction at a café in Spain.

In several scenes during the film a Spanish café is prominently featured. Two observations are prompted by these scenes: 1) the Lone Man's insistence on drinking two espressos in two cups, as opposed to a double-espresso in a single cup; and, 2) the choice to include, by today's filmic standards,⁴² long takes of the Lone Man waiting to meet his next

⁴¹ Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993).

⁴² For more on the drastic shifts in tempo and cadence in cinema, see: David Bordwell, "Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in Contemporary American Film," *Film Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2002): 16-28; Steven Shaviro, "Post-Continuity: full text of my talk," <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=1034>; and, Matthias Stork, "Chaos Cinema Part 1," <https://vimeo.com/28016047>.

interlocutor. Taking on the first of these observations, let us situate the coffee transaction as a model to establish the Lone Man's knowledge in relation to the waiter's habituation. Again, I want to clarify the figural gesture of my interpretation: I am writing from the position that these characters embody the form of an idea and that this is an illustration of how two ideas clash to make a reading possible. That is, and more specifically for this case, when social interactions have been rendered subservient to financial transactions, consumer practices ground social reproduction itself. Meeting his various appointments at the café, the Lone Man does not share his espressos. He is, in other words, not ordering a second drink for a friend, client, or partner; rather, he is simply ordering *two espressos in two cups*. The idea of multiple drinks—two espressos—in a single cup is already a question of the commodity form, or more specifically, of habituation to a general movement of material consolidation and economic efficiency. There is nothing inherently wrong with this gesture, outside of the fact that the Lone Man is asking for two espressos in two cups and instead receives two espressos in one cup. The Lone Man's insistence is neither rude nor arrogant; he is simply ordering a drink in a multiple of two.

The real question raised though with this scene is in the Waiter's (Óscar Jaenada) verbatim repeating of the order: *two espressos in two cups*. Despite the cognitive processing of this linguistic request, he in fact brings back a double-espresso in a single-cup. But I would argue that this isn't just a representation of a bad waiter, or even an example of how our economy runs through the service industry. Instead, we see how the reduction of perception to habit and social interaction to engineered response is a condition made ubiquitous through the conditioning of our bodies under capitalism—the process of thought is translated into an action predetermined. To link this encounter to the larger socio-economical resistance being met by the Lone Man's

body I turn to Bernard Stiegler, who aligns “the *new form of proletarianization*” with “the organization of *consumption as the destruction of savoir-vivre* [knowledge of how to live] *with the aim of creating available purchasing power,*” a process that itself “refin[es] and reinforce[es] that system which rested on the *destruction of savoir-faire* [knowledge of how to make or do] *with the aim of creating available labor force.*”⁴³ Stiegler’s diagnosis of an omnipresent pathology toward habituated labor, as opposed to artisanal work, further relegates the body under capitalism to the position of a de-individualized self. Put another way, the linguistic violence here—what is lost in translation during the transaction—is not a simple slip. It is a symptom of surrendering the body and its style to the rote processing of a homogenous commodity transaction; a day at the café is now a space for the institutionalization of the everyday.

If it is important to recognize the body of the Lone Man as an opportunity to rethink our tacit assumptions—assumptions that help to escort us unthinkingly through capitalism’s suggested life narrative—it is because these assumptions account for both a deficiency in our potential to think and act. The Waiter’s slip serves to illustrate the body acting on habituated behavior. The mistake is not intended but instead the result of not engaging and thinking about what was said and therefore what needs to be done. The suggestion I want to make here, is that rote functioning—muscle memory gone awry—circumvents the opportunity to think, and even that thinking itself is a much harder act than we often perceive it to be. While simple mistakes are no crime, the film itself spends a significant amount of time on this scene. We are first presented with the order; then, in real time, we wait for the espresso to be delivered; next, the order is made a second time and we wait a second time for the espresso to arrive. It seems odd to

⁴³ Bernard Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Daniel Ross (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010), 27.

spend this time on such an insignificant scene. The duration of this extended scene allows us to see the process of thought transforming into action to play out. As a result, viewers are presented the opportunity to not just think (as we might expect from a film invested in slowness as an organizing principle), but to see the transformation of thought into action. The confrontation here, in other words, is not between the Lone Man and Waiter. Instead, it is between knowledge and habituation, sustained effort and rote procedure. This scene questions what actions are possible without sustained thought. As accidental as this mistake may seem, then, what drives this mistake is a routine of compliance, and thus a body trained by a habituated labor practice.

The relationship between bodily habituation and diminishment of our perceptual capacities, as a growing number of theorists attest, is one of the more striking features of contemporary labor practices. For example, Jonathan Crary's *24/7* is largely a study concerned with how the current economic and social milieu propagate "techniques and procedures for producing abject states of compliance."⁴⁴ "One of those conditions," he further explains, "can be characterized as a generalized inscription of human life into duration without breaks, defined by a principle of continuous functioning."⁴⁵ The demand this sweeping economic principle makes on the human subject, in Crary's estimation, "is an ongoing diminution of mental and perceptual capabilities."⁴⁶ One of those capabilities is the sustained effort to think, perceive, and act, as *The Limits of Control* makes evident—first through its representation of the interaction between the Lone Man and the Waiter, and second, by the formal decision to render this scene in real time. What distinguishes the habit and repetition of the Lone Man, then, from the habit and repetition

⁴⁴ Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 8.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

of the Waiter? This question is answered in part by how the film presents the Lone Man's labor as an exercise in how thought leads to action. His various acts of sitting, walking, and contemplating reinforce the slow, methodical style that returns thought to representation (e.g., the Lone Man silent and ostensibly thinking) through presentation (i.e., long-takes, static shots, in other words). The measured pace Jarmusch uses implies, in contradistinction to commercial cinema, that sustained action is the result of sustained thought and not merely the by-product of automated response. If Crary is right when he argues, "Sensory impoverishment and the reduction of perception to habit and engineered response is the inevitable result of aligning oneself with the multifarious products services, and 'friends' that one consumes, manages, and accumulates during waking life,"⁴⁷ then the Lone Man's capacity to move, effect, and progress through the scenarios presented to him are a result of his attention to self-care and measured control. I don't want to suggest that the Lone Man provides us with a blueprint, a script to follow in order to evade or negate the crippling effects of capitalism's cruelty. I don't believe any such one-to-one translation would be possible. However, I do think it's productive to align the slow form of this film with the deliberate and sustained effort the Lone Man displays without the compromises exhaustion demands as a constructive shift in how we might reconceptualize endurance as a critical term.

The Limits of Control, and the conception of endurance I have tried to outline throughout, might lay the groundwork for thinking about the circumstance of contemporary "endurance" from a different perspective. In place of the passive fascination with cruelty and exhaustion that have largely animated endurance as a critical term to this point, I posit the sustained activity of thought and action as a response allowing us to not merely identify an issue in our culture, but,

⁴⁷ Ibid., 105.

ultimately, to help us think how to move beyond it. The allure of our current cultural modalities—liquidity, instantaneity, fluidity—is a promise premised on making life easier, faster, more thrilling, and therefore more enjoyable. By contrast, at the café and various other locations Jarmusch’s film seems to raise a provocative question about the degree to which such an environment negates our capacity to think and therefore act. To conceptualize a theory of endurance, then, is to conceptualize a theory of politics. After all, such a conception of endurance maps the virtual adaptations needed to actualize a more capable political subject; it is a way to conceive a body (and mind) trained and prepared for the challenges posed to it. What this film ultimately challenges, then, is the long held fascination with idleness, non-participation, and corporeally negligent forms of orientation that are often construed as a means to resist the exploitative demands of a socially utilitarian and (re)productivist society.⁴⁸ These are, in fact, the very concepts, truths, and acts that seem immanent because they are the material habits afforded and circulated by capitalism’s adherence to conformity and habituation.

1.4 Action-Oriented Life

We have just given attention to how the impoverishment of experience through habituated thought and action deprives political bodies of the means to see, think, and act from a base of accumulated knowledge. The short-circuit of habituation reduces the social sphere of possibilities to consumer transactions, relegating memory and knowledge to the position of inconvenient skills necessitating rigorous cultivation in a culture founded on rewarding rote consumer practices. In thinking of the Lone Man as an embodiment of endurance, I conceive him

⁴⁸ Karl Schoonover, “Wastrels of Time: Slow Cinema’s Laboring Body, the Political Spectator, and the Queer,” *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 53, no. 1 (2012). Schoonover’s essay argues that slow cinema’s “wasted time” is an attempt to think about temporality outside of a necessarily productive labor time.

to be capable of sustained action and thought resulting in a greater number of capabilities and the efficiency to enact them. This move, from knowledge to habituation, diffuses psychic and social orientations predicated on conceptions of an alternative social being who can imagine and possibly perform the work of the body differently. Accordingly, the two quotes that serve as epigraphs for this chapter were chosen to frame the dimensions of my understanding of endurance with these points in mind: first, to more fully read the value of art cinema as a critique of capitalism, extending the work Berlant and Gorfinkel started; second, to distinguish my theorization from the growing number of publications concerned with endurance, solely as a means to identify a cultural symptom, in order to continue the work this term may offer to interpretation of film.⁴⁹

Further, I want to clarify this project as it relates to how we understand action—specifically my notion of an action-oriented body. While I have made several suggestions throughout this chapter concerning the political nature of this term and its critique of capitalism, I have been unable to articulate the exact dimension of this relation. That facet of endurance is, needless to say, a question to take on at a separate time. But I do not want to leave the question entirely suggestive as it may read now. The larger question endurance helps us think through is related to Berlant’s suggestion concerning artistic performance as a means to revitalize action for the purposes of “valuing political action as the action of not being worn out by politics.”⁵⁰

⁴⁹ In addition to the work already mentioned, recent publications concerned explicitly with endurance or implicitly with its characteristic concerns include: Giorgio Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009); Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, trans. David Fernbach (London and New York: Verso, 2008), 71-76; Elizabeth A. Povinelli, “The Will to Be Otherwise/The Effort of Endurance,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 453-475; and, Bernard Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Daniel Ross (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010), 45-70.

⁵⁰ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 262.

Endurance suggests a set of principals that help orient us to a better understanding of the body as a site of un-actualized potential—an understanding that the discourse of endurance as fatigue cuts short.

If the Lone Man is a hero for these times, and at the very least a figure oriented through the political potential of endurance, he is so because he's attuned to and not overwhelmed by the ordinary crisis Berlant diagnosis as all too prevalent in today's political culture. Thus, part of this project lies in returning to a conception of the body that sees the latter as a place of continuous and involved practice. To follow Étienne Balibar's observation that "*the subject is nothing but practice*,"⁵¹ I question through my understanding of endurance how this practice, under capitalism's overinvestment in acceleration and liquidity, helps to develop the subject. If anything, *The Limits of Control* offers a supplemental understanding of the laboring body under contemporary capitalism. Further, cinema's principal capacity to archive this bodily performance through its renewal of modernist film techniques sheds new light on how filmmakers are reimagining progressive cinema for these times. The body thus serves as a vessel for cinematic explorations of new possibilities for action-oriented politics. Here, we see endurance as both a recruitment of physical potential and a display of action orienting our place and position in the world—a visual collection of physical force that acts, works, and can even challenge the very limits of our control.

⁵¹ Étienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, trans. Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso, 2007), 25.

2 LIFE AT THESE SPEEDS: PEDRO COSTA, CINEMATIC CADENCE, AND THE FORMS OF FINANCIAL CAPITALISM

The two passages above were chosen to quickly highlight the increased attention crisis has received in recent years amongst scholars and artists as a generalized global condition of living. Scholars such as Berardi and Berlant, through their various means of analysis, are representative contributors of a growing discourse that frames the world condition as one in a chronic state of crisis stemming from but not limited to issues related to the environment, economy, and political organization. What interests me as it relates to this discourse is how many of the concerns and issues related to crisis, most notably the inability for a general audience to perceive the factors that contribute to it, are being addressed by contemporary art cinema. This is not to say, of course, that such social, economic, and political issues can be resolved by a film, no matter how adept or affecting it is in its presentation or depiction of crisis. What is worth noting though, and what I will explore here, is how art cinema's aesthetic provides a means for exploring this crisis by distilling its contributing forces and forms for consideration.

Over the last twenty years, scholarship related to film, media, and visual studies could be characterized by a constant investment in historicizing how technology has transformed the human subject's experience of and formation by space, speed, and time, perhaps to the exclusion of modern cinema's equally complex engagement with stasis.⁵² Art cinema's slow form provides some traction in rectifying this exclusion through its serial use of long takes, stunted plot progression, and often static camera. The aesthetic encounters of this non-commercial form

⁵² See: Jonathan Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle* (Hanover and London: Dartmouth College Press, 2006); Mark B.N. Hanson, *Bodies in Code: Interfaces with Digital Media* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006); and, Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2001).

highlight the way art cinema places us within a conceptual paradigm of relationality, often highlighting the immaterial issues at hand, such as speed, by forcing the viewer to occupy a material space where such effects register over time. This aesthetic, in other words, asks viewers to slow down, to disengage with their accustomed experience of the world in order to consider how those forces contribute to many of the issues related to crisis. This aesthetic, then, parallels one of the central conundrums of exploring social crisis: how to make conscious the contributing factors of this situation on the relation between time and space, body and mind, the interior and the exterior.

This chapter intends to put the above points into dialogue analyzing: first, the disparate nature of lived life under financial capitalism, stemming from immaterial forces disrupting *stabilizing life patterns*; and second, the precarious effect these disruptions have on *spaces of living* that an increasing number of art films are documenting. For this reason, and with increasing regulatory, social commentary and media entertainment are discussed as representing, responding, or exploring crisis. We know that crisis in this sense is normally embodied as a grave threat to society, whether it comes in the form of alien invaders from another planet, a catastrophic storm, or traditional enemies from a foreign nation state. For the entertainment industry, these external crises remain a staple of summer blockbusters, but more recently there is a growing contingent of films that take crisis as an internal threat inherent within our economic system. Intellectuals have framed this type of crisis, classically speaking, in Marxist terms as the concentrated explosion of all of the constitutive contradictions of capitalistic production. But unlike the terrors we can find at the theater, these contradictions have largely been celebrated in Western capitalist society for their capacity to productively expand the economic and, by turn,

cultural and political terrain of society. Crisis as a byproduct of capitalism, in other words, is a natural, normal, and even necessary component of the financial market's unmediated movement.

Capitalism's capacity to relentlessly integrate great swathes of culture and social practices into its economic system helped it expand to a global system of management. Cultural and national difference related to language and custom have been superseded by the universal monetary system, which helped usher in a repositioning of economic crisis from a contingent catastrophe to a habitual norm. That is, capitalism's capacity to expand, integrate, and connect most of the world system has also meant an increase in the volume and severity of crises the world over. In tandem with the neoliberal ideals instituted by Reagan, Thatcher, and Deng during the 1980s, which helped increase the speed and scope of capitalism's growth through the loosening of governmental regulation and oversight, there is an increasing consensus amongst intellectuals⁵³ that lived life is largely defined in relation to a generalized state of crisis. And, these crises, such as they concern ecology, technology, pandemics, terrorism or war, are to an increasing extent the defining milieu of contemporary life.

Over the last two decades there has been a marked shift in how we attempt to interpret these concerns with greater concentration given to their connectedness. More specifically, this scholarship has attempted to conjoin our collective, global crises as an aggregated "Crisis."

Starting with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and moving through the financial

⁵³ Since the recession of the mid-2000s there has been a wide body of literature published as it concerns the contemporary moment in relation to crisis. Such titles include: Karen A. Ritzenhoff and Angela Krewani, eds., *The Apocalypse in Film* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015); Thomas Stubblefield, *9/11 and the Visual Culture of Disaster: Dystopias, Disasters, and Other Visions about the End of the World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014); Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* (London and New York: Verso, 2012); Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (London and New York: 2009); Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy* (London and New York: 2008); Stephen Keane, *Disaster Movies: The Cinema of Catastrophe* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2006).

meltdown of 2007-08, growing attention has been given amongst any number of academic disciplines to try to make sense of our increasingly accelerating, connected and, by result, complex and fragile planet. Robert Brenner links these two moments for the purposes of productive isolation suggesting, “The main short-, medium-, and the long-run trends shaping the economy today were clearly operative long before [September 11, 2001], and I do not think that those events, however significant in other respects, have substantially altered them.”⁵⁴ Here, Brenner suggests that if we soberly approach the cross relations between social and financial crisis, the mechanics of the latter were long in place before the catastrophes of the former. And yet, while it is perhaps dubious to quantifiably assess a necessary one-to-one relation amongst any two specific and isolated events, as Brenner cautions, there is good reason for the increasing tendency to link and couple crises under a single global state of crisis. The reason for this tendency is certainly related to our networked and interrelated societies across the globe. But also, as I hope to show throughout this chapter, the reality that all parts of the planet—North and South, first world and third world, urban and rural—are more dependent on one another bespeaks a growing realization and scramble to understand how isolated, local crises are increasingly the byproduct of a far ranging and unequally distributed crisis.

More recently, and at the behest of recurring financial tremors that shake economic and therefore social stability with increasing regularity, approaches have attempted to address not only the interconnectedness of the planet in the 21st century but also the human limitation of accounting for this level of complexity. In particular, this has manifested in a calcification of imagination and will power so that one of the most pressing issues debated today is the very

⁵⁴ Robert Brenner, *The Boom and the Bubble: The U.S. in the World Economy* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), xiii.

willingness and capacity to imagine crisis itself. Brenner has remarked elsewhere concerning this point: “the standard intellectual response to the problem of the long downturn has not been to provide alternative accounts, but rather, explicitly or implicitly, to deny its very existence.”⁵⁵ Brenner’s remark is as much about reflecting on the academic failure to honestly and critically assess the financial deficiencies inherent in the capitalist system prior to 2007-08, as it is about the difficulty in framing an issue that ceaselessly reinvents itself on a global scale. Naomi Klein has remarked on this same matter, “Living with this kind of cognitive dissonance is simply part of being alive in this jarring moment in history, when a crisis we have been studiously ignoring is hitting us in the face—and yet we are doubling down on the stuff that is causing the crisis in the first place.”⁵⁶ Statements like these help situate the current state of living as a problem between material threats to our wellbeing on one hand and the capacity to imagine our own vulnerability on the other.

In part, this difficulty is compounded by what feels like a near universal acceptance that the turbulence of global capitalism is the “price to be paid” for the exhilarating rush of living in a fast paced, consumer driven world. Uncertainty and destabilization, in this sense, are traded for the “freedom” to “construct ourselves” around any and every corner of culture to create our ideal, individual lifestyle. Mark Fisher depicts this current condition under the aegis “capitalist realism” as today’s dominant form of social knowledge. He describes the prevailing mindset as the following:

⁵⁵ Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence* (London and New York: Verso, 2006), xxiv.

⁵⁶ Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 3.

There is no punctual moment for disaster; the world doesn't end with a bang, it winks out, unravels, gradually falls apart. What caused the catastrophe to occur, who knows; its cause lies long in the past, so absolutely detached from the present as to seem like the caprice of a malign being: a negative miracle, a malediction which no penitence can ameliorate. Such a blight can only be eased by an intervention that can no more be anticipated than was the onset of the curse in the first place. Action is pointless; only senseless hope makes sense. Superstition and religion, the first resorts of the helpless, proliferate.⁵⁷

Fisher's account of capitalist realism is bleak, suggesting that its all-encompassing nature renders all of life hopeless in effecting change and that the only real value concerning knowledge, social relations, or material objects relate to the market. Further, Fisher suggests that our capacity to distinguish, even imagine alternatives have been compromised by the extinguishing of historical consciousness for the immediate and always-contemporary nature of capitalist culture. This point is fed back through a belief that capitalism is simply and organically "how things are." Additionally, capitalist realism signals not simply the diminution of possible socio-economic alternatives but rather its outright impossibility. This changeover prompts a general condition of social and political disempowerment, so that work once directed toward social change has been rerouted to an endless working on one's self. In short: the felt sense that the world is too big and complex to effect change redirects those desires inward. This, in turn, marks a decided shift away from social projects to individual growth and accumulation of

⁵⁷ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism?: Is There No Alternative* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009), 2-3.

pleasure and experience, so that the work on the individual becomes the only truly worthy life project since it is the only one where results seem viable.

Contextualizing this point, Slavoj Žižek has remarked that our current understanding of the world stemming from what seems like a chronic state of crisis “appeals to capitalist realism, or the lack of it: the people simply did not possess a realistic image of capitalism; they were full of immature utopian expectations. The morning after the enthusiasm of the drunken days of victory, the people had to sober up and face the painful process of learning the rules of the new reality, coming to terms with the price one has to pay for political and economic freedom.”⁵⁸ The question of “realism”—perhaps the most enduring strategy of oppositional aesthetics—raises its head here for the first time in a somewhat unexpected way, not as a form of resistance to the power structures that dominate the way life is lived but as a concession to their dominance.

The long history of aesthetic realism reaches farther back than cinema’s occupation with it, but today’s dominant commercial aesthetic seems entirely disinterested with the realist form to the point that it feels, like social projects generally, hopelessly anachronistic. This is in part because realism has undergone a great change under the dictates of neoliberal, global capitalism. Instead of constituting an alternative form that captures truth or renders intelligible an unknown facet of power, realism is instead the internalized knowledge that capitalism is our only horizon.

One reason to engage with contemporary art cinema is for its powerful reinvestment in realism in light of these issues. What prompts me to say this is an ongoing misunderstanding of aesthetic forms, like realism, that are often interpreted as remnants the past. I think this is a misstep if we are to take seriously how aesthetic forms can, like capitalism, continually renew themselves with original and divergent meanings, even if the basic machinery remains the same.

⁵⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London and New York: Verso, 2010), viii.

What the style of contemporary art cinema can help us to see is a financial logic that undergirds the basic operations of life. As I will go on to argue, the style of these films presents the issue of realism as a capitalist ethos, which helps us consider exactly how and why crisis serves as a prevailing means to express the current zeitgeist. Therefore, this chapter, like the previous, carries with the form of “slowness” or “cinematic contemplation” in order to show how these films help orchestrate an aesthetic that grants access to experiencing the immaterial values of financial economics in relation to seeing the material ramifications such values necessitate.

In order to think through the crisis of precarious life and current aesthetic responses to it, this chapter engages with three films by Portuguese filmmaker Pedro Costa shot between 1997 and 2006. These years are significant because they span the period between the functioning existence and then demolition of Lisbon’s Fontainhas neighborhood. The working class neighborhood of Fontainhas provides an apt and urgently needed space through which to consider a series of closely interrelated concerns that persist under the dictates of neoliberal governance and financial capitalism. The space of Fontainhas—as a critical metaphor, narrative device, and visual image—is something to think through over the course of these films, not just stare at or avoid. Over the course of Costa’s three films, we witness of the slow and often brutal effects of capitalism contour the space of Fontainhas and the subjective states of its residents to align with the values that contribute to its functioning. These films, then, importantly engage issues related to this crisis for how they render the wear and tear of forces such as acceleration on the bodies and buildings of this neighborhood.

My aim in bringing these points together is to examine the material consequences of financial capitalism’s efforts to accelerate society through the decelerated aesthetic form of contemporary art film style. What is gained by doing so is an opportunity to engage these issues

through their parallel investment in the mediation of speed, or what I call *cadence*. Therefore, I propose the dialectical interplay between social acceleration and aesthetic deceleration suggests a new theoretical framework for each that leverages cadence as the critical faculty to better understand each. Ultimately, what I am working toward by framing these issues through the disjunction in speed between capitalism and aesthetics, suggests the critical potential of current art film style helps facilitate an understanding of the destructive forces that contribute to how we understand crisis. The conceit of taking the aesthetics of art cinema to explore social impulses of acceleration, and the consequences of it, is predicated on attending to the growing yet neglected spaces of precarious living, and, equally, to read the critical value of art film style back into contemporary cinema. Both of these concerns—the crisis of social acceleration and the critical acumen of aesthetic deceleration—taken together offer constructive and needed perspective on what a growing number of theorists, such as Elizabeth A. Povinelli, claim as the present social ethos: “to care for others is to refuse to preserve life if it lies outside a market value.”⁵⁹ The force of acceleration, as these films show, is a principal driver concerning our current understanding in the world and how it affects our capacity to live life.⁶⁰

In order to take the aesthetics of contemporary art cinema as a heuristic device for understanding the precarious nature of life under financial capitalism, I introduce the concept of cadence in order to think of how paces of life are valued or altered. Cadence implies a formal,

⁵⁹ Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 159.

⁶⁰ To clarify at the outset, I understand a significant difference between the social impulse of acceleration and the experiential concerns related to speed. The latter, I contend, is invested in top speeds, which are easily quantified and detached from linked social phenomena. The former, in contrast, concerns overall average increases in speed because it is entirely integrated into any number of social, cultural, and technological circuits. For indelible readings of the history and theorization of speed, see Paul Virilio *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006); and, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, trans. Philip Beitchman (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009).

stylistic adherence to controlling the reception of images, information, and knowledge.

Understood as such, it is a means to take art cinema's capacity to establish through its slow style a temporality of *durée* in order to frame the interplay between space, place, and social practice.

There are a myriad of ways to think about temporality in cinema. Mary-Ann Doane has illustrated several types of cinematic time. There is the "temporality of the apparatus itself—linear, irreversible, mechanical." There is additionally "the temporality of the diegesis, the way in which time is represented by the image, the varying invocations of present, past, future historicity." "And finally," Doane explains, "there is the temporality of reception," in which we are led to "honor the relentless temporality of the apparatus."⁶¹ My analysis is interested in the particular temporal flux generated by the latter two forms Doane indicates.

Costa's work, through its meticulously measured pace and static long takes, elicits a temporal experience for the viewer that reflects the temporality of the diegetic space. His serial uses of static shots forces the spectator to experience the disjunction between capitalism's demand for increased efficiency and velocity through the material and corporeal bodies that do not have the capacity to keep pace. With this aesthetic, Costa creates a temporality where the Bergsonian notion of time, or duration meets the speed and time of the capitalist clock. Bergson argued that duration, time as it is actually lived, is not the same as clock time. The latter is presented as homogenous, spatialized, and measurable, fitting for capitalism's penchant to quantify value. While duration is more appropriate for thinking about psychic states, sensations, and affects that cannot be measured or reduced to numerical consideration, they instead accumulate and modulate over time, changing continuously. For Bergson, duration is made up of

⁶¹ Mary-Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 30.

a variety of rhythms that interpenetrate time rather than succeeding one another in space. These rhythms are like “the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another.”⁶² Some of these rhythms are self generated by our psyche or disposition, while others are exterior to ourselves like the acceleration of lived life under capitalism that effect us nonetheless. Costa stages with his aesthetic a means to consider how these interpenetrating notions of time and by consequence space play out as contributing factors of social crisis.

Growing out of social theories concerned with social practice as an outcome of time and space—most notably from Lúcio Alberto Pinheiro dos Santos, Henri Lefebvre, and Gaston Bachelard—cadence is related to but not entirely redundant of rhythm. Unlike studies on rhythm that seek to understand the relationships between various paces of life, the idea of cadence looks at how the variety of paces in life have been reduced to a singular logic of acceleration. In this way, cadence is best understood as a practice of control and consolidation of life’s rhythms. This shift also helps us to make room for film style as a critical heuristic for understanding the forces of speed under discussion here through the viewing experience of slow cinema. Cadence, then, is best described as a style of practice predicated on controlling the flow of events, especially the sensate experience. The slow films of Pedro Costa present us with a cadence that that stages a conflict between the accelerating paces of capitalism and the crises that ensue from it.

Cadence, if we take the term etymologically from *cadenza*, suggests an arresting of the collective rhythm of the group.⁶³ Musically, issues of cadence are elicited in relation to the orchestra, but theoretically we can imagine its relationship to the social more generally. Lefebvre, on this broader note, reasons, “Everywhere where there is interaction between a place,

⁶² Henri Bergson, “The Idea of Duration,” in Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarky, eds., *Henri Bergson: Key Writings* (New York and London: Continuum, 2005), 60.

⁶³ I owe this point entirely to Angelo Restivo, Georgia State University (Atlanta, Georgia).

a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm.”⁶⁴ For Lefebvre, rhythm works to reveal how the constructed nature of modern life has been subsumed as an organic process of living. Most pressing for Lefebvre are moments where, to borrow his words, “The antagonistic unity of relations between the cyclical and the linear sometimes gives rise to compromises, sometimes to disturbances.”⁶⁵ One of the most pressing concerns today as it relates these points is how capitalism denies organic, cyclical aspects of life in order to elevate the linear nature of capitalist realism. Thus, various aspects of life like sleep, as argued in Jonathan Crary’s *24/7*, or a clear distinction between times and places for work and leisure are lost in the maddening, atemporal rush of work and consumption. The capacity of aesthetic experience to reset, pause, or otherwise disturb the “normal” flow of social life is why it remains a valuable contribution to studies that seek to address life’s most pressing social concerns.

The distinction, then, between cadence on one hand and rhythm on the other concerns how we might imagine an aesthetic break of the linear for a pause in, or elevation of the cyclical qualities of life that have largely been eradicated.⁶⁶ Therefore, we might imagine the slow, “boring” style of art cinema as a moment of forcible resistance from the rushing onslaught of capital’s seductive linearity. Further, these moments for Costa are largely improvised in a way that both capture a social rhythm of acceleration while aesthetically sustaining a cadence that decelerates the experience of unbridled sensation. Cinematic cadence, then, like the virtuoso soloing of a musician arrests the generalized rhythm of the group in order to abandon the

⁶⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 25.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶⁶ For more on violence of capitalism’s sustained war on bioderegulation and possible expressions of organic resistance, see Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London and New York: Verso, 2013).

collective pulse of order for the improvised vision of the soloist. In this way, an aesthetic deceleration would serve as this form of virtuoso interruption to an otherwise monotonous and all-consuming social acceleration.

Before explicitly moving to the above concerns, and why I take them together, I want to foreground the formal approach for this essay, which is a critical aesthetic analysis of art cinema. The premise of treating style as a critical rather than descriptive category repositions the aesthetic form of contemporary art cinema away from the discursive comforts of “slowness” or “contemplation.” The aesthetic markers of today’s so-called “slow” cinema first gained notoriety during the post-World War II period in Europe and have been traditionally linked to the films of Italian neorealism and the writing of French film critic and theorist André Bazin. Regrettably, but perhaps predictably, the body of films that constitutes this contemporary return to a form first made notable almost seventy years ago—such as, *Satan’s Tango* (1994), *Goodbye Dragon Inn* (2003), and *Mekong Hotel* (2012)—have been either reductively praised for their oppositional aesthetic or dismissed as anachronistic.⁶⁷ This chapter continues to examine this point started in the last chapter by taking a third way: neither dismissing art films for their so-called studied homage, or celebrating them for their return to the past, a reactionary reading that misunderstands not only the value of today’s art cinema offerings, but in the process reduces the filmmaking of the post-War period in Europe to mere aesthetic experimentation.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ For an overview of the critical response to art cinema’s aesthetic embodiment of slowness, see Danny Leigh, “The View: Is it OK to be a Film Philistine?” *The Guardian* May 21, 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2010/may/21/film-philistine>; Matthew Flanagan, “Towards an Aesthetic of Slow in Contemporary Cinema,” *16:9*, no. 29 (2008), http://www.16-9.dk/2008-11/side11_inenglish.htm.

⁶⁸ While I find fault on both lines of this divide, I am more concerned with the former’s dismissal than the latter’s exuberance, largely because it attempts to de-politicize the last remaining vestige of critical inquiry the cinema may offer us now under the pressures of so many industrial and technological transformations. For an oppositional reading concerning art cinema’s politics of

In what follows, I take on Pedro Costa's Fontainhas trilogy, giving particular attention to how style provides the opportunity to engage the forms of financial capitalism. In doing so, it is also a means to render art cinema's critical faculty into existence, an occasion, in other words, to more productively understand one of art cinema's most controversial aesthetic preoccupations: the return of slow, contemplative cinema. What I want to argue, as it concerns film, is that art cinema's aesthetic provides the form to witness the world we live in defined by the consequences, and not the returns, of perpetual, accelerated change. That is, art cinema offers a form to think how the immaterial innovations and sophistications of finance do in fact materialize, but materialize in ways that are designed in the very logic of these financial processes to be eradicated, erased, expunged with as little material, corporeal, and physical remainder as possible.

The Fontainhas trilogy accomplishes as much by documenting the material symptoms of financial capitalism through its signature aesthetic of static long takes. Additionally, the combination of static long takes is uniquely directed toward the actual locations and people of Fontainhas. What the static long takes are able to capture through their emphasis on the duration of time is the *local pace of life* of its inhabitants as they (and we) witness the destruction of their neighborhood. This destruction, which becomes an increasingly dominant theme over the course of the trilogy, happens as a result of a *second, competing pace of life* invading and remaking the spatial contours of this neighborhood to align with the accelerating flows of financial capitalism. It is how Costa's cinematic cadence mediates between these two rhythms that we are finally able to witness the material turbulence of finance's virtual nature.

aesthetics see, Steven Shaviro, "Slow Cinema Vs Fast Films," *The Pinocchio Theory Blog*, <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=891>.

2.1 Globality, Finance, Style

Critics and scholars invested in contemporary art films have with increasing repetition framed them as constituting a global cinema.⁶⁹ Much like its commercial counterpart in Hollywood, art cinema has been updated, reimagined, and re-presented thanks in large part to changes in production technology, distribution models, and competing platforms of entertainment. One repercussion of the film industry's evolution from a national to global entity has been accounting for non-commercial film practice in the midst of a global market place with a global audience in mind.⁷⁰ This significant redefinition of art cinema, traditionally understood as adhering to a nation's character, has returned the critical discussion to many of its foundational themes: most notably realism, the ontology of the image, and uncensored explicit imagery.⁷¹ Although the renewed interest in art cinema as a global entity has rekindled a variety of productive and necessary debates, at least one traditional point of interest has lagged behind: making the turbulence of social reproduction under capitalism visible and audible.

⁶⁹ For exemplary readings of art cinema's move from a "national" to "global" discourse, see Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, eds., *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Natasa Durovicová and Kathleen E. Newman, eds. *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010); and, Tom Zaniello, *The Cinema of Globalization: A Guide to Films about the New Economic Order* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2007).

⁷⁰ Hollywood's global character is discussed in length in the following: Toby Miller and Others, *Global Hollywood: No. 2*, 2nd ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Toby Miller and Others, *Global Hollywood* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); and, Scott Robert Olson, *Hollywood Planet: Global Media and the Competitive Advantage of Narrative Transparency* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999).

⁷¹ Discussions concerning art cinema's status in relation to renewed interest in violence, affect, and realism, see Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall, eds., *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011); Tim Palmer, *Brutal Intimacy: Analyzing Contemporary French Cinema* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011); and, Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007).

In contrast, Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover have recently advocated that despite the changing nature of its production, distribution, and intended audience, art cinema's social function remains tied to its unique representation of the world:

art cinema has from its beginnings forged a relationship between the aesthetic and the geopolitical or, in other words, between cinema and world. Thus, it is the critical category best placed to engage pressing contemporary questions of globalization, world culture, and how the economics of cinema's transnational flows might intersect with trajectories of film form.⁷²

To take Galt's and Schoonover's prescient assertion seriously necessitates not merely an admission of art cinema's new global status, nor recalling its current style as paying homage to its modernist past. Instead, what the global nature of art cinema demands is a reevaluation of style from the ground up. In other words, the film form under discussion here, so-called "slow" cinema, needs redressing because it speaks not to national or local issues exclusive to Portugal (in the case of Costa) but a growing global social condition.

To better understand contemporary art cinema's engagement with the world through one of its current constellations, namely here the static long takes of Fontainhas, makes possible interrogating the lived conditions of globality, and its systemic symptoms. For that reason, Costa's trilogy—*Bones* (1997), *In Vanda's Room* (2000), and *Colossal Youth* (2006)—first marks a unique documentation of the spatial destruction and social expulsion of Lisbon's Fontainhas neighborhood during a ten-year span that saw an aggressive shift in the logic of global capitalism. And, second, does so using an art film style increasingly understood as a

⁷² Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, "Introduction: The impurity of Art Cinema," in *Global Art Cinema*, eds. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3.

global form representing “geographical difference, or potentially of geopolitical critique.”⁷³

Therefore, the interplay between representation and presentation in Costa’s films is significant for thinking about not only the world we live in but also what it means to live in a part of the world defined by perpetual and destructive change.

The attention art cinema’s current preoccupation with “slowness” has received is largely descriptive. The task for many critics has been tied to tracking a filmmaker’s style, cataloging each film with a number of signature markers in order to contribute to what amounts to a cinematic genealogy. For our concern here, this body of criticism has centered on Costa’s progressively longer takes and decision to use exclusively static cameras, as well as the shift from celluloid to digital video for the Fontainhas trilogy’s final two installments. For reference, a growing number of film critics have commented, in the fashion of Shigehiko Hasumi, how “since his early film *O Sangue (The Blood, 1989)*, Pedro Costa’s camera has been moving less with each film, until *No Quarto da Vanda (In Vanda’s Room, 2000)*, which consists almost entirely of fixed shots.”⁷⁴ The combination of these formal elements directed at the largely impoverished and powerless residents of Fontainhas have preoccupied the majority of critical attention these films have received,⁷⁵ but have done so at the exclusion of interrogating the critical function of art cinema’s global status. The outcome, ultimately, of this descriptive body

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷⁴ Shigehiko Hasumi, “Adventure: An Essay on Pedro Costa,” *Rouge* 10, 2007. http://www.rouge.com.au/10/costa_hasumi.html.

⁷⁵ Criticism concerning Pedro Costa that exemplify this approach, include Manhola Dargis, “Life, Assembled One Room at a Time,” *The New York Times*, August 3, 2007, sec. E.; Nathan Lee, “No More Drama,” *The Village Voice*, July 24, 2007; Mark Peranson, ‘A Desperate Utopian Dream - Pedro Costa: an Introduction’, *Vertigo Magazine* 3, no. 9 (Spring/Summer 2008); Mark Pernason, “The young untold: Pedro Costa shows us the way to go,” *San Francisco Bay Guardian Online*, March 5, 2008; Jonathan Rosenbaum, “Cinema of the Future,” *Chicago Reader*, November 15, 2007.

of work reductively places art cinema within a discursive binary—between art cinema’s antiquated-slow style as a means to distinguish it from Hollywood’s new-hyperkinetic model of presentation—that serves neither art cinema’s reach as a global aesthetic, nor its critical function within global capitalism.

The often recited “slow” or “contemplative” nature of art cinema too easily places it in opposition to Hollywood’s prevailing stylistic practice of rapid cutting and dynamic camera movements. More recently, scholars have attempted to place these prevailing aesthetic markers of contemporary art film practice as a mode of temporal authenticity. Schoonover, for instance, succinctly characterizes the critical response to this aesthetic explaining, “Critics have identified this durational aesthetic as a means of reinvesting in the immersive and contemplative qualities of old-fashioned filmgoing. These films dilate time to sharpen the viewer’s acuity.”⁷⁶ What slowness affords, in other words, is the time to process the images and contemplate their message, value, or function not after but during the viewing experience. Schoonover, one of art cinema’s most ardent defenders, argues that slowness is more than an oppositional style in headlock with Hollywood’s temporal economy. Instead, it speaks to a larger set of questions concerning time and value, bodies and labor.⁷⁷ Continuing to move the dialogue concerning art film style from the descriptive to the critical is partly my aim here. Foremost though is shedding the suffocating construction “slow” as the predominant means by which to engage art cinema in order to privilege some of the overlooked contributions such a decelerated aesthetic provides.

⁷⁶ Karl Schoonover, “Slowness as Intimacy in Apichatpong’s *Mekong Hotel*, *In Media Res*, December 12, 2012, <http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/2012/12/12/slowness-intimacy-apichatpong-s-mekong-hotel>.

⁷⁷ Karl Schoonover, “Wastrels of Time: Slow Cinema’s Laboring Body, the Political Spectator, and the Queer,” *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* vol. 53, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 65-78.

Due to the large influx of (neo)Bazinian scholarship over the last ten years,⁷⁸ we shouldn't be surprised that nearly all forms of "slow" cinema have largely been understood as an exercise of returning spectators to a more authentic cinematic experience of time. In Schoonover's study of Italian neorealism, for example, he argues that the durational experience of time provides a sustained opportunity to witness the brutality and violence of stemming from World War Two. Regarding this point he claims, "these films seek to turn watching from a passive form of consumption into an activity replete with palpable geopolitical consequence. Through the staging of bodily violence for virtual witnessing, these films offer up the activity of looking as an exercise of political will. Cinematic encounters with the violence or physically compromised human form become a means of exploring the ethics of witnessing."⁷⁹ For Schoonover, and by proxy Bazin, the uninterrupted long take affords the spectator freedom to look and interpret the film according to her own will, unlike Hollywood or even early Soviet cinema where interpretation is dictated to the viewer through schematic editing patterns. Unencumbered by the heavy-handed processes of editing, what realism in this instance insists on is not only a respect for spatiotemporal unity but also autonomy in viewing and interpreting according to one's own will. The cinema of Italian neorealism was singular in this sense because not only did it provide an aesthetic rooted in transnational humanism, it also disseminated images and stories of brutality globally. In this way, the films of Italian neorealism dispersed the

⁷⁸ For a sampling of work concerning the renewed interest in André Bazin, see Joseph D. Anderson, "Scene and Surface in the Cinema: Implications for Realism," *Cinémas: Journal of Film Studies*, vol. 12, n° 2, (2002): 61-73; Ian Conrich and Estella Tincknell, "Film Purity, the Neo-Bazinian Ideal, and Humanism in Dogma 95," *P.O.V.* No. 10, 2005; Rosalind Galt, "'It's so cold in Alaska': Evoking Exploration Between Bazin and The Forbidden Quest," *Discourse*, 28.1, (Winter, 2006): 53-71; Steven Shaviro, "Emotion Capture: Affect in Digital Film," *Projections*, Vol. 1, no. 2 (Winter 2007): 63-82.

⁷⁹ Karl Schoonover, *Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), xvii.

material and corporeal violence of Europe's destruction for a global audience to witness and exercise humanitarian concern.

This, of course, is not the situation today. Our current networked society⁸⁰ allows for a near instant proliferation of images and information at any time from any place. Witnessing material and corporeal brutality has become so commonplace, in fact, that depictions of human suffering are positioned as both expected and unmoving.⁸¹ Capitalism's generalized crisis in conjunction with a technological capacity to broadcast nearly everything has propagated, in other words, a condition of disaffected malaise. As I introduced earlier, this very situation has been defined by a growing number of critics as "capitalist realism," where considerations of the past and future are short-circuited for an all-consuming present. What this suggests is that inequality and brutality, because they are so commonplace, become accepted conditions of living. Capitalist realism, ultimately, suggests a prevailing sense of anticipated crisis that has exhausted the capacity to conjure empathy from the virtual witness.

Thus, it would be wrong to think that today's aesthetic realism operates in the same way it did during the postwar years of Europe. In his recent study on realism, Fredric Jameson suggests, "Realism as a form (or mode) is historically associated [...] with the function of demystification. It is a function which can take many forms, in this foundational instance the undermining of romance as a genre, along with the use of its idealizing values to foreground

⁸⁰ For two landmark publications on the nature of society constituted through its capacity to be connected, see Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture* 2nd ed. (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); and, Steven Shaviro, *Connected, or What It Means to Live in the Network Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

⁸¹ One area entirely undertheorized that concerns this point in relation to the "posthuman turn" is the effect technology has had on the human subject's capacity to identify with humanism. Because media saturation is inescapable in the developed world, and society increasingly elevates the values of technology over and above those of humans, humanism has become an idea that seems divorced from everyday life.

features of the social reality they cannot accommodate.”⁸² If we are to take Jameson’s historical account of realism seriously, we will find greater meaning in today’s aesthetic realism if we situate it as a continuation of this legacy but do so through a reevaluation of the form. This necessitates a careful consideration of what aesthetic realism may accomplish under the dictates of capitalist realism. Jameson contends, “Realism [...] is a hybrid concept, in which an epistemological claim (for knowledge or truth) masquerades as an aesthetic ideal.”⁸³ What we have seen since the institutionalization of neoliberal, global capitalism is this very instance in the negative. Traditionally, and what Jameson is referencing here, is the ideology that an aesthetic can transmit knowledge/truth through its adherence to realism as opposed to spectacle, romance, or speculation. But what we have seen over the course of neoliberalism’s ascension to the status of a general rationality is a historical reassessment of aesthetics so that the comforting spectacle of fantasy far outpaces any knowledge/truth to be gleaned from the older model of realism.

Jameson’s account though does not, ultimately, dismiss realism as an aesthetic because, as we would expect from him, he reads the form dialectically. As I have stated previously, capitalism, like aesthetic forms, evolve under ever shifting cultural, political, and social conditions. How this concerns my project is directly related to how we understand the aesthetic of art cinema in its current historical moment as something unique and valuable beyond its perceived influences from the past. This means reassessing the aesthetic of art cinema as a contemporary model of interpretation that uniquely addresses the fundamental issues of today’s socio-economic landscape. Here, in what is unique to the present moment, realism attempts to address and make evident the disparate nature of today’s generalized crisis by establishing an

⁸² Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 4.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

alternative cadence, one that specifically decelerates the experience of life in order to understand it differently. For Costa's films, aesthetic realism therefore provides a form of disrupting the affective stranglehold of capitalist realism in order to pause and occupy spaces of urban decay so as to show the unseen connections between First World finance and Third World brutality.

Shooting exclusively in the shantytowns of Lisbon's Fontainhas neighborhood, Costa's films utilize aesthetic realism in order to expose the ideology of capitalist realism. This gambit could easily be mistaken for mere documentation of today's social realities but instead, as my analysis will show, it uniquely addresses lived life, such as the impoverished micro-spaces of the global city, in ways commercial forms of filmmaking cannot.⁸⁴ The Fontainhas trilogy, in other words, is exceptional for a number of reasons, most obviously its strict adherence to stark, static camera shots, and its devotion to documentation at the expense of narrative progression and clarity. But it is also exceptional for reasons yet articulated for art cinema more generally, which is why my reading theorizing cadence suggests how we might begin to make intelligible the otherwise obfuscated immaterial forms of financial capitalism. Consequently, instead of strictly extending the line of Bazinian inquiry that has choked the progressive nature of art cinema, this chapter focuses on how Costa's films uniquely represents space and, in turn, offers insight into the virtual forms financial capitalism. Specifically I see the relationship between presentation

⁸⁴ Commercial cinema's interest in precarious social conditions and spaces of living is entirely invested in the neoliberal logic of "bootstrap theory," which argues for those not born into wealth to pull themselves up and create their own opportunities independent of any help. Hollywood's investment in this logic is to always position social outcasts as an opportunity for individual self-rehabilitation, largely evading any notion that there may be systemic logics in play preventing such possibilities in the real world. For examples regarding "rags to riches" movies, see *The Pursuit of Happyness*, directed by Gabriele Muccino (2006); and, *Maid in Manhattan*, directed by Wayne Wang (2002). More cynically, Hollywood's portrayal of social mobility is overwhelmingly tied to gambling or criminal activity. For films related to this idea, see *Tower Heist*, directed by Brett Ratner (2011); *21*, directed by Robert Luketic (2001); and, *Ocean's Eleven*, directed by Steven Soderbergh (2001).

and representation, or form and content, playing out in Costa's work so as to privilege *space* through the choice of fixed cameras and *speed* through the duration of the shot. These stylistic choices start to raise the question of what social reproduction means under today's forces of acceleration.

Cadence, which brings these coordinates into alignment, suggests an approach to art cinema that privileges urban space as the material marker of acceleration's force. Because Costa's films document a pace of life unique to the Fontainhas community, the static long takes uniquely capture, over the decade these films were shot, the extinction of the local pace of life of its inhabitants as they (and we) witness the destruction of their neighborhood. This destruction, which becomes an increasingly dominant theme over the course of the trilogy, happens as a result of a second, competing pace of life. This second pace of life is defined by global capitalism's penchant for social acceleration that necessitates material destruction. As we witness Fontainhas bulldozed and demolished into nothing more than rubble, we also witness the extinction of this local pace of life no longer profitable in a global economy.

The impetus for giving attention to how these images tie speed to space is two-fold: 1) this is an increasingly violent social phenomenon that displaces the disenfranchised lower classes of the world to make room for bourgeois lifestyles of consumption; and, 2) art cinema's style provides us with one of the last oppositional strategies of image-making that put this trend on full, naked display. Therefore, privileging cadence as a critical reading practice makes interpreting the aesthetic of contemporary global art cinema available for current social concerns. Images that provide the opportunity to witness the spatial and temporal processes of a global trend toward acceleration, resulting in material and corporeal brutality, in real time are rare.

Consequently these images are valuable because of their capacity to show the process of immaterial forces playing out on the material spaces of Fontainhas.

For what remains of this chapter, I want to ground my investment in cadence as a theoretical interplay concerning social acceleration and aesthetic deceleration. The first conception understands pace as an inevitable process of acceleration that structures our day-to-day life, including patterns of work, socialization, and leisure. The second conception aligns art cinema's aesthetic choices to the above social logic in order to make visible a second, non-accelerating pace of life specific to Fontainhas. The interplay of these two logics of pace allows the latter to act as means of deciphering the forms of the former, which too often leaves assimilation or expulsion as the only viable options. To better understand this neglected and overlooked aspect of art cinema's style, cadence helps delineate these two speeds in order to frame the interplay between cultural pace and social practice. The global nature of contemporary art cinema offers a unique set of images that capture not the threat, promise, or aftermath of brutal destruction, but the inherently fleeting process itself. What I am working toward, ultimately, is a cinematic account of how global capitalism's penchant for increasing the pace of life complicates social reproduction, especially for those disadvantaged by such processes. The adherence to a capitalist logic of acceleration, as I will outline next, has led critics to either celebrate the negative potential of this force to implode capitalism or decry its unceasing and irreversible ethos of brutality. Therefore, before moving to the formal analysis proper, we should acquaint ourselves with exactly how social acceleration has been depicted in order to glean the value of art cinema's aesthetic deceleration.

2.2 Accelerationism

Of all the circulating truisms concerned with contemporary society, most prominent is the notion that global capitalism is here to stay. This point is accepted almost unanimously amongst capitalism's detractors and celebrators alike. Perhaps the most cited source concerning this stance remains Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*. Here, Fukuyama infamously argued in the wake of the Berlin Wall falling that global capitalism marks the end point of human evolution and the final form of human government. In short: all of social life, culture, politics, and environmental realities are subordinate to the rationale of capitalism. The question for many who refuse to accept this position is not whether capitalism is too big to fail but: can we withstand the failures intrinsic within it? That is, as capitalism expands across the globe, the question is: will we be able to withstand the constitutive contradictions inherent within capitalism's circuitry?

Part of this construction derives from the increasing attention speed and, more recently, "accelerationism" has received from critics and scholars. Acceleration, though interpreted from a multitude of perspectives, has recently become an increasingly common theoretical tool to account for the current zeitgeist. Predominantly, scholars have taken acceleration down two roads of interpretation: either, as a heuristic device to help us diagnose social and cultural mutations, or as a force that can either aid or destroy capitalism itself. In this way, acceleration serves to make sense of contemporary culture and how we might imagine this virtual force playing out ultimately to our benefit or destruction.

The recent uptick in theoretical exploration of acceleration, as opposed to speed and the theories of dromology developed by Paul Virilio in the 1970s is also telling. Virilio's groundbreaking work on the topic articulated a largely undertheorized aspect of modern culture.

And, while Virilio is often (and rightly) cited as anticipating the domestication of military technology that would go on to fuel the telecommunication boom of the 1980s and 1990s, his work is still largely concerned with the issues related to the physical traversing of space. Acceleration, by contrast, seeks to explore and debate the merits and symptoms related to how the material and corporeal reality of lived life is irrevocably altered by the often invisible and virtual forces of neoliberal governance, financial capitalism, and technology. The confluence of these factors, as it is almost universally argued, has led to an unchecked acceleration that bleeds into all aspects of life. Whether this combination is understood as an interpretive lens, omen of doom, or innovative savior, the general outline of how these forces have changed everyday life is generally agreed upon: technological virtuosity is now a human barometer for success; capitalism is an unquestioned and increasingly complex entity; and, personal governance, in opposition to collective government, is now the predominant political disposition.

With increasing regularity, commentaries addressing the substantial codependence between technology, politics, and the economy locate an inherent weakness within the world system based on the speed of interconnected activity. For instance, financial analyst and economist Richard Bookstaber has remarked about this situation, “The Financial markets that we have constructed are now so complex, and the speed of transactions so fast, that apparently isolated actions and even minor events can have catastrophic consequences.”⁸⁵ Bookstaber, who holds a PhD in economics from MIT but has worked as a hedge fund manager for most of his life, provides a unique and welcome iteration of this narrative, largely because he is responsible for designing some of the earliest software programs that helped automate financial services and trading. Over the course of his analysis, eerily predicting the forthcoming financial collapse of

⁸⁵ Richard Bookstaber, *A Demon of Our Own Design: Markets, Hedge Funds, and the Perils of Financial Innovation* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2007): 1.

2007-08, Bookstaber reiterates again and again that virtual complexity proliferates speed into all sectors of the economy. “Failures have causes, and after the fact these causes are often easy to explain. The problem,” Bookstaber asserts, “is complexity itself. We cannot prepare for every thread of causality through every interaction; in the speed of the event we find there is no time to make adjustments.”⁸⁶ Bookstaber goes on to explain that “tight coupling,” or the critical interdependency between two or more market components, leads to an unchecked acceleration of financial processes. When something does go wrong the components are so tightly intertwined that there is no time to unravel their codependency before disaster strikes. Ultimately what Bookstaber contends is that this type of design flaw in conjunction with a globalized market place leads to “normal accidents,” or the unavoidable tremors, even anticipated disasters that have shaken the financial markets over the last decade.

What this chapter is premised upon is accounting for how these virtual design flaws play out not in the immaterial ether of information but in the material world of lived life. For economists like Bookstaber, the real issue at hand concerns the unpredictable nature and increasing magnitude of the normal accidents that play out in the market. “Just where the global reach will extend is unpredictable;” Bookstaber admits, “it all depends on which country is having a crisis, which banks are involved in that region, and which other assets those institutions happen to be holding in their portfolios at that moment.”⁸⁷ While these comments are less revelatory now than they might have been prior to the global recession of 2007-08, what is interesting is how commonplace and accepted such “normal accidents” have become in the intervening years. For just this reason scholars like Benjamin Noys, the writing team of Alex

⁸⁶ Ibid., 144.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 147.

Williams and Nick Srnicek, and most recently Steven Shaviro, have mobilized various theories of “accelerationism” to diagnose the influx of financial logics into the general global culture of the 21st century. With this in mind, I want to highlight some of the major trends these thinkers raise, where they overlap, and why they diverge to more fully assess how art cinema takes up these contemporary issues.

In *The Persistence of the Negative* Benjamin Noys introduces accelerationism as a social logic. Here, Noys provides a theoretical genealogy for contemporary concerns and discussions revolving around acceleration. For Noys, in order to fully appreciate the present stature of accelerationism we would do well to track its roots back to May 1968. Noys argues that the failed uprising of the late 1960s heavily impacted the thinking and writing during the 1970s of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, as well as Jean-François Lyotard. The key texts Noys has in mind are *Anti-Oedipus* and *The Libidinal Economy*. Noys outlines how these texts called into question traditional means of subversion and resistance to dominant modes of governance and power. By way of example, the most oft cited passage concerning this point from *Anti-Oedipus* reads:

But which is the revolutionary path? Is there one? – To withdraw from the world market, as Samir Amin advises Third World Countries to do, in a curious revival of the fascist ‘economic solution’? Or might it be to go in the opposite direction? To go further still, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding, and deterritorialization? For perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and practice of a highly schizophrenic character. Not to withdraw from the

process, but to go further, to ‘accelerate the process,’ as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is that we haven’t seen anything yet.⁸⁸

For Noys, a passage such as this is emblematic of how these thinkers were modeling a theoretical structure that sought to understand the acceleration of life as a potentially destabilizing weapon that could combat capitalism from within like a virus. Unlike in more traditional models of resistance that would seek to stop or slowdown capitalism’s progress, these thinkers advocated a speeding up of the processes so as to overwhelm and burnout out its components.

More recently, Noys has elaborated that the emancipatory qualities of acceleration theorized in the 1970s were never meant to be taken wholesale. His principal concern relates to contemporary manifestations of this accelerationist doctrine—what he ultimately means by “accelerationsim”—that seem to cling to the utopian qualities of these earlier thinkers while ignoring the historical reality of its failure to do so. Noys elaborates:

While we can certainly only begin to construct a just society on the ground of what exists this does not entail accepting all that exists or accepting what exists as it is given. This is a crucial political question: how can we create change out of the ‘bad new’ without replicating it? Of course, the accelerationist answer is by replicating more because replication will lead to the ‘implosion’ of capital. Replication, however, reinforces the

⁸⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 239-40.

dominance of capitalism leaving us within capital as the unsurpassable horizon of our time.⁸⁹

Noys, here, nods to perhaps the fundamental blind spot of accelerationism's account of capitalism: its ability to integrate and make productive the very forces that oppose it. In this way, the difference between critics such as Noys and advocates such as Williams and Srnicek lie in their individual estimations of capital's capacity to assimilate new and unaccounted for aspects of life into the economy, whether these be material objects, virtual forces, or otherwise. What Noys is concerned with is the inestimable, even irrevocable changes that capitalism may effect on humanity if it is given unbridled reign of the forces of acceleration.

To start, Noys sees acceleration leading to a kind of perverse tendency to voluntarily dehumanize: "Accelerationists reject this 'humanism' by embracing dehumanization. They take utterly seriously the Marxist argument concerning the dehumanizing aspects of capitalism and they also take seriously those ideologues of the market who try to dehumanize us into 'mere' market-machines."⁹⁰ Losing our fundamental association of being *living* humans, as opposed to *existing* "market-machines," belies a great danger: foreclosing the future to an interminable reign of capitalism that only recognizes and rewards self-exploitative labor and lifestyles. In this way, Noys reasons, "Accelerationism is constructive, but the construct replicates the past in the guise of a possible future."⁹¹ From this standpoint, the danger of accelerationism lies, then, on two fronts: voluntary dehumanization and a blind faith in a potential, utopian future that is always-already informed by the dictates of capitalism.

⁸⁹ Benjamin Noys, *Malign Velocities: Accelerationsim and Capitalism* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books), 10.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

In “#ACCELERATE: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics” Williams and Srnicek position the potential of acceleration quite differently. In many ways Williams and Srnicek launch their manifesto from the same platform as Noys. For each, the current global condition is beset on all sides by racial and cultural intolerance, financial exploitation, and, most concerning, environmental catastrophe. Describing this current state volatility as a political impasse of global proportion they claim: “today’s politics is beset by an inability to generate the new ideas and modes of organisation necessary to transform our societies to confront and resolve the coming annihilations.”⁹² Making sense of this current condition, Williams and Srnicek trace the origins of these problems to 1979 when neoliberalism became the hegemonic global political ideology. More recently, since the financial cataclysm of 2007-08, they argue that a “neoliberalism 2.0” has spawned new and ever more aggressive tactics from the private sector to infiltrate and abolish what remains of social democratic institutions and services. Symptomatic of these changes, they contend, is the ineffectual and outmoded strategy of the political left, which after thirty years of neoliberal dominance has “rendered most left-leaning political parties bereft of radical thought, hollowed out, and without a popular mandate.”⁹³

For this reason, Williams and Srnicek point out that these older political forms, especially those rooted in the potential of revolutionary change, “whilst heartening in their ability to resist the dogmas of contemporary capitalism, remain disappointingly unable to advance an alternative beyond mid-Twentieth Century socialism.”⁹⁴ Pushing past what they deem as anachronistic forms of leftist politics, Williams and Srnicek advocate political tactics that are “at ease with a

⁹² Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, “#ACCELERATE: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics,” *Critical Legal Thinking*, <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics>.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

modernity of abstraction, complexity, globality, and technology.”⁹⁵ In short: acceleration offers the political left if not a playbook of tactics, at least some consistency in thinking through the undeniable shift in terrain concerning the relationship between politics, finance, technology, and humanity. The hope for this shift is a move away from political theories that advocate for small, local, and direct action. Williams and Srnicek refute this course of action because it failingly attempts to address the myriad of symptoms and not the root causes of so much global violence and suffering. “By contrast,” they declare, “an accelerationist politics seeks to preserve the gains of late capitalism while going further than its value system, governance structures, and mass pathologies will allow,” so that they can be “*repurposed* towards common ends.”⁹⁶ The current state of things, they believe, “is not a capitalist stage to be smashed, but a springboard to be launched towards post-capitalism.”⁹⁷

Acceleration’s potential, as Williams and Srnicek have it, lies not in a by-gone past or a utopian future but instead in the present moment. Capitalism, they argue, has restrained and codified the potential of technology, relegating it to relentlessly producing ineffectual consumer products at the expense of accelerated emancipation. Much of the manifesto, especially the latter half, infuses hope in the contemporary moment by placing faith in technology as an instrument of positive transformation. Because technology and the social are irreparably entwined, they speculate that a change in one necessarily changes the other, so that even in our current moment “we surely do not yet know what a modern technosocial body can do.”⁹⁸ Concluding their vision for an accelerationist politics with by placing faith in technology’s capacity to alter change, their

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

manifesto insists that we reevaluate criticisms related to financial systems, complex math, and economic modeling as principal contributors to how society is organized. What led us to disaster toward the end of the 21st century's first decade Williams and Srnicek argue, echoing Brookstaber's analysis, was not our reliance on technology and the financial instruments they created but our blind faith in them. Only by becoming literate in the "new ways of the world"—to echo Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello's descriptive phrase for our zeitgeist—can we ever hope to fully enter into and engage the present moment's pressing dilemmas.

Responding directly to the above, Steven Shaviro has suggested that his own work on the topic "occupies a middle ground, in between Williams and Srnicek's advocacy and Noys's denunciation."⁹⁹ Shaviro launches his intervention from the platform that we need to more seriously "consider the *aesthetic* possibilities of accelerationism" because "[i]n today's capitalism *everything* is aestheticized, and all values are ultimately aesthetic ones."¹⁰⁰ For Shaviro, aesthetics is not a site of cultural resistance, nor is it an opportunity to expand the terrain of societal sensibility. Instead, aesthetics serve to demonstrate the dominant shifts in how and why we value acceleration as a social logic. In this sense, aesthetic forms are not an active register of political or artistic subversion so much as they are a passive marker of capitalistic subsumption. As I outlined in the first chapter, Shaviro takes a hardline stance against the notion that aesthetics are easily or even possibly translatable into political statements. Instead, he advocates we judge accelerated forms of style dialectically as opposed to moralistically, seeking out what we can learn from these texts, forms, and objects as opposed to denouncing them for their allegiance to capitalism's preferential pacing.

⁹⁹ Steven Shaviro, *No Speed Limit: Three Essays on Accelerationism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), ix.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, ix, 30.

Shaviro points out that in a world of global, neoliberal capital real subsumption is the ruling marker of life. By this he means two things: aesthetics play a prominent role in extracting surplus labor from non-material means (i.e., affective labor) while also reducing style from a potentially emancipatory practice to an exchange of cultural markers of societal value. For this reason, Shaviro contends:

Aesthetic sensations and feelings are no longer disinterested because they have been recast as markers of personal identity: revealed preferences, brands, lifestyle markers, objects of adoration by fans. Aesthetic sensations and feelings are also ruthlessly cognized: for it is only insofar as they are known and objectively described, or transformed into data, that they can be exploited as forms of labor and marketed as fresh experiences and exciting lifestyle choices.¹⁰¹

Here, Shaviro argues that aesthetic objects and sensations are cultivated in order to be reduced and translated into quantifiable information so that no aspect of life remains outside of capitalism. Capitalism's transformation of aesthetics from a disinterested outside to a fully incorporated value reduces it to a universal equivalent: money or data. In fact, this process of integration is the defining marker for why an accelerationist aesthetic is possible, if not preferable, in Shaviro's opinion.

The ramifications of this process result in a definitive end to the subversive possibilities of aesthetics more generally. If all aesthetics, in other words, are assigned value in capitalism the potentially negative value of an aesthetic form is thus denied as it already holds commercial worth. Shaviro explains:

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 30-31.

Modernist artists sought to shatter taboos, to scandalize audiences, and to pass beyond the limits of bourgeois ‘good taste’ [...] the aim was always to stun audiences, by pushing things further than they had ever been pushed before. Offensiveness was a measure of success. Transgression was simply and axiomatically taken to be subversive. But this is no longer the case today. Neoliberalism has no problem with excess. Far from being subversive, transgression today is entirely normative.¹⁰²

Shaviro’s stance largely denies aesthetics the possibility to subvert capital in the same way an accelerationist political strategy might since capitalism is fully capable of integrating every point of transgression into a value productive component of the market. Further, these elements, following this logic, are not only incapable of confronting capitalism but in fact “actually work to promote and advance capitalism, by providing it with its fuel.”¹⁰³

Although I want to ultimately depart from Shaviro’s stance as it regards aesthetics, his stance on accelerationism itself is an invaluable contribution to understanding the rapidity of contemporary life. Shaviro’s work should be read and considered because it importantly acknowledges accelerationsim as a primary symptom of our zeitgeist. His own discriminating stance regarding a possible opposition to acceleration, or accelerationism’s inherent potential to liberate, while sobering, brings some necessary perspective to this discussion regarding the reality that the world we live in, as currently organized, will not be slowing down any time soon. To borrow his own words on the matter: “the problem with accelerationism as a political strategy has to do with the fact that—like it or not—we are all accelerationists now.”¹⁰⁴ Shaviro productively moves the discussion on accelerationism beyond the established binary we find in

¹⁰² Ibid., 31.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 34.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

the work of Noys and Williams and Srnicek by acknowledging that accelerationism is a major influence on how we live. Regardless of its potential as a negative or positive force, Shaviro helps redirect our investment from morality to analysis, and the upshot here is that while we might not be able to stop the accelerating rush of capitalism, we may gain better insight into what acceleration means and how we might gain a better perspective on it.

What is clear throughout Shaviro's work on accelerationism is that it is neither a force to be celebrated or halted. Instead, Shaviro takes accelerationism as a symptom of the power structures that govern lived life. He explains, "Accelerationism is a new response to the specific conditions of today's neoliberal, globalized and networked, capitalism."¹⁰⁵ In many respects I agree with these statements. My contention, rather, is not to suggest that accelerationism must be stopped at all costs, or that it even can be stopped. Additionally, I am equally dubious that accelerationism can be harnessed for an emancipatory future. Like Shaviro, I read these developments as symptomatic of the current social milieu rather than as two separate and competing notions of political strategy. At the same time, though, I am skeptical of Shaviro's stance regarding the potential relationship between accelerationism and aesthetics largely because it misunderstands a swath of alternative aesthetic forms that address accelerationism through a process of aesthetic deceleration.

Shaviro concludes his thoughts on accelerationsim by making an appeal to self-cultivation, specifically how this idea developed in gay cultural practices. Shaviro argues that self-cultivation is a form of work on the self that is decidedly not in line with "market competition and judged exclusively in terms of the financial profit that it is able to yield under

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 41.

stringent constraints.”¹⁰⁶ At the same time, he admits that self-cultivation may be “unthinkable under our current condition of austerity,”¹⁰⁷ which leads him to suggest that acceleration may induce the types of social changes necessary to make it productive as a site of resistance. Here, Shaviro takes an odd step sideways regarding the work on the self and the possible freedom that we might derive from it, arguing, “The aesthetic of self-cultivation gladly accepts qualified and temporary satisfactions, rather than wallowing in the ironies of perpetually unfulfilled and unquenchable desire.”¹⁰⁸ Shaviro’s conclusion raises an interesting point, largely related to how notions of scarcity are derived from the idea that human desire is infinite in nature and incapable of being satisfied in reality. Self-cultivation, Shaviro would have us believe, does not participate in the neoliberal ethos of work on the self because it works outside of this conception and works as a “reflexive turning inward; as such, it is the opposite of self-branding.”¹⁰⁹

Shaviro’s point places great faith in how accelerated aesthetics can help reorganize our conceptions of life, stirring changes that can ultimately reset how we understand our place on the planet. Of course, making these systemic changes is no easy task, which is probably why Shaviro is skeptical that self-cultivation can take place under the aegis of neoliberal governance and financial capitalism without a further appeal to acceleration. But his insistence that this type of shift in our subjective position within capitalism is possible (or necessary) is palpable. Using Paul Di Filippo’s short story “Phylogenesis” as an anecdote, which concerns the survival of the human race after aliens land and colonize the planet, Shaviro argues that if humanity is to survive the oppressive external forces we suffer under we must learn how to adapt and adopt new

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

ways of living. He concludes: “Both materially and affectively, they [the human race] develop an ethos of abundance, generosity, and self-cultivation, even in the face of terror and dispossession. This is, finally, what we must learn to accelerate.”¹¹⁰ Shaviro curiously places faith in the aesthetics of acceleration to lead us to self-cultivation and a reassessment of how to live and what to value. And yet, it is this very accelerated aesthetic that reinscribes the values of capitalism.

Capitalism, for all its appeals to the revolutionizing change of acceleration, remains stagnant in how it conceptualizes society as an extension of the market. The contradiction of capitalism, as we are approaching it here, is tied to its insistence on accelerating the pace of life while remaining stationary in its conception of how society should be organized. The results of this situation have helped institute the state of permanent crisis outlined in the opening. By expanding and speeding up the machinations of capital while retaining its basic investments in profit margins, a number of imbalances (e.g., between the lower and upper classes, number jobs in relation to the work force, the speed of society in relation to the speed of the body) have occurred that place a large number of the population at risk of falling behind the pace of accelerated life. One of the largest obstacles in realizing how the forces of acceleration play out in society is due to their immaterial nature. But what I propose the decelerated aesthetic art Costa’s film can contribute to this discussion is a set of images that give form to these forces, allowing us to see their effects on the bodies, buildings, and streets of Fontainhas.

The above point returns us to the question of art cinema, and moreover art cinema’s particular aesthetic forms. Shaviro’s take on today’s art cinema is that its slow aesthetic does not engage the present but instead seeks to replicate past uses of it. Implicit in his stance is the

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 60.

thought that only accelerationist art is capable of rendering visible, and therefore intelligible, acceleration as a social value and serve as a potential catalyst for change. There are a number of issues to be raised regarding this stance, foremost among them is my contention that films like Costa's can and in fact do account for accelerationism. Put another way, while the content of the accelerated aesthetics Shaviro privileges helps us to imagine the contours of contemporary society in how they depict the present, he unfairly denies the slow, meticulous nature of contemporary art cinema the possibility of engaging with these issues in their own way. Shaviro is not wrong to look at genres such as science fiction, or action films for the way they utilize the imagined speed of the future to help shed light on our present investment in it. When Shaviro states, "science fiction is not about the actual future but about the *futurity* that haunts the present. It grasps, and brings to visibility, what Deleuze calls the *virtual* dimension of existence or what Marx calls *tendential* processes,"¹¹¹ I think there is real value to be derived from this idea and these films. But, at the same time, the suggestion that contemporary film styles that rely on an accelerated aesthetic are the only way to approach accelerationism is in need of revision.

In *Post-Cinematic Affect*, Shaviro argues that films such as *Boarding Gate* (2007), *Gamer* (2009), and *Southland Tales* (2006) "can be valued for what could perhaps be called their *intensity effect*. They help and train us to endure—and perhaps also to negotiate—the 'unthinkable complexity' of cyberspace, or the unrepresentable immensity and intensity of the world space of multinational capital."¹¹² Shaviro's faith in these so-called post-cinematic media works is based on his belief that the "role of art is to explore the dangers of futurity, and to 'translate' these dangers by mapping them as thoroughly and intensively as possible."¹¹³ But his

¹¹¹ Ibid., 2.

¹¹² Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2010): 138.

¹¹³ Ibid., 139.

faith in mixed media and post-cinematic films disregards how other types of aesthetic objects are addressing these issues in ways these texts cannot. Certainly we can see why Shaviro suggests that texts such as the films listed above—because of their disregard for continuity, linearity, and narrative cohesion—provide a generalized model of functioning under neoliberalism. What is overlooked in Shaviro’s reading is how a decelerated aesthetic can account for various aspects of speed without actually reproducing its effect. What this chapter seeks to do, in its own way, is to extend Shaviro’s project of mapping the forces of acceleration by a different means.

Keeping the above in mind, I want to now turn to Costa’s work specifically. In the next three sections I take the films of Costa’s Fontainhas trilogy in turn in order to model how explicitly a decelerated aesthetic engages with accelerationism. Further, I want to make clear that this is possible only from the perspective that we pay particular and close attention to the form of the aesthetic itself, which goes far beyond Shaviro’s unthinking association of contemporary art cinema as a remainder of modernism. In order to do this, I will give a comprehensive reading of the trilogy’s first entry and supplement that analysis with a brief example from each of the following films.

2.3 Desynchronization and Spatial Dissymmetry: *Bones*

Pedro Costa’s third film, *Bones*, tells the story of three struggling youths living in the working class neighborhood of Fontainhas. The plot is rather minimal: a child is born; the young parents do not know how to care for it; an older woman who works as a nurse tries to help them. The film’s plot based on this description alone might sound like a melodrama, but nothing related to the film’s form works within the expectations of that genre. The film, like its characters who have almost nothing and appear stripped to the bare framework of existence, contains no artificial lighting, no color, almost no dialogue, and no discernible narrative. Most of

the film concerns the daily lives of the parents and their friend Clotilde (Vanda Duarte) who work as cleaners in the affluent homes of Lisbon.

These “actors” are in fact actual residents of the neighborhood, making *Bones* both documentary and fiction, integrating the residents, their daily lives and environment into a carefully rehearsed script.¹¹⁴ Although my interest in this film and its style are not concentrated in its documentary-esque qualities, it does suggest something quite powerful about Costa’s film. While *Bones* is staged, the scenes scripted, its appeal to realism through documenting the lived lives of these youth, in the words of Bárbara Barroso, “gather the living force of a community into a collective effort of cinema, into an exchange of trust and work. The film, or cinema, enters into these people’s lives and they enter the film in equal measures.”¹¹⁵ Costa’s capacity to capture the community of Fontainhas by integrating his crew into the neighborhood is the film’s most celebrated quality, but what makes this so fascinating to watch is the attention he gives to the minute, daily activities that transpire.

¹¹⁴ For more on the complex history between documentary style and fiction filmmaking, see Aileen Blaney, “Remembering Historical Trauma in Paul Greengrass’s *Bloody Sunday*.” *History & Memory* 19, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2007): 113–38; David Davidson, “Direct Cinema and Modernism: The Long Journey to ‘Grey Gardens.’” *Journal of the University Film Association* 33, no. 1 (January 1, 1981): 3–13; Jeanne Hall, “‘Don’t You Ever Just Watch?’ American Cinema Verite and Don’t Look Back,” In *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video*, edited by Barry Keith Grant, 223–37, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998); Jeanne Hall, “Realism as a Style in Cinema Verite: A Critical Analysis of ‘Primary.’” *Cinema Journal* 30, no. 4 (July 1, 1991): 24–50; Craig Hight and Jane Roscoe, *Faking It: Mock-Documentary and the Subversion of Factuality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Gary Don Rhodes and John Parris Springer, *Docufictions: Essays on the Intersection of Documentary and Fictional Filmmaking* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2006); Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight, “Building a Mock-Documentary Schema,” in *New Challenges for Documentary*, edited by Alan Rosenthal and John Corner, 2nd ed., 230–41 (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005).

¹¹⁵ Bárbara Barroso, “Ossos / Bones,” *Senses of Cinema*, February 2009. <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2009/cteq/ossos/>

In this way, the film draws our attention to and places us within the “diegetic” environment through its extended long takes. These long takes often take the form of small mysteries, as Costa’s editing denies the viewer any contextual information, instead inviting the viewer to experience the time, pace, and space of Fontainhas at the expense of narrative clarity. What results from these choices is a focus on the everyday actions of the people with a keen eye toward how those actions are partially determined by the space depicted. The narrative intrigue of the baby, the young struggling parents, and the kindly nurse who attempts to help become almost insignificant in light of the film’s relentless attention to the daily routines of working class life.

The opening shot of *Bones* is a close-up framing the face of a young woman named Clotilde staring blankly into the camera. Her face is presented without adornment—natural lighting, no makeup, hair disheveled—as she sits alone on a rusted twin bed. Her face is expressionless, nearly motionless, only her eyes move, looking first directly at the camera, then down to the floor, and finally back to the camera. Her body is slumped over to one side, resting on the wall for support. Her eyes are heavy, surrounded by dark rings of exhaustion. The camera cuts to the title shot, plain white letters on a black background, before cutting again to the interior of the home, focusing on a single window emanating sunlight from outside.

The light from the window creates a silhouette of Clotilde, who descends down a short flight of stairs with a deep wheezing cough. Constant noise from the street and neighboring apartments bleed through the walls: out of ear shot conversations, dogs barking, cars driving down a nearby street. As Clotilde reaches the bottom of the stairs, the camera pans one hundred and eighty degrees to reveal a small, decrepit kitchen. Clotilde fills a pot with water and puts it on a stovetop. She strikes a match to ignite the gas stove, whose pilot light has stopped working,

and then a cigarette before turning her attention inward, looking at the kitchen wall ahead of her. The following shot frames Clotilde's face again starring blankly into the camera. She exhales the smoke from her cigarette as a dog barks in the background. Clotilde gives a nod and knowing smile, the dog's bark seems to provide a moment of respite before her face falls into a disaffected expression once more.

The rooms of Clotilde's home are, like herself, stripped of any ornament, unkempt by any middle-class standard, shabby and only half functional, containing no luxuries: the walls in need of a new paint job, rusted metal, chipped paint, and a few half working appliances. The space that introduces the film is telling in the way it coincides with the characters, creating a direct association between Clotilde and her home. For instance, Clotilde's blank stare and hacking cough are paired with the building's half working appliances and rusted furnishings. Their shared state of decay is hard to ignore, as the camera lingers on each detail in close-up allowing our eyes to investigate every perceivable detail. The house itself feels less like a home and more like a holding pen, offering little comfort, excluding the comforts we would imagine a home to possess. Decoration and modern appliances are lacking, even interior lighting is absent from these opening shots; only the "bones" of these buildings are present, with the structural framework occupying the central feature of domestic space.

The film's opening moments quickly establish a controlled, measured cadence through its succession of lingering close-ups that feature the dilapidated condition of this home in relation to the disaffected expressions of Clotilde. Both of these bodies (the body of the home and Clotilde's) are shot with particular attention given to those details that signify their worn and exhausted status. The film's elongated shots allow us the opportunity to see these details but they further serve to establish the particular temporality of Fontainhas. Here, the film's long takes

work to reinforce the withering effects of acceleration by slowing the progression of shots, so that they coincide with the pace of life they were designed to facilitate. Clotilde's home is obviously a remnant of a previous era, one that was not built to support the speeds of contemporary life. This space's antiquated construction is inadequate to support, among other things, modern electric circuitry, appliances, or Internet access. The bones of this building remain, but the flesh is rotting, relegating it as a vestige of a time modern life has long since surpassed.

To this point in the film, no lines of dialogue have been spoken. Nearly all the information of the film's opening scene has been communicated visually through the largely static camera that juxtaposes the domestic space with its residents. The long static takes and natural lighting give the sense that the life this space can support is withering away, literally decaying in front of us. As this scene progresses it begins to create a suffocating effect through its lack of luminescent lighting, static camera, long takes, and close-ups. The shots are framed so that they never reveal a connecting room, or even much sense as to the actual size or scope of the space. Like Clotilde, we experience this space as an absolute representation of the environment. Without a master shot to establish spatial orientation, we are left with no context outside of a few cramped, decrepit rooms.

We can begin to interpret this scene (and the space of Fontainhas) with greater insight with the following shot of Clotilde and the father of the aforementioned child Nuno, waiting for the bus. The two stand in silence, looking at the ground as the whir of traffic is heard off camera. Their lack of energy is clearly central to establishing the characters' identity and context. In the movies, we are accustomed to seeing young people full of energy, moving, running, jumping through the cinematic space with intoxicated exuberance. These shots clearly work away from

that model, suggesting that time for these youth is not abundant, the future is not full of potential, and what energy they have cannot be expended on playing, flirting, or idle conversing. Standing practically motionless, Clotilde and Nuno wait for the bus. As they wait at the bus stop, the camera holds us captive in this moment with Clotilde and Nuno as we hear cars driving down the road, the sound of their engines rapidly entering and exiting the shot.

The disparity between the speed of auditory movement heard off-screen and the static nature of Clotilde and Nuno on-screen holds these two competing paces of life together for comparison. Thus, the disparity between the cars moving down the motorway and the idle waiting for public transportation present a clear depiction of two speeds: the first, embodied by the periphery elements of the film, such as these cars, establishes the organizational pace of capitalism; the second, found in Fontainhas and with its residents, forms an alternative pace of life that is rendered slow and obsolete in light of the first. Small moments throughout the film, like not having the monetary means to own a car, begin to accumulate suggesting how these speeds cohabitate a space in an antagonistic tension.

While the immediately apparent content concerning class struggle and urban precariousness is there and very much a real concern; my aim is to show specifically how the film's style is allowing this to appear for us. For instance, it does not take a huge leap to see that taking public transit limits agency, the ability to move freely and rapidly through the space of the city. But what is unique in how *Bones* addresses these issues is the specific aesthetic that works to productively hold the immaterial forces of capitalism (acceleration) together in order to witness the material effects on lived life. Therefore, waiting for public transit, that ever frustrating halt in the flow of modern life is revealed here as a consequence of falling out of acceleration's slipstream. The power of such a simple juxtaposition, a moment easily overlooked

with a more dynamic presentation, reveals how aesthetics can begin to untangle some of the complexity of contemporary life through its capacity to bifurcate into two distinct moments what is often only lived as a single united experience. By shooting in long takes we can begin to read how the banality of waiting has long served as an essential aspect to the experience of being together through the isolation experienced by Clotilde and Nuno. The unproductive time of waiting, and waiting with others also elicits the opportunity for community through the shared social experience. But here, the camera's close-up frames just Clotilde and Nuno, bringing attention to the outmoded nature of public transit, and further, the outmoded nature of communal space for the convenience of owning an automobile and its accompanying privacy.

There are any number of moments like this throughout *Bones* that place the relation between space and speed at the crux of the individual's experience. For example, the proceeding shot continues to hold these paces together in a productive tension, framing Clotilde's and Nuno's interlaced hands in a close-up as they sit on the city bus. Their hands do not move. Instead they rest idly, revealing dirt under their fingernails. As Clotilde and Nuno sit the roar of the bus's diesel engine saturates the scene. The bus, an automated form of accelerated movement, brings Clotilde and Nuno "up to speed," into Lisbon's upper middle class neighborhoods. The context of these shots is initially denied to the viewer, the camera zoomed in too far to gain any real perspective of the outside world, presenting only their hands from the interior of the bus. Then the camera abruptly cuts to a serene white door, prominently displaying an eyehole and four security locks. The door is pushed open, revealing that the camera is actually inside the home. Vanda opens the door and enters, coughs twice and takes a cautious look around. After asking if anyone is home and receiving no reply, Clotilde lets Nuno into the home.

Initially it is unclear what Vanda and Nuno are doing: are they visiting someone they know? Could they be breaking and entering? Or, perhaps they are looking for something? Once they have entered the house Clotilde changes into a dress and apron, what turns out to be a cleaning uniform, after using the shower. The relationship between Clotilde and this new space is now clear: she is there to clean the house, and Nuno is simply accompanying her. The space is luminescent from walls virgin white, furnishings impeccably kempt, and spaces clearly demarcated as living room, bedroom, kitchen, closet. It is a stark contrast to Clotilde's home in nearly every way. The furnishings are modern and abundant and the walls appear newly painted. The next shot shows Nuno idly sitting on a sofa while an electric vacuum cleaner hums in the background. Clotilde enters the shot running the machine back-and-forth across the carpet. The electric whir of the machine the only audible sound.

The space of this middleclass home when compared to Clotilde's seems hermetically sealed from outside intrusions, sounds unwanted, intrusions unwelcome. In this way, the room is guarded from the outside, providing a quiet space for leisure and recuperation. By comparison, Clotilde's space is porous, open to the outside world and all the intrusions that come with it: traffic noise, private conversations of neighbors, unwanted light, etc. Further, the home Clotilde cleans is shot so as to highlight the expansiveness of the space. This is highlighted by how the camera is always positioned in an adjacent room, so that the living room, for example, is framed by the walkway to the dining room, or the bathroom by the open doorway to the hallway. The sense this space gives is that it is both conducive to the flow of movement, with its open style, and provides respite from the ceaseless activity of the shared, public spaces of the city. The multitude of locks and open, airy design also help to magnify how the design of the room fosters

a sense of security and comfort. In contrast to the porosity of Clotilde's space, it feels like a space where rest and peace of mind can be cultivated from wearying pace of the outside world.

Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis in the essay they wrote together in 1925 ("Naples"), poignantly discuss the city of Naples evoking the central image of porosity. I want to suggest that what they wrote about Naples is equally illustrative of the city of Lisbon, particularly how *Bones* presents the Fontainhas neighborhood. Moreover, reading Lisbon through the images of Naples that I am briefly suggesting here is consistent with Benjamin's own method of reading one city through the images of another. Describing the city of Naples as grown into the rock, Lacis and Benjamin wrote:

At the base of the cliff itself, where it touches the shore, caves have been hewn [...] As porous as this stone is the architecture. Building and action interpenetrate in the courtyards, arcades, and stairways. In everything, they preserve the scope to become a theatre of new, unforeseen constellation. The stamp of definitive is avoided. No situation appears intended forever, no figure asserts it 'thus and not otherwise.' This is how architecture, the most binding part of the communal rhythm, comes into being here.¹¹⁶

Further they reflect that "[p]orosity is the inexhaustible law of life in this city."¹¹⁷ This "inexhaustible law of life," presciently put forward by Benjamin and Lacis, is also the law of life in Fontainhas where "building and action interpenetrate" in the areas that have survived the ravages of time and gentrification. Yet, the aesthetic richness of this space of action only takes place within the sea of poverty engulfing it and buried under the thick layers of grime and decay.

¹¹⁶ Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis, "Naples," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans., Edmund Jephcott, ed. Peter Demetz (New York and London: Schocken, 1986), 165-166.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

Extending this image to the character and the psychology of the inhabitant of the city, Benjamin and Lacis further write, “Porosity results not only from the indolence of the southern artisan, above all, from the passion for improvisation, which demands that space and opportunity be preserved at any price. Buildings are used as a popular stage. They are all divided into innumerable, simultaneously animated theaters. Balcony, courtyard, windows, gateways, staircase, roof are at the same time stage and boxes.”¹¹⁸ Thus, in the porous city the categorical demarcation between inside and outside, between private and communal life, between the skin and body, begins to blur: “Just as the living room reappears on the street, with charis, hearth, and altar, so [...] the street migrates into the living room.”¹¹⁹ Porosity, here, is a psychocorporeal boundary of space, expressive of the fragile state of the body. It is not just the boundaries of Fontainhas that are porous, but its residents are also soluble. This space is the source of bliss and despair, as the communal space of Fontainhas, its openness to encounters and the non-productive time of leisure are threatened by the forces of acceleration that seek to invade its very interiority.

In order to fully render this idea palpable here, let us now briefly turn our attention to the architectural design of Fontainhas as it is presented in the film. After Clotilde and Nuno finish their day of cleaning they return home to Fontainhas. Unlike in the film’s opening, we are given an establishing shot of the neighborhood, provided by an overhead view. Initially the image seems to be shot at a canted angle, but upon further inspection we realize the intersecting alleyways that are the focus of the shot are in fact winding. The spatial representation here highlights how the movements on the street are slowed based on their winding course, littered with bystanders lined along its course, and intersect with various other side streets and alleyways. The remote street lighting casts an innumerable number of shadows that also play out

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 166-167.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

on the viewer's optical experience of the space, morphing and contorting the buildings and debris that line these passageways. The camera then cuts to a series of interior shots of Clotilde, Nuno, and Mariya (the child's mother) in their collective domestic spaces shutting doors and windows, vainly attempting to keep out the exterior noise and light from the street. The rusted locks and latches reveal cracks and crevices along the edges of the window and doorframes. Here, the winding nature of Fontainhas is presented to highlight the paths by which its residents can move and interact within the contours of its space. This type of space is conducive to chance encounters and the time of communal gathering, which is a stark contrast to streamlined spaces of Lisbon's motorways and middleclass homes that encourage unrelenting movement. In addition, the ever present exterior noise and light that saturates the Fontainhas homes demonstrate that this is a space that is open and therefore vulnerable to outside intrusions.

The space of Fontainhas is depicted here to highlight its inability to fully defend and seal off exterior forces. The jump from Fontainhas, to the bus, to the middle class home, and then back to Fontainhas, represent a schematic depiction of how we can understand the relationship between space and speed as a byproduct of acceleration. This opening scene, we can say, serves as a microcosm for the film as a whole. The most prominent images throughout *Bones* are of the two spaces juxtaposed in this opening: the makeshift homes of Fontainhas and the middle-class homes Clotilde, Mariya, and Nuno attend to as cleaners. Within the first ten minutes, these spaces establish a bleak dichotomy between those able to navigate a society of accelerated action and those merely surviving on its margins. What *Bones* makes clear with its observational long takes is how a blind adherence to acceleration opens a fissure between societal synchronization and social integration. The class distinction between these spaces is obvious, but more interesting

is how these spaces are shot so as to highlight their capacity to facilitate the pace of life in the modern global city.

As these spaces establish, *Bones* is a film that takes great care in juxtaposing several locations in Lisbon, primarily the lower class neighborhood of Fontainhas and the public and private spaces of Lisbon's commercial district. The film's static camera gives us a penetrating glimpse into the interior of both Clotilde and the spaces of Fontainhas, establishing that life lived in Fontainhas and life lived in the middle-class homes operate on entirely different scales of speed. While the film ostensibly revolves around Clotilde and Mariya and Nuno, who become parents of an unwanted baby, what the camera is continually preoccupied with is how these spaces facilitate movement and activity with rest and respite. Clotilde's home clearly is unable to provide much protection from the outside world. Additionally, her daily routine largely revolves around traversing the vast expanse of the city. In the interim, idle waiting, and at the end of the day, back at home, with all of Fontainhas's noise and activity bleeding through the walls.

Equally, the camera focuses on the bodies of these main characters, allowing the viewer to gaze upon their posture (slumped over), clothes (tattered), and grooming (hair not brushed, hands unwashed), which serve as sites of impact where we can register the effect of these forces. Clotilde, Mariya, and Nuno are most often shot propped up against a wall, or otherwise supported to establish the exhausted nature of their bodies in relation to the dilapidated structures they live in. The camera's fixation on these points draws our attention to the impact of acceleration through the attrition we find in these material/corporeal markers. We find this point most prominently in the opening scene through the lack of movement, suggesting a shortage of energy, motivation, or desire in these young people. Further, their lack of movement suggests an attempt to conserve energy, to not use any physical source of strength unless it is called for. The

effects of manual labor and commuting to work seem to accumulate in a general sense of ennui, so that the lives of these youth are presented as an endless string of demanding actions. Even the home, traditionally a space of respite, is bereft of any comfort or protection to the speeds of the outside world.

The repetition we find here in the structuring of each day is also inscribed in the editing pattern of the film. The static long takes, like the repetition of activity in Clotilde's life, reinforce the monotony of living at a decelerated pace. The film, while only 90-minutes long, begins to take its toll on the viewer through its exacting depiction of the daily task of reproducing the self. Here, the static camera, long takes, close-ups, exclusive use of diegetic sound, and natural lighting produce a feeling of claustrophobia. In fact, one of the most curious aspects of the film is its indifference to contextualizing shots that would provide some sense of the cityscape, or some other space where the exhausting pace of life is arrested, if only momentarily. Instead, the camera's shots are so tight that it becomes increasingly hard to imagine what, if anything, might be happening outside of the youth's daily routine. The aesthetic repetition, then, provides its own routine that forecloses the possibility of an outside space that could facilitate both the "productive" speed of capitalism with some protection from these wearying forces. The juxtaposition between these spaces, rather, showcases either the bustling flow of city's commercial district, or the slow decay of Fontainhas.

For these young people, stepping outside of Fontainhas, the city presents itself as an endless series of vectors to be traversed but never occupied for any substantial amount of time. The camera cuts during these scenes in an almost elliptical fashion, never settling in one space for long before moving on to the next. *Bones* establishes how these youth move and flow through the city's space without any corresponding right to stay in any one place. Outside of Fontainhas,

we rarely glimpse a space designed for rest or recuperation. Instead, the spatial design only privileges the flow of movement: city streets, sidewalks, hallways. Like finance, the flow of movement defines the economy of life. The capacity to move at the appropriate pace is often presented through the juxtaposition between the static nature of the main cast of characters who occupy Fontainhas and the masses that drive by, walk past, or otherwise speed through the space of Lisbon's commercial district.

The initial series of shots establishes this point through the film's structural sequencing: some time is spent in Fontainhas preparing for the day ahead; then, on the city bus across town; next, entering the middleclass home they are paid to clean; finally, returning home to Fontainhas until it is time to repeat this sequence again tomorrow. When the flow of movement is arrested, it is often in the film's domestic spaces, specifically those located in Fontainhas. In this way, Costa's film is reminiscent of Chantal Ackerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), as each pauses over the physical gestures of everyday life while simultaneously capturing the disaffected inner drama of daily routine. This inner drama finds external expression in dialogues full of long silences, physical acts of cleaning, walking, or standing but always emphasizing the bodily demand of the act. What is familiar and domestic in these physical acts, though, *Bones* reveals as brutal and exhausting. In this sense, Costa's attention to lower class struggle and precariousness departs from Ackerman's focus on middle class monotony and domestic boredom. Thus, where Ackerman's film lays bare the internal strife of late 20th century femininity, Costa's focuses instead on the barren essence of life lived under the value of finance. Jeanne Dielman's physical routine, domestic and sexual, is here replaced by the precarious relationship these youth have to the spaces of Lisbon. The cadence established through the sustained long takes gives weight to the time spent in these spaces so that

each physical act reveals a tactic for sustaining life: cleaning and showering is done in the homes of others; travelling occurs by foot on city streets or on public transportation; eating takes place where food is to be found, in the kitchens of friends or through the charity of strangers, even in public trash bins in the city center; and, socializing in the small, cramped living quarters of Fontainhas.

Within this juxtaposition—between Fontainhas and the middleclass spaces of Lisbon—is a dialectical interplay between the accelerated order of financial capitalism and the archaic sputtering of urban decay. The juxtaposition between these places creates a strong sense of spatial dissymmetry, revealing that locations ill equipped to handle the demands of acceleration are at risk of becoming *desynchronized* from the rest of society. Desynchronization is the form of financial capitalism *Bones* renders visible through its dialectic of spatial dissymmetry. Hartmut Rosa, in his extensive study on acceleration, argues that desynchronization is the result of multiple temporal dynamics co-existing within the same space:

marginalized groups in the so-called Third World, and certainly in the industrialized societies as well, are becoming “desynchronized” in that they are excluded from the decisive structural and cultural developments. All the diagnoses of globalization agree that the simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous is rapidly increasing: the Stone Age and the Cyber Era exist next to each other in an unmediated fashion.¹²⁰

Here, I want to suggest that the static long takes of the people and places of Lisbon’s Fontainhas neighborhood help in giving form to social desynchronization as a material consequence of financial capitalism’s imperative to accelerate nearly every aspect of life. In severing society through acceleration into at least two groups—one group capable of navigating

¹²⁰ Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 19.

the increased pace of life, and the other not—we are able to read the film’s style as giving shape to the “simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous” in how it highlights movement or stasis in Lisbon’s various spaces.

In order to develop the critical acumen gained from prioritizing cadence as a way to better understand the value of art cinema’s aesthetic, we can now turn our attention directly to desynchronization as the form of financial violence *Bones* presents. This point is perhaps best captured with the film’s most dynamic image: a two-minute long tracking shot that follows Nuno through the streets of Fontainhas. In this sequence Nuno is shot in a side profile, walking against traffic on the side of the street. The background is littered with decaying buildings, trash, graffiti, and transient occupants hunched over or sprawled out on the streets. Nuno does not look up or down, left or right but dead ahead, focused solely on traversing the space one tiring step at a time. This shot is both welcome, as it breaks the suffocating stillness and closed quarters of the spaces presented to this point, and distressing, as Nuno walks against traffic at a middling pace. Curiously, despite the perceived movement, it does not register for the viewer, as Costa’s camera tracks alongside Nuno. This technique gives the effect that Nuno, in relation to the cars that rush by so fast they barely register a blur, is actually walking in place. Here, the strain of Nuno’s efforts is felt due to the long take, positioned against the backdrop of urban decay that surrounds him. In contrast, the vehicles that accelerate through the space seem inhuman, moving without effort and with no clear motivation other than movement itself. In an odd twist, then, Costa’s cinematic cadence as it simultaneously captures the speed of acceleration so that it renders Nuno’s movements stationary on-screen.

This point is magnified across a wide range of urban spaces by Costa’s static, observational camera, as it frames life from the perspective of bare survival. In this way, it is the

physical gesture that helps define the space, but it is also the space that determines what types of acts are appropriate to it. Costa's overextended scenes change our understanding of the work and activities these youth perform when we take their spatial context into consideration. Costa's camera demands we watch long enough so that we notice that the activities continually amount to gestures of survival, as opposed to leisure, with the labor of reproducing life being the thematic constant. Drawing on this interplay, the film reveals the demarcation between the two types of space so far discussed: one that is modern, built on a grid with an eye toward cultivating movement; the other, a decaying amalgamation of shanties that dot Fontainhas along its crooked alleyways.

This point is reiterated throughout the film but perhaps no more clearly than the sequence that follows the tracking shot. Here, Nuno arrives in the city center with his newborn child. In one of the few exterior scenes in the film, Nuno cradles his young child and approaches strangers asking for food for his newborn. The camera is static and positioned at eye level. Nuno walks in small semicircles, doubling back on the same few feet of space. His movements are restricted by the overflow of people hustling in and out of the frame. No one stops, no one listens—people flow through the city center with rapid pace. The movements of these anonymous people—to work, to school, to shop—are directed by the designated walkways that keep the flow of movement constant. Nuno's movements, in contrast, do not follow the flow of traffic. Instead, he paces back-and-forth from the left edge of the screen to the right. He moves against traffic, attempting to siphon off one out of the group in hopes of securing money or a meal. Nuno's attempt to occupy this space, which is clearly designed to prohibit occupation with its wide, straight lanes, is unsuccessful as he is never quite able to arrest the flow of human traffic.

The space in question is Lisbon's Chiado square, a traditional shopping area that also serves as an important cultural district, where several museums and theaters are located, such as the Chiado Museum and National Theatre of Saint Charles. Chiado is most known for its architectural elegance, sophisticated network of bookshops, old-style cafes, and art nouveau jewelry shops. The camera frames the space so as to highlight the square's straight lines, conducive to walking and browsing the various shops and historical sights. Two buildings bookend the edges of the shot, prominently framing a state commissioned statue of a military hero in the center of the frame, as shoppers, businessmen and women, and tourists rush by in a hurried fashion. During the two-minute long shot dozens of pedestrians enter and exit the frame.

As Nuno walks in a circular pattern around the square, holding his baby, he attempts to engage a large man in a navy blue business suit as he enters the shot and stops dead center in the frame. He stands a few feet closer to the camera than most of the pedestrians walking by, dominating the frame, and eclipsing the statue that sets in the background. The shot is framed so as to create a vertical line that runs from the top of the statue to the center of the square, where Nuno walks back and forth against the pedestrian traffic. The buildings on either side serve to further embellish this vector, creating a straight path where we find the speeds of this commercial district flowing through. Nuno asks the man for help, without making eye contact the businessman shakes his head in a dismissive manner, looks away, and proceeds to rejoin the flow of human traffic down the street and out of shot. In his absence the entrance to the Lisbon Metro, a citywide subway system, appears before us. Here we see how the space of Chiado, with its emphasis on streamlined movement, prohibits the types of communal encounters found in Fontainhas. Further, the optic alignment between the monument, the businessman, and the subway system reinforces the metaphorical alignment between these symbolic agents of

governance, economy, and infrastructure. Clearly, the space of Chiado is presented in stark contrast to the network of interconnecting alleyways and side streets of Fontainhas we discussed previously.

Interestingly, the spatial juxtaposition between Chiado and Fontainhas elicits comparison to another major European center, Paris during Georges-Eugène Haussmann's urban renewal project. Between the years 1853-1870 Paris underwent a major transformation as it relates to the architectural design of the city's street plan and neighborhoods.¹²¹ Due to mass congestion, concerns about the spread of disease, and the general state of degradation to the city's infrastructure, it was decided that a major renovation to the city's spatial plans were needed. Haussmann's project was designed with the intention to create wider lanes for the flow of traffic, increase the availability of private and domestic space, as well as to create a cleaner, safer experience for the rapidly expanding and modernizing city.

However necessary these changes might have been for expansion, they also generated harsh backlash amongst many Parisians, being accused of systematically destroying the essence of Paris by placing the city on a grid. Further, the project's critics argued that the real purpose of Haussmann's boulevards were to make it easier for the army to maneuver and suppress armed uprisings; Paris had experienced six such uprisings between 1830 and 1848, all in the narrow, crowded streets in the center and east of Paris and on the left bank around the Pantheon. These critics argued that a small number of large, open intersections allowed easy control by a small force. In addition, buildings set back from the center of the street could not be used so easily as

¹²¹ My understanding of Haussmann's direction of the Paris urban renewal project during the 19th century is largely derived from two essays by David H. Pinkney: "Napoleon III's Transformation of Paris: The Origins and Development of the Idea," *The Journal of Modern History* 27, no. 2 (1955): 125-34; and, "Money and Politics in the Rebuilding of Paris, 1860-1870," *The Journal of Economic History* 17, no. 1 (1957): 45-61.

fortifications. The construction of the grand boulevards, like the Champs Elysees for example, were done, as these critics believe, precisely to cut a “straight corridor” into the labyrinth of the neighborhoods, so that state power could keep functioning in the case of political uprisings. And last, the reimagining of Paris’s spatial design forcibly removed thousands of families and businesses from their buildings that were demolished for the construction of the new boulevards, drastically raising the price of rent in the process.

In his essay “Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrational Principles and Procedures,” David Bordwell interestingly uses an architectural metaphor for classical film form. In the section titled “the Straight Corridor,” Bordwell explains, “The classical segment is not a sealed entity. Spatially and temporally it is closed, but casually it is open,” so that “[o]verall narrational qualities are [...] manifested in the film’s manipulation of space.”¹²² Bordwell’s appeal to the straight corridor as a metaphor of classical film narration aligns streamlined space with the linear trajectory of cause-and-effect storytelling. For Bordwell, the straight corridor serves to illuminate how classical narrative form directs the flow of action in a spatially and temporally closed manner. Thus, through the concealment of production that is achieved through classical Hollywood’s invisible style, Bordwell explains, “the fabula seems not to have been constructed but appears to have preexisted its narrational representation.”¹²³ Due to the concealment of Hollywood’s production the “viewer concentrates on constructing the fabula, not on asking why the narration is representing the fabula in this particular way—a question more typical of art-cinema narration.”¹²⁴

¹²² David Bordwell, “Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrational Principles and Procedures,” in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986): 20, 24.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

If Bordwell deploys the straight corridor as an architectural metaphor for classical form, *Bones* appears to offer its own, alternative metaphor for art cinema: the labyrinth. The shots of Fontainhas's spatial coherence direct our attention to the numerous side streets and alleyways that crisscross the urban landscape of this lower class neighborhood. The inner workings of this space operate at a pace and tempo slowed by the winding and ambiguous pathways that have aggregated during centuries of organic construction. Appropriate to this spatial organization, then, is the measured cadence established through the editing and long takes of the film. Here, *Bones* in contradistinction to classical form offers us a separate and competing architectural metaphor that helps us connect the aesthetic of contemporary art cinema with the actual physical space of Fontainhas. With Bordwell's straight corridor, to borrow his words, "the camera seems always to include character subjectivity within a broader and definitive objectivity."¹²⁵ Here, the subject is constrained by the objective design of the space, so that agency is subordinated to the dictates of the fast, flowing movement of the urban corridor. The space of Chiado and the space of Fontainhas juxtaposed throughout *Bones* does not simply hold two organizational principals of space together, but additionally reveals how their designs shape the experience of life by dictating the experience of speed and movement.

The cadence of *Bones* works to distinguish the various paces of life as they play over the spaces of Lisbon. Here, we find the style of the film halting our own movement, which takes the viewer out of the accustomed experience of urban space. In the place of the accelerated experience of cutting through space, the cadence established through the static long takes offers the opportunity to experience the space as the forces of movement flow through it, as opposed to

¹²⁵ Ibid.

simply being swept up in the movement itself. In this way, the film stages the “unseen production” of capitalism, the forces of acceleration, through its decelerated style.

The particular aesthetic of *Bones* continues to inform Costa’s successive films, which further refine the inimitable presentation to follow with *In Vanda’s Room* and *Colossal Youth*. Jonathan Rosenbaum summarizes writing, “*Bones* was shot on film with a conventional crew and has a conventional running time (94 minutes); the actors, though mostly nonprofessionals, play characters with different names. But Costa himself shot the latter two on DV over several years, using crews of just two or three people. They’re both about three hours long, the camera never moves, and the performers, all nonprofessionals, play themselves.”¹²⁶ The stylistic distinction between *Bones* and the latter two films is notable for how it is able to render intelligible the forces of power for imaging the change of Fontainhas at the hands of capitalism’s dynamic forces.

Bones’s decelerated style reveals through the worn out and dilapidated nature of the bodies and buildings of Fontainhas how the impulse to accelerate privileges those members of society capable of “keeping pace” with aggressive dynamics of change. And, as a necessary result, excludes those who are unable to account for these changes. Therefore, an increasing number within the population who are unemployed, underemployed, sick, without rights, or marginalized, as Clotilde, Mariya, and Nuno demonstrate, are excluded from exactly those social spheres that are decisive for the direction of social development. The result of this dynamic implies, as we will see in the next two films, that those disadvantaged people will become increasingly unimportant as it concerns the structural and cultural transformation of society,

¹²⁶ Jonathan Rosenbaum, “Cinema of the Future,” *Chicago Reader*, November 15, 2007. <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/cinema-of-the-future/Content?oid=999691>.

largely relegating them to pockets of the urban landscape where their incapacity to facilitate the speed of the market is contained.

While my efforts here have been concentrated on the particular capacity of urban space to facilitate the speed of contemporary life, more broadly I am interested in tracking the spatial change of Fontainhas across the three films Costa dedicates to it. Particularly what I find fascinating about this form of documentation is how it maps the forces that drive the capitalist project of spatial subsumption. The value of this film and its style, then, lies in how it presents the disruption between “pace of life” (i.e., how one is asked to live) and “pace of living” (i.e., how one is able to live), which creates a schism for those unable to keep up with the increasing acceleration of life. With *Bones* we find the results of this situation to be dire for some and lethal for others. From the vantage point of cadence, desynchronization becomes evident through the spatial juxtaposition between the poor, working classes of Lisbon and its affluent members.

The decision to shoot the precarious youth in *Bones* in a number of settings offered several key images regarding financial capitalism’s legibility. The principal distinction of these locations is the absence of members of the ruling elites who may lead viewers to assign culpability to individual persons. Denying viewers the narrative trope and accompanying images we might normally expect from a commercial film in order to give explanation for suffering highlights such absences so as to reproduce financial capitalism’s reliance on abstraction and stealth processes. Thus, the complexity and abstract nature of finance becomes not only increasingly less tangible for the layperson, but so too does any means of navigating a process that systemically excludes it through acceleration. Costa’s achievement is found in how he gives form to these surreptitious processes. *Bones* does so not by crafting a villain who symbolically

represents these issues, rather it documents the daily toll the forces of acceleration have on those who suffer them and the spaces that suffering takes root.

2.4 The Pace and Space of Fontainhas: *In Vanda's Room*

In the last section we analyzed how *Bones* helped to present and hold together two distinct temporal logics in the same space. This was accomplished through the static long takes that decelerated the film, which established an alternative cadence by which we could experience the force of acceleration. This shift in the reception of information, the slowing down of the narrative progression of the film, created a durative sense of time, which we leveraged to juxtapose the speeds of Fontainhas with those of Lisbon's commercial district. In slowing the film's narrative progress, and thus decelerating the temporal experience of the viewer, the static long takes gave observational purchase to the startling speed of contemporary culture by placing the viewer in that temporal framework for an extended period of time.

With *In Vanda's Room*, the productive tension generated by this juxtaposition continues in the form of material demolition and spatial reconfiguration. In the intervening years between the trilogy's first two entries, Fontainhas finds itself on the verge of implosion. The attention *Bones* gave to labor and the production of life is redirected here to the demolition of Fontainhas's shantytowns. Like *Bones*, *In Vanda's Room* takes great care to show how the various and disparate activities of an urban center are interconnected and codependent in ways often unnoticed in the rush of everyday life. And, like the last film, Costa relies on static long takes to hold these various aspects of life together for our consideration. One of the more fascinating results of the static long takes is how they capture the shifting landscape of Fontainhas. The film's capacity to sustain the constant presence of these exterior forces through the camera's static position is interestingly juxtaposed to shots of Vanda, in close-up, sitting in her home.

Vanda's immobility is reinforced through the static camera, which reflects her own sense of being trapped, powerless to exert any influence on the forces of gentrification. What results, as we will see in one key scene, is a powerful series of shots that give time and attention to a space, temporality, and life style on the verge of extinction. Additionally, the space of Fontainhas is shot in order to highlight its winding, off kilter design, dominated by small alleyways and the porous open spaces discussed in the last section. The attention to the curves and crevices present Fontainhas as an extensive, multilayered space. The film seems to continually urge us to think about the relationship of these often unseen and unnoticed spaces, the alternative temporalities they host, and their vulnerability to the forces that would reshape them.

The film also affects a feeling of isolation and entrapment through its static long takes, especially those focused on Vanda. This further plays out in the way the film luxuriates in the myriad of micro-settings in Fontainhas—bedrooms, alleyways—in a long take before abruptly cutting to entirely different location without clear motivation. This interestingly suggests that, as the neighborhood is slowly demolished to rubble, these images like the locations they depict are rapidly being extracted from the flow of the story and social space of Lisbon alike. Shooting these scenes with a static camera, normally in the tight corridors of the streets or the small bedrooms of the tenement buildings, communicates a claustrophobic experience for the residents of this neighborhood. Further, these sequences enact a process in which the various forces of acceleration come to the fore in duration, that is, through the extended, static shots that capture the forces of transformation. Here, the material demolition of Fontainhas is shown to correspond with the personal crisis of its residents. The inability to move and flow at the speed of contemporary culture makes the residents and neighborhood a target for gentrification while highlighting the lack of speed we are accustomed to experiencing in everyday life.

In order to accomplish this Costa jettisoned the full film crew of his earlier efforts using just a handful of people, allowing him to burrow even deeper into the labyrinthian space of Fontainhas. With this decision, Costa is able to shoot the people and places of Fontainhas with even greater attention than he did with *Bones*. Here, Vanda Duarte, a secondary character in *Bones* where she was known as Clotilde, takes on the central role of the film. *In Vanda's Room* presents the daily routines of Vanda and her neighbors, which elevates these individuals that many would deem disposable into starring roles. Vanda occupies the center of the film with the periphery composed of the systematic demolition of Fontainhas, as it is being gentrified. The interplay between Vanda and the demolition of her neighborhood is at the heart of my analysis, which seeks to extend the work I began in the last section.

In Vanda's Room presents a careful meditation on space as it is being steadily eliminated from the geography of Lisbon and the psyche of its residents. In fact, the film is hardly more than a collection of images that juxtapose the demolition with the actions the residents of Fontainhas take in response to it. Throughout the film the editing consistently brings to our attention associations between the space of Fontainhas and those living there to highlight how each has become detached from the economic and social system that surrounds it. We find this association through the juxtaposition of images that focus on the demolition machinery tearing through the neighborhood and its residents seeking solitude inside their homes. The desynchronization we discussed in *Bones* manifests in *In Vanda's Room* with the elimination of Fontainhas. In order to bring this section of Lisbon's urban center into alignment with the speed of capitalism, what *In Vanda's Room* allows us to see are the very real consequences of failing to stay adrift in capitalism's accelerating slipstream.

Although the specific relationship I am developing between pace and place is rarely discussed as an interpretive model in film studies, the relationship between speed and space has been a long standing topic of interest for critical theory. Scholars such as Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, and Edward W. Soja have argued that critical theory's "spatial turn" was an attempt to relate the many unseen critical factors (i.e., tempo and time, material and metaphysical, labor and law) aggregating in central or key sites of social, cultural, or political space.¹²⁷ The key distinction such theorists advocate concerns how space is tied to social production. For instance, in *The Production of Space* Lefebvre explains, "(Social) space is a (social) product [...] the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action [...] in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power."¹²⁸ To understand space from this perspective means that it is as much a material place as it is a social construction. For Lefebvre, and those who followed his lead, social space is in part a by-product of a physical place, an instrument to control social practice. Space, in short, plays an active and determining role in how people live, labor, and learn.

The distinction I want to make as it concerns this point rests on understanding the duration of Costa's static long takes as a way to visually gain access to the various paces of life within the space of Fontainhas. Therefore, I take space as a condition of pace, where the formal style of *In Vanda's Room* works to reveal the tempos of life Fontainhas hosts. Directing attention toward to this relationship allows us to extend our inquiry into art cinema's appeal to endurance,

¹²⁷ The key texts I have in mind include: Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991); and, Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London and New York: Verso, 2011).

¹²⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 26.

especially how this film captures the waning of endurance in light of its destruction. *In Vanda's Room* further refines the aesthetic we analyzed in the last section. Cyril Neyrat has remarked concerning this refinement in style, “The work of Pedro Costa has progressed in slow, measured steps, but each step has been a giant leap. His slowness is both the condition and the consequence of ethical standards he shares with precious few directors of his generation [...] so that the film’s rhythm is perfectly attuned to the rhythm of life.”¹²⁹ Here, Neyrat suggests how Costa’s insistence on long takes is not merely a reaction to commercial cinema’s hyper kinetic chaos, as so many have commented in reaction to “slow” cinema’s aesthetic, but instead performs the deliberate function of establishing the temporal logic of social production in Fontainhas.

Further, following the aesthetic connection between these films, we can continue to follow the desynchronization of life outlined in the last section here as a confinement, restriction, and, ultimately, evisceration of spaces that cannot keep pace with the flows of capitalism. When the capacity to move and flow with the changing nature of society is choked by these spaces—and those residing within them—we see how they become expendable. The calcifying of these spaces, their incapacity to remain flexible, as we will investigate with the trilogy’s final entry *Colossal Youth*, often leads to expulsion, relocation, and reintegration into the circuits of capital. In this section and the next I want to continue investigating how this style holds a multiplicity of speeds together for our consideration by briefly highlighting just a couple scenes that extend the analysis I began with *Bones*.

¹²⁹ Cyril Neyrat, “Pedro Costa’s Fontainhas Trilogy: Rooms for the Living and the Dead,” trans. Nicholas Elliott. <http://www.criterion.com/current/posts/1425-pedro-costa-s-fontainhas-trilogy-rooms-for-the-living-and-the-dead>.

Nine minutes into *In Vanda's Room* street noise percolates from all directions in a tight alleyway. The foreground of the shot is cast in shadow by an urban canopy of tin and aluminum roofs. The piercing rays of the afternoon sun illuminate the background. In seconds an impact is heard, white powder dust and debris rains down from an unseen source. The mechanical noise of an off-screen engine intensifies as a wall (a roof?) drops to the ground just as the scene cuts to an interior shot of the film's title character, Vanda Duarte. The cut is abrupt. The interior is dim, shot with natural lighting, which is to say no "lighting" at all. Vanda sits on a bed, telephone book on her lap, parsing out a ration of what appears to be cocaine or heroin for herself and a friend. The ominous roar of an off-screen engine persists, growing louder, seemingly inching its way to Vanda's location. Vanda speaks to someone off screen, nonchalantly remarking that everyone needs to clean their room.

At first, the request to clean seems trivial, even confusing considering the destruction occurring outside Vanda's walls. The exterior sounds of machinery crashing into concrete and sheet metal are at odds with Vanda's request to clean the house, creating a noticeable dissymmetry between the interior of the home and the exterior space of the neighborhood. Subsequent concerns about Vanda attending to her job of distributing local produce in the neighborhood, her mother changing the diaper of an infant, and the act of dividing the narcotics all play out over the course of the film to this same exterior "soundtrack" of destruction. The scene's final shot is of another confined, alleyway, prominently displaying debris from surrounding buildings pouring down into the tight lane between rows of buildings. As the destruction intensifies, the image becomes a blur of debris, overwhelming the shot until all that is visible is a cascade of wreckage.

With this initial sequence the film creates a powerful sense of *being with* Vanda by both keeping her in view in light of the demolition around her and creating a particular pace of observation. The camera stays stationary throughout this scene. While she attends to her drug habit we share the duration of her activities and experience of the demolition, and are thus drawn close to her experience of decelerated time organic to Fontainhas now under attack from the outside world. Gilberto Perez has commented that cinematic time that is “in no hurry to move ahead to the next thing often gives us the sense of our sharing with the character an unabridged interval in the passage of their lives.”¹³⁰ In this shared time with Vanda the film does not give us a point of view shot but is rather structured as though to mimic the way in which she might look, and thus experience, the diegetic environment. Once again, we are presented with a relation between the interior and exterior through the camera’s lingering quality, so that her experience of waiting ties to the landscape’s resigned state in the face of the surrounding demolition.

The persistent roar heard from the machinery systematically tearing Fontainhas to the ground draws attention to the link between the interior and exterior space. Specifically, how the gentrification of this place, its extinction, cannot be escaped, no matter the tactics (i.e., drug use, indifference, denial) deployed to do so. There is a sense from the film’s first moments that the fates of Vanda and her home are sealed. The static, observational shots frame destruction—personal destruction from drug dependency and material destruction from the demolition—as if there is not much to do other than wait for the inevitable outcome. The duration of waiting appears brutal to Vanda, as she attempts to pass the time by remaining high for as much of the day as she can. During these scenes we are made to wait and endure the passing of time with Vanda. Bliss Cua Lim’s formulation of Bergsonian duration comes to mind here: “while we wait

¹³⁰ Gilberto Perez, *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 370.

patiently, we become (somewhat painfully) aware not only of our own duration but of the multiple durations outside our own.”¹³¹ For Lim, the time of waiting in cinema opens up the opportunity to reflect on the multitude of durations present. During these scenes of waiting, what is experienced is the convergence of capitalism’s pace on the space of Fontainhas. As we sit and watch Vanda, we experience the intrusion of her space by these outside forces, which aim to adjust the temporal rhythm of life to align with a faster and thus more productive pace.

What is revealed in these scenes is the extinction of the pace of Fontainhas for the pace of capitalism and this plays out in Vanda’s life as she is thrust into a new rhythm of life that does not coincide with her own. We might easily read the interplay between these moments, from the accelerated blur of destruction to the glacial pace of waiting/looking, as an example of how the ruthless efficiency of finance contours space. In this sense, destroying a neighborhood that is not conducive to the efficiency and speed of today’s capital flow can be understood as a violent consequence of the logic of capitalism. Scenes where the camera is cutting between the movement of destruction and the stasis of occupying these spaces, like the one described above, conclude by relocating the character (and by proxy the viewer) in a new location. These cuts that jump from one pocket of Fontainhas to another punctuate these scenes of destruction without a clear sense of spatial and temporal continuity, which leaves a lasting impression of disorientation for the viewer. These landscape sequences are edited so as to disrupt a coherent sense of space, reinforcing the instability and disorientation of spatial transformation for those living in it.

Puzzling together these sequences becomes exceedingly difficult using a standard cause-and-effect rationale. We know that the demolition machinery is destroying the neighborhood and we know that the drug use, through her constant hacking wet cough, is destroying Vanda. But

¹³¹ Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 15.

while these processes do show a correlation they do not illustrate in a dot-connecting fashion the necessary links between the shots. Instead of making one-to-one connections, the film offers only an assembly of shots depicting destruction but also the confusing and overwhelming sense of its decentering play. That is, as much as we see the effects of poverty and an economic system that exploits it, we also gain a felt sense that there is no single component to isolate and blame, no representation to condemn. Instead, in Vanda's room, we simply listen to the all-surrounding rumble, watch her get high, and sit in the dark without anywhere to go or much of anything to do.

Because of the disorienting nature of the cuts, the film continually presents particular details or important aesthetic and narrative moments that even after several viewings remain jarring. In Deleuzian terms, we can think of the film's style opposed to his idea concerning "common sense" which, and in the words of Ronald Bogue, "organizes the world according to fixed identities and stable spatial and temporal coordinates."¹³² Common sense suggests a way to recognize and thus understand the world. But what organizes Vanda's world is a total lack of stability that thrusts her and the viewer from one place to the next with little context or coherent motivation. What the film helps to reveal through its aberrant editing is the often unseen brutality that such a shift can elicit for those ill-equipped for such an abrupt change. This is important to note because it suggests that what the film's aesthetic accomplishes in these micro-settings is a new spatio-temporal configuration, one that is motivated by the forces of acceleration.

What the editing complicates is the capacity for the viewer to reach an understanding of whom or what is responsible for the destruction of Fontainhas. The ambiguity derives from a number of factors: lack of contextualizing information, absence of dialogue, and the abrupt edits

¹³² Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze's Way: Essays in Transverse Ethics and Aesthetics* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 55.

that throw the viewer from one anonymous section of Fontainhas to the next. *In Vanda's Room* takes particular care, then, in reproducing the bewildering and seemingly nonsensical experience of being removed from one sector of the city and relocated to another. Instead of shooting this spatial transformation with an eye toward intelligibility, that is, shooting the destruction with accompanying background information that explains in detail how the forces propelling State power are linked to the processes of gentrification and its after effects, we are given essentially no information as to what is happening. The events of the film unfold from a series of shots, all of which uncover new details of Fontainhas but none of which serve to stabilize a narrative logic enabling the viewer to place events and assign them resolute meanings.

Over the course of the film's three hours, we watch and listen to the neighborhood being torn down one tenement at a time. The inevitability of this destruction is palpable with scenes either explicitly showing the destruction or implying it with the sound of the machinery and engines heard constantly from off screen. *In Vanda's Room* thus takes on the question of acceleration through its mediation of pace and place and the combination of filmic techniques work to reveal the various forces that play out on the surface of the city. Reinhold Martin has argued, as it concerns the relationship between politics, aesthetics, and urban space, that today's global city offers a landscape to read financial capitalism's forms through the cultural practices of its residents and the aesthetic design of its architecture. Martin contends that the aesthetic life of cities have been linked systematically to financial circulation—a relation he argues is audible in the term “global city.”¹³³ Martin asserts:

This applies both in the narrow, deterministic sense that would privilege techno-economic development as causal, as well as in the broader, more inclusive sense that

¹³³ For the defining study on “global cities,” see Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001).

would assign to social, cultural, and aesthetic processes a semi-structural role in shaping the pulsations and interchanges of economic life. In either sense, the city stands as a receptacle, a sort of archeological site for holding these dynamics in place long enough and firmly enough to study them in all their complexity.¹³⁴

For Martin, social and cultural practices help to define what is meant when we conceptualize financialization. Financial capital is thus legible in the high rises and slums of today's global city because finance's "presence or absence helps to define these physical forms but is also defined by them."¹³⁵ In this respect, the urban landscape of Fontainhas, distilled through the static long takes of Costa's camera, gives form to the complex network of cultural and social practices that make financial globalization, and its after-effects, visible.

Most attempts to address the disruptive forces of acceleration often seem like little more than the occasion to mobilize various ideologies—discussions or depictions not of the process itself, but of its effects, good or bad. In other words, these attempts are concerned with judgments that are easily read as finite and totalizing in nature. Equally, functional descriptions tend to isolate particular elements without relating them to each other. The aesthetic of *In Vanda's Room's* goes a step beyond these two strategies, showing the effects as they surface from an ongoing process. In this way, the film suggests something more productive than a causal explanation assigning blame: an aesthetic that captures desynchronization through the unfolding of the process. What resonates by producing this unfolding is the affective experience of confusion, disorientation, and resignation that such forces can induce for those not prepared or equipped to manage these changes.

¹³⁴ Reinhold Martin, *Mediators: Aesthetics, Politics, and the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 15.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

To juxtapose Costa's distinctive style to a more traditional filmic form, let us take Mike Judge's workplace comedy *Office Space* (1999) as an instructive example. Judge's film conceives of *workspace* as a significant and malevolent force in social organization, but does so with a film style heavily reliant on continuity editing and logical, linear narrative progression. The premise of the film centers on the dissatisfaction of Peter Gibbons (Ron Livingston) and his co-workers who are employed at Initech, a giant software company. Gibbons becomes increasingly disillusioned over the course of the film's first act stemming from his employer's increasing demand for him to increase his productivity. Gibbons, in defiance, makes every attempt possible to decrease his activity over the course of his workday, resulting in Initech hiring two consultants to diagnose how the company can increase its efficiency. The result of this company wide assessment recognizes downsizing and outsourcing as the company's best (and only) option for increasing profits. Gibbons, in response to this assessment, preemptively quits his job in a moment of defiance. As it concerns this chapter, the most striking scene of the film is the morning after the day Gibbons quits. The scene fades from black to Gibbons's alarm clock. Gibbons wakes with a start, believing he is late for work, until he remembers he quit the previous day. The resulting action consists in a number of vignettes that show a stark contrast in attitude to a day no longer structured by the increasingly busy workday. Time, activities, and even social interactions take on a completely different meaning, resulting in a happier and healthier human subject.

Judge's film premises its critique on a temporal shift between time spent "on the clock" and time "off the clock," with predictable outcomes concerning both: the former "bad" and the latter "good." *Office Space* takes a critical stance toward contemporary white-collar work, but it chooses to do so in a fashion that shows this violence at the expense of translating the actual

experience itself. Therefore, while the scenes and actions are easily understood, they deny that same viewer the opportunity to distinguish the forces at play in their own exploitation. By shooting the film with a traditional, linear, continuity style, Judge's film obscures the specificities between an accelerated pace of life and the spatial construct it erects. What results is an entertaining, even intriguing take on space under the force of acceleration without any authentic experience of this relationship. That is, we relax and enjoy witnessing the very conditions that enact this exploitation, hiding the root cause of our own dissatisfaction.

Nearly every minute of *In Vanda's Room* takes place on the streets or in the homes of Fontainhas. The shantytowns of Fontainhas host the various forces acting on, over, or against the people and dilapidated infrastructure. The homes, like their inhabitants, are in an advanced state of decay: dirty, dank, and dim. Characteristic of these shots is a prevailing sense of apathy and acceptance amongst the members of the community. In addition to the static cameras, Fontainhas's occupants are largely inactive, sitting, hunched over, or lying down in living rooms and bedrooms, or makeshift living quarters that resemble hallways and closets. Large swathes of time are spent watching outmoded televisions, idly talking, or using and suffering from hard drugs. Time is out of sync from mainstream, Western, and first-world experiences of it, which is to say the productive time of labor. Because of this temporal dislocation, Fontainhas is isolated and out of step with the rest of Lisbon's urban center, making it prone to dissolution and gentrification. The film aesthetically reinforces the measured pace of the listless lives of the residents, while the stationary camera addresses the sense that leaving Fontainhas is both impossible, unimaginable, and yet inevitable.

The alternative time of Fontainhas, the pace at which its particular occupants live, is shown with an eye toward its exhaustion. The old buildings, appliances, forms of entertainment

are all outmoded, obsolete, and the film works to duplicate that sense in its residents. The exhaustion of these spaces, their inability to facilitate faster pace of life helps to highlight a second pace of life. This pace of life is defined by capitalism's progressive attempt to accelerate and synchronize spatial, temporal, and biological entities. The specificity of this pace aligns capitalism with acceleration. Acceleration, understood as the progressive amplification of the pace of life, is a normally unseen force that structures the real, material relation of life and labor. Accelerating forces act as a destructive, because unstable, factor for social and material spaces unwilling or unable to keep pace. These forces of acceleration seek to sync every spatial construction to a singular temporal logic, or discipline it through demolition.

We find perhaps the best example of these two paces of life occupying the space of Fontainhas in a scene late in the film. The camera is positioned in a tight, winding corridor. Each side of the corridor is lined by a series of doors to the homes of those residing in Fontainhas. The walls and streets are composed of gray concrete, which are covered in graffiti and loose debris. Vanda occupies the center of the frame holding a box of cabbage. As she walks from door to door asking if anyone is interested in purchasing her goods, we hear German production team Snap!'s 1990 dance hit "The Power" playing from a radio off screen. The song was a global hit upon its release in 1990, most known for its catchy hook that repeated the line "I've got the power" by vocalist Penny Ford. The song on its own could be considered an object of acceleration with its syncopated beat and dance club sensibility, but placed here in the midst of the soon to be bulldozed street it takes on a particularly ironic meaning. The line "I've got the power" echoing down the corridor of the soon to be demolished tenement building, only highlights the lack of power this place holds. Further, this cultural relic of the past signifies how

out of sync with the times this space really is, equating the space and the song through their shared link of disposability.

As the scene progresses the camera cuts from the corridor to yet another undisclosed pocket of the labyrinthian Fontainhas. Vanda is center frame, sitting on a table that sets in the middle of the street with her arms folded next to the box of cabbage. The shot is framed by a doorway to a home looking out on the street where the radio is presumably located, since the sound of the music is much louder now, as Turbo B (a little known MC during the 1990s) raps the line: “Like the crack of the whip / I snap attack, front to back / In this thing called rap.” Then an abrupt cut to a close-up of Vanda in a dark room, lit only by the natural lighting of the sun from an exposed roof. The space is nearly silent signaling we are in a different location, yet Vanda’s expression remains largely the same. The song’s call for agency and action is here offset by Vanda’s stillness. As she looks down toward the ground, she works over a piece of aluminum foil with a lighter, attempting to get high. Vanda contorts her face so as not to make eye contact with anything but the ground. We hear her snuffle and see flies hover over her as her eyes glaze over from the drugs entering her system. The relationship between the exterior and interior here surfaces through the music’s capacity to signal the predominate ethos of neoliberal society: individual power, freedom, and agency. Vanda’s struggle to sell cabbage, her failure to work and act as an entrepreneur, further suggests that the capacity to keep pace and exercise the power of Western capitalism is never as easy or jubilant as Snap!’s pop hit promises.

Aesthetically we find a further layer of complexity, as the commercial form of pop music plays out over the dilapidated space of Fontainhas. As this scene unfolds we listen to the pulsing beat of the song, hear the refrain “I’ve got the power,” but see nothing more than Vanda sitting and waiting, powerless to the change that is occurring around her. The film holds all these

experiences together through its use of static long takes, allowing the space of Fontainhas to act as a retainer for all the competing forces present, which create a jarring disjunction for the viewer. It is with scenes like this that the time of waiting surfaces to hold the various paces of life together. As Elizabeth Grosz argues, “Waiting is the subjective experience that perhaps best exemplifies the coexistence of a multiplicity of durations, durations both my own and outside of me, which may, by chance, coalesce to form a ‘convenient’ rhythm or coincidence, or may delay me and make me wait.”¹³⁶ Grosz’s observation helps direct our attention to how the demolitions surrounding the neighborhood work to “exteriorize” the interior turmoil of its residents by holding the “multiplicity of durations” together for an extended period. The disappearing space of Fontainhas here acts as a material manifestation of the incompatibility to both retain a local way of life and be connected to the capitalist system.

In Vanda’s Room repeatedly stages scenes like the above that alternates the daily habits and tasks of Vanda with the destruction around her. In these scenes, the contracting space of Fontainhas makes it effectively harder to go about the day-to-day activities Vanda has been accustomed to: selling produce door to door, socializing with friends and family, partaking in leisure time at home. The disruption of her normal routine surface in the moments when Vanda seems to be giving up on life, or at least this particular way of life, so that when she is slumped over on the table in the street, or high in her bedroom we gain access to the felt sense of these rhythms and activities wearing out, losing their place and purpose in the accustomed mode of living. The film does not seek to explain the cause of these disruptions so much as they work to

¹³⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 197.

bifurcate our experience to induce a sense of living in a space that's time is on the verge of extinction.

Instead of thinking about acceleration merely in terms of distance over time (e.g., miles per hour) or time over action (e.g., minutes per act), *In Vanda's Room* asks us to think about it as a social logic. German sociologist Hartmut Rosa takes this point as the organizing principle for his general theory of "social acceleration." For Rosa, social acceleration is an all-encompassing principle that cuts across the various factors that alter, influence, or dictate social and cultural norms. Rosa's foundational point is that while on the surface our accelerated society offers us a myriad of cultural experiences and identity options, their fundamental processes deter the realization of social stability that may ground our identity and serve to help make sense of the world. Instead, social subjects are relegated to a permanent volatility that privileges flexibility over and above stability.

Starbucks, to take one prescient example, publicly endorses their "flexible" work schedule as one of the company's strengths. The root of this issue concerns how neoliberal ideology has helped to redefine "instability" as an asset in a society increasingly experiencing social change, schedule disruption, and bioderegulation. One of the primary complaints of Starbucks employees is that schedule changes are not posted with adequate warning. This results in a situation where employees are often left in a holding pattern unsure when or if they will be working on a given day. Further, employees are often asked to work the closing shift one night and the opening shift the next, leaving little time for familial, school, or other social obligations.

Despite the perceived benefits such a lifestyle may allow, the instability of a flexible work schedule actually creates a greater dependency in the employee on the employer.¹³⁷

For *In Vanda's Room*, what results from structural instability is an increasingly precarious lifestyle that complicates identity formation, labor practice, and leisure possibilities. The interruption of continuity from forcible evacuation, lack of jobs, and a constantly changing geographic landscape, denies the residents of Fontainhas the stability to work, think, and act sensibly.¹³⁸ The disruption of day-to-day life troubles the social bonds predicated on continuity; whether it is solidarity between co-workers and neighbors, or enacting sustained action and thought. Temporal and spatial disruption leaves the task of identity formation vulnerable to a host of factors that benefit from the resulting state of social precarity. Systemic precarity renders social subjects increasingly reliant on factors such as technology and labor practice to anchor one's time. And, further, this dependency creates real, material problems for the lower and working classes. The one place we find a stable pattern is with Vanda's drug use, which could be read as a one way of exerting some influence on the outside world by controlling the way it is experienced from within.

The demolition of Fontainhas is arguably the trilogy's pinnacle moment of documenting the materialization of financial capitalism's violence. Christian Marazzi has succinctly described this phenomenon, writing: "The access to housing is created on the basis of mathematical models of risk where people's life means absolutely nothing, where the poor are 'played' against the less poor, where the social right to housing is artificially subordinated to the private right to realize a

¹³⁷ "How Starbucks's 'Flexible' Scheduling Is Stretching Workers to the Breaking Point," *The Nation* August 18, 2014. <http://www.thenation.com/blog/181301/how-starbucks-flexible-spending-stretching-workers-breaking-point>.

¹³⁸ For an alternative theorization that reads political resistance back into forms of discontinuity, see Davide Panagia, *Impressions of Hume: Cinematic Thinking and the Politics of Discontinuity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013).

profit.”¹³⁹ Due to the overwhelming material destruction of *In Vanda's Room*, the demolition of social space out of pace with the flows of finance is the most present form of brutality Costa works to demonstrate. The film's extreme style doubles-back to induce the overwhelming and inescapable nature of this particular consequence of acceleration: first, through its adherence to long takes that instigate a spatial orientation to the proximity destruction on the horizon; and second, through the static camera, which frames its subject matter without pause, disallowing any idea of escape.

Taking these components together, this aesthetic reveals one form of financial capitalism, its uncaring destruction of people and places out of synch with its temporal logic. *In Vanda's Room* frames contemporary art film style as a singular attempt to document the phenomenon of social acceleration through its refusal to be sped up. That is, art cinema's at times achingly meticulous style provides the opportunity to visualize a multitude of actions and forms of living operating at a variety of paces without necessarily, and automatically, privileging the faster form, even if we recognize it so much more intimately as our own. Of course, the time of the film is measurable. A scene lasts for a set number of seconds or minutes. But, if the various paces that make of the time of life interpenetrate in certain sites like Fontainhas, as I believe they do, then we can see the passing of time in film as an interpenetrating process of forces that play out over each other. We can, in other words, question how various temporal strands entwine in the duration of a film in order to better see the forces that motivate them. Ultimately, what art cinema demonstrates through its measured control of pace is the opportunity to experience *dureé* under the *force* of acceleration while witnessing the material destruction and social alienation that results from such a conjunction.

¹³⁹ Christian Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*, trans. Kristina Lebedeva and Jason Franis McGimsey (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011), 40.

2.5 From Economic Inclusion to Social Expulsion: *Colossal Youth*

The last two sections have taken cinematic cadence as a critical lens to read the formal logic of financial capitalism into the spaces and bodies represented in *Bones* and *In Vanda's Room*. As we have already discussed, the cadence of these films have established an alternative pace to analyze accelerationism. In breaking from the accustomed speed by which we experience lived life, these films have helped to render the opaque effects of accelerationism's forces visible by instituting a cadence that can register speed as such. By doing so, these films have helped to identify several contributing factors to the often hard to interpret ramifications of finance for lived life, specifically the long (and often brutal) transformation of social and physical space. From this analysis, *desynchronization* (temporality) and *demolition* (space) have surfaced as two ways we have been able to read capitalism's forces through the film's style. The last film under discussion, *Colossal Youth*, presents a final point in need of consideration—social *expulsion*.

Like the last section, I will not be presenting a prolonged analysis like I did with *Bones*. Instead, I want to quickly look at a couple of scenes from *Colossal Youth* that extend the analysis we began with *Bones*. In mining the use of static long takes once more, we gain access to the aftermath of Fontainhas's demolition, which is concentrated in the public housing units where the displaced have been moved. Locating my analysis in the tenement building provides a useful example for seeing how the design of this space radically alters the way of life for the displaced residents of Fontainhas. The tenement building serves as a needed counterexample to the porous space we have discussed in the last two sections, allowing us to better see their differences. Additionally, the exorbitant long takes confront the viewer with the socio-economic restructuring of space that, as I will discuss, has become an increasingly subterranean activity, eluding State endorsed forms of recognition. The long take here allows the viewer to settle into these spaces,

experience the transformation, and provide an encounter for the viewer of the machinations of capital to register on a much larger and affecting scale.

Over the course of the previous two films we have seen the life of Vanda (the trilogy's only recurrent performer) play out against the backdrop of her neighborhood's transformation from home to rubble. In many respects, *Colossal Youth* continues what the previous two installments started in mapping the social, spatial, and temporal climate under the forces of capitalism. In *Bones*, Vanda's work cleaning the homes of more affluent residents of Lisbon helped to highlight questions of space and time, movement and stability, which resulted in her desynchronization from the accelerating pace of culture. With *In Vanda's Room*, these issues culminated in a dual destruction: the material demolition of Fontainhas and the personal impairment of Vanda stemming from her drug dependency. These two films have documented Vanda's life, drawing close parallels between the landscape of accelerated change and the consequences of failing to keep pace with it. For each, the diegetic space of the films has afforded us the capacity to reflect on how acceleration registers in the material world.

Colossal Youth continues this general line of inquiry into the people and places of Fontainhas by repositioning its focus from the process of falling out of step with the cultural logic of acceleration to its aftermath. Unlike the previous two films, which largely focused on the precarious and vulnerable lives of Lisbon's youth, *Colossal Youth* focuses on one of its long-term residents, Ventura, a seventy five-year old former resident of Fontainhas, who is now adjusting to life after being displaced.¹⁴⁰ Further, *Colossal Youth*'s preoccupation with space and its adherence to the long take do not function in order to hold a multiplicity of speeds together like we saw previously. Instead, Costa's camera lingers in the newly built tenement building that

¹⁴⁰ For more on Pedro Costa's working relationship with Ventura, see Mark Peranson, "L'avventura: Pedro Costa on *Horse Money*," *Cinema Scope* 60.

the former residents of Fontainhas are moved into. What is revealed in these scenes, for which I will look at one extensively, is not a plurality of rhythms and speeds playing out over the surface of the space but a single, all-pervading pace.

With this change in personal perspective comes a change in spatial configuration. Gone are the bustling street scenes of *Bones* and the demolition zones of *In Vanda's Room* for the unnerving silence of the tenement building Ventura moves into. The literal translation of *Colossal Youth*—*Juventude em Marcha / Youth on the March*—suggests not only that the youth of Fontainhas have (been) moved, but also that youth itself has moved on. If we read this title back into the landscape of the film, shot largely in the newly built housing projects on the outskirts of Lisbon, we gain a sense of resignation. Not only has the community of Fontainhas being fractured and separated but there is also a sense throughout that the ambition and hope of escape from the precarious life of poverty, whether through upward mobility or the rush of chemical stimulation, is no longer an effort that can be sustained.

Like its predecessors, *Colossal Youth* unfolds in an elliptical fashion with no discernible narrative to guide us as we explore the post-demolition lives of Fontainhas's residents. Film critic Manohla Dargis describes the film writing:

Its episodic narrative, which Mr. Costa developed with his nonprofessional cast and shot in digital video, unfolds as a series of seemingly disconnected encounters. Things happen, people talk, as in real life, but without the crutch of a plot. A man identified only as Ventura moves through rooms and streets visiting men and women who may or may

not be his children. They call him “Papa,” smoke, eat, tell stories, live. It’s as simple as that, even if it’s also complex.¹⁴¹

This complexity unfolds over the film’s 155-minutes with Ventura occupying the center of attention. Ventura spends most of his time walking between the remnants of Fontainhas and the housing project he lives in now. He ruminates about his former wife, the life he lived in Fontainhas, and the situation he finds himself in now. But what overwhelms the images of Ventura’s new life in the tenement building is not what this new space provides, its promises of comfort, security, and modernity, but what it has taken away, namely community and a sense of belonging.

The initial shot of *Colossal Youth* frames a single standing house amidst the rubble of the demolished Fontainhas neighborhood. The static long take is shot at night; the moon lit façade of the house illuminates an open window on the second floor. Lack of street lighting, noise, or human activity indicates the resolute desolation of this once vibrant communal space. At once, debris is flung out the window crashing to the littered ground below. The wreckage below is so thick the city streets are no longer visible; all that is observable is broken concrete, discarded wood planks, and forgotten personal items. Several more unidentifiable objects are ejected through the window before this initial shot concludes.

The opening of *Colossal Youth* immediately establishes expulsion as the concluding and definitive resolution of all that has transpired over the trilogy’s first two entries. Fontainhas, now a rubble heap, is barren, excluded, and, outside of its former residents, forgotten. The destruction of Fontainhas was not only the demolition of a place; it was also the loss of a community and the relationships cultivated therein. *Colossal Youth* is in many respects a meditation on this loss, but

¹⁴¹ Manohla Dargis, “Life, Assembled One Room at a Time,” *The New York Times*, August 3, 2007. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/03/movies/03colo.html?_r=0.

it is also a graphic depiction of reintegration. The opening shot of *Colossal Youth* very subtly opens a reading of the spaces of the film in how it definitively communicates the death of Fontainhas and the community that occupied it. Costa's attention to and exorbitant duration within the spaces of Fontainhas helped establish a collective and communal pace of life, organic to its location and people. Over the course of the first two films, we looked at how the organic space of Fontainhas has fallen out of order with the machinations of capitalism and been transformed to meet the demands of commerce. The movement from desynchronization to demolition to expulsion, then, provides visual traction for one of the most significant economic changes within the economy: from the 20th century's doctrine of including more and more aspects of life into the economy to the expulsion of everything not commodified.

Saskia Sassen, writing about the reorganization of social space in light of the ongoing financial disasters of the last decade, has argued that expulsion is an emerging tactic used to eliminate pockets of society that are not generating profit at the desired speed. Sassen investigates how recent trends in Europe's major urban centers to aggressively gentrify lower income areas exemplify the emergence of finance's hegemony in determining the role and value of social, environmental, and political practices. Sassen explains that the process of removing people from prominent parts of the city allows quantifiable measurements of the economy to discount their presence entirely. "Anything or anybody, whether a law or civic effort," she writes, "that gets in the way of profit risks being pushed aside—expelled."¹⁴² What is more, these expulsions are largely unseen or unnoticed because what (or who, in this case) is expelled is no longer partaking in society where such concerns find recognition. Sassen argues:

¹⁴² Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2014), 213.

It [expulsions] goes well beyond simply more inequality and more poverty. It is, in my reading, a development not yet fully visible and recognizable. It is not a condition faced by the majority, though it might become one in some cases. It entails a gradual generalizing of extreme conditions that begin at the edges of systems, in microsettings. This is important, because much of this sharp shift I am seeking to capture is still invisible to the statistician.¹⁴³

For Sassen, those unable to navigate the increasing pace of social and economic developments are excluded by way of relocation or destruction in order to efface the negative drag on the economy's growth. What this amounts to is shrinking the measurable space of the economy while simultaneously increasing its profitability.

What expulsion affords a society operating at an increasingly accelerated pace is a new method of (ac)counting economic and social inclusion. Responding to recent studies that have concluded that economic growth in Western Europe is on the rise, Sassen points out, "What is left out of these measures showing a return to some growth is that a significant portion of households, enterprises, and places have been expelled from that economic space that is being measured. The expelled become invisible to formal measurements, and thereby their negative drag on growth rates is neutralized."¹⁴⁴ That is, measures for growth are now excluding those expelled from the space of the economy. Therefore, it is a measure of growth that is able to deny rising joblessness, homelessness, hunger, and poverty through spatial reconfiguration. The method of counting, as Sassen presents it, is restructured specifically in order to attain a smaller but efficient economic and social space. This method accounts for space through GDP metrics at the expense of any real, material engagement with it.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 29.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 37.

The difficulty in raising the issue of expulsion, as Sassen notes, concerns its “subterranean” nature, its ability to elude statistical recognition. But as we have seen over the last two sections of this chapter the aesthetic of Costa’s work has forged an alternative means to account for these people and places at risk of expulsion. Costa’s work has been able to document these economically disadvantaged spaces by eschewing a full film crew for a single camera. The minimal film crew has allowed for a more intimate portrayal of the subject matter by penetrating these often overlooked and ignored spaces. Costa’s aesthetic is further reinforced by these “microsettings,” allowing the viewer to register the subterranean life of Fontainhas through the close-ups that have reinforced the design of space, the static camera as a form of unmediated documentation, and the long take to maximize the effect of scale over time. The intimate and extensive shots that make up these films provide through its aesthetic a powerful document of these social issues that account for this process.

Therefore, taking the tenement building as an extension of the Costa’s previous two spatial meditations, we find a vast difference in the way space and life is organized. We are first introduced to the space of tenement building from its exterior. The buildings are introduced with a low angle shot, framing the buildings with an eye toward their impressive height. The low-angles completely reconfigure the horizontal geometry of the previous two films. Gone are the predominantly one-story shantytowns of Fontainhas. In their place resides the towering, vertical shape of the newly built housing projects. This juxtaposition dwarfs Ventura, showing him next to but not equal with the tower. As Ventura enters the scene, he stops and looks around. He appears lost even though the space is geometrically organized and nearly empty. He calls out for Vanda multiple times. No one else is visible in the shot and the only audible sounds are of Ventura’s own voice echoing throughout the cavernous courtyard that sits in the middle of the

housing project. As Ventura stands alone in the midst of these towering buildings, we find him alone and unsure, confused as to what this place is and how to life is to be lived in it.

Although shot in color, these shots highlight Ventura's dark skin against the building's clinically white veneer, inducing a stark contrast to the colorful and vibrant spaces of Fontainhas. Gone are the free flowing alleys, open room homes, and hum of daily conversation and community of Fontainhas. In their place we find tall vertical towers, compartmentalized rooms, and a clinical silence. These characteristics serve several functions for introducing the space to the viewer: the location of the buildings are far from the pulsating community of the previous films, instead they are located in what appears to be an industrial zone on the edge of the city; the color palette gives the sense of a lifeless, engineered design; and while the apartments are modern in terms of fixtures and amenities, they are also isolating, denying a common space for social interaction. Shooting again with only natural light, Ventura often times stands out as the only discernible figure in this environment, everything else indiscernible, washed out in a mono colored gray.

In the next scene, Ventura is introduced to the interior of the building by a government appointed housing agent. He walks Ventura into his new home, showcasing the modern amenities and increased privacy now available to him. The apartment's white walls, uniform design, and spring-loaded doors, which close automatically without assistance, clearly disturb Ventura. Despite the clean interior, the apartment is met with stunned silence by Ventura as the housing agent shows him around. Here, the communal elements and flowing spatial construction of Fontainhas are replaced by private, individual quarters that emphasize separation and isolation. They also induce a feeling of confusion. Ventura works over these foreign elements

with his eyes, runs his hands over their surfaces, and listens to the housing agents endorsement of this new way of life.

Initially, Ventura cannot even enter the room. It is locked and the key entry is both foreign and confusing to him. Ventura walks through the room, resting on the side of the wall, as he walks away the civil service agent wipes the wall where he was leaning with his jacket sleeve. The white walls and blinding white light from the window reveal nothing about the room outside of its clinical cleanliness. After listing the room's amenities, the civil service agent turns to Ventura and states, "This move is important to our future." With these words, Ventura remains silent, but the message communicates without a rejoinder: the move into this new space marks the end of the old way of living. Then the civil service agent, relaying the contours of the building says, "All that is left to discuss are the rights of the residents." Standing in an empty room, with the door closing automatically, the agent continues by saying: "Unpaid rent means eviction; unpaid water means no showers; unpaid gas means no cooking; unpaid electricity means no light; and no dealing on the premises." Here, instead of a list of rights, Ventura receives one rule for living in the building presented as an array of rules. The "rights" of living though are but one simple rule: if you want to live, you will pay for that right.

As the scene progresses, the housing agent is clearly convinced that Ventura is not in his element in this apartment. The agent also appears more eager to wipe clean the traces of Ventura's intrusion on this sterile place than he is in welcoming him to his new home. And then, something quite remarkable happens. In the middle of an empty room that makes a silhouette of Ventura and the housing agent, the agent begins to recite the amenities of the building; listing the dimensions of space in square footage, and how easily it will accommodate a television, sofa, and table. In answer to this list, a quantifiable sales pitch for modern life, Ventura majestically

extends his arms towards the ceiling and plainly states: “It’s full of spider webs.” As the housing agent turns his head from window he had been looking out of to the location on the ceiling Ventura gestures toward the viewer is also invited to look. The housing agent cannot verify the presence of these spider webs on the ceiling anymore than we can; all that is visible is radiant white light of the sun reflecting off of clinical white veneer of the wall. And yet, I do not think Ventura is simply being obstinate in this moment. Instead, he signals to us an aspect of the space that is not accounted for in the list of amenities to be found on the housing agent’s clipboard. In the process, our own position within this space changes, not by a move or cut of the camera, but instead through a recognition that life (even a spider’s) cannot be accounted for through a strict process of statistical measurement. Exposed in this moment is an image that carries the marker of life, even as we cannot see it. The spider’s web is not visible to us in this shot, nor is it listed on the agent’s paperwork. But it is clearly visible to Ventura whose own process of recognition, for life and the living, far exceed any of those found on sheet of statistics. As the housing agent leaves, Ventura opens the automatically closing door and watches it swing shut. After a momentary pause, he reopens the door only to watch it shut automatically once more.

Colossal Youth separates itself from the trilogy’s previous two installments in scenes like the above. Without the neighborhood—the messy, lively, *human* environment—there is a lack of interaction and communion amongst the residents. In fact, with the exception of Vanda we never once see another resident of the tenement building. The automation of life, this scene suggests, is now the appropriate mode of living. Gone are Ventura’s neighbors, friends, and family, now separated and trying to manage the aftermath of destruction. The walls of these buildings, wiped clean as soon as Ventura leaves, will tell nothing about those who occupy this space.

We find the conclusion to this point in a fascinating scene toward the end of the film, where we inexplicably find ourselves in a third space, a room in Lisbon's Calouste Gulbenkian Museum. The shot is quite startling, providing yet another stark contrast to the grit and grime found in the remnants of Fontainhas and the clinically white walls of the tenement building. Nothing in the preceding shot announced this visit, and there is nothing in the film to suggest that Ventura has an interest in painting. Costa has abruptly transported Ventura to this museum, which is empty of visitors. A silent shot shows us a museum guard walk up to Ventura and whisper something in his ear. As Ventura walks out of the room, the guard pulls a handkerchief from his pocket and wipes clean the traces of Ventura's feet in a similar fashion to the housing agent. The immediate impression this scene gives is that the pleasures of art are not for the working class and, more precisely still, that museums are closed off to the workers who build them. This point, concerning the museum's construction, becomes clear in the conversation between Ventura and the museum guard, where we learn why Ventura has visited this place: before the museum was constructed what occupied this space was nothing but a wetland. It was Ventura, together with other workers, who refurbished up the area, laid down the veranda, constructed the plumbing system, carried the construction materials, built the statue of the place's founder, and planted the grass at its feet.

Ventura in this scene becomes not an idle visitor but a chronicler of his own life, an actor who renders visible his life so that it is seen; it is recognized in light of capitalism's exclusion of those that cannot be chronicled with statistical measures. The relationship of Pedro Costa's art to the art displayed on the walls of the museum exceeds the simple demonstration of the exploitation of workers for the sake of the pleasures of the bourgeoisie. Here, the museum serves as a site where art is locked up, yielding no transparency of the lives and labor that constituted its

construction. If the museum excludes the worker who built it, a space where the material of life denies the existence of those lives that traditional art neglects, it is because it excludes all that lives. But what Costa's films have done through their exacting and glacial cadence is reassert these aspects of life back into consciousness with a cinematic document that forces recognition at every turn: recognition of life, recognition of space, and recognition of the very forces that motivate these systemic expulsions.

2.6 Deceleration: Intended, Unintended

At issue throughout *Colossal Youth* is a reorientation of how the world is conceived under the pressure of an ever-faster pace of living. Part of that reorientation is the aggressive segregation of society, dividing the world into an expanding number of divisions that isolate human subjects based on economic distinctions. Here, a world that makes financial aptitude a prerequisite for social inclusion devises legitimacy—those who count and those who do not—through a brutal numerical equation. Subjects unable to keep pace with the state of change are excluded and ultimately made the enemy of those who do. In the end, as Alain Badiou I think makes clear, “if the world is one of objects and signs, it is a world in which everything is counted. And those who do not count, or are poorly counted, have our laws of counting imposed on them by war.”¹⁴⁵ The working class and poor are not only targets of violence and criminalization; they are also increasingly excluded or segregated so that these acts go unnoticed.

Colossal Youth's achievement along these lines lies in how it is able to document through the microsettings Ventura occupies what, as Sassen argued, the statistician cannot. Historically, the oppressed have found solace and potential in common spaces and social bonds. The dictates of financial capitalism have denied this potential in great part due to how the oppressed have

¹⁴⁵ Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, trans. David Fernbach (London and New York: Verso, 2008), 59.

been expelled and survive at a great distance from their oppressors. Further, today's financial turn dictates that the "oppressor" is increasingly not a single or stable entity. Instead, it is more often than not, as Sassen as argued, a "complex system that combines persons, networks, and machines with no obvious center."¹⁴⁶

My concern, with this chapter more largely, has rested on the notion that the general trend toward unmediated acceleration is at the heart of a growing number of concerns that are increasingly brutal in nature but often go unseen or unnoticed. I have discussed this point by showing how the abstractions of financial capitalism surface in a variety of ways: desynchronization, demolition, and expulsion. Costa's decade long attention to Fontainhas, shooting with his exacting and measured pace, has slow the day-to-day experience of life and allow viewers to register how the unseen manifests in our material reality. This aesthetic deceleration, ultimately, affords the opportunity to map the terrain of today's social climate.

One outcome of, to use the title of a popular text on the topic, "the acceleration of just about everything"¹⁴⁷ is the unintended but constitutive deceleration of various parts of society. The people and places of Fontainhas, shot in meticulous long takes, have given us some key images into this reality. Further, this alternative pace aligns with the decelerated life of folks like Vanda and Ventura, as they are systemically cut off and removed from society at large. The deceleration of various parts of society pervade all walks of life, from traffic jams to waiting lines, but increasingly they are the province of those not privileged to afford faster alternatives. These unintended decelerations—Clotilde's commuting, Vanda's waiting, and Ventura's seclusion—are now a principal measure to demarcate and discount those slowed by a culture of

¹⁴⁶ Sassen, *Expulsions*, 10.

¹⁴⁷ James Glick, *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything* (New York: Faster Books, 2000).

acceleration. What Costa's work has mapped is how this deceleration plays out over the long term. What his films have displayed is a process where those who are not capable of maintaining pace within an accelerated society fall victim to segregation and expulsion, a practice that eliminates those least profitable within society.

Pedro Costa's Fontainhas trilogy, as this chapter has argued, embodies one of the more vital contributions in contemporary filmmaking that documents this trajectory. Through the use of long takes, static cameras, close-ups, and the exclusion of non-diegetic sound, Costa's work showcased time and speed as an increasingly brutal weapon to shape the social. The erosion of material institutions, such as local or regional cultures, communities and relationships, or metaphysical means of orientations, such as space and time, are no longer reliable in the ever-shifting landscape. The erosion of these traditional institutions that have provided a means to orient one's self have left many vulnerable to disruptive patterns of acceleration, which have resulted in damaging and perverse brutalities.

With Costa's Fontainhas trilogy, I have argued that art cinema's controlled pace offers the opportunity to witness the material consequences of financial capitalism. In doing so, cadence has served as the interpretive framework by which art cinema regains its critical capacity. Moving away from a descriptive analysis of "slow cinema" to a critical interpretation of art cinema's pace has helped provide a ground to engage the immaterial forms of finance. The immaterial nature of financial capitalism has been discussed through how these forms materialize as social and economic hardships for human subjects at risk of falling behind the accelerating pace of life. The aesthetic of *Bones*, *In Vanda's Room*, and *Colossal Youth* has given us images of temporal *desynchronization*, spatial *demolition*, and social *expulsion*. Together, these films

have helped map the new virtual terrain of capitalism, and the disturbing trajectory of lived life under it.

In today's global economy it is safe to assume that most agree that the financial markets play a real role in how society is shaped. Missing from this general consensus, though, is any real notion of how the forces that accompany finance may actually play out and affect everyday life. The turbulence of the world financial system is often discussed in abstract terms related to complex financial algorithms, with a strong focus on speculation, perceived value, and potential future earnings. Experts can easily cite, and normally do, statistics and percentages related to taxes, employment, and GDP as evidence of their real world affects. What is lost in these interpretations is their ability to effectively communicate their connection to *lived* life, that is, the material reality of living under the dictates of capitalistic acceleration. But with the static long take, these films attempts to show how the forces of speed register in the material world. In fact, we could say that what this aesthetic provides is the hard material, the *bones*, of the financial body, where the attrition of forces can be located and observed.

With the static long take, the accumulation of effects from trying to commute to work, take care of a newborn, care for the self, and participate in social life are cataloged through the worn out homes of Fontainhas and the tired bodies of its residents. What then is displayed through the long takes of the buildings and bodies are the accumulated effects of acceleration. The difficulty of discerning the stakes of acceleration is often tied to the blurring rush in which we experience it. Here, these stakes are chillingly displayed through the film's decelerated cadence, which allows us to pause and register how these forces wear on and wear out those who struggle to keep up with the pace of capitalism. It is the *durative* nature of time these long takes

emphasize, allowing the viewer to gain access to the exhausting and potentially dangerous realities of acceleration.

Maurizio Lazzarato, commenting on the financial capitalism's influence on time and the psyche, has argued, "fear, sad affects and passions serve to neutralize the power to act. Finance is a formidable instrument for controlling the temporality of action, neutralizing possibilities."¹⁴⁸ The complexity of contemporary life and the speed at which we experience it, Lazzarato argues, leads increasingly to feelings of fear, confusion, and vulnerability. For those who are not able to fully keep pace, like the youths represented in this film, there is a corresponding slowing down, a wearing out that pervades the architectural design of Fontainhas and the residents who live there. To always be doing something and in connection with others generates a rush, a thrill of perceived power through an ever-increasing number of associations. To be disconnected, though, suggests a subject out-of-synch, denied one of the most fundamental ways to connect with others that has an isolating effect that can lead to social exclusion. The increasing difficulty of fulfilling this societal expectation, then, is more than an innocuous impulse. Instead, it contributes to real, material dysfunction for a growing number of the population. And, it is exactly the unadvertised realities of this shift in our cultural and economic infrastructure that Costa's measured cadence allows us to explore.

The value of art cinema's style, finally, lies in how its cadence makes the forms of this violence conceivable. The conditions for such violence are many, growing, and diversifying, which speaks to art cinema's unique role in documenting these occurrences. Representing the brutality that results from these new social and economic forms are but one way art cinema's critical capacity remains vital and tied to the world we live in. Over the course of the Fontainhas

¹⁴⁸ Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man: An Essay on the Neoliberal Condition*, trans. Joshua David Gordon (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012), 71.

trilogy, the measured, exacting pace of Costa's work accounts for those not counted, showing us potential spaces for making—making alternative economies, alternative temporalities, and new modes of inclusion.

3 GOVERNING BY FACULTY: ON DEBT RELATIONS, DIAGRAMS, AND THE DOGMA OF *DOGVILLE*

The previous two chapters have understood the style of contemporary art cinema in relation to the ongoing transformations of capitalism and, by consequence, the corporeal, temporal, and spatial effects that derive from it. This transformation, I have argued, warrants a major reassessment concerning art cinema's investment in aesthetic choices that are often described as "slow" in light of their prominent use of long takes, static cameras, and ambiguous narrative structures. Primarily, I have analyzed a variety of social, material, and corporeal changes contemporary art cinema addresses through this style, specifically issues related to the body, space, and time. In this regard, I have been sensitive to how art cinema continues to use and recycle older film techniques and stylistic choices to express the unique qualities and complexities of contemporary life. Moreover, I have attempted to intervene in several current discourses concerning social theory and film in order to more fully assess the importance of each for the other.

My efforts to this point have been focused on two fronts. The first, a reading of the corporeal performance of the actors in *The Limits of Control* (2009), outlined a working theory of endurance, a theoretical structure that organizes this project from the start. This initial chapter analyzed *The Limits of Control* with specific attention to how the actors' bodies were significantly featured in a variety of actions and postures. Taking the film's style as a lens to understand its content, I explored how these bodies offer a divergent conception of endurance from current discourses that evoke this term as a perpetual state of exercising stamina. While much of what has been written concerning endurance as a theoretical construct has helped to organize some of today's most pressing social concerns, I diverged from this body of literature

on the question of how this concept is understood. Beyond naming a host of general deficiencies that define contemporary life, the presentation of the actors' bodies in *The Limits of Control* also demonstrated a way to conceptualize endurance as an active means of acquiring the capacities to live otherwise. By emphasizing the body from the standpoint of style, I sought to reimagine endurance as something other than a defensive and impotent form of survival. In the end, the film performs an alternative conceptualization of endurance; a way of naming the necessary mental, physical, and political complements to the pervasive dematerialization and bioderegulation we are experiencing now.

This line of thinking was continued in the next chapter by considering space and time through the cinematic cadence of Pedro Costa's Fontainhas trilogy (1999-2006). By examining the spatial and temporal norms of life in the global city of Lisbon, I stressed how Costa's work uniquely gives shape to the unseen forces of financial capitalism. These forces, as they played out over the decade Costa spent documenting Fontainhas, surfaced through the film's meticulous use of static long takes, granting observational purchase to financial logics that have bled into the social sphere more generally. This reading suggested that art cinema's measured pacing—in light of commercial cinema's style that privileges rapidity, intensified continuity, and chaos—stabilizes the film's form in order to represent the violence of unabated acceleration. In the process, Costa's efforts granted us images of the material blowback stemming from the change in our relationship to space and time, further suggesting how endurance is a compromised ideal in light of the market's penchant for rapidity.

With this chapter I turn my attention to Lars von Trier's *Dogville* (2003), where my analysis continues to assess the contours of contemporary life through the consideration of art cinema's current aesthetic trends. While the previous two chapters looked at recent corporeal and

spatial transformations capitalism has affected and the consequences that stem from those changes, this chapter brings these points together in order to evaluate how *Dogville* makes possible a particularly vital assessment concerning the relationship between subjectivity and debt, particularly how the latter constructs the former. The relationship between subjectivity and debt is also where we are able to locate *Dogville*'s appeal to endurance. First, as a significant theme in the diegesis, as witnessed through its protagonist Grace Mulligan (Nicole Kidman), who must endure increasingly hostile and violent acts in order maintain residency in the town; and second, through the viewing experience, challenging the spectator's sustained reception of the film through prolonged scenes that evoke both violence and boredom. The ethical issues *Dogville* raises through its overt abuse of Grace enables us to see how debt institutes a new understanding of moral behavior as it relates to the town's system of labor and exchange, and further, how this morality leads to related questions concerning the relationship between human faculty and governance.

In order to explore how *Dogville* presents these ideas, let us survey more closely the situation at hand. Von Trier's film centers on Grace, a woman of unknown distinction who appears in the small Colorado mountain town of Dogville not long after gunshots ring out in the film's opening scene. For the simple, working class townsfolk of Dogville Grace is an obvious outsider: adorning stylish blonde hair and an elegant ankle long coat with fur trim, she easily stands out amongst the drab attire of the locals. Grace's initial appearance confounds Dogville's residents. Unsure of why she has arrived, or what her expectations might be, the townsfolk initially seek to drive her off. But at the behest of the town's local intellectual, Tom Edison, Jr. (Paul Bettany), Grace is allowed sanctuary in return for work the townsfolk want done. At first none of Dogville's residents openly acknowledge a need for any work. But after Tom speaks

with the townsfolk they begin to change their minds. Eventually a compromise is agreed to that allows Grace to stay in exchange for work to pay off the debt she now owes for the asylum that has been granted to her.

Despite the initial success of this arrangement, things quickly devolve as Grace undergoes a transformation from dubious outsider to accepted community member. Over the course of the film Grace is accepted, welcomed, championed, and, ultimately, taken for granted, exploited, and enslaved. Most of the film centers on Grace's relationships with the various members of Dogville; negotiating and performing her agreed upon duties; and the intermittent visit from local law enforcement that are searching for her, prompting the townsfolk to hide her when they arrive. The turning point for Grace is largely based on the introduction of the law, which places a monetary value on her capture. When the townsfolk learn she is not merely "lost" but instead "wanted," a transition made explicit upon the sheriff's second visit to the town, her fortunes begin to change. After the sheriff nails a wanted sign to the town's posting board, Grace becomes the object of suspicion and distrust. This quickly prompts the townsfolk to demand more work for less pay as compensation for their complicity, and because Grace's situation is compromised from the start, she is all too eager to comply in order to retain her residency.

Until the film's final, climatic scene of excessive and brutal violence it is unclear who Grace is or where she comes from. Initially she is desperate for sanctuary but for reasons she will not divulge. Tom's interest in helping Grace is two-fold: first, an opportunity for him to hold court amongst Dogville's residents in order to persuade them through his investment in the virtues of Christian mercy and exercise his power as the town's leading intellectual; and second, a romantic desire for Grace who is a welcome and unexpected addition to the small, isolated town. After it has been decided that Grace will be allowed to stay the film falls into a rather strict

pattern over the course of its nine chapters, with Grace being put to work, having her workload incrementally increased until, finally, she is essentially performing all the tasks that need to be taken care of in town. This situation lays the foundation for Grace's fall, as she is entirely dependent on the townsfolk for community, subsistence, and asylum. Any shortcoming in her work, or challenge she makes to the townsfolk's authority results in her being threatened with eviction.

Grace's exploitation is presented in a disturbingly casual fashion. The film's long running time and deliberate pacing make this fall from "grace," as it were, all the more painstaking to watch. Watching the film gives a strong feeling of unease as Grace's goodwill and workmanlike attitude is continually exploited. And yet, the film never dramatizes this debasement, instead presenting it in a matter of fact fashion reinforced through the observational camera, long takes, lack of non-diegetic elements, and straight forward dialogue. Only John Hurt's omnipresent narration seems to keep the "action" moving. The minimal set where these scenarios play out and the protracted pastoral dialogue befit historical theater more than art cinema, and these choices help to create a sense that none of the violence Grace suffers is out of the ordinary, or even a question the townsfolk consider. These formal choices challenge the viewer to make sense of the violence that is never explicitly denounced. Instead, these acts of exploitation are treated as the normal operations of everyday life. What results is a bizarre viewing experience where the spectator is presented with a series of scenarios that highlight Grace's mistreatment without any formal acknowledgment of the fact.

In order to make sense of this odd coupling the "physical" town of Dogville and the social environment found there have become principle factors for interpreting the film. For example, in his *New York Times* review, film critic A.O. Scott describes Dogville as "a place

where life seems to have been reduced to its crude minimum.”¹⁴⁹ Ostensibly, Scott’s comment is directed at the film’s much-discussed mise-en-scène: a sparse theater stage with black background and chalk lines. But it also is meant to acknowledge the grim reality of living during the Great Depression, which serves as the historical backdrop for the film, and undergirds the film’s preoccupation with capitalism, the American dream, and the social environment that transpires from it. With these cinematic choices, von Trier’s meditation on American life, the first part of his so-called *USA: Land of Opportunities* trilogy,¹⁵⁰ announces itself as a stark departure from his earlier Dogme 95 efforts. From the film’s opening top-down shot, to the historical period of the diegesis (1932), to the use of a theater stage, von Trier established with this effort a new formal chapter in his career as Europe’s “punk *auteur*.”¹⁵¹ Disregarding the self-imposed “vow of chastity”¹⁵² that constituted his Dogme efforts that brought him notoriety around the world, von Trier surprised many with the theatrical look of his new film and confounded even more with exactly what he was doing in this stark change in presentation. With the radical shift from the tenets of Dogme, which sought to reinvigorate the realist traditions of new wave cinema in light of Hollywood’s exorbitant use of special-effects, it was clear von Trier had outgrown his earlier ambitions of returning cinema to its purest origins.

¹⁴⁹ A.O. Scott, “‘Dogville’: It Fakes a Village,” *New York Times*, March 21, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/21/movies/dogville-it-fakes-a-village.html?pagewanted=3>.

¹⁵⁰ *Manderlay* followed *Dogville* in 2005, and the trilogy is planned to conclude with *Washington* [sic], which remains unfinished as of 2015.

¹⁵¹ Jose Arroyo, “How Do You Solve a Problem like Lars von Trier?,” *Sight and Sound* 10, no. 9 (2000): 16.

¹⁵² Lars von Trier’s and Thomas Vinterberg’s co-authored “vow chastity” can be found on-line at: <http://www.dogme95.dk/the-vow-of-chastity>. In short, the ten rules outlined by von Trier and Vinterberg were a reaction to Hollywood’s increasing reliance on post-production and special-effects and attempt to return filmmaking to its basic core: handheld cameras, natural lighting, on-location shooting and no special-effects or non-diegetic sound. For further context and historical overview of the Dogme 95 initiative, see Jack Stevenson, *Dogme Uncut: Lars von Trier, Thomas Vinterberg, and the Gang that Took on Hollywood* (Santa Monica: Santa Monica Press, 2003).

In its place, von Trier shot a film that looked to most viewers like a community theater production. Because of the film's jarring style, two primary bodies of literature have formed in order to make sense of this formal decision: the first, from popular film criticism, regards *Dogville*'s unique aesthetic as a pretentious presentation of the film's otherwise transparent narrative, understood as an ideological criticism of America's political, economic, and social hegemony. The second, the auteur theory, examines the film as an extension of von Trier's personal biography and reads it for the clues offered concerning his aesthetic genealogy. Neither of these directions, as will be discussed later in this chapter, takes the film's style as a reading strategy, something I argue is vital for its aesthetic implications more generally. Instead, both argue in their own way that the film's peculiar presentation is best understood as a gimmick to provoke a reaction or simply a way to trace von Trier's unique method of aesthetic hybridity. And, while neither of these approaches take the film as a question of aesthetics, despite their critical investment in questioning the film's style, both make clear that viewing the film is a challenge in a way his previous films were not.

One exit from this impasse can be found in a third body of literature informed by Jacques Rancière's reading of the film and his particular assessment of the relationship between aesthetics and politics.¹⁵³ Rancière understands the film as a comment concerning the contraction of spaces of political and artistic *dissensus* during the presidency of George W. Bush, whose time in office coincided with the film's release. For Rancière, *Dogville* uniquely captures the zeitgeist of the early 2000s, particularly as it conveys the shift in status of art and politics during the aftermath of September 11, 2001. In his reading, Rancière names this shift the "ethical turn,"

¹⁵³ See: Jacques Rancière, "The Ethical Turn in Aesthetics and Politics," in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 184 - 202.

where all political and artistic practices are reduced to a question concerning their moral validity instead of their potential to disrupt the dominant visual field. Rancière's theory of aesthetics grants it the capacity to alter the distribution of the sensible—what is thinkable, sayable, and therefore doable. In his reading, Rancière importantly acknowledges the relationship between aesthetics and *Dogville*, but like the above literature he curiously evades analyzing the film's style, instead deriving a theory of aesthetics from the content alone. Because of this, Rancière understands *Dogville* as a statement about how aesthetics relate to a larger social sensibility, rather than analyzing how the film's style distributes the sensible itself.

I engage these bodies of literature because my analysis hinges on assessing how *Dogville*'s mise-en-scène, particularly its barren staging and diagrammed town, provides a style that compliments one of the defining principles of neoliberalism: the naked display of economic reason as the rationality of all social life. As I will argue, the theater stage is conducive to revealing neoliberalism's influence over the social environment through the form of its mise-en-scène. The stripped down set reveals not a town but a chalk diagram, not a community but a schematic representation. The set lays bare this substitution by revealing the particular norms of capitalism as a self-evident fact of society, particularly how it depicts social relations as economic transactions. Therefore, by attending to the film's mise-en-scène as a means of showing how the social is inundated by the economic, we are able to see that a *diagram* of capitalism works as a foundational *ground* of politics.

The diagram, of course, has a long and contested history in Western thought. The two thinkers who have made this concept most prominent in their own work are Charles Peirce and Gilles Deleuze. For each, we can say that their philosophies are constructivist in nature, and the diagram is an agent of this construction. It is, in fact from Peirce that Deleuze borrows the

concept, submitting it to a radical reworking that rejects the broadly representational philosophical framework within which Peirce situates it. While my own concerns here are not to exhaustively delineate between these philosophers and how each approaches the diagram, a brief distinction is necessary to more fully appreciate how *Dogville* approaches this concept.

For both Peirce and Deleuze the diagram is an agent for the construction of reality. But there are two distinct conceptions of reality implicated here. For Peirce, reality is a mode of being asserted by a true proposition, regardless of what any actual mind thinks of it. That is, reality is logical truth, independent of the actual experience or thought that is subject to empirical inaccuracy. For Deleuze, in contrast, reality is a mode of being of material existence, in contrast to (logical) possibility. Furthermore the Deleuzian project is oriented not towards an already existing reality, whether actual or conceived, but towards the construction of a “new” reality that does not already exist. For Peirce, the construction of reality entails the acquisition of logical truths through a process of refining thought, while for Deleuze construction involves the production of a new reality. Therefore, we can say that for Peirce the function of a diagram is to assist thought’s process of approaching logical truth, while for Deleuze, diagrammatic construction is not grounded on what can be deemed truthful, but instead is directed towards the production of new values.

From Deleuze we know that diagrams function as abstract machines that give rise to particular concrete assemblages of power. The diagram is not a visual representation of existing reality, but on the contrary brings into being new modes of truth. As Deleuze and Guattari explain, the diagram “does not function to represent...but rather constructs a real that is yet to

come, a new type of reality.”¹⁵⁴ The diagram, therefore, renders aspects of the world around us seeable and sayable, visible and articulable. To this extent, diagrams play a role in guiding potential interactions with others and ourselves. For this reason, recent discussions concerning diagrammatic thought have related it to neoliberalism in contemporary capitalist society. The purpose of the neoliberal diagram, according to Matthew Tiessen and Greg Elmer, is “to monetize what once had no price: friendship, curiosity, culture, communication.”¹⁵⁵ The neoliberal diagram therefore functions to construct and extend social life in capital’s image, as much as it limits and governs social activity around a particular set of monetary values. In doing so the neoliberal diagram extends endlessly into new realms of activity in order to create particular modes of life and integrate them as nodes within its relational network.

As this concerns *Dogville*, the film produces a literal diagram in its set construction, which helps us gain visual access to this idea, establishing transparency as a primary means of its functioning. The film presents the town on a barren stage; only the chalk diagram (in this sense, the philosophical diagram is literalized in the diagrammed lines that stand-in for the town) delineate its boundaries, structures, and roadways. In this sense, we understand the diagram, in light of Peirce, to construct reality from the basis of what is known. The transparency of the *mise-en-scène*, in other words, reproduces the transparent logic that all that has happened in the town (i.e., its various activities, social relations, laws) is all that will happen. At the same time, the film’s aesthetic produces a second, competing diagram, one that exposes the logic of the former through the violence and brutality suffered by its inhabitants, presented with strict adherence to long takes and observational camera work. In light of this double valence, *Dogville*

¹⁵⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987): 142.

¹⁵⁵ Matthew Tiessen and Greg Elmer, “Editorial Introduction: Neoliberal Diagrammatics and Digital Control,” *MediaTropes* 4, no. 1 (2013): ii.

sustains a dialectical fashioning of the diagram that works to unveil the power structure of capitalism through an aesthetic that reproduces the neoliberal logic that transparency constitutes truth.

Grace's mistreatment highlights how the diagram that underlines *Dogville's* mise-en-scène plays out through the nature of the townsfolk, revealing their subjectivity as aligned with the tenets of neoliberal capitalism. Specifically, the film addresses subjectivity from the standpoint of its construction and the characters that inhabit Dogville present this subjectivity through their actions that repeatedly find them abusing Grace. Further, Grace's mistreatment is framed as a question of debt that she must pay for the credit she is bestowed for being granted asylum from the police. This is important because the abuses Grace suffers are presented as organic, economic transactions within the day-to-day functioning of Dogville. The abuses that derive from Grace's indebtedness imply that the construction of subjectivity in Dogville is rooted in the geometry of capitalism, replacing social and political questions that warrant debate for the transparent and therefore "logical" principle of economic rationality. The aesthetic diagram that exposes this violence as a by-product of debt reveals the neoliberal diagram that constructs the town, particularly how the mise-en-scène embodies the neoliberal ethos of transparent truth (Peirce) that both constitute the governing relations of debt while revealing them at the same time.

The question of the diagram for *Dogville* thus stages a productive tension between the film's mise-en-scène, which operates as a site of social production, and the camera, which brings attention to these issues through its promiscuous movement that works against the bodies of the townsfolk and actions that take place amongst them. We find these moments where the camera seems to be working independently of the on-screen action at several key points in the film

where a violent act transpires between a town member and Grace. In these scenes, Grace is caught between assimilating to the standards of the town, predominantly the increasingly violent acts she must endure to remain safeguarded from her pursuers, and the desire to leave Dogville. In these moments, the camera repeatedly moves in a promiscuous fashion, working against or away from the action on screen, often deemphasizing the brutal violence directed at Grace so as to normalize it within the greater workings of the town. For instance, in a pivotal scene we will revisit later, Grace is lured into the house of a neighbor, threatened and blackmailed and ultimately raped while the camera slowly zooms out and then pans from side-to-side surveying the entirety of the town. The camera's zoom and pan works to deemphasize the horror happening on screen, flattening the violence of the rape, suggesting its equivalence with all the action transpiring.

Finally, we can briefly mention one more duality here at the onset of this chapter as it concerns labor, more specifically how labor is represented in the diegesis and the labor of the spectator, who must endure these acts of violence in long, methodic shots as they happen repeatedly over the film's nearly three hour running time. The question of labor places debt as a foundational key to interpreting the film. As viewers of the film, we not only witness Grace's exploitation from the standpoint of working off her debt, but we as viewers also participate in a type of work that refuses to facilitate enjoyment in exchange for the exorbitant time and attention the film demands. In this way, like Grace, the spectator becomes indebted through the viewing experience, laboring through the demands of the film without any relief or respite in return.

The double-movement related to debt in *Dogville* therefore takes aesthetics as a contested ground at present, exposing how it can function to normalize the violence of capital, while also critiquing it through his own oppositional style that renders these points visible for the spectator.

To make this argument, I understand the principles of neoliberalism—primarily that generalized competition constitutes all social relations—as effecting a transition within capitalism, from an economic order to a specific type of governing practice. This idea, first proposed by Michel Foucault in his lectures on biopolitics in the late 1970s,¹⁵⁶ takes on new meaning in *Dogville* through its relentless staging of competition as the defining principle for social inclusion. While much of *Dogville* remains a mystery, what is clear from the outset is that debt is the foundation for inclusion, and it is the specifically exploitative nature of debt that becomes apparent through Grace’s attempts to integrate into the town’s social structure. Of course, the relationship between capitalism and governance is not a new argument. But what is at stake in *Dogville* is much more than a question related to how social structures render humanity as a form of biopower: *Dogville* enacts through its mise-en-scène a vital depiction of how subjectivity under neoliberalism is constituted aesthetically, and how capitalism may effect an aesthetics all its own.

My understanding here is strongly influenced by theorists Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, as well as German philosopher Christoph Menke. To take the former first, Dardot and Laval understand the nature of contemporary subjectivity as a construction derived from the principles of neoliberalism and capitalism. Updating Foucault’s lectures from the late 1970s, Dardot and Laval argue that the tenets of neoliberalism are designed to construct a self-governing subject by instituting competition as a generalized form of social interaction. In order to expand the terrain Rancière started to stake out concerning the ethical turn, Dardot and Laval prove useful for how they conceptualize generalized competition as constituting the specific

¹⁵⁶ Here, I am referencing Foucault’s published lectures from 1977 to 1979 at the Collège de France. Specifically, see Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2007); and, Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2008).

form of ethics under neoliberalism. “Neo-liberal interventionism does not aim,” Dardot and Laval explain, “to systematically correct ‘market failures’ in accordance with political objectives deemed desirable for the population’s well-being. It first of all aims to create competitive situations supposed to benefit the ‘fittest’ and strongest, and to adapt individuals to competition, regarded as the source of all benefits.”¹⁵⁷ For Dardot and Laval, subjectivity and the social relations that result are entirely conditioned by the normalization of competition. Suggested here is that market forces construct the subject needed to advance capitalism. This standard is then normalized for all human beings who wish to partake in society.

But this point also suggests that beyond redistributing the sensible aesthetics may have a much more complicated tie to politics, questioning the subject’s very ability to recognize *dissensus* as desirable from the start.¹⁵⁸ Initially Grace’s stay is meant to be only for a short time, but as her time in Dogville evolves into a more permanent arrangement we find her internalizing the system of exchange and exploitation her asylum is predicated upon. In one such example, Grace meets daily with Jack McKay (Ben Gazzara), an elderly man who is blind and lives alone. After several meetings, Jack leverages his disability as a way to physically grope Grace when she visits but instead of refuting him Grace justifies these encounters as a result of his loneliness and excuses his actions. Grace’s acceptance of these terms is interestingly reinforced by the film’s style, revealing private moments publicly, as no structures obtrude the spectator’s vision. In these moments of violation Grace suffers the townsfolk seemingly “look past” the offensive actions, suggesting that the transparency effected by the *mise-en-scène* also works against an

¹⁵⁷ Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, *The New Way of the World: On Neo-Liberal Society*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 229.

¹⁵⁸ Commentaries related to political resistance as a question of desire are growing in favor. For a particularly erudite study, see Steve Fraser, *The Age of Acquiescence: The Life and Death of American Resistance to Organized Wealth and Power* (New York, Boston, and London: Little, Brown and Company, 2015).

understanding that would deem these acts objectionable, or at least questionable. Instead, the aesthetic normalizes these offenses, creating an environment where alternatives are hard to imagine.

The second way *Dogville* raises the question of subjectivity engages with Menke's philosophical reconsideration of aesthetics. Menke also sees human subjectivity as a question of construction, but from an entirely different position. For Menke, subjectivity is taken from a strictly aesthetic perspective. He proposes that aesthetics opens the question of how subjectivity is constituted from two opposing sides. Menke advocates for two contrasting views on aesthetics: the first, conceives the aesthetic as a sensible cognition where subjectivity is defined by the self-willed exercise of faculties. He states, "Practice aims at the acquisition of capabilities and proficiencies. Through practice, we gain ability. To practice means to practice a praxis so that we can exercise it. What we gain in practice is a double ability: the ability to perform something and the ability to guide ourselves."¹⁵⁹ Here, Menke describes how the individual's ability to act and act according to one's will is defined by the practice of the body's faculties. The second view problematizes the first, understanding the aesthetic as a play of expression, propelled by a force that is unconscious. Menke suggests that it is the aesthetics of force, an encounter that can dislodge the known and create the new, as opposed to a self-willed practice of available faculties learned through socialization freed from any norm, law, or logic that distinguishes aesthetic nature from the culture acquired by practice.

If we take this claim in relation to the issues raised by Dardot and Laval, I think we can begin to understand how *Dogville* raises the question of aesthetics for art cinema in a new way. Traditionally, philosophy has understood aesthetics (as in Baumgarten and Kant) as a form of

¹⁵⁹ Christoph Menke, *Force: A Fundamental Concept of Aesthetic Anthropology*, trans. Gerrit Jackson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 20.

constituting subjectivity through the exercise of self-will. But as Foucault has outlined, and more recently in the way Dardot and Laval have taken on his concerns related to governance and neoliberalism, aesthetics could easily be the by-product of constituting subjectivities that are expressly demanded by the power structures that construct humans into subjects. Menke's work helps to distinguish between these two philosophical traditions, providing an opportunity to fashion aesthetics as a process of internalizing the principles of "generalized competition" and subsequently a means of self-government, as much as an emancipatory play of unconscious expression.

For each, subjectivity is a malleable entity open to the forces and influences encountered in life that ultimately determine our capacity to attain faculties, which inform the available actions we are able to take in various circumstances. In its broadest definition the term faculty concerns "the power of doing anything," and speaks as much to the sense of facility that comes with such a power as it does to the rigors of discipline sometimes needed to attain it. For Dardot and Laval, faculty becomes a question of how subjectivity is engineered by the various power structures that dictate what actions are encouraged from those that are not. While for Menke, faculty is a philosophical problem precisely because exercising one's will is often already informed by these power structures and thus necessitates an aesthetic encounter to dislodge, expand and, ultimately, inaugurate new actions that can be self-willed. To make such an argument will necessitate a closer look at how *Dogville* renders human subjectivity as a construction between the aesthetic forces of the diagram and the governing practices of labor that are legitimized through Grace's debt. *Dogville* presents us, therefore, not with a film that plays out an ideological take on aesthetics, but stages a crisis of aesthetics through its style.

The implications of this claim are vast and go well beyond the scope of this chapter, but we can begin to map a significantly richer picture of what is at stake in *Dogville* and for art cinema more generally if we attend to how the film addresses subjectivity as a form of faculty building. With this in mind, *Dogville* provides us with a meditation on the *governance of faculty* through the capacities that Grace learns and exercises stemming from her indebted servitude. What such a reading demands is a renewed attention to the film's minimalist, transparent mise-en-scène that lead to this specific conception of indebted subjectivity. Thus, to return to A.O. Scott's assertion that *Dogville* reduces all of life to its "crude minimum" belies a more substantial point: the errant reduction of transparency to simplicity and the translation of economic principles into social facts.

3.1 Lars von Trier's "America"

Released in 2003, *Dogville* received plenty of attention amongst critics for its aesthetic ambition, with most of that commentary directed at the film's prominent use of a theater stage. While the film's style has raised numerous responses ranging from curiosity to disdain, it is hardly a surprise considering von Trier's reputation as a stylist is arguably his defining marker as a filmmaker. Previous efforts of von Trier's such as *Europa* (1991) and *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) were praised for their aesthetic virtuosity, as these films experimented with film form and told compelling stories that audiences found affecting. Exemplary of such praise is Edward Guthmann's *Dancer in the Dark* review, which offers praise for von Trier's willingness to experiment in ways uniquely his own, noting, "It's great to see a movie so courageous and affecting, so committed to its own differentness."¹⁶⁰ In large part, von Trier's willingness to be

¹⁶⁰ Edward Guthmann, "Dancer Dares to be Different," *The San Francisco Chronicle*, October 2000. <http://www.sfgate.com/movies/article/Dancer-Dares-to-Be-Different-Singer-Bjork-3303305.php>.

different with such affecting vigor and flamboyant audacity made him a darling amongst critics and filmgoers looking for something innovative in the cinema.

Von Trier's early career continued to garner near universal praise with such releases as *Breaking the Waves* (1996) and *The Idiots* (1998), as critics and filmgoers seemed to revel in his audacious approach that challenged audiences in ways his contemporaries were not. By the early 2000s though, there seemed to be a growing impatience with von Trier's aesthetic indulgences and a decided shift away from granting him the benefit of the doubt that something truly valuable was taking place amidst all the anguish and cleverness that seemed to sprout from his films. In this regard, *Dogville* marks the first film where we see this shift, where critics seemed generally intrigued but ultimately dismissive for a film that, in the words of one reviewer, "looks like little more than a staged reading."¹⁶¹

Despite the near universal curiosity regarding the film's presentation few if any seemed to take *Dogville*'s style and content together as a successful marriage. For example, Ann Hornaday writing for the *Washington Post* contends:

For all of "Dogville's" strengths—its powerful performances, the ingenious staging, how quickly and completely the audience accepts its stylized reality—its take-home message is, ultimately, measly. And this is where von Trier's limitations come in. As in so many of his previous films, the director goes to outlandish, often shamelessly manipulative, lengths to inform viewers of a simplistic truth they didn't exactly need to be reminded of

¹⁶¹ More tellingly, this same review diagnoses the film's failure as one relating to style: "when computer generated imagery offers more and more options in terms of scenery, nobody expects to go a theater to see such things as a dog or bushes being represented by words spray-painted on the floor." Kam Williams, "Dogville: Danish Director's 'Dogville' More of a Sketch Than a Movie," *Town Topics*, April 2004. <http://www.towntopics.com/apr1404/cinema.html>.

in the first place—in this case, that greed, dishonesty and pious self-deception are bad, bad, bad.¹⁶²

For critics such as Hornaday, the issue with *Dogville* is von Trier, who has “emerged less as a filmmaker than as a consummate and canny showman.”¹⁶³ The discontent of such critics hinges on von Trier’s contentious and often painfully self-aware style. Less enamored this time around, the discontent of such reviews like Hornaday’s suggest that von Trier’s stylistic ambitions overwhelm the film to the point where it excludes the viewer’s enjoyment of watching it. Despite *Dogville*’s success at evoking thought and emotion, most seem dissuaded by the film’s naked display of its filmic and ideological scaffolding. The minimalist staging, stilted acting, and overt references to American pastoral life certainly struck a chord, but in doing so critics like Hornaday seemed apprehensive about engaging with the film’s tactics, often deferring to remarks about von Trier’s wanton personality and selfish pursuit as an aesthete.

For this reason, reviews like David Denby’s for *The New Yorker* point to a cultural and geopolitical antagonism inherent within *Dogville*, as well as between von Trier and his interlocutors. “What Lars von Trier has achieved is avant-gardism for idiots,” Denby writes.¹⁶⁴ “Like so many revolutionaries, von Trier can’t wait to impose himself on free people,” he continues before concluding, “The movie is, of course, an attack on America—its innocence, its conformity, its savagery—though von Trier is interested not in the life of this country (he’s never been here) but in the ways he can exploit European disdain for it.”¹⁶⁵ Denby’s summation concerning this antipathy reads like a transcontinental *quid pro quo* of critical ire between

¹⁶² Ann Hornaday, “Danish Cinema Cuts to the Chaste,” *The Washington Post*, January 2004. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2004/01/11/AR2005033113042.html>.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ David Denby, “The Quick and the Dead,” *The New Yorker*, March 2004. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/03/29/the-quick-and-the-dead-3>.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

Europe's art cinema bad boy and a defensive American intelligentsia who seem bemused at best and dismissive at worst. Inherent in these accounts is the quick-and-easy association these reviews take concerning *Dogville*'s obvious and critical commentary on America, regardless of audience, which for Denby is rife with insincere intention, bordering on exploitation.

Exemplary of this line of argumentation is Todd McCarthy's oft cited *Variety* review that contends, "The identification with *Dogville* and the United States is total and unambiguous," and suggests, "If the director wants more outraged reactions from Americans about his ignorance of their country, he'll certainly be able to fill many clippings books with them this time out."¹⁶⁶

McCarthy's understanding of the film as a one-to-one relation between fiction and reality, *Dogville* and American life, is representative of how critics approached this peculiar film upon its release. By most accounts, such as McCarthy's, American critics took the film as a form of admonishment from a Danish director who has never set foot on American soil.¹⁶⁷ The defensive nature of this body of critical literature interestingly grants von Trier's alleged American critique as simultaneously self-evident and disingenuous, and perhaps most egregious of all is the fact that von Trier has never even visited the very country he seems so intent on admonishing. The notion that America is a domineering empire is not in question for these critics, though, who are entirely willing to accept these charges in the midst of Bush's presidency. Instead, what strikes

¹⁶⁶ Todd McCarthy, "Review: *Dogville*," *Variety*, May 2003.

<http://variety.com/2003/film/markets-festivals/dogville-1200541582>.

¹⁶⁷ Von Trier's refusal to visit America has been discussed at length elsewhere. The standard response from von Trier concerns his aversion to flying and the inspiration he takes from Franz Kafka's early novel *Amerika*, which was written without the author ever having visited the country. More tellingly though, during the press tour for *Dogville* von Trier claimed to be "60% American" stating, "Entering a country with troops is small change compared to the way we have allowed ourselves to be occupied [by American culture]," and concluding that he knows "more about America from various media than the Americans did about Morocco when they made *Casablanca*." For the entirety of these interviews, see Lars von Trier, interview by Ole Koster, Cannes, TV2, May 23, 2003. *Dogville* (Disc 2, Nordisk, 2003); and, Stig Björkman, ed., *Trier on von Trier*, trans. Neil Smith (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), 245.

so many as offensive is the fact that a foreigner presents America's problems to itself over three hours on a single theater stage in Sweden.

Despite most critics explicitly raising the question of content (i.e., critique of America) and style (i.e., the theater stage) independently, their relation goes largely unacknowledged, as if these two aspects of the film are not inextricably linked. Instead, as Denby notes, the film suffers because audiences "will be screaming not from terror but from boredom,"¹⁶⁸ suggesting *Dogville's* critical acumen would be sharpened if only it were presented in a way that befit viewer's expectations. In a sense, this continues a long held line of argumentation that von Trier is a filmmaker of geopolitical importance, making films that transparently comment upon issues of nationalism, culture, and political violence.¹⁶⁹ But unlike previous efforts no one seemed willing to both accept von Trier's alleged critique and find value in *Dogville* as a *film*. Instead, *Dogville's* critics devalued it based on its overly sophisticated presentation of a simple truth, or celebrate the film's bold cinematic rendering by repressing its overt geopolitical stance.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Denby, "The Quick and the Dead."

¹⁶⁹ For a reading of von Trier's earlier Dogme 95 work as a question of space, place, and politics, see Rosalind Galt, "Back Projection: Visualizing Past and Present Europe in *Zentropa*," *Cinema Journal* 45, no. 1 (2005): 3-21.

¹⁷⁰ An exemplary counterexample to those given above can be found in Stephen Holden's *New York Times* review, where he states, "The clearest path toward understanding Lars von Trier, whose three-hour quasi-Christian allegory, 'Dogville,' is certain to divide audiences into passionate champions and hissing naysayers, is to accept that he is a ruthless provocateur with a practical joker's sensibility." Holden locates the film's value in von Trier's mercurial sense of humor, noting appropriately, "A lot of fuss has been made about Mr. von Trier's supposed anti-Americanism. (He has never visited.) It seems to me that this showy stance is more a provocative maneuver than a hardened prejudice. As long as the United States is called the promised land where the streets are paved with gold, its myths are ripe for puncture. We ought to be able to stand it." For Holden, critics have missed out on what is to be valued, if not outright enjoyed, about *Dogville*, which is how it combats the staid efforts of Hollywood through perverse humor and tongue-in-cheek vitriol. Stephen Holden, *The New York Times*, March 2004. <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/26/movies/26DOG.html>.

What has changed between von Trier's early efforts that garnered near universal praise and *Dogville* is not immediately clear. Perhaps for these critics von Trier had simply gone to the well once too often—exploiting shock and boredom at the expense of something more substantial. We might also all too easily assess the American reception of *Dogville* as the awkward and unwelcome reality of being confronted with one's national identity during a historical period of global disdain for the United States. But a close reading of this literature reveals something more endemic. For a film that explicitly takes style (and not only content) as an ideological issue few seemed willing to grant von Trier credit for doing anything more than provoking indignation at the expense of an enjoyable viewing experience. Instead, a general critical consensus formed around the film's emotional and ideological manipulation of the viewer in order to stage a direct and combative representation of America.

Part of this reasoning ties into von Trier's admitted attempts to make sense of the hard reality of life through a worldview that is largely defined by American consumerism and capitalist principles. Von Trier himself has suggested that *Dogville* is a way to use the cultural significance of America as a stand-in to enlarge personal or regional issues tied to capitalist consumerism. Von Trier has made clear that he recognizes the all-pervading influence America has on global culture and in turn each of us individually and *Dogville* in some ways was his attempt to work through this issue. Speaking to this point, von Trier has offered:

America is a good subject because such a big, big part of our lives has to do with America. ... America is kind of sitting on the world, there's no question about it. And therefore I'm making films that have to do with America, because America fills about 60% of my brain. All the words in there, all the things I've experienced in my life, about 60% of them—and I'm not very happy about it—is American. So in fact I am American,

but I can't go there to vote, I can't change anything because I'm from a small country. And that is why I make films about America.¹⁷¹

Here, von Trier offers an added layer of complexity to the analysis we have looked at thus far. Far from a mere attack on America, *Dogville* becomes a sort of moving Rorschach test, melting personal and cultural concerns into an intertwined whole that places the country and its global reach on center stage. Suggested as well in von Trier's comments is that physical locale is less substantial than ideological perspective, such that regardless of where one lives or works, thoughts and actions tie back to values associated with America, such as consumerism and exchange.

What further intrigues me as it regards von Trier's admission that America plays a significant role in his imagination is the suggestion that the American way of life, and certainly what this means in part is an adherence to capitalism, can infiltrate and inform a style that proliferates globally even if it derives from a particular place.¹⁷² In fact, we know this line of thinking quite well starting with classical Hollywood cinema, but here we are dealing something quite different. *Dogville* is certainly not a film trying to look or feel like an American moving picture, but at the same time it cannot completely escape its influence, as nods to Hollywood genre films, pastoral life, and a particular strain of Christian piety that is definitively American abound throughout the film. Therefore, despite von Trier's singular cinematic sensibility he admits that even his own originality is heavily influenced by American culture. This point raises some interesting questions, such as, what does it mean for a Danish director to make art cinema

¹⁷¹ This popular quote is taken from the press coverage leading up to *Manderlay*'s release in 2005. I quote it here at length as transcribed in Caroline Bainbridge, *The Cinema of Lars von Trier: Authenticity and Artifice* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2007), 143-144.

¹⁷² For more on cinema's global turn, see Toby Miller, et al., *Global Hollywood 2* (London: British Film Institute, 2008); and, *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, eds. Rosalind Gault and Karl Schoonover (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

while also claiming to be “60% American”? Or, more to the point, what might we say about art cinema’s role in a globalized culture that cannot escape the very culture (i.e., Hollywood) it attempts to confront?

If we take his words seriously, von Trier seems to be a filmmaker working between a number of transcontinental nodes, bouncing between them, trying to exact a practice of authenticity in order to realize some truth about what it means to live in a globalized world. Much of his efforts in this regard, we could infer, are an attempt at working through the frustrations of living in a globalized culture that we cannot, in the end, affect in any substantial way. Part of what makes von Trier such an enigma, then, is directly tied to his genuine disdain for hegemonic thought, particularly as it relates to America’s commercial dominance of the cinematic arts. Of course, von Trier’s early career was transparently an effort to confront these issues. Corresponding with the digital turn that was taking place in the cinema during the 1990s, the Dogme collective took an antagonistic stance toward Hollywood’s infatuation with the commercial possibilities of the burgeoning tech boom. Mette Hjort has argued that von Trier’s particularly confrontational attitude toward this change in the filmmaking process was meant to inspire an oppositional form of globalization, “a network of audiences with a genuine global reach,”¹⁷³ where filmmakers working outside the confines of Hollywood could compete for recognition. But *Dogville*’s reception reminds us that this type of transformation, and any subsequent recognition that would follow, is exceedingly difficult in a globalized world that seems to offer not more but less opportunity for those working outside the hegemonic confines of Hollywood.

¹⁷³ Mette Hjort, “The Globalization of Dogme: The Dynamics of Metaculture and Counter-Publicity,” in *Purity and Provocation: Dogme ’95*, ed. Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (London: British Film Institute, 2008), 155.

Linda Badley offers further insight here, explaining, “From the outset, Trier has presented himself as a contradictory, eclectic, European, and transnational figure within a global postmodern (as opposed to Danish) context.”¹⁷⁴ Situating von Trier’s output in this way, Badley points to the importance of Dogme’s influence on even his later efforts proposing that “Dogme’s international success marked the beginning of Trier’s direct engagement with cultural politics.”¹⁷⁵ For Badley, von Trier’s output has increasingly staged his personal contradictions as a response to the global contradictions of contemporary life. “The personal *becomes* political,” Badley writes, further suggesting, “Finding a source of his dilemma in Hollywood-inflected global postmodernism, Trier often makes Hollywood the backdrop against which he projects that dilemma in elaborate games and rules or in auteurist psychodramas set in allegorical and politicized frameworks.”¹⁷⁶ Understood in this way, von Trier’s cinema is often a testing ground to work out an inability to authentically express himself in a postmodern world that seems to only recognize conformity to a global value system of American economic and political hegemony.

In surveying the above responses, we can assess several unifying points among them, particularly that *Dogville* is a film that punishes its audience through prolonged and meticulous scenes of violence and boredom, and that these confrontational tactics are a way for von Trier to explore what it means to be an individual in an era of globalization. The role of the spectator drives the responses we looked at, as *Dogville* is often framed as a film that seems to delight in the displeasure and discomfort it produces. At the same time the film itself is almost entirely focused on Grace and her increasingly dire situation in Dogville. Bringing these points together,

¹⁷⁴ Badley, *Lars von Trier*, 3.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

then, is appropriate not only because they have garnered the most attention but also because it is indicative of how contemporary art cinema is responding to changes stemming from an increasingly interconnected and globalized perspective. While it is the critic's job to interpret and ultimately pass judgment on a film, we have seen a tendency to speak to the dissatisfaction *Dogville* produces during its reception. *Dogville* largely accomplishes this by staging one horrific scene after the next, offering little to no respite for the audience. This is why we see tactics used to make sense of von Trier's film quickly move to exterior and supporting evidence, such as Bush's presidency or von Trier's biography, to make sense of what is otherwise a three-hour torture play.

What is interesting is how the reception implicitly raises the question of debt. Ostensibly we see this play out in the film's diegesis between Grace and the townsfolk who accept her into their community at a price. In order for Grace to remain in Dogville, and away from the danger she claims to be running from, she must repay the debt she owes to those who give her sanctuary. But there is an additional debt worth mentioning here, that between the film's brutal and untoward presentation and the viewer who is tasked with enduring it. The question of debt, then, is raised from multiple angles so that the film's content is reinforced through its reception. That is, as Grace becomes increasingly entangled in the minutiae of frontier town life, her stay becomes more costly, more violent, and ultimately life threatening. And, we can speak to a similar pattern of debt related to the film's reception, which ultimately leaves the viewer entirely alienated from the filmic experience, relegated to searching for justifications for the ebb and flow of boredom and violence beyond the film, as evidenced in many of the reviews we looked at earlier.

Taking debt as one of the organizing mechanisms of *Dogville* means we must take seriously the difficulty in watching the film and treat the stylistic choices as an exacting exercise in determining how much inhumanity and terror one must endure as a by-product of an indebted way of life. For example, Roger Ebert's review takes the film's challenging presentation as the basis for his review, stating, "Few people will enjoy seeing it [*Dogville*] once and, take it from one who knows, even fewer will want to see it a second time."¹⁷⁷ Ebert's appraisal points to the fact that this film can very easily feel like a long exercise in patience testing, as *Dogville* offers very little by way of enjoyment, which is the default expectation amongst film viewers stemming from Hollywood's economy of enjoyment as *the* organizing principle for the cinematic arts. Instead, conforming to the expectations of enjoyment that derive from Hollywood's global reach, *Dogville* seems to delight in punishing its viewer, forcing them to witness gross horrors of physical, emotional, and sexual violence. Perhaps one reason no one has bothered to think about the aesthetic implications of *Dogville* in relation to debt as a global signifier of citizenship to the extent we are here relates back to how the film so curiously oscillates between monotony and disgust, situating its viewing as both tedious and terrifying, creating a social environment that authorizes violence as an organic aspect of (indebted) life.

We might begin this task first as a question of how far can a debtor bend before they break? Or, where is the limit to human endurance under constant and increasing forms of violence? Or even what constitutes repayment in a social field designed to place the weak and helpless in the hands of those that rule? In order to begin answering these questions we should take seriously von Trier's appeal to the systemic violence that is often associated as an individual failure: "My primitive view is that if a system is partly built on the idea that you are the maker of

¹⁷⁷ Ebert, "Dogville," <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/dogville-2004>.

your own happiness, then of course poor people are miserable in the sense that they failed completely. Whereas in other countries [outside the U.S.], you might look at that more as a failure of the society.”¹⁷⁸ Von Trier’s comments are worth mentioning because happiness and success as individual responsibilities are, after all, one of neoliberalism’s most important edicts. But we should also not stop at the surface reading, which suggests that mistreatment is bad and Grace’s hardship is not her fault but really lies in the hands of the individuals who are keeping her captive. Instead, what emerges over the course of the film is how all of Dogville’s residents are bound to the power structures of the town, but none of them see that system for what it is, even as the operations of it are plainly in sight throughout the film. It is the transparency of the violence that fuels the ethical dilemma the film poses to its viewers.

3.2 Dogville’s Debt

In recent years there has been increased interest amongst scholars of the art cinema concerning its reception, particularly as it relates to the explicit sex and violence found in films that makeup what has been called the “cinema of sensation,” “cinéma du corps,” “cinema brut,” or “extreme realism.”¹⁷⁹ Films that fall into these categories—such as Gaspar Noe’s *Irréversible* (2002) and Clair Denis’s *Trouble Every Day* (2001)—have garnered attention for their confrontational subject matter that elicits a strong affective response in viewers. Lisa Cartwright has written in her book *Moral Spectatorship* that feeling has traditionally been “a suspect area of research for film and media scholars who, since the time of Brechtian distancing and

¹⁷⁸ Scott, “‘Dogville’: It Fakes a Village.”

¹⁷⁹ For more on the recent study of extreme cinema, see Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); Tim Palmer, “Under Your Skin: Marina de Van and the Contemporary French *cinéma du corps*,” *Studies in French Cinema* 6, no. 3 (2006): 171 – 181; Dominique Russell, “Introduction: Why Rape?,” in Dominique Russell, ed., *Rape in Art Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2010): 1 – 12.; and, James Williams, “His Life to Film: The Extreme Art of Jacques Nolot,” *Studies in French Cinema* 9, no. 2 (2009): 177 – 190.

Althusserian apparatus theory, have worked to institute models that allow us to resist the seductive pull of the medium as it moves us to feel for the other.”¹⁸⁰ But increasingly film scholars have become interested in exploring the nature of reception from a wide array of angles, and one of the more productive avenues these studies have gone down concerns the relationship between affect and ethics.

Regarding the tendency to overlook the emotive in film reception, Carl Plantinga has noted, “any satisfactory account of film reception and its implications for ideology, rhetoric, ethics, or aesthetics had better be able to take film-elicited affect and emotion into account.”¹⁸¹ As we have seen, much of the critical reception of *Dogville* is directed at the difficult and uncomfortable experience it elicits amongst its viewers. In fact, *Dogville* seems to be a film set on stymieing a clear-cut reading, seemingly delighting in challenging viewers with alternating currents of violence and boredom. This has resulted in most accounts of the film to rely heavily on ideological critique and allegory as reading strategies. But often these reviews, like Ebert’s we looked at in the last section, raise the question of reception even if it remains peripheral. What makes affect of interest here is how the film deploys its peculiar style in order to pose new questions to previous assessments of the film like von Trier’s own, where he states, “I think the point to the film is that evil can arise anywhere, as long as the situation is right.”¹⁸² The evil that arises during the film is not difficult to pin down. We know acts of enslavement, lying, manipulation, and rape are wrong. Watching Grace’s debasement at the hands of people who gave her sanctuary in a time of need presents a unique depiction of evil, rooted in the

¹⁸⁰ Lisa Cartwright, *Moral Spectatorship: Technologies of Voice and Affect in Postwar Representations of the Child* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008): 1.

¹⁸¹ Carl Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator’s Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009): 5.

¹⁸² Scott, “‘Dogville’: It Fakes a Village.”

exploitation of labor and the manipulation of her indebted status. In addition, the stripped down style renders this violence particularly grotesque for how it elicits both disgust and boredom. While the actual physical and emotional abuse we see Grace suffer is challenging, it is the prolonged takes, where the viewer must sit and suffer through the violence with her, and the disaffected nature of her perpetrators, who show little to no emotional repercussions from their actions, that elicits such a disturbing feeling amongst viewers.

Disregarding the reception of *Dogville*, its brutal treatment of Grace and the seemingly nonchalant presentation of violence mistakenly ignores an important aspect of the film, particularly how it approaches the question of debt. The issue of debt is important because it works to both justify and normalize the violence done unto Grace, as well as induce a felt sense of indebtedness in the viewer who is suffers along with Grace in these prolonged scenes. We can gain further appreciation for von Trier's odd marriage of violence and boredom as an avenue to think about how debt functions if we place it in relation to the earlier art cinema of the 1960s, which itself thwarted a certain kind of spectatorial pleasure of its own. The art cinema of this era—films such as Michaelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert* (1964) or Jean Luc-Godard's *Weekend* (1967)—challenged audiences in their own right, confronting them with ambiguous narratives, outbursts of violence, and confrontational subject matter in protracted style. At the same time these films tended to give back a different kind of pleasure, connected to the sublime, cinephilia, and subversive politics en vogue with the era's burgeoning youth movement. These films, while challenging, had an instructional function, teaching its audience how to look, offering a pedagogical exchange for the aesthetic and narrative challenges they provided. In this sense, the filmmakers of this era offered texts where the viewing subject could learn outside of the State model of education, providing a ground for new lines of thinking.

With von Trier, though, we do not quite get the same thing because the relationship between the text and the spectator has shifted. Instead of cinema, or aesthetics more generally, serving as a possible pedagogical device, it is instead inscribed into the very fabric of State power. This shift complicates the consumption of culture, largely relegating it as an extension of capitalism. In turn, we can extend this shift in cultural production to von Trier, whose work is often understood as obscenely grotesque instead of uniquely subversive because education itself is not conceived as an opportunity to break out of conditioned models of understanding, so much as it is about investing in the faculties that reproduce the very conditions of capitalism itself. We see von Trier's appeal to global, postmodern politics, discussed in the last section, play out in Grace's entrance into the capitalist space of Dogville and her subsequent education on how to adopt the skills necessary to survive. Issues such as human capital come into play here, requiring a mobile and flexible self with a constant eye toward innovation and growth, instead of resistance and reform, which extends to Grace, as we see her adapt and conform to Dogville's expectation of her. In this regard we might say that neoliberalism is largely about the application of the economic grid to social phenomena, designating cultural production like film (or labor) as an extension of this process.

In this respect, Grace's time in Dogville like the viewing experience itself leads us to consider debt as one of the film's central issues, particularly: what does it mean when our sense of morality and justice is translated to the language of a business deal? What might it mean when moral obligations are reduced to debts? Or even, what does it mean when the one turns into the other? These questions play out in disturbing fashion, as we will see shortly. But debt itself is not a self-evident issue and the way Dogville formulates it is important for understanding the larger diagrammatic modes of thought it attempts to reveal.

As we know, Grace's sanctuary is initially agreed to as a moral obligation of Christian piety to help one's neighbor. This moral obligation though is translated as a debt, so that Grace's sanctuary is predicated upon her commitment to fulfill her obligations by working. As a result, debt unlike any other form of obligation can be exactly quantified. This allows debts to become simple, cold, and impersonal, which in turn allows morality to be treated as a matter of impersonal arithmetic. Dogville's residents are apprehensive, skeptical, and generally unmoved by the apparent but unspoken danger Grace is desperately seeking asylum to avoid. The film stages Grace's fate in a town hall style meeting, where all of Dogville's community members gather to debate the issue of whether she should be allowed to stay or not. The meeting is led by Tom who gives a stoic and detached argument based on the social customs and norms of the town, such as pious devotion to work, commonsense rationality, and individualism. Tom's status as the town's public intellectual is prominent early and sets the tone for Grace's transformation from stranger to town resident, outsider to community member. In this way, Tom sets the precedent not only for Grace's integration into social life, but also serves as the mouthpiece for Dogville's ethos.

Grace's status in relation to the town also highlights how the diagrammed town serves as a blueprint for the mode of subjectivity Dogville constructs. The scene itself is shot so as to expose the transparency of the town hall, which is situated in the middle of Dogville. The camera's focus alternates during Tom's speech between him and the townsfolk who are seated in rows of benches. As the camera pans from left to right and right to left, these shots allow the viewer to see the entirety of the town as Tom speaks. At times the camera will catch some action in the background, like Grace who is on the far end of town waiting to learn of her fate. For this example, the camera pans from left to right with Tom in the foreground. We see the townsfolk

sitting and stirring, directing questions at Tom about whether Grace's stay will jeopardize Dogville's way of life. At this point Grace slowly enters the frame and becomes the focal point as she eventually becomes the center of the shot. The camera then zooms in on her while keeping Tom in the frame. These shots construct a layered visual, as we can clearly see the entirety of Dogville from end-to-end during this scene. The roaming camera in relation to the transparent *mise-en-scène* creates an interesting association between Grace, the outsider who is on the edge of society, and the townsfolk, who decide her fate, based on Tom's proclaimed method of illustration. Tom's address to the townsfolk centers on his insistence that "illustration" is the method by which Dogville will experience prosperity, and the camera and *mise-en-scène* reinforce this illustration by juxtaposing Grace's vulnerability with the lines that embody the town.

The visuals are paramount here, as Tom largely speaks in abstractions, until at one point Liz berates him for his "philosophy." At this point, Tom states, "Since no one seems to think anything is wrong, let me illustrate." It is at this point that he fetches Grace, bringing her into the town hall. Here, the illustration Tom speaks of begins to take shape, as Grace becomes the center of everyone's attention. As she stands awkwardly, the camera moves from her face to individual members of the town, creating one-to-one associations, as the camera cuts quickly back to her face before panning and zooming to another resident. As each town member looks Grace over and seems to ponder her potential, there is a real sense that the diagrammed stage and Tom's appeal to "illustration" suggests an explicit link to the Deleuzian diagram. Here, the barren stage reveals the diagram as a visual information device, like a map, line or graph, which works to present information on the functioning of life. What this suggests for this scene, which takes place in a space of communal gathering and debate, is that under Tom's method of illustration

the townsfolk can operate as passive recipients of power or an active collaborator intertwined with and mobilized by Dogville's diagram.

Finally, after some convincing, Dogville's residents relent and allow Grace asylum but only so long as she negotiates with every person independently based on their individual desire. Grace undergoes a transformation from elegant outsider to subordinate community member, having to earn her keep and establish trust and social standing through a series of tasks that implicate her as a worthy and productive addition to the town.¹⁸³ The negotiations take place at the resident's reluctance with most showing no real interest in Grace and annoyance that they must entertain this young stranger. Additionally, after several remarks concerning her "alabaster hands" and elegant clothing, Grace proceeds to change her personal style to align with the prevailing aesthetic of the town. Grace is willing and eager during these exchanges, now adorned in working attire, a plain ankle length dress and scarf that covers her blonde hair. Grace begins to assimilate to the town's expectations for residency both visually and through her subordinate demeanor.

The work Grace agrees to take on is loosely defined and over the course of the film the demands placed on Grace continue to escalate as the price for acceptance in Dogville intensifies with each successful task accomplished. Under this agreement Grace begins by weeding Ma Ginger's wild gooseberry bushes at the edge of town. In turn, others follow her example: Ben (Zeljko Ivanek) has Grace cleaning the garage where he lives, Vera (Patricia Clarkson) takes her on as a baby-sitter and a tutor of her children; Tom Edison Sr (Philip Baker Hall) has her serving as a caregiver related to his health, and above all his hypochondria, while Jack has her listening

¹⁸³ Although my focus is not related to issues of immigration, we can see a clear parallel here regarding Grace's acceptance into a foreign society and requisite concessions often demanded of those seeking asylum abroad.

to his day-long talks about the features of the sun's light off the mountain range to the West despite the fact he is blind; Martha (Siobhan Fallon) takes her as an assistant to play the organ at the mission house; Bill (Jeremy Davies) wants her to educate him to read and write; and Olivia (Cleo King) has her serve as a nurse for her disabled daughter June (Shauna Shim). Even the most hesitant of Dogville's residents, Chuck (Stellan Skarsgård), finds value in Grace as a day laborer in his orchard helping to pick apples.

Grace unquestioningly accepts these conditions as the price of life, residency, and social inclusion, and ceaselessly goes about working, but above all attempting to find friendship and camaraderie in order to attain full acceptance and inclusion in the community. Grace works harder and longer as she continues to succeed in accomplishing her tasks to the standards of the town's residents. The more she works the more efficient and productive she becomes and, in turn, the more she accomplishes the more work she is expected to do. In addition, Grace undergoes a stark physical change as well. We initially see Grace in her fashionable attire, her form notable for the long, straight vertical lines of her posture. Grace walks through Dogville slowly in those initial scenes, taking in her surroundings with cautious skepticism. But the longer she stays in Dogville the further removed she becomes from this picture. By this point in the film she largely shot stooped over, either cleaning or gardening, or simply from exhaustion. Her body takes on a more horizontal shape, her face shows her resignation as well as her fear, and this shift is important for seeing how the tasks she performs reorients how she moves and experiences this space. In this way, social inclusion is not only a question of having work gifted to Grace, but also based on her capacity to continue to adapt and develop faculties, and subsequent corporeal changes necessary to meet the rising cost of residency.

Interestingly, Grace's labor is discussed in a scene that follows the town hall decision. Tom and Grace walk side-by-side through the town, as Tom introduces each town member individually. As they walk on the main street through town, Tom reveals to Grace the names, relations, and one secret each of them harbors. The townsfolk themselves are inside their homes, unaware that Tom and Grace are passing by. To the viewer, of course, we can see both inside and outside, so that Tom's knowledge of each resident in town is supported by their transparency on screen. Grace, at this point, states, "All I see is a lovely little town and these beautiful mountains." Again, the emphasis of the speech and camera is on the transparency of Dogville, which we are to understand constitutes the power structure that organizes the town. Because all that Grace can see is the scenic beauty of Dogville, she seems confident that this beauty is also to be found in the structuring of the town. But this transparency constitutes a new relation between labor and capital, and in turn Grace and Dogville, where her own exploitation becomes a transparent fact.

There are a number of curiosities in these dealings but none more prominent than Grace's acquiescence to work harder, longer, and in increasingly humiliating and degrading circumstances. Andrea Brighenti has noted, "When Grace begins to work each day, for each Dogvillian, we clearly have a shift from the symbolic toward the economic reason," so that "[t]he process of her inclusion proceeds in parallel with the process of her submission, her oppression, her exploitation."¹⁸⁴ Because she offers little to no resistance to the increasing demands placed on her over the course of the film, it is hard to pinpoint a culprit or, even more traditionally for film, to assign blame to a villain. In fact, at the onset Grace is quite eager to please, to be accepted and welcomes the increasing expectations placed on her. As Brighenti has

¹⁸⁴ Andrea Brighenti, "Dogville, Or, The Dirty Birth of Law," *Thesis Eleven* 87 (2006): 105, 106.

observed, the process of her inclusion is concomitant with her exploitation, but also her transformation stemming from this process. Dogville's town members also seem to act with increasing violence and disregard for Grace in unison, as if this set of practices is both natural and self-evident. For Grace, these demands are met with worry and anxiety unrelated to her own wellbeing and position, but instead for her capacity to perform the various tasks required to meet the increasing cost of social inclusion.

Grace's slow and brutal incorporation into the town has been framed repeatedly as a question concerning the economy of gift giving. Lorenzo Chiesa suggests, taking Grace's name as a stand-in for the term itself, "both the Biblical and the Roman pagan grace are ultimately based on a continuous exchange of favours."¹⁸⁵ As Grace integrates herself further into Dogville's community, Chiesa notes how accountancy becomes the rule of legitimacy writing, "All Dogvillians learn to become good managers."¹⁸⁶ This process of (self-)management is extended throughout the town to the point where each act of "grace" is made public through a measure of counting. The two most prominent examples of this include ringing the town bell twice an hour to regulate Grace's labor, and ultimately the ringing of the bell after the men in the town have raped her after she has been reduced to a sex slave.

Dany Nobus understands the nature of Grace's work as a path to social acceptance in similar terms. Nobus claims, "What von Trier's film provokes, here, is not only our realisation of the fundamental lack of solidarity that animates, permeates and substantiates a community of people, but the equally intrinsic lack of reciprocity that governs and maintains the exchange of social goods. The gift-object as the very figure of loss determines the radical impossibility of

¹⁸⁵ Lorenzo Chiesa, "What is the Gift of Grace? On *Dogville*," *Film-Philosophy* 11, no. 3 (2007): 2.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

reciprocity in the relationship between giver and receiver.”¹⁸⁷ For Nobus, like Chiesa, Grace’s labor is treated as a question of a gift-economy where she “gifts” Dogville her labor in order to be “gifted” a place amongst the social ranks of the community.

Chiesa and Nobus take gift exchange as a means to crack open *Dogville*’s complexity largely because Grace does not produce a commodity; she simply volunteers herself to work. But if we reinterpret the terrain of gift giving as an accounting for debt we can begin to reevaluate Grace’s role in the film. If access to Dogville is predicated on debt and Grace is asked to labor out of desire as opposed to need the type of work she does becomes very important. Grace’s labor is service oriented. She does not, in other words, produce or manufacture goods or commodities, but services the town members through physical and affective labor, which includes baby sitting, counseling, cleaning, gardening, and, finally, sexual favors. If we take the issue of work not as a gift, the giving away of something, but instead the production of a certain form of subjectivity, this situation entails a reorientation of the commodity in this economy, one that necessitates the human subject as commodity *par excellence* that is manufactured in lieu of any tangible, material good. Debt then becomes less an abstract agreement and more a condition of being, informing how we are to act, behave, and think.

While I depart from their conclusions, Chiesa and Nobus do point us in a productive direction, ultimately signaling a lack of reciprocity between Grace and the town members in addition to how this exploitative relationship is counted and therefore legitimated. I suggest we read the question of “gift giving” as a relationship between “debtor and creditor” because this shift allows us to move between the film’s content and style more closely, so that we understand debt as a foundational relationship between Grace and Dogville, as well as between the filmic

¹⁸⁷ Dany Nobus, “The Politics of Gift Giving and the Provocation of Lars von Trier’s *Dogville*,” *Film-Philosophy* 11, no. 3 (2007): 33.

system and the spectator. For this reason, the question of debt productively supplements Chiesa's and Nobus's economy of gift exchange because it affords us the opportunity to interpret not only how the film turns Grace into an indebted subject of servitude—constructing her subjectivity based on the faculties her labor demands—but also how von Trier stymies the viewer's enjoyment, asking them to give more and more of their time and energy without any satisfaction in return.

We find an early example of this not long after the police initially visit Dogville in search of Grace. After the townsfolk realize Grace's stay is compromised by the law things start to become very difficult for her as she is expected to do more and more work to compensate for her newly established "wanted" status. Because of the additional workload, Grace inevitably makes mistakes, and the people she works for become increasingly hostile toward her as she fails to meet their growing expectations. The situation slowly escalates, with the male citizens making small sexual advances and the females becoming increasingly verbally abusive. Even the children are perverse. At one critical juncture in the film, Jason (Miles Purinton), the son of Chuck and Vera, demands Grace spank him for all of his misdeeds. This blackmail also works as another form of debt, where Jason's alleged transgressions must be repaid through physical abuse as repayment. This is the first point in the film where it is clear how completely Grace's lack of social status and choices makes her vulnerable to other people manipulating her indebtedness.

The scene itself is quite bizarre. Jason, who appears to be roughly ten-years old, clearly establishes his dominance over Grace in this scene that is both discomfoting and oddly matter-of-fact. As Grace is attempting to teach the children their school lesson (one of her many jobs), Jason continually acts up, disrupting the process. At one point, for example, Jason takes the

papers Grace has distributed for homework and rips them to pieces. After several attempts, Grace finally suspends class, asking the other children to leave the schoolhouse so she can speak with Jason alone. At this point the camera, which has been shooting exclusively in close-ups frames Grace and Jason with a medium shot. This allows the viewer to see not just Grace and Jason but also the townsfolk going about their day-to-day lives in the background of the same frame. When Grace asks Jason to explain his actions he states that he has been bad and needs to be punished. He slowly paces back and forth in the schoolhouse, speaking in a plain manner with an even tone. Grace in contrast is quite upset; dismayed that Jason would act up and without any justifiable provocation. Calmly Jason explains that Grace should punish him by spanking. Initially Grace resists, even more flustered at the demand, stating that she would never hurt Jason. But Jason persists, threatening to blackmail Grace by telling his mom that she hit him if she refuses to spank him. Eventually Grace, in a huff of frustration, relents and does what Jason asks.

There are several issues here that raise alarm for the viewer: first, the lying and deception, particularly by a child, in order to manipulate Grace who has done nothing but work hard and to the best of her abilities; and second, there is the ambiguous sexual encounter, as the spanking Jason demands is something he specifically asks for after he states that he is acting up largely to gain Grace's attention at the expense of others. And last, there is Grace, who finds herself unable to escape this scenario, forced to choose between spanking Jason, or being accused of hitting him. Grace expresses frustration, not really understanding what this charade is truly about.

It is clear that the social dynamic of Dogville is one defined by debt, as Jason's misbehavior is rectified through a payment deemed sufficient to repay his trespass. The fact that

a ten-year old boy is dictating these terms to a grown woman is also disturbing for how it reveals the institutionalized nature of debt in Dogville. It is important to keep in mind too that this scene takes place in the schoolhouse, a place of communal gathering and education. While Grace's own lesson was interrupted, the lesson itself continues, as Jason assumes the role of authority. His manner of speaking to Grace suggests he is lecturing her as he paces back and forth in the schoolhouse, providing a tutorial in how Dogville operates. Through the imagined walls of the schoolhouse, we see this private moment play out as if it were happening in the town square. Jason's blackmailing is presented as a logical conclusion to Grace who, as Jason tells it, must punish him for his transgressions for interrupting class and bullying the other school children. Grace attempts to stay on good terms with Jason, humoring his childish thoughts, until she realizes that he is not joking and that serious consequences are in play. Jason's own logic for forcing punishment on himself is also revealing for how it normalizes the indebted dynamic between them and the violence demanded as payment for his transgression. What is learned, both for Grace and the viewer, is that her place in Dogville is conditional upon her conformity to this logic of indebted exploitation.

The formal conceit of this scene is equally important for understanding what is happening by way of the transparent "town" marked in chalk. While we know that the chalk lines represent walls that would prevent the townsfolk from witnessing this act, the viewer sees it quite differently, with the entire town visible in the background. What is interesting here is how the film provides us with Jason's lesson in relation to the background of the town's activities. As Jason paces back and forth inside the schoolhouse extolling the virtues of physical violence for acts of transgression the camera pans slightly from side-to-side, capturing the other townsfolk in the midst of their daily tasks. The series of shots that juxtapose these two moments do so in order

to reveal their equivalence. That is, nothing happening during this scene is out of the ordinary, Grace's blackmailing is, for instance, no different than anything else clearly visible in the same frame, such as Tom taking a walk down Elm Street, or Jack McKay reading a book in his living room. What is prominent throughout is how Grace is being taught to behave, develop the appropriate faculties to live and act in accordance with the nature (i.e., indebtedness) of Dogville's social structure.

Of course, the terror of the above scene is merely a prelude for the one that follows. After Grace spansks Jason, she states, "this is pointless," and walks across the room. Jason looks out the window and announces that his dad has come home from work early. As Jason walks out of the schoolhouse two police cars enter the town, at this point Chuck enters the schoolhouse. When Grace asks what is going on, Chuck relays that the police have arrived and are looking for her. Terrified, Grace begins to panic, but Chuck approaches her and reminds her that she must remain silent so the police will not hear her. At this point, Chuck begins to aggressively make advances toward Grace, until finally he wrestles her down to the ground and rapes her. The parallels between these encounters are not accidental, as Jason's lesson clearly anticipates Chuck's rape through the signaling of her indebted status. The fact that the rape occurs upon the law's return is also suggestive of how violence is understood as a form of repayment. That is, Grace's violation occurs at the very moment when the law reinforces her debt to society. It may be worth noting that like Tom and Jason, Chuck acts as a male "guide" who bestows the virtues of capitalism: Tom acting as the intellectual; Jason a figure of youthful exuberance; and Chuck the laborer. These male figures serve as a tripartite of authority, reinforcing how business is done and educating Grace in various ways: persuasion from Tom, blackmail from Jason, and physical force from Chuck.

The issue of debt is further reinforced through the subtle yet complementary camerawork. As Chuck forces himself on Grace, the camera is positioned inside the schoolhouse. These initial shots frame the two of them side-by-side as they argue in whispered tones, so as not to notify the police. After several cuts, the camera changes position, moving to the exterior of the home, often inside the houses of the neighboring townfolk. At this point we lose the capacity to hear Grace and Chuck as the camera moves to a different focal point yet keeps the action in frame as it plays out in the background. The camera makes several more cuts repeating this pattern: first, it frames Grace and Chuck inside the schoolhouse in close-up, then it moves to the exterior of that building, keeping Chuck and Grace visible but this time in the background as the foreground is occupied by the daily tasks of the various townfolk. This pattern of shots integrates the violence of the rape as an organic part of Dogville, keeping it in frame with the daily, monotonous activities of pastoral living such as sweeping the floor, or raking the community garden. While the townfolk continue to go about their normal tasks, the viewer is presented with these actions from a multitude of perspectives, creating equivalence through the association of shots. As the rape occurs, we see the town's children playing with one another, the women of the general store discussing the day's work ahead, and the men occupied with the police outside in discussion. The brutality of the rape, its violence in other words, is presented casually as a constitutive component of the town, so that Jason's lesson on conformity and repayment corresponds with the violence of the rape.

The above sequence is followed by another equally distinct series of shots. For these, each shot begins with a close-up before the camera zooms out, at the same time panning across the set. This distinct movement of the camera, which is repeated every time there is a cut, allows the viewer to see Chuck and Grace first before zooming out to frame the rest of the town. At first

these shots seem to be solely focused on Chuck and Grace, but as the camera zooms out it also pans over, dwarfing the former action in relation to the rest of the town and displacing it from the center. Each time the camera cuts it gives the sense that we are witnessing something horrific, as the violence is front and center. But the silence that pervades this scene (ostensibly to evade the police) produces much less horror than we would anticipate. This is not to say that Grace's rape is not disturbing, but rather it is presented in a manner far too subdued for the circumstances. As the camera zooms out, the act is made smaller and barely noticeable amongst the comings and goings of the rest of the town. Instead of fashioning the rape as a moment of unspeakable terror, violence, and transgression, the camera places it within a larger context that flattens its importance in relation to the rest of the town. Once zoomed out, the camera pans over, making the act itself even harder to place, until finally the camera is so far removed from the rape that it is hardly distinguishable from, for example, Ma Ginger (Lauren Bacall) watering her flowerbed.

Dogville challenges its audience with scenarios like the above through the combination of explicit violence and lack of recognition of these acts as violent, even as they are clearly visible. It is in this odd yet unique presentation where the division between private and public fully collapses through the transparency of the walls that establish a sense of unease for the viewer. The fact that Grace's degradation and manipulation seem to function just as normally and openly as any other task in town tends to elevate both to equal standing. In other words, from the viewer's perspective we clearly see all that is going on, both Grace's victimization and the daily workings of life (e.g., picking apples in the orchard, shopping in the store, etc.) as organically co-existing.

In this regard, the camera perversely works against the gestures of the bodies engaged in the act of horrific violence. As the rape occurs the camera works over the *mise-en-scène*,

panning from side-to-side, never pausing or focusing on any one action or area, flattening the horror we are witnessing before ultimately situating it amidst the everyday activities and operations of town life. In this sense, Grace's "education" is partly informed by an agreed upon principle: what is owed must be paid, and what constitutes payment often situates the victim as the wrongdoer. We find here one of the basic tenants of debt, but what is interesting in the way the film approaches the exploitation of the debtor is exactly how it domesticates the violence done unto the victim in order to displace what would otherwise be disturbing in order to normalize it. In his book length treatment on debt, David Graeber explains, "The way violence, or the threat of violence turns human relations into mathematics [...] is the ultimate source of the moral confusion that seems to float around everything surrounding the topic of debt."¹⁸⁸ We find here a good example of how subjectivity can easily be conditioned through social acceptance of systems of exploitation, so that what is alarming for the viewer is not the shock of Grace's rape but instead how it is organically situated within the social environment and how easily she is convinced of her own wrongdoing.

We find throughout the film scenes such as the above that test Grace's patience, her ability to forgive, her physical stamina, and by extension our own. She like the viewer are bludgeoned and brutalized in ways that are stir outrage, but are also justified through the social contract of repaying one's debt. The film's slow, methodical pacing and indifference to the on-screen violence begin to create a situation, like Grace's, where it becomes increasingly difficult to conjure the energy needed to be outraged by such inhumane treatment. *Dogville*, in other words, subtlety yet relentlessly works to wear down the audience through repeated acts of violence, so that witnessing one more trespass, or one more exploitative relationship challenges

¹⁸⁸ David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (Brooklyn and London: Melville House, 2011), 14.

our capacity to elicit the appropriate and needed empathy and outrage such scenarios demand. In turn, the appeal to the affective and visceral components of spectatorship has important implications for thinking about the ethical purchase of such extreme films. While most films that traffic in extreme depictions of violence and sex—like, Catherine Breillat’s *Fat Girl* (2001), or Bruno Dumont’s *Twentynine Palms* (2003)—do so in an overt manner, *Dogville*’s extremism is almost entirely confined to the rote functioning of everyday life. What is complicated here is how the film works to eliminate a single moment, person, or instance where the viewer can locate and name the evil that persists. Instead, there is a very strong sense that what is happening in the town and to Grace is simply how business is done, so that bringing that evil to bear becomes confused amongst the day-to-day activities of life.

As viewers, we may ask: Is the evil that pervades *Dogville* to be found in Grace’s overwhelming and exploitative workload, or when Jack rests his hand on her upper thigh? Might we locate this evil when Vera’s children lie to their mother about being mistreated by Grace, or when she is publicly shamed for innocently flirting with Tom during the fourth of July picnic? On their own, none of these acts seem “evil” in the way we might imagine that idea in other films of the new extremism, but collectively they amount to something quite disturbing and this is why *Dogville* exposes through its peculiar spectatorial positioning a unique understanding of ethics. Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall write, concerning the issue of ethics in extreme films, “In the films of the new extremism, questions of ethics are brought to the fore: by pushing at the limits of the watchable and the tolerable, these films involve and implicate spectators in particularly intensified ways with what is shown on screen, demanding critical interrogation and

ethical and affective response.”¹⁸⁹ What exactly the ethical response to *Dogville* might be is hard to discern based on the film’s fashioning of these acts of evil. Almost all of the transgressions, even the multiple rapes Grace suffers, are common knowledge both for the spectator and townsfolk alike. And further, the morality of this violence is actually displaced so that Grace is logically the wrongdoer, the debtor, the one who must repay society for the transgression.

The lack of concern or sympathy is alarming in the way the transgressions are presented as seamless to the functioning of daily life. Even Grace’s lack of emotional response in light of being lied to, over worked, or raped assists in creating an increasingly ambiguous and confusing viewing experience. The current interest in extreme cinema often locates the appeal to ethics in how extreme depictions of violence elicit an ethical response in the viewer. But *Dogville* is extreme partly because of how it enlists ethics as a way to justify the labor practices of exploitation. The violence that is done to Grace, in other words, is almost always presented as a just punishment for her refusal or resistance to being exploited, and thus her submission to accepting her indebtedness.

3.3 Neo-subjects and Aesthetics as Human Faculty

How morality is implicated in *Dogville* relates to how Rancière fashions the “ethical turn,” which elevates leading public discourses to a moral imperative. “It [ethics] is viewed,” Rancière argues, “as a general instance of normativity enabling one to judge the validity of practices and discourses operative in distinct spheres of judgment and action. Understood in this way, the ethical turn would mean that today there is an increasing tendency to submit politics and art to moral judgements about the validity of their principles and the consequences of their

¹⁸⁹ Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall, “Introduction,” in *The New Extremism in Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 8.

practices.”¹⁹⁰ For Rancière, the distinction here is not that ethics has overtaken political and artistic action. Rather, Rancière relates that the particular qualities of politics and art are now indistinguishable from ethics and evaluated on those terms. Rancière proposes that this particular formation has dire consequences because: “Ethics amounts to the dissolution of the norm into fact: in other words, the subsumption of all forms of discourse and practice beneath the same indistinct point of view.”¹⁹¹ For Rancière, *Dogville* exposes collective expressions of popular opinion as the singular measure of what is and what ought to be because they are elevated to the status of a moral imperative.

In other words, *Dogville* reveals how prevailing social investments that circulate as “common sense” can function as a strict fact of social life. What results from this conflation is how *normative practices* of exploitation become *constitutive facts* of a given social structure, as we have just seen regarding Grace’s position as a debtor. For Grace, the hardship she endures is the price of admission into society, such that the violence done to her is not even recognized as such, it is rather a simple fact of living. Rancière states early in the essay that the evil Grace encounters:

refers to no other cause but itself. Grace no longer represents the good soul mystified by her ignorance of the causes of evil. She is merely the stranger, the ‘excluded’ who wants to be admitted into the community, which brings her to subjugation before expelling her. This tale of suffering and disillusionment does not stem from any system of domination that might be understood and abolished. It is based upon a form of evil that is the cause and effect of its own reproduction.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus*, 184.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 185.

For Rancière, the evil of the world is not embodied in a political system that can be recognized and therefore challenged. Instead, evil operates through a conflation of right and fact, so that it is not distinguishable from a virtue or morality. Inclusion into a community, therefore, requires relinquishing the right to have divergent interests and opinions. Rancière's intervention is vital for understanding the implications of subjectivity in *Dogville* as his observation productively suggests how ethics establishes an identity between a social environment, a way of being, and the principles of action, how one is able to act within that environment.

For Rancière, questions concerning how one is able to be/act in the world necessarily entail an appeal to aesthetics and politics, and my argument has been that the aesthetic is implicated in a process of developing faculties in direct relation to today's self-governing rationality. Taken apart, politics can be understood simply as the exercise of governing through various forms of power, such as the passing of laws or military enforcement. Likewise, art taken as a singular domain of human thought and action can easily be connected to a long tradition of liberation from the mimetic tradition. What Rancière argues is that by taking art and politics together we come to a much fuller conception of their socio-political potential, such that they are able to suspend the rules governing habitual practices and commonplace understandings.¹⁹³

Rancière explains, "Artistic practices are 'ways of doing and making' that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to

¹⁹³ Jonathan Crary argues that the reduction of thinking and acting to habituated response is one of the biggest threats to humanity in today's globalized, 24/7 economy. Although he does not take on aesthetics specifically, he does entertain "images that would be completely useless to capitalism" may provide leverage to the "ongoing diminution of mental and perceptual capabilities" he sees as endemic to contemporary life. For more on this issue in relation to capital's erasure of sleep and the subsequent disharmony between living beings and 24/7 capitalism, see Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London and New York: Verso, 2013).

modes of being and forms of visibility.”¹⁹⁴ Rancière names this function *dissensus*. “What dissensus means,” Rancière elaborates, “is an organization of the sensible where there is neither a reality concealed behind appearances nor a single regime of presentation and interpretation of the given imposing its obviousness on all. It means that every situation can be cracked open from the inside, reconfigured in a different regime of perception and signification.”¹⁹⁵ Dissensus, understood as such, emerges not as a necessary outcome inherent in communities or people, but from a break constituted by aesthetic innovation that disrupts the political logic that ordinarily governs social life.

What is important to understand with Rancière’s philosophy is that this conception goes far beyond a mere reordering of society. That is to say, dissensus is not a word designating institutional overthrow, so much as it is a means to introduce new actions and diverse objects into the field of perception. Rancière emphasizes, “To reconfigure the landscape of what can be seen and what can be thought is to alter the field of the possible and the distribution of *capacities and incapacities* [emphasis added].”¹⁹⁶ Here, Rancière contends that dissensus takes the obviousness of *what* can be seen, thought, and done to question *who* has the capacity to perceive, think, and alter the coordinates of the social field. Grace’s entrance into society becomes very interesting on these terms because she must first learn how to assimilate to the standards of Dogville before she can be truly accepted and thus partake in social life. At the same time, her acceptance into the social sphere is contingent upon her learning how to act, work, talk, and

¹⁹⁴ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 13.

¹⁹⁵ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2009), 48-49.

¹⁹⁶ Rancière, *Emancipated Spectator*, 49.

think like a Dogvillian, which is to say: she must learn how to govern herself to the dictates of the town's social, economic, and moral imperative of indebtedness.

Rancière's conception of the ethical turn is undoubtedly an important and needed consideration when thinking about the changing social dynamics of political extremism, specifically how such treatment of the political side-steps politics itself as a tactic of domination. The ethical turn thus stages a working hypothetical, a proposal of what society might look like if it excluded the contentious and agonistic qualities that define politics for a totalizing morality based on capitalist values. Rancière's reading rightly suggests as much, written at a particularly volatile time during the aftermath of 9/11. But Rancière's reading is not quite right, or rather it overlooks something important, mainly how the film's cinematic elements perform an aesthetic dissensus within the town's social structure. If we take seriously how von Trier composes his scenes aesthetically and not just narratively we can see that Rancière's abandons the disrupting force of the film too quickly by overlooking how its cinematic elements—specifically, the diagrammatic, the gestural, and camera movements—destabilize the viewing the experience, opening up an optic to the power structures in play. These cinematic elements, when taken together, create a spectatorial position that removes the viewer from Dogville's diagram, placing them at a remove from the narrative on-screen, focusing on the information communicated through the actor's gestures, and thus short-circuiting the diagram's hold.

In addition, this critical oversight reveals that these critics' unwillingness to engage with the specific way the film asks us to view it exposes their own ideological overdetermination concerning politics in the historical moment of film's release. How these critics have neglected the aesthetic dimension of the film though is instructive because it showcases the power of transparency to normalize and domesticate not only what is barbaric and totalitarian (i.e., the

workings of *Dogville*) but also the efforts to combat and expose such tactics of domination (i.e., the aesthetic work of the film). In such a cultural atmosphere, political subversion must employ techniques that are perhaps counterintuitive, or hard to recognize in order to find footing as we find in *Dogville*. By placing emphasis on the gestures and postures of the actors the film is able to convey information that conflicts and even combats the ostensible political ideology found within the workings of the town. In doing so, von Trier is able to cultivate and hold a productive tension between freedom and control together by offering a countervailing set of images (via the body) for the viewer to consider within the ostensible ideological structure of *Dogville*.

Like Rancière, much of the critical literature on social life in light of contemporary modes of governance concerns the control of human faculty through its diminishment. David Harvey, for instance, suggests we understand this development as concurrent with the rise of neoliberalism and its particular set of values. Harvey observes, “Neoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world.”¹⁹⁷ For Harvey, what is troubling about the current social milieu is the diminishment of thought to common sense, action to conformity. What thinkers like Harvey suggest, in a way I think appropriate to link to *Dogville*, is that the ethical turn implicates the market as the ethic for all human action. Therefore, politics and art are reduced to conforming to market values that have subsumed cultural values and social concerns in turn.

For a growing number of scholars, the reduction of life to work and social relations to competition are two ways neoliberalism systemically engineers human faculty. Dardot and Laval take this point on explicitly, arguing that the principle of competitive labor bleeds through the

¹⁹⁷ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3.

social fabric of society, reimagining all of social life as a never-ending competition amongst co-workers and colleagues on a global scale. What results is a socio-economic system where the values of the market become internalized and dictate the potential of human subjects through a process of self-government. Dardot and Laval explain:

The term ‘governmentality’ was precisely introduced to refer to the multiple forms of the activity whereby human beings, who may or may not be members of a ‘government,’ seek to conduct the conduct of other human beings—that is, govern them. For government, far from relying exclusively on discipline to access the innermost being of the individual, ultimately aims to achieve *self-government* by the individual him-or-herself—that is, to produce a certain type of relationship to the self.¹⁹⁸

Explicit in Dardot and Laval’s account is the transformation of market logics to human rationality. When, to put it in Rancière’s terms, the *norm* of capitalism becomes a *fact* of living, capitalism reaches a stage where human beings govern themselves as an extension of the market. The expanded role of governing—from something exterior to something interior—necessitates an understanding of neoliberal rationale beyond issues of capital accumulation to include the engineering of human subjects.

What Dardot and Laval insist is that this expansion of neoliberalism from market logic to human rationale is nothing less than the transformation of subjectivity itself, which they describe as an “accountable and financial subjectivation.”¹⁹⁹ From their vantage point, this transformation “involves generating a relationship of the individual subject to him-or-herself that is homologous to the relationship of capital to itself: very precisely, a relationship of the subject to him-or-herself as ‘human capital’ to be indefinitely increased—that is, a value to be ever further

¹⁹⁸ Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 5.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

valorized.”²⁰⁰ Adapting to how neoliberalism changes human beings is key to understanding the ethical turn Rancière argues confuses norm and fact. For Dardot and Laval, this process fully realizes contemporary subjectivity: “It is not by ‘nature’ that man knows how to conduct himself; it is thanks to the market, which constitutes a process of education. It is by invariably placing individuals in a market situation that they will be able to learn to behave rationally.”²⁰¹ Here, the market is conceived as a process of self-transformation where the properly socialized subject is self-educating and self-disciplining. In other words, the market constructs its own subject, training it as a self-constructive being who fully realizes the rationale of capital.

But what would it mean if, as I propose, the aesthetic were not necessarily oppositional to but instead constitutive of capitalism. In other words, if aesthetics are capable of transforming thinking and practices, and capitalism necessarily constructs humans into the subjects it warrants, perhaps neoliberalism is equally a question of aesthetics as it is one of logic, law, or rationality. This is in fact what *Dogville* allows us to see, to see in fact not only through buildings and natural obstructions but also that the act of seeing itself fundamentally alters what we deem normal. The exploitation that Grace experiences perversely registers as normal largely because no visible alternative is present. Grace’s acquiescence becomes not only a way to integrate into social life but also a form of education in the way Dardot and Laval suggest, first as a means to measure rational behavior and second as a way to discipline and govern one’s self.

What we can infer from *Dogville*’s style is that beyond Dardot and Laval, neoliberalism’s influence on capitalism has done a whole lot more than transform capitalism from an external logic to an internal rationale. This argument does not account for the aesthetic dimension of capitalism. I want to amend these points by stating that if neoliberal rationality is a form of

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 107.

constructing subjects through self-governance, then it is imperative we understand these processes as inherently aesthetic. The philosopher Christoph Menke influences my thought here, particularly his understanding of aesthetics as force. Menke's argument elevates aesthetics as the defining qualification of subjectivity, so that "the aesthetic, understood as the pleasure of self-reflection, is a process of transformation of the subject and its faculties and practices—a process of aestheticization."²⁰² Key for Menke's formulation of aesthetics is the way he conceives the subject as a being capable of rendering thought into action. "Aesthetically conceived," Menke explains, "the subject is someone who is able. Only because and to the extent that he is able to do something is the subject also able to know and will something."²⁰³ Menke's formulation raises the question: What is one able to do? And, how are we conditioned to act?

Menke distinguishes two conceptions of aesthetics in order to address these questions. The first takes aesthetics as a governing practice where human beings exercise socially constituted practices. This practice relies on the exercising of socially constructed norms that serve as the entrance into society through the attainment of a predetermined mode of subjectivity that can be seen and therefore replicated. The second is more in line with Rancière's take, which understands aesthetics as a disruptive force of play that works outside the bounds of social norms. *Dogville* reveals through its transparency how the former conception comes to dominate the latter under the neoliberal diagram, showing Grace's entrance and acceptance to the small mountain town as a process of constructing the self to meet and conform to its prevailing norms. What plays out over the course of Grace's transformation is a visual account of integration, discipline, and construction into a properly socialized (capitalist) subject, one that adheres to the principles of competition that form the basis of self-governance, which is rooted in the town's

²⁰² Menke, *Force*, xi.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 21.

transparent and consistent image of servitude. *Dogville* helps us to see through Grace's laboring body how debt as a force plays a constitutive function in defining subjectivity through an aesthetic that operates to instantiate this norm into a living, social fact.

As we have seen with Grace, transparency, so often mobilized as a key component of political justice and social liberty, is turned on its head serving to normalize exploitation and violence to the point where it can legitimately be taken as a social fact. The style of *Dogville* therefore positions the spectator in a relationship to the text that reveals the power of the neoliberal diagram by offering no clear alternative. What we see over the course of Grace's stay in *Dogville* is how the diagram constructs her as a "hub," defined by the network of relations between individual townsfolk in which she must situate herself in order to secure continued employment. This relationship to the townsfolk radically reconfigures Grace's identity because she is not tied to a single organization, but as a node in a broader network (or diagram) of relations. The consequences of this are troubling, as the basic antagonism between capital and labor is internalized within Grace, which runs through the social fabric of Dogville as a whole. As more and more work is asked of her, Grace becomes increasingly reliant on these learned faculties—not only in terms of professional expertise, but also in terms of her ability to connect and cooperate with others.

Specifically, Grace provides Dogville with affective labor; especially care work in people's homes and in Chuck's apple orchard. The confluence of these forms of labor—affective and physical—constitutes Grace's subjectivity in a unique way, governing her physical movements and gestures, as well as her mental state. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, concerning the relationship between affective labor and control, argue:

Unlike emotions, which are mental phenomena, affects refer equally to body and mind. In fact, affects, such as joy and sadness, reveal the present state of life in the entire organism, expressing a certain state of the body along with a certain mode of thinking. Affective labor, then, is labor that produces or manipulates affects such as a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion. One can recognize affective labor, for example, in the work of legal assistants, flight attendants, and fast food workers (service with a smile). One indication of the rising importance of affective labor, at least in the dominant countries, is the tendency for employers to highlight education, attitude, character, and “prosocial” behavior as the primary skills employees need. A worker with a good attitude and social skills is another way of saying a worker is adept at affective labor.²⁰⁴

For Hardt and Negri, affective labor is material work that “involves our bodies and brains”²⁰⁵ in order to produce an immaterial product. In this way, Hardt and Negri suggest that affective labor “creates not only material goods but also relationships and ultimately social life itself,”²⁰⁶ so that this type of work constitutes not simply *what is done* (e.g., cleaning, picking apples, educating children) but also *how we relate* (e.g., cheerful, responsible, dutiful) to that work.

For Grace, the indebtedness of her labor creates a situation of compliance, where she not only accepts the increasingly exploitative nature of her work but also relishes the opportunity to prove her worth to remain in the good graces of Dogville’s residents. To this point, Maurizio Lazzarato has argued that a subjectivity defined by debt forestalls the potential for emancipation

²⁰⁴ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 108.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

because it forecloses future action and thought to a present already defined by the obligation to pay what is owed. “The logic of debt is stifling our possibilities for action,” Lazzarato observes, “fear, sad affects, and passions serve to neutralize the power to act.”²⁰⁷ There is no longer a distinction between action and labor, Lazzarato argues, because future actions are already accounted as an extension of working on one’s self, in other words, developing the faculties that would construct subjectivity to the dictates of indebted servitude. With Grace, we see her struggle through this dilemma, often left exhausted and too tired to question her surrounding circumstances, and too fearful of potential violence or eviction to challenge them outright. This is why Grace’s body becomes such a vital example of how principles and ideologies, such as market capitalism and debt relations, can be internalized and turned into unspoken, self-governing mandates. Throughout the film we find her stooped over, half-asleep in bed, out of breathe, or even immobilized by the accompanying fear and distress of sexual violence.

Cinematically, though, thinking in terms of labor and subjectivity as they specifically relate to Grace places emphasis on the relationship between performance and the body, in a way that suggests Deleuze’s distinction between “the cinema of action” and “the cinema of the body.” Deleuze discusses the “cinema of the body” as a type of cinema which privileges gestures, postures and attitudes over concrete character and plot development. Deleuze’s key contention is that “the cinema of the body” is performative, that is, it cannot be simply understood as a reproduction of the script. Deleuze argues that through this performativity we are able to interpret the immaterial affects of our material labor through the postures and gestures of the body as markers for the concrete realities of everyday life. Deleuze suggests, “The body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach

²⁰⁷ Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man: An Essay on the Neoliberal Condition*, trans. Joshua David Jordan (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012), 71.

thinking. It is on the contrary that which it plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life. Not that the body thinks, but, obstinate and stubborn, it forces us to think, and forces us to think what is concealed from thought, life.”²⁰⁸ Deleuze’s distinction rests on a new understanding of the body: not as an obstacle to thought but as an avenue to thinking. This is why so much emphasis is placed on Grace’s performance, as it is her body that offers thought to us, suggesting that her movements constitute an aesthetics that reveal the diagram of Dogville. With this shift in understanding, the body gains new purchase as a material heuristic for the workings of social life that remain unseen, invisible to those who are the byproduct of them.

Based on Deleuze’s understanding of cinema, performativity specifically relates to the camera’s interaction with the actors’ performances, and results in the subordination of the film’s content for its style. For Deleuze, performativity refers to a cinematic style where showing an action is elevated over the action itself. The result gives equal weight to the film’s presentation and representation of bodies so that narratively conceived psychological traits are minimized to favor a form of characterization based on the exhibition of attitudes and postures. Understood in this way, the camera’s interaction with the performing body in space produces cinematic information that transcends narrative comprehension. Deleuze notes, “The categories of life are precisely the attitudes of the body, its postures. [...] To think is to learn what a non-thinking body is capable of, its capacity.”²⁰⁹ The body as Deleuze understands it here, reflects back the world it has learned to live in, performing gestures and postures that help us to gauge “what a body can do” (i.e., its faculties) under the forces and laws that govern it.

²⁰⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Gelata (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 189.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

For *Dogville*, the shift in cinematic focus from the narrative to the body redirects the emphasis of characterization to the social characteristics of Grace instead of her psychological motivation. For Grace, we find traces of her exploitation in her tired body and her indebtedness with her compliance. While it can often be frustrating to witness Grace's submission, it also speaks to how the faculties of her body speak to the diagrammatic aspects of *Dogville*. What is specific to this film though is how the ascetic environment of the theater stage specifically affects the presentation of the body. The film's *mise-en-scène* helps bracket interpretive tendencies toward psychological portrayal because the barren set affords the spectator the opportunity to uniquely observe the character's bodies, both in relation to one another and to their environment more generally. What results from the transparency of the stage is an opportunity to see the disconnection between Grace's corporeal attitude and her unspoken feelings. This becomes a key function for reading Grace's distress, as she is unwilling (perhaps, unable) to verbalize her exploitation. Grace's inability to speak her feelings suggests not complacency but compliance, not repression but acceptance. Throughout the scenes showing Grace labor we see her transform herself under the dictates of her indebted servitude, as when Grace placates toward her employers, citing, recording, and listing all she has done and all she is willing to do while simultaneously slowing down, wearing out, and working through the compulsion to escape her own exploitation.

Grace's physical transformation is perhaps best captured in a short montage sequence roughly an hour into the film. At this point the sheriff has just left *Dogville* for a second time, taking down the poster that stated Grace was "missing" and replacing it with a poster declaring her status as "wanted." After the sheriff leaves, the town appeals to Tom that Grace's stay is becoming increasingly dangerous. Next, Grace finds Tom and asks what the town is thinking.

Tom calmly replies, summarizing his meeting with the townsfolk, "From a business perspective, your presence in Dogville has become more costly." Grace is understandably upset and suggests multiple times that what is best for everyone is for her to leave. But Tom replies that the town feels differently, suggesting that she double the number of daily visits she makes to each residence, thus defraying the cost of danger to the town and boosting its business by extracting more labor without any further pay. Tom explains that this will make up for her status as wanted without, as her says, "increasing your workload too much." In this moment, Grace grows silent and a confused look falls over her face. She stammers several times, trying to parse out how this arrangement will not increase her workload. Ultimately she relents, feeling assured that she would be able to stay, stating, "Of course I'll work harder, you know that, I'll do whatever is necessary."

Following this exchange the camera cuts to a top down shot of the town. Grace is shown walking from residence to residence doing her daily tasks. As Grace moves from home to home the speed of the scene slowly increases, highlighting the difficulty presented by her new arrangement. As the scene progresses Grace's body becomes a blur of movement as she rushes from task to task, working at a feverish pace. As we follow Grace racing across town, we can clearly see the movement of the sun's light, suggesting that the fast forward is not a composite of several days, or even weeks but one day of work. As Grace's movements begin to speed up until they blur the scene reaches its pinnacle, culminating in Grace dropping a piece of fine China she was dusting from the general store. At this point Grace's movements' resume to normal pace, she is now heaving, desperate for air, her hair unkempt, her body hunched over sweat visible on her brow. When she tries to apologize for the broken plate, she is so defeated by the

insurmountable workload that she can barely offer an excuse, instead she stares at the ground where the shattered pieces of porcelain lie and apologizes.

Here, the physical and cognitive come together, so that her exhausted body reinforces her subordination to the rest of the town, and her acceptance of this way of life. What the film provokes in this moment is not only our realization of the fundamental lack of solidarity that animates, permeates and substantiates the town of Dogville, but the equally intrinsic lack of reciprocity that governs and maintains the social sphere more generally. Grace's exhaustion that leads to the destruction of the shop's fine China exposes the radical impossibility of reciprocity in the relationship between debtor and creditor. Yet the real provocation of the film is much more unpalatable, notably that the system of exchange that binds Dogville together through acts of solidarity, reciprocity, and friendship does not lead to the development of a stable community, but to the gradual deterioration of the social fabric into a structure of retaliation, punishment, and revenge, justified by Grace's indebted state. In fact, the more Dogville shows its acceptance and hospitality by integrating Grace into a mutually agreeable pattern of social transactions, the more its politics crystallize into a shared, communal and seemingly "objective" practice of exchanges, the more the town turns itself into an inhospitable, hostile and radically unfair community.

Over the course of Grace's education from vulnerable outsider to indebted laborer, Grace is presented as an alterable subject, malleable under the principles of indebted labor that serves as a perverse form of "reciprocal exchange." What is clear is how Grace's body becomes the focal point, so that her performance speaks to both her subjectivity but also the nature of her environment. Grace is rendered in these scenes as the product of Dogville's social forces and not as a self-determined subject. From this we can read Grace's movements and practices as conflicting directly with her well-being, and the result is that her subjectivity is divorced from

any sense of interior or psychological determination. That is, the more Grace assimilates herself to the directives of Dogville's residents the more fully her subjectivity becomes a product of the power structures that govern the social relations in that environment.

To help clarify this, I want to take a look at one last scene, where Grace publicly discloses the abuses she has suffered. This is the first time Grace makes public her personal thoughts about how she is being treated and is staged in the same town hall that hosted the original debate about whether she should be allowed to stay or not. Grace presents her side of things to the town's residents who sit in stunned silence. She stands next to Tom throughout this scene, seemingly gaining confidence that at least one member of the town believes her side of the story. After Grace concludes, Tom asks her to leave so they may deliberate on what has just been said. Taken aback by Grace's active resistance, Dogville's residents demand that Tom side either with them or with her, strongly urging him to oust Grace from the town. At this point, Tom returns to Grace's house torn between his romantic interest in her and his allegiance to Dogville's way of life, which privileges his role in the community.

The scene starts with Tom and Grace lying in bed in what would otherwise be considered an affectionate manner. As Tom describes to Grace that Dogville's other residents are forcing him to choose between her and their way of life, the camera subtly oscillates between the left and the right angle of the frame. The alternation of camera angles is succeeded by a stark change in Tom's posture, he sits up, takes his coat off, and leans over Grace, placing two soft kisses on her lips. Tom states that he has chosen to side with her and to spurn the town that has given him power and influence, stating, "I chose Grace. I chose you. And now it's time. The time we've been waiting for." Tom initially appears calm and at ease with Grace, signifying both his affection but also his respect for her. Tom moves on top of her and continues to kiss her, while

Grace remains unmoved, lying on the bed in submission. But Tom's easy going movements and relaxed, intimate posture is quickly replaced by a sudden antagonism after Grace does not reciprocate his intimacy. Tom becomes increasingly aggressive throughout this encounter and the camera captures it all from a detached high-angle shot. As Tom physically foists himself on Grace, the camera slowly zooms in, eliminating the space around them, directing the spectator's attention to their bodies. Tom is moving more quickly, more aggressively than we have seen up to this point. Grace is too tired to move, simply lying on the bed, looking past him with a dead look in her eyes as tears begin to well.

The camera's alternation between distance and proximity emphasizes the physical gestures here, and further splits the characters subjectivity from their interior life, so as to convey how their physical posture reveals Dogville's social reality. The camera further incites the spectator to view the body from a removed position. The camera's slow zoom, gradually increasing the magnification of the bodies, takes the spectator from this removed position to an intimate one. The high angle god's-eye-view encourages an analytical stance towards the bodies on screen, with the zoom working to magnify the specific postures of each character. At this point, Tom becomes so frustrated he pushes himself off of her, prompting Grace to sit up in bed. Here, von Trier frames Tom's and Grace's bodies so as to highlight a set of "interpersonal" and social relations that reveal the governing principles of Dogville through their actions. Debt operates here through Tom's aggressive gestures to secure what (i.e., Grace's body) he believes he is owed for all the "help" he has given her. Tom subtly suggests to Grace that he is owed the right to enjoy her body because he has credited her in advance for sanctuary, companionship, and a paying job. Tom's decision to take Grace's side, in other words, prompts him to believe he is within his rights to take her body as fair compensation for what he deems Grace owes to him.

Tom's conviction throughout this scene is reinforced through his increasingly aggressive nature. Grace initially resists his advances, but as he persists, moving closer and holding her tighter and with more ferocity, she relents knowing that Tom *has* "helped" her in Dogville, and that he remains the only adult male she has not submitted to sexually. Grace tells Tom that if he wants her he can, but quickly follows up, saying: "Just do what the others do. Threaten me. Tell me you'll give me up to the gangsters. You can take whatever it is you want from me." These words stun Tom and the tension that has been building throughout the scene appears to dissipate. Tom sits up and looks longingly at Grace lying prone on the bed before she pulls him back on top of him and caresses his head before telling him: "But I think it's wonderful that you don't." Tom's body visibly shrinks, he bows his head, and begins to pull his coat back on before finally leaving Grace, and heading back out into Dogville's cold, snowy night. The camera follows Tom as he walks outside, erect and walking, while Grace continues to occupy the lower portion of the screen, still splayed out on the bed, too scared to move and perhaps too exhausted to care.

How "sex" is treated in this scene exemplifies the larger claim the film advances: social relations are governed by the monetary principles of capitalism. And, here, debt serves as the general condition by which social relations seem to operate. The way von Trier treats sexuality as an extension of economic reason is amplified by Tom's use of language that explicitly names economic terminology as the rational incentive for his body's actions toward Grace. The performative quality that is magnified by the camera's move from a high angle distance to a claustrophobic close-up reveals the physical actions so as to present it from a critical optic. Clearly we can see the juxtaposition between Tom's dominant, controlling movements and Grace's inertness as a key function in communicating their place in society, with the camera functioning to position separate the spectator from the entangled bodies and minds of Dogville's

diagram. This particular scene most prominently demonstrates how the camera's presentation of the actor's body proposes that actions are not individual choices but instead embedded in a social context.

What the performative aesthetic affords the viewer combined with the austere environment of the stage is the opportunity to bear witness to how *Dogville's* economic principles play out as social practices, such as above when Tom imposes his sexual desires on Grace following the capitalist law of making profit through exchangeability. Further, Von Trier's camera, as we have already seen in the previous section, works to position the spectator outside the diagram in order to expose its workings. The camera movements thus serve as a glitch, or short-circuit in the town's capitalist system by working against the actions on-screen. This formal choice recuperates the aesthetic function of the film as a force in the way Menke describes it, offering the discontinuity between the camera and Grace's body and the town's *mise-en-scène* as a destabilizing force that resuscitates what Rancière would in fact call "dissensus."

For the critics who have argued this film is merely the reproduction of American hegemony, and perhaps even for Rancière himself who seems skeptical in this moment that dissensus is desirable or even possible at all, the relationship between the body, *mise-en-scène*, and camera indicates something altogether different. Suggested in the specific way the cinematic elements come together is how the dissensus of the aesthetic has been obscured. While the film does not state this point directly, it does reveal it in the same way it fashions the diagram, by placing it entirely within the view of the spectator. In fact, when viewed from this perspective, it is the spectatorial positioning that is the product of these cinematic elements that impart this point. That is, by destabilizing our relation to what we are seeing, we assume an optical position

in relation to the text where we can in fact hold Dogville's diagram and *Dogville's* dissensus in productive tension. This uniqueness of this interplay, in fact, renders the critical reception we have overviewed as overdetermined, suggesting an ideological unwillingness to confront how we are positioned within the text. And, this unwillingness belies perhaps the film's most damning indictment: Dogville's diagram is obscured not because we are ignorant to its workings but because we too closely identify with it.

3.4 Burning the Diagram

Dogville concludes with the gangsters returning to town at Tom's request who, after being spurned by Grace, is looking to further extract what profit remains from her stay in Dogville. The entire town eagerly anticipates the gangsters' arrival and treats them as if they were soldiers returning from a war fought on foreign soil. As the gangsters exit their cars, Tom asserts himself as Dogville's liaison, welcoming them and offers to accommodate their requests. The gangsters' sharp clothes and machine guns grant them credibility and authority from the start. Tom is both nervous and eager to please, stating that while no financial reward is necessary, he will gladly accept whatever they are willing to offer. Grace is soon escorted to the mysterious black car that holds the gang's leader. Up to this point the identity of this person has been unclear, but as Grace enters the back of the car and sits next to the Big Man (James Caan) it is quickly divulged that he is her father.

The reunion between father and daughter is filmed in a two-shot, which starkly diverges from the single shot/reverse shot style of Grace's encounters with the men of Dogville. Where previous scenes sought to demarcate Grace from the town's residents, this scene explicitly presents a connection, no matter how tenuous. Initially, Grace and her father sit uncomfortably in the car, not making eye contact, instead gazing out over the town of Dogville. Their conversation

begins in fits, it is obvious that they have had a falling out, that Grace has been shot at by her father's own henchmen, and that they share an unwillingness to compromise on whatever disagreement occurred in the past. As the conversation progresses, though, Grace is given the opportunity to leave Dogville and return to her family, and presumably the life of privilege and power that would follow. Grace initially resists the offer, citing her father's lack of compassion for the poor, stupid, and wretched residents of Dogville.

Grace's father presents her with an opportunity to resume her role in the family, presumably to rid her of the burdens she has taken on and return her to the position of power she had previously occupied within the crime syndicate. Her father's lack of compassion, treating the town and their plight of poverty, isolation, and ignorance as a simple matter of fact, is presented as a mere business decision. Without emotion or empathy, her father takes no responsibility nor does he make any attempt to justify the two vastly different worlds presented here, but simply reduces the disparity in wealth and power to a matter of organic circumstance. Eventually "common sense" wins out and Grace decides to return to her family. The turning point in this scene is located when Grace's father states, "Dogs can be taught many useful things, but not if we forgive them every time they obey their own nature." Grace pauses after this line, she stares out of the front window of the car, the camera cuts to the gangsters intimidating Tom and the rest of the town. The camera cuts to a series of shots framing each member of the town and then back to Grace, evoking a fading sense of connection as she sits inside her father's car, knowing these are the final moments she will spend here. Although her mind is made up, we can visibly see during this sequence Grace's distress, as she exchanges her role of being exploited to one of power. Grace, in this moment, realizes that all the compassion and forgiveness she can muster will only lead to her further exploitation. To say this is a "dog eat dog world" is too easy, but it is

also not entirely wrong. For Grace, she must decide to be exploited or to do the exploiting, to dominate or be dominated, and her time in Dogville has taught her that there is no other option; all social subjects are now explicitly tied to this either/or dichotomy.

There is a moment of pause in the car, a silence between Grace and her father and she continues to survey the town and the gangsters who are milling about with guns in hand. At this point Grace steps outside and walks up to Tom. He is nervous as she strides up to him, once again adorning the long, black fur coat we found her in at the film's opening. In his nervous fit, Tom admits that he is scared, he used her, and what he did was wrong. Grace's face tells the story, she is resolute her decision and she knows what siding with her father means as much as Tom does. In these final moments, Tom states: "I think this *illustration* has surpassed any conceivable expectation, it says so much about *being human*." After this line Grace returns to her father's car and orders the gangsters to kill everyone in town, except for Tom. At this point gunfire erupts and the town is set on fire. The camera cuts to each town member once more in reciprocal fashion as they are mowed down by gunfire. Afterward Grace steps out of the care once more and walks up to Tom, he knows as well she does that this is his final moment alive. He turns to Grace, surrounded by the gangsters, and tells her, "I have to say, your illustration beat the hell out of mine." And, at that comment, she pulls her father's pistol out of her coat and shoots Tom in the back of the head.

In some respects, we could read this final scene as the playing out of a Biblical style form of justice, or more filmically as art cinema's take on the "rape revenge" exploitation film. Instead, what surfaces in the film's ending is a simple choice to live a life of power and domination, or to be dominated. Grace, for her part, can hardly be blamed for making the choice she does after all she has endured. But, more curiously, it is how she exercises her power in this

final scene that leads us back to the question of debt. Tom's emphasis on "illustration" during these final moments brings to mind the diagram that constructs and binds the town together and interestingly places it in relation to the organic nature of life, or as Tom suggests, "it says so much about being human." What *Dogville* tells us about "being human" is that our nature is anything but organic, it is instead constructed, and constructed on the basis of power, for which the debtor/creditor relationship has shown us here. It is difficult to imagine anything redemptive here, as the only act that elicits Tom's confession of wrongdoing is a power play of violence that is even more grotesque than the ones he himself authorized. Grace's own reluctance to fight back during her stay in Dogville reveals to us that violence is perhaps the only thing the townsfolk will truly understand, as no act of kindness, or compassion she showed ever truly made a difference amongst the people she tried so hard to help through her work and sacrifice.

Perhaps what grace Grace had to offer, as it were, was a willingness to try to find some alternative path that eluded the confines of the diagram that besets us all. As the film shows us time and again, by entering into debt Grace entered into an asymmetrical situation where power relations' influenced and dictated her actions, thoughts, and conscience in opposition to an economy of exchange that implied and presupposed equality. Grace's willingness to work evokes Rancière's concern regarding ethics as well. The debt Grace accepts produces a specific ethic that unties the "effort-reward" of work for the morality of "promise-fault" that founds debt. The ethical turn, as we can imagine it here, moralizes the indebted nature of Grace's work by endowing her with a conscience of guilt and responsibility. We see then over the course of the film how she accepts this position through the promises made verbally over-and-over again to the town members. Here, Rancière's argument concerning the reduction of political contestation for morality bleeds into the economic aspects of life. The debt that constitutes Grace's

relationship to Dogville is treated not simply as an economic issue, but an ethical one as well, so that her indebtedness is presented as an act of transgression. And, because of this, the violence Grace suffers is easily justified as penance for her wrongdoing.

The debt Grace enters produces a subject incapable of action outside of this logic—all action becomes the working off of her debt. Grace's labor reinforces the type of work she exercises through the faculties acquired to pay off her debt. Not only does she perform as a caregiver, farmhand, counselor, and prostitute, but she also becomes these things through her constant exercising of those faculties. What is prominent through these tasks, in other words, is not how Grace's indebted nature solicits the exploitation of her labor but instead transforms this work into an ethical action. The indebted nature of Grace determines the kinds of faculties she is capable of developing but also mobilizes these faculties as a morality of the debtor, her very mode of existence.

But as the film concludes and she enters the world of power and money her father represents, she is able to step back and reassess her position. Confronted with the choice of staying or leaving, Grace cannot justify remaining in Dogville, no matter how much she tries to rationalize that as the "right thing to do." Here, the debt that founds social ties between subjects is all encompassing: forgiveness and compassion are treated as antiquated luxuries, not fundamental human capacities. Labor, in this sense, helps to signify what the world of Dogville values. And, Grace's labor locates that value as indebted servitude to those in power. When Grace's opportunity to enact power comes—instead of being the victim of it—she reluctantly takes that position, making sure each resident of Dogville is killed in a reciprocal fashion to the kind of violence they exercised on her.

If *Dogville* were the morality film so many have argued it is, if it simply displayed how a certain strain of conservative morals have replaced political contestation as the prevailing ethic our time, as Rancière argues, then Grace's final actions would reinforce her subordination to the town's merciless logic. Von Trier ends the film, though, on an entirely different note. Grace, upon reuniting with her father, reflects the uncaring and ruthless power of the town in a violent act of vengeance. For most of the film, Grace permits her own violent exploitation, sacrificing her own well-being to meet the demands of living in Dogville. What is most disturbing about Grace's actions throughout the film is not the horrors she faces but how easily and eagerly she submits to her violence. The near automation of her actions, as opposed to her feelings, reveals not a saintly capacity for forgiveness, but instead a mechanical exercising of faculty in opposition to any real sense that she is acting out of any allegiance to what is good. And, in the film's final moments, this point is echoed in reverse, reproducing the grotesque violence she endured as a way to recoup what she gave and was given in Dogville.

The question of endurance rears its head here once more, as Grace, her father, and the accompanying band of gangsters drive off, leaving Dogville burning in their wake. Sometimes a film opens up spaces of reflection that are more vital than the film itself. Or, one could say that these discursive spaces really represent an extension of the text, its epistemological determination, and that its aesthetic validation is proportionate to the extent to which it upends culturally hegemonic conventions and expectations. But this view, as it concerns *Dogville*, is both much too pragmatic and much too modernist in its fashioning. What is truly on display is not how *Dogville* upends conventions, but how the extreme aesthetic von Trier utilizes exposes the banality of exploitation and violence. Here, the film's aesthetic works to unnerve and upend the viewer not on the ground of its radicality, but instead through its complacency and normality.

Dogville, in this way, demands something of the viewer, their time and attention, their patience and understanding without ever presenting something in return (e.g., enjoyment, shock, novelty, etc.). Within this spectatorial position, we too become indebted, where the violence and boredom we are made to suffer serves as our atonement.

4 “TRACES OF TEARS”: ARCHITECTURES OF AFFECT IN WONG KAR-WAI’S

2046

The previous three chapters of this dissertation have explored some of the prevailing aesthetic trends of contemporary art cinema, specifically its return to the slow, realist style prominent during the 1960s and 1970s. Analyzing contemporary cinema’s return to older stylistic markers has led us to engage with a number of issues facing lived life in the early 21st century. The issues discussed in the previous chapters have concentrated on time, space, and the body, and specifically how they have been altered in light of systemic changes from the forces of financial capitalism and neoliberal governance. This has been accomplished by taking the style of art cinema as a reading strategy for identifying the immaterial and often opaque forces that are dramatically influencing the world we live in. Within these chapters, I have specifically directed the above concerns towards: the latent potential of the human body for working through the stultifying nature of global capitalism (chapter one); the gentrification of urban space and subsequent effects of spatial precariousness (chapter two); and, the forms of subjectivity current neoliberal governing principles encourage through the displacement of financial values for social ideals (chapter three). In doing so, each of these chapters have worked to show how the various styles of contemporary art cinema reproduce the blur of forces that motivate some of today’s most pressing social changes.²¹⁰

²¹⁰ While many of the publications I refer to here are discussed in length in chapter two, I want to highlight several more valuable studies concerning contemporary art cinema: Tiago Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge, eds., *Slow Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); Justin Remes, *Motion(less) Pictures: The Cinema of Stasis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Lutz Koepnick, *On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Ira Jaffe, *Slow Movies: Countering the Cinema of Action* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2014); Song Hwee Lim, *Tsai Ming-Liang and a Cinema of Slowness* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press: 2014); and, Jacques Rancière, *Béla Tarr, the Time After* (London and New York: Verso, 2013).

Additionally, in raising these issues for consideration, I have argued through my readings that this aesthetic highlights *endurance* as an increasingly important social concept in light of how these films emphasize its centrality in both the narrative and formal address to the viewer. For these purposes, *The Limits of Control*, the films of the Fontainhas trilogy, and *Dogville* have served to highlight endurance as a central term where related issues, such as fatigue, instability, and fragility, become increasingly important for framing the challenges posed to us by today's prevailing power structures. The challenges from acceleration, exhaustion, and violence have largely surfaced in the way these films present the individual in a precarious landscape of turbulent change, often culminating in an elliptical storytelling pattern with no definable narrative goal, showcased through long takes, static cameras, and a focus on the dilation of time. Toward that end, we have looked at how these films have exposed a larger shift in the social field, and moreover, how they engineer a subject suited for this way of life.

Extending these concerns, this chapter will address Wong Kar-wai's *2046* (2004), a film that stylistically departs from the slow cinema we have looked us thus far, by presenting its protagonist, Chow Mo-wan (Tony Leung), as a man adrift in a rapidly modernizing Hong Kong in the 1960s. The film's premise in many ways follows the previous efforts we have discussed, presenting an individual in an unpredictable environment just holding on to the edges of society. Unlike the films we looked at previously that took the body as the leading heuristic for observing the social concerns outlined above, *2046* places emphasis on the internal struggles of its characters to magnify the often unseen forces that influence lived life. Because of this shift in emphasis, from the external to the internal, we have an accompanying stylistic change. While *2046* is not entirely devoid of long shots or static cameras, its style is most notable for its brilliant use of neon lighting, slow motion, and montage sequences. This shift helps create an

atmospheric cinema, less interested in granting observational purchase for viewers than immersing them so as to imagine how we might cope with societal challenges.

For those familiar with Wong's work, it will be easy to recognize *2046*'s protagonist Chow Mo-wan from a previous film, *In the Mood For Love* (2000), where he was faced with making sense of a marriage undone by infidelity, and his own desire for a married woman he befriends during his grief. But we can actually date Chow's cinematic life to an even earlier effort, *Days of Being Wild* (1990), where he makes a brief appearance in the concluding shot as a young bachelor preparing for a night out on the town. In the latter film, Chow was given a single scene without dialogue, and his appearance was of no real consequence. But the character would move forward and to the fore in Wong's *In the Mood For Love* serving as a bridge to connect these three films that take place in Hong Kong during the 1960s, which explicitly explore the issues that would go on to define his cinema: impermanence, love, and temporality.

These issues play out most prominently in the relationships Wong stages, often depicting characters that fail one another, or are victimized by events out of their control. The tragic nature of these relationships are often offered as a way to crystallize the moment where life takes an unexpected and jarring turn, like the films of Antonioni, offering the aftermath as a way to make sense of the past. Antonioni's films open up "idle periods of everyday banality"²¹¹ so as to convey "the interior *through* behavior,"²¹² not the event itself so much as the aftermath, when all that remains is a posture, gesture, or attitude. As Gilles Deleuze explains, "the idle periods in Antonioni do not merely show the banalities of daily life, they reap the consequences or the effect of a remarkable event which is reported only through itself without being explained (the

²¹¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 5.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 9.

break-up of a couple, the sudden disappearance of a woman...).”²¹³ We find moments in Wong’s films that resonate with Antonioni, offering information about his characters that are glimpsed in the reflections in the various ways we might deal with, say, heartbreak over a lost lover, the end of a marriage, the loss of a friend, or even a potential opportunity that never materializes.

At the same time, Wong’s films always seem attentive to the forward movement of time, never allowing the past to prevent new events from transpiring, so that his films take on an episodic nature even as they never move on from the foundational loss suffered. Angelo Restivo’s observation concerning Wong’s *Ashes of Time* (1994) offers us an exemplary rendering of this point: “on the one hand we have the human characters mostly waiting, the film presents us with images of a world which is positively Heraclitan, in their suggestion that everything is in constant flux. [...] So the characters, who are trapped by their pasts and condemned to psychically replaying memories, are nonetheless surrounded by a world which, at the molecular level, is in constant movement and change.”²¹⁴ In *2046* we are presented with very similar themes, between the forward movement of life and pervasiveness of the past, and this oscillation defines the fluctuating atmosphere of the film and characters that populate it.

Under the forces of this temporal flux, the *2046* casts Chow as an urban drifter who represses his true nature for a cold, calculated lifestyle that champions an attitude of self-interest. Through the various events of the film, which are largely concerned with the failed romantic liaisons of its characters, we find Chow practicing a form of detached subjectivity that strongly suggests pure indifference to the world is the only way of surviving it. For this reason, Stephen Teo has argued, “In *2046*, the 1960s are seen as a time of chaos and uncertainty that breeds a

²¹³ Ibid., 7.

²¹⁴ Angelo Restivo, “Wong Kar-wai: The Optics of the Virtual,” in *A Companion to Wong Kar-wai*, ed. Martha P Nochimson (London: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016), 141.

rootless man, Chow Mo-wan, who drifts to Singapore and back again. In Chow Mo-wan, we see that love, permanence, fidelity and security are elusive, and this is the ache that afflicts the heart of the trilogy and also the ache that afflicts the heart of Hong Kong.”²¹⁵ Chow’s commitment to self-interest therefore signals a response to what Teo describes as an unpredictable and potentially dangerous environment, where the inability to secure “permanence, fidelity and security” is the driving preoccupation of the film. It also raises endurance in a way we have to yet to explore, not as a state of self-control, or physical test, or even a force of will, but as a social problematic of emotive and affective exhaustion. Here, Chow’s tormented psyche, a result of navigating the unstable terrain of modern love and urban life, becomes a litmus test for how we adapt to the exhausting nature of habitual disappointment and failure we see dramatized in his the daily minutiae of everyday life.

Chow’s cold exterior is thus a stark contrast to how Tony Leung portrayed him in *In the Mood For Love*, where he appeared as a love struck victim, reeling from tragic loss but also placing faith in the potential for reconciliation. If we allow ourselves to take these films as a whole we could easily understand Chow’s persona here as a direct response to his former self, a man no longer willing to trust his feelings, unable to make himself emotionally available in light of the pained disappointments of his failed marriage. We find this most explicitly in his affair with Bai Ling (Zhang Ziyi), a call girl who develops genuine feelings for Chow and desires a committed, loving relationship, which over the course of the film he refuses outright. There are, of course, other supporting moments that elicit Chow’s commitment to detachment as well: his travels, most notably to Singapore to gamble; his state of precarious employment; his decision to reside in the transient domestic space of a hotel; and his serial dating being the most prominent

²¹⁵ Stephen Teo, *Wong Kar-wai* (London: British Film Industry, 2005), 142.

among them. But it is his intermittent encounters with Bai Ling that drive the film, revealing Chow to be emotionally hardened and unwilling, or perhaps unable to divest himself of the pained feelings of his past.

Under the stress of constant and unpredictable change, I want to emphasize how *2046* frames endurance as a response to these forces that manifest in Chow's detached lifestyle, which serve as a perverse appeal to solidity in the face of extreme transience and fluidity. In *2046*, Chow is presented as man both reveling in indecisive and irrational decisions that disrupt the monotony of his life, as well as overwhelmed and exhausted by unpredictable nature of lived life. As a result, Chow is shown reeling back and forth on an affective spectrum that seems to push him from ecstasy to melancholia without warning. In response, Chow develops the ability to stifle these emotive swings through a persona who is indifferent to this jarring flux. As the film unfolds, the only thing Chow seems explicitly dedicated to is remaining unattached, uncommitted, and entirely indifferent to the various and increasingly contingent events that surround him. At the same time, the film gives us additional insight into Chow's life through its depiction of his innermost thoughts and feelings, which are revealed to be in conflict with his exterior actions. These moments of the film supplement his otherwise cold and dispassionate exterior, suggesting that his demeanor is not entirely genuine and is as much a byproduct of his environment as it is an expression of his self. Throughout the film Wong stresses that having any sense of the world is a retroactive process, so that each character attempts to recreate the conditions of their past (relationships) in order to get back to some point where the world seemed to stand still long enough so it could be interpreted. This tension is where we find the root of Chow's disposition, and it is in the disaffected persona he chisels himself into where we find some insight into what it takes to endure so much.

As we have seen in previous chapters, slow cinema transmits a sense of time committed to the moment, a time that dwells in the space of the moment, not the dramatic time that in most films subordinates the moment to the overriding arrow of the plot. Instead, time for slow cinema is not a time of “what next” but a time of “what now,” not a linear but a lingering time. In this lingering is the value of slow cinema, a form that demands we pay attention to the here and now at the expense of the possibility of what comes next. It has been slow cinema’s dilation of time in the above sense that has allowed us to pause and take stock of the issues at hand in the contemporary world, where otherwise nothing seems to stand still long enough to notice you missed something to begin with. But in *2046*’s rendering of these issues we find a something different. As the characters struggle to find footing in Hong Kong’s modernizing landscape they try to resuscitate the past in the present, inviting the viewer to dwell in the suspended time of their memories, providing a sense of action that may not be occurring in present time but is occurring at the present moment nonetheless. Here, we find an epistemological shift, where slow cinema was invested in the intense duration of each passing moment, a study in the disjunction between the time of capitalism and the experience of time itself, *2046* explores life under capitalism through the desire to reclaim the fleeting and fragile moments of the past that seemed to rush by too fast to comprehend, or act on with any certainty.

The dialectic that plays out between these points is where we find the crux of the film, a schism between the interior life and the exterior actions of the human subject of late capitalism. Here, *2046* stages the modern condition as one pregnant with dissatisfaction, implying that detachment and individualism are preferable alternatives to commitment and collectivism. Through Chow’s perspective the film suggests that a disposition of indifference, a turning away from the world and others who inhabit it, is favorable for its capacity to foreclose the possibility

of suffering stemming from (inter)personal loss and failure. But what is exposed during the intensely stylized sequences of Chow's interior life is something quite different, a desire for companionship and meaning beyond the rote exercising of his everyday routine.

Historically we know the 1960s to be a time of nascent neoliberalism and Wong captures it uniquely in the disjunctions between Chow's lived life and his fantasies/memories. Here, Chow's past failures resurface in his fantasies, playing out the dramas he cannot seem to escape in his dreams and creative outlet as writer. In this way, *2046* stages a mode of consumption, the time Chow spends indulging his memories, so that it becomes intensified to the point where it becomes a mode of production, which we see in his job as a writer of serialized pulp fiction. Through this translation, *2046* reveals how the tendrils of neoliberalism wrap themselves so tightly around each and every aspect of private life that it is next to impossible to fantasize without affirming its principal ideals. In these retrogressive moments, where Chow is reliving his past in the fantasy world of his fiction, we see the neoliberal tendency to confuse progression with conservatism, where a desire to restore the order of the past overrides the necessity to progress from and reverse the conditions that caused such stagnation and upheaval to start.

These moments are staged almost exclusively in interior settings. *2046* ostensibly takes place in Hong Kong but was actually shot in Shanghai, and the city's exteriors are largely ignored for the stylish interior of the film's principal location: the Oriental Hotel. While this may seem a trivial production detail at first glance, it is actually quite telling of how Wong structures the film, which is to say in the closed intimate settings of the bedrooms, hallways, and lobby where Chow and most of the film's primary characters occupy their time, as well as a few other locations, such as a restaurant Chow frequents, a gambling hall he visits in the Singapore, and the title location "2046" that is the manifestation of his imagination as a writer. The events that

take place in these locations are on the surface quite banal: eating with friends, drinking after work, nursing a fever in bed, etc. But the everyday instances of life given over to Wong's singular style become deep meditations on the driving forces of the capitalist economy, the trauma of unrequited love, and trappings of age that bear important images of endurance worth our consideration here.

We see this play out in the way that employment is possible but not guaranteed; new neighbors may become new friends or lovers, or simply disappear without so much as a goodbye; heartfelt moments may appear to be significant but then never extend beyond that instant; or, time spent alone may one day feel isolating and the next restorative. Further, the choice to set the film in these closed quarters—of either the hotel or the mind—suggest a certain withdrawing from the world where private space becomes a refuge for the blunting forces of life, and this point allows us to explore not the harsh conditions of the world that we have discussed thus far, but the psychic spaces that serve to repeal them.

By emphasizing the melancholy of Chow's memories, *2046* mobilizes its style to produce a mood that embodies the stability Chow desires. Thus, sad affects become a stabilizing force, a feeling that is perversely desirable for its familiarity. Wong's unique use of style here presents an interesting angle in order to explore the changes wrought by the forces of capital we have been discussing throughout this dissertation. Therefore, in a society that necessitates flexibility and adaptation from its subjects, themes we have explored in the Lone Man's physical discipline, Vanda's drug use, and Grace's work ethic, we will explore here in Chow's reliance on his memories to sustain him in the face of the unknowable future.

The disjunctive nature of the film's style is presented in a clear patten that repeatedly cuts from a moment of heightened emotion during the 1960s to a moment in Chow's past, or a

fantasy scene from his story that works to convey a response in light of the constant changes we see reinforced through the film's episodic narrative. For instance, when the narrative takes an unexpected turn the film reinforces this moment through a shift in its presentation that conveys Chow's experience of it. These scenes, Chow's memories and the sections of his story "2046," work to reveal the emotions that Chow largely represses, or at least struggles to communicate. And interestingly these stylistic disjunctions provide a formal consistency to the elliptical narrative, looping back to the familiar pain of Chow's past as way to stabilize the disruptive narrative change in the present. David Bordwell suggests that Wong's films do not seek to establish a sense of realism but instead a cacophony of "sensuous abundance," so that "Realism is less important than a bold expressiveness in every dimension,"²¹⁶ and this is why such a dramatic shift in styles from what we have discussed previously is worth considering here, because *2046* can achieve through its "bold expressiveness" something "slow cinema" cannot.

Worth noting is how Bordwell's writing on Wong signals not only an important aesthetic shift between the genre pictures that put Hong Kong on the map as a central site of film production during the 1980s and Wong's own inimitable efforts, but also a fundamental distinction concerning solidity and fluidity as descriptors for the human experience under capital. Bordwell has described Wong's cinema as *liquid* in nature, which he sees as fundamental to establishing him as a global auteur: "Wong stands out from his peers by abandoning the kinetics of comedies and action movies in favor of more liquid atmospherics. He dissolves crisp emotions into vaporous moods."²¹⁷ Bordwell's comment highlights the unique fluidity Wong's films possess, which I want to ultimately argue aligns with how many cultural critics, Zygmunt

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

²¹⁷ David Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment*, (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), 281.

Bauman foremost among them, have defined the late capitalist period as a decisive shift from a heavy and solid modernity to one defined by lightness and liquidity. The “liquid aesthetic” of *2046* helps to supplement and extend Zygmunt Bauman’s theory of a “liquid modernity” in some fascinating ways that reveal not the absolution of solidity, but its displacement to the affective register of the human experience we find with Chow.

In fact, Bauman’s thoughts on liquid modernity further help to put into context the very situation we have described as Chow’s. For Bauman, the liquid modern experience is defined by the individual’s increasingly heightened sense of uncertainty and the privation of ambivalence. Liquid moderns are, in other words, individuals who understand precariousness not as a social ill but as a fact of life. Life takes on a strictly nomadic quality for the liquid modern, where the best chance of navigating an increasingly accelerating and precarious environment is to surf the waves of change, staying untethered and uncommitted to any one person, place, or thing.

Bauman explains:

The virtue proclaimed to serve the individual’s interests best is not *conformity* to rules (which at any rate are few and far between, and often mutually contradictory) but *flexibility*: a readiness to change tactics and style at short notice, to abandon commitments and loyalties without regret—and to pursue opportunities according to their current availability, rather than following one’s own established preferences.²¹⁸

What results is a normative mindset, a construction of subjectivity that favors the capacity to abandon one commitment for another rather than investing in the current situation for the long term, which are of course the very instances we see play out with Chow’s romantic excursions.

²¹⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 4.

In addition, the fluid nature of this change places an enormous amount of responsibility on the individual. Bauman argues that individuals are left to navigate a world in constant flux and individuals are tasked with making choices based on a future they cannot predict or rely on. What results from this situation is not the outright negation of stability, but its displacement to other areas of life. Bauman argues:

Unable to slow the mind-boggling pace of change, let alone to predict and control its direction, we focus on things we can or believe we can, or are assured we can influence: we try to calculate and minimize the risk that we personally, or those nearest and dearest to us at that moment, might fall victim to the uncounted and uncountable dangers which the opaque world and its uncertain future are suspected to hold in store for us.²¹⁹

Here, Bauman explains that due to the dizzying pace and rampant unpredictability of modern society, efforts to manage the precariousness of everyday life have been internalized, a move in emphasis from systemic societal issues to the personal social concerns of the individual. That is, one of the primary issues with modernity's liquid nature is how individuals address the uncertainty of lived life. For Bauman, responses to this situation are often registered not on changing policy or repealing the various social structures that have created this situation of uncertainty, but on how individuals take responsibility for the systemic shifts and seek out solutions on an individual level.

What makes *2046* pertinent to this situation is exactly how it presents stability in a world defined by uncertainty. Bauman's theory suggests that issues concerning control and agency have not entirely evaporated but instead have been relocated onto the individual. He suggests, "it is now left to individuals to seek, find and practice individual solutions to socially produced

²¹⁹ Ibid., 11.

troubles, and to try all that through individual, solitary actions, while being equipped with tools and resources that are blatantly inadequate to the task.”²²⁰ Bauman’s point is interesting in relation to the staged future of “2046” if we regard the latter as an attempt to address the former. That is, if we take Bauman’s notion that the responsibility is entirely on the individual to manage the socially produced troubles we have discussed, then Chow’s story offers itself as one way we might imagine his solitariness as a form of emancipation.

Bauman’s subjectivity seems in many ways to be a responsible measure by which to frame the interplay between Chow’s exterior and interior life. Chow’s life is composed of a fluid-detached lifestyle that is most prominent in his social interactions with women. At the same time, he also desires stability and consistency, which we see rise to the surface through the affects his memories can induce. What results is a reflexive and multiple self, a form of subjectivity that must remain unrooted so as to deal with the ambiguous, fluid nature of social relations. And, in many ways we can read this theory of modernity in Wong’s style. In other words, the increasing feeling of uncertainty and privatization, where a person can shift from one social position to another in a fluid manner, is exactly the work Wong’s liquid style achieves. What results from *2046*’s address is a disorienting experience, a confluence of cinematic parts that become related through proximity much like the characters who live side-by-side in the crowded Oriental Hotel.

The relationship between these moving parts of the film as understood through Bauman’s theory suggests that we revisit Bordwell’s passing mention of “liquid atmospheric” and “vaporious moods,” for how they uniquely depict the psychic life under capitalism as a prison of memories in Wong’s style. Ostensibly, Bordwell’s description is an attempt to capture Wong’s

²²⁰ Ibid., 14.

penchant for integrating Western and Eastern film techniques into his own unique cocktail of cinematic flair. And yet, while these surface observations are certainly undeniable they shortchange the significance of Wong's aesthetic choices by not bringing to the fore the latent cultural, political, and social issues at hand. *2046* shows this in the way Chow mobilizes the sad affects of his past as a way to create a consistent structure of feeling that helps do the work that, as Bauman argues, is left to the individual. This is why we get the formal repetition: because Chow circles back to these feelings at moments where the present seems unstable (e.g., the end of a relationship, the loss of a job, etc.). This is to say, these moments of intensified affect, where Chow manufactures stability out of sadness, occur when he finds himself in the midst of a personal or professional change. *2046* provides these moments again-and-again in order to establish the vaporous and liquid elements of society as clearly dominant in the social sphere. This is also why it is paramount for us to reassess this aesthetic in light of the issues raised thus far, not because they provide us with a convenient gap in the discourse of the filmmaker, but because it offers us the opportunity to see how his films are expressing the concerns of late capitalism in an entirely distinct fashion.

What is important here is how Wong is, in the words of Stephen Teo, “showing change through the changes in character themselves.”²²¹ Whether these changes are physical, such as the signs of age, or mental, such as a shift in disposition toward a specific individual, Wong only alludes to the changing socio-political dynamic of the mid-20th century through the subtleties found in Chow's romantic excursions. What results is a much more subtle approach to the political and economic issues we have discussed in previous chapters, taking these concerns from the body of the capitalist subject to the psyche. This is why every primary concern in the film—

²²¹ Teo, *Wong Kar-wai*, 127.

whether it is the dissolution of a marriage, or a political order—is handled from a distance, in the memories, fantasies, and passing conversations of its characters, and this helps to reinforce the distance Chow puts between his genuine feelings and the actions he takes that largely belie his true desire.

We find an initial example of this technique that defines *2046* in *In the Mood For Love* when Chow and his beloved Su Li-zhen walk by each other in a public square that houses several noodle stalls. The scene itself is orchestrated by the film's recurring use of the chamber piece "Yumeji's Theme," a waltz that plays out to the rhythm of the images that are presented in slow motion. As the scene unfolds, Chow and Su are presented at opposite ends of the food stall, and as Su enters Chow is already beginning to exit. The camera cuts back and forth between the two, capturing their micro movements and gestures as if they were titanic acts. As the music picks up pace and the strings swell, the two brush by each other, bringing into focus their desire to be together while revealing that their lives are moving in opposite directions. The heartbreak of this scene is rooted in a longing for a time when the future seemed both open to possibility and secure in its predictability. Rey Chow observes that this oscillation in the temporal climate of Hong Kong culture writing, "the idealization of the past functions side by side with a submission to chance, fate."²²² This paradox, between the open and closed sense of the future, burrows itself deep in the emotive quality of life Chow and his companions elicit, so that nostalgia becomes a shared feeling that can be relied on in the face of a constantly changing present.

The muted drama of a scene like this is important to keep in mind as we move through *2046*, as similar tactics are used in order to expose seemingly insignificant acts as corresponding to something more significant, more personal, and, ultimately, more revealing than what first

²²² Rey Chow, "A Souvenir of Love," in *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World*, eds. Esther C.M. Yau (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 224.

appears. Specifically, the film treats dualities such as individualism and isolationism, melodrama and stoicism, as well as hope and resignation as significantly competing forces within individuals. These issues are familiar ground for this project, as we have mapped the often-jarring forces that late capitalism, neoliberalism, and modernity ask humanity to confront and negotiate in similar terms. Unlike in the previous chapters where we looked at the effects of these forces, here Wong presents a model for living that accounts for these conditions by internalizing them. What results is less about pinpointing the issues of capitalist society, or modernization, or even political discourse, as we have discussed previously. Instead, we gain access to the affects that are cultivated within this environment, how they shape the human experience, and specifically the social strategy needed to survive them on a daily basis. In this way, Wong's film presents us with an important orchestration of how the forces discussed thus far shape human life and the disposition needed to survive it.

The above concerns bring us back to several themes this dissertation has investigated that concern the precariousness of contemporary society. One outcome of this investigation has been to think of endurance as a specific principle related to the issues that arise from the value placed on flexibility and adaptability. This is, of course, the flexibility and adaptability that is the goal of tearing down the Fontainhas district in the films of Pedro Costa; and it connects to *Dogville's* affective labor as well for how Von Trier presents the interplay between adaptation and exploitation. These types of dualities exist here as well, but instead of locating it in the body of the actors or the materiality of the urban terrain, we find it manifest in the emotive quality of the film's aesthetic, which serves to impart to the viewer Chow's interior life that is otherwise obscured by his disaffected appearance. Here, *2046* asks us to think about these issues not as surface markers of the material world, but as an internal and unspoken struggle. Put another way,

Chow's detached exterior belies the forlorn, confused, and complex emotions he tries to repress under the destabilizing effects of modernization and the transitory nature of life that comes with it.

In the last chapter we looked at the social construction of subjectivity as presented in Lars von Trier's *Dogville*. In this chapter, the construction of subjectivity once again becomes a question but in a much more subtle manner. Instead of the forced decisions found in von Trier's film, where the governance of the subject was orchestrated through the discipline of the body, we are instead presented in *2046* with a series of open decisions that Chow must confront concerning his position in life and the way he thinks is best to live. What is most prominent over the course of the film is Chow's devotion to remaining unattached and uncommitted to nearly everyone he encounters. By utilizing his past traumas in relation to the general fragility of everyday life, Chow assumes a disposition to life that can navigate the chronic fluidity of modern society: the disaffected loner. In this role, he finds a way to survive the brutalities of modern life—being laid off from his job, boredom, deceit, disappointment, loneliness—and models a form of subjectivity that emphasizes the adaptability one must cultivate in order to survive in an ever-changing social landscape.

In addition, the shift in style between *2046* and slow cinema is an important addendum for this project as it signals a separate and competing aesthetic within contemporary art cinema that is equally helpful in mapping the forms of capitalism we have investigated thus far. The aim of this chapter, then, is to address the ramifications of the issues we have already explored, to better understand, in other words, how we are asked to live, as capitalism's forces become internalized values. Instead of meditating on the forces that alter, contour, or shape contemporary subjectivity, we will instead take *2046* as an opportunity to investigate a model for living that

negotiates the turbulent terrain of the capitalist landscape. The distinction between this fourth and final chapter and the three that preceded it concerns not the effects of these forces but the kinds of affects needed to survive them. In the process, the question of endurance is raised once again, not in the wearying exercise of life, but the mental disposition demanded to live on.

4.1 Spaces of Survival

Several critics have already suggested that Wong's films are strongly informed by the central role capitalism plays in them even though explicit references to the economy and Hong Kong's burgeoning consumer culture are never broached directly on-screen. One such critic, Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, understands Wong's highly stylized cinema as a statement concerning the capitalist fantasy of consumption. He explains, "Wong's films represent a panorama of parodied capitalism in which reality gets absorbed in a dreamsphere cushioned in a kind of immature subjectivism. The dreamlike mode of existence that is shown in Wong's films is linked to a capitalist dreamworld of consumption."²²³ Here, Botz-Bornstein importantly points out how Wong's depiction of capitalism plays out in the film's presentation, what he describes as its "dreamlike mode of existence," and further, this "dreamsphere" is implicated in producing images of "neo-humanist attempts to survive in a capitalist environment."²²⁴ For Botz-Bornstein, Wong's cinema reveals not the inner workings of capitalism, but a sense of what it feels like to live within a society that embraces it. Like myself, Botz-Bornstein sees a fundamental relationship between the film's two primary locations: Hong Kong of the 1960s and Chow imagined future "2046." As the action in "reality" takes an unexpected, or painful turn, we often see a transition to the "dreamsphere" that is Chow's fantasy world. Here, the actions happening

²²³ Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, *Films and Dreams: Tarkovsky, Bergman, Sokurov, Kubrick, and Wong Kar-wai* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), xi.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

during the 1960s become transformed and reimagined in a fictional plot about train passengers traveling to a location where time stands still.

What is poignant for our discussion here is how Botz-Bornstein understands the fantastical elements of *2046* as a way to imagine how human subjects attempt to manage the shocks of modern life. Notably, Botz-Bornstein's take is largely influenced by that of Walter Benjamin, the cultural critic perhaps best known for exploring the disjunctive nature of life in the first half of the 20th century. In his analysis of both Baudelaire and the cinema, Benjamin employs his final definition of shock as over-stimulation within the context of psychoanalysis. In his essay, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Benjamin quotes Freud as writing "for a living organism, protection against stimuli is an almost more important function than the reception of stimuli."²²⁵ According to Freud, the human "protective shield," which has its own energy, guards the nervous system against "the excessive energies of the outside world."²²⁶ For Benjamin reading Freud, "the threat of these energies is one of shocks" and "the more readily consciousness registers these shocks, the less likely they are to have a traumatic effect."²²⁷ Freud through Benjamin is contending that the external world is constantly threatening to over-stimulate us and that, instead of requiring more means of accessing the world, the subject needs protectors, shields, to help block it out.

Benjamin's observation is entirely relevant here, as it helps signal the unspoken design of Chow's personal life, specifically how his lifestyle works to domesticate the jarring and potentially traumatic encounters that he experiences with increasing regularity. Benjamin's observations about the experience of modernism further illustrate the challenges posed to Chow

²²⁵ Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 161.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

if we place them alongside the neoliberal doctrine of individualism. Taken together, the blunting forces of shock Chow experiences and the isolation he experiences from traditional social structures helps us to understand the stylistic oscillations of the film, which provide a glimpse into the efforts taken by individuals when they are tasked with protecting themselves from disjunctive or destabilizing encounters. Chow's dreamworld, in other words, works as a way to assuage shock, to domesticate it and even prepare the individual to seek the pleasure from the speed of everyday life.

In a related vein, Jean Ma argues that film's like *2046* embody a larger film movement within China concerned with the temporal rush of living under capitalism and the affects it has on those who suffer them. Ma writes, "Wong is often described as a painter of modern life in the global city of the late twentieth century. His filmmaking approach singularly captures Hong Kong's qualities as a place in a process of constant transformation, flux, and erasure, where capitalist modernity's reigning value of speed and an uncertain political future converge to produce a foundational indeterminacy."²²⁸ According to Ma, Wong's varied use of style helps establish Hong Kong as an unstable entity, changing at variable rates and unexpected times, never allowing its characters (or audience) to settle into one routine for long. Ma's apt description helps to bring a couple important factors together concerning *2046*: first, uncertainty as a defining marker of modern life under capitalism; and two, the often desperate attempts the characters of his films take to establish continuity and connection as tactics to mitigate the disorienting effects of "foundational indeterminacy."

With the above point, we again revisit the themes that have anchored this dissertation from the start, both the disorienting nature of contemporary life and the various forms of living

²²⁸ Jean Ma, *Melancholy Drift: Marking Time in Chinese Cinema* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 2.

needed to adapt to constant change. *2046*'s aesthetic provides an alternative form to the slow cinema we have discussed thus far, utilizing a plethora of film styles and genres—such as science-fiction, film noir, and melodrama—to help reproduce the sensation of societal indeterminacy through an aesthetic plurality. For the cinema, we usually rely upon genre conventions to inform the “rules” of the diegesis, and these rules most notably play out in the film's presentation. The value of convention in the cinema is to provide a strong sense of orientation and coherency so the story is intelligible for audiences. When those conventions are violated, so too is the foundation by which the audience can rely upon to guide them through the film's narrative. Consider how the cinematic experience changes when this foundation is dropped: the audience's spectatorial position changes from one of cognitive certainty to confusion.

In some sense, this is exactly what plays out in *2046*. The ambiguous narrative finds Chow in one misadventure after another, chasing after women, gambling without regard for his well being, and drinking too much and too often as he tries to pick the pieces of his failed marriage and the subsequent but short lived liaison with his true beloved, Su Li-zhen (Maggie Cheung) from *In the Mood*. At times, in the midst of Chow's drinking, gambling, and womanizing, it becomes unclear where the film is taking us, or for what point. And yet, *2046* is remarkably consistent in its meandering narrative progression and disjunctive stylistic shifts. What is offered through the film's elaborate aesthetic design would seem to be utter chaos, where the stylistic shifts mark a fundamental instability in the conventions that govern the film. But its style accomplishes something quite different, holding itself together through the consistent mood it establishes through Chow's melancholy demeanor. Regardless of the presentation, Chow is consistently portrayed as a man consumed by the failures of his past that

establish a consistency not in style or narrative but in mood. Through these parallel issues, *2046* suggests that affects, especially bad ones, can provide stability in a world that values pervasive fluidity and constant change. As this chapter will argue, the result of this conjunction is a means to experience the disjunctive nature of life through the film's shifts in style that reinforce the fluidity of the modern world through a rapid change in presentation, as much as an exploration in the tactics that its character's develop in order to facilitate the accompanying trauma of sudden change.

Keeping the above in mind during the film can help signal where the apparent confusion in the narrative begins to congeal in its style, so that the sudden changes that Chow encounters (moving from Hong Kong to Singapore, friends leaving town without saying goodbye, old lovers suddenly reappearing) set into place a pattern of actions that accompany the stylistic transitions from a realist depiction of Hong Kong to the neon vibrancy of "2046." What we see again and again is how Chow consistently relies on his memories at times of personal crisis, trauma, or change to produce a sense of stability through the melancholy they induce. That is to say, bad affects like sadness, resentment, or disappointment become reliable forms of feeling when cognitive and sensorial circuits become scrambled under the rush of modern living, or disrupted due to sudden or unexpected change. Certainly, we could read Chow's disposition and the accompanying filmic techniques such as string-laden music in minor key, or slow motion as ways for *2046* to communicate the immediate pain he feels when, for instance, he befriends the daughter (Faye Wong) of the hotel owner, only to see her suddenly leave Hong Kong and marry someone else.

Instances like these are often followed by a scene from "2046," where Chow's present and past collide in order to induce stability through the accompanying affective melancholy. For

example, after learning the hotelier's daughter will be married to a Japanese businessman the film takes a decidedly stylized turn, employing slow motion and non-diegetic sound to signify Chow's inner turmoil. We see Chow moving through the hotel, Hong Kong's streets, and the nightclub he frequents with his head down, suggesting his disappointment at the news. The montage culminates in a shot from *2046*, transposing the hotelier's daughter from the present to Chow's imagined future, appearing as one of the bullet train's android attendants. The camera frames her from the front in a close-up, backlit in vibrant, neon red. The camera slowly zooms in on her face as the string-laden score plays out in the background, clearly revealing a single tear fall down her cheek. As the tear reaches the bottom of her face the lighting changes, all hints of the neon red that illuminated her are gone and a white, high ambient light appears, where upon the android flashes a smile and starts walking down the train's corridor to serve her attendants.

Moments like the above dot the running of the film and are provocative in their repetition on at least two accounts: first, for how they offer the bad feelings of crisis as a point of orientation; and two, how these feelings serve to inform a strategy of indifference and disaffectedness under the turbulence of modernity. Chow repeatedly finds himself in moments like the above where there appears to be a payoff at hand, where his life seems to be closing in on a culminating point. But what these scenes reveal to us us time-and-again through the disappointment of a missed encounter, misunderstood communication, or simple twist of fate are the pained examples of a lesson Chow must learn: that life is not a movement toward something but an endless series of moments that aggregate over time.

Certainly we hear further echoes of Benjamin here, most notably how time seems to take on a particular affinity to his rendering of it in "On the Concept of History," where time itself is rendered as a single catastrophe of aggregated wreckage. But what further distinguishes *2046* is

the final shot that cuts back to Chow. The transition from the hotelier's daughter to Chow is done with a match cut and his face is also lit in neon red (ostensibly from the nightclub) so as to appear, if only for a moment, that they were really, actually in that shared space of life together. The expressive transition of the android from tearful solemnity to buoyant laborer reverberates the affective disposition Chow assumes, burying his inner feelings of pain underneath the hard veneer of his disaffected mannerisms and misusing what employment he can find as a cathartic stand-in for his personal setbacks. The metaphor of the train becomes, as you can see, increasingly important for how it communicates both the rapidly moving and liquid nature of modern life, as well as these crystalline personal moments where everything seems to stand still if only for a second and coalesce in an affective punctuation.

In most readings, affect has been construed as a potential force of disruption. For example, in Brian Massumi's exemplary reading affect allows us to guide ourselves to understand the force of "a half-second lapse between the beginning of a bodily event and its completion in an outwardly directed, active expression."²²⁹ Massumi, in other words, conceptualizes conscious intention and brain activity as different things; before intention or rational elaboration arrives, the body-brain has already formed a thought. Here, sticking to what you know is constantly challenged by the affectivity of the body, which can potentially evoke something new. If affect has the potential to arouse the body beyond rationality and activate us as subjects, it is no wonder that its powers have been the subject of capture and capitalization, as Massumi suggests, "The ability of affect to produce an economic effect more swiftly and surely than economics itself means that affect is itself a real condition, an intrinsic variable of the late-

²²⁹ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 29.

capitalist system, as infrastructural as a factory.”²³⁰ There are a number of industries that invest in affect production from reality TV shows to social media sites, from celebrity blogs to the credit industry and lending businesses. To capitalize on affect is to capture, structure, and modulate the infrastructures where it moves by emphasizing its movement and the possible changes it can produce.

Art cinema remains as much tied to these industries for its own unique capacity to conjure and mobilize affect, as it remains apart for its ability to expose these circuits for possible critique. As we have seen over the course of this dissertation, art cinema’s style remains as confrontational as ever, even if its critics strain to find the ingenuity amongst its collective parts. But what is confrontational as it concerns *2046*’s rendering of affect in relation to how film scholars and critical theorists such as Massumi have portrayed it is not tied to its revolutionizing power. Instead, *2046* renders affect as a supportive crutch, a way to give stability to human experience through an all-pervading feeling. In this case, of course, we are seeing a perverse manifestation, where the bad affects of Chow’s past color his perception of the present and so inform his decisions about the future. In this way, affect becomes a tactic for sustaining endurance by manufacturing stability where Massumi, for instance, sees it as a modulating, even disruptive force.

4.2 Genre and Liquid Aesthetics

2046’s opening moments prepare us for the encounter between the disjunctive nature of life and how affect serves as a source of reliability. The film begins with a close-up of an unidentifiable object with two blue backlit canvases on either side. The camera frames this abstract setting while slowly pulling back. The slow zoom reveals no discernible context, only

²³⁰ Ibid., 45.

light and shape, before abruptly cutting to the title shot. Then the camera quickly cuts again to a series of shots of a vast urban landscape rendered in CGI. The abrupt transition places the spectator amidst a futuristic Hong Kong. Bright neon illuminates the cityscape, revealing an expansive horizon of glass and steel skyscrapers. The city seems to float amongst the whirl of its own activity of flashing lights and racing trains. The camera cuts to the beat of the pulsating score, on time and with the action of the moving train, so that movement comes from multiple dimensions at once. The buildings appear endless, so tall they are framed in what could easily be called a mid-shot, from the “waist” up with no clear visual of the ground beneath, or even a clue as to how far the buildings extend below. Already, this detail is telling, denying us an image of the ground, revealing a modern city entirely untethered from the expanse below, further suggesting a landscape ungrounded and in flux

Abruptly the kaleidoscopic imagery of the film’s opening is overlaid with a voice over narration announcing, “In the year 2046 a vast rail system spans the globe.” The narrator explains that every once in a while a train leaves for “2046” and every passenger who goes there has the same intention: “They want to recapture lost memories. Because nothing ever changes in 2046.” These opening moments of the film are disorienting, denying the viewer any quick or easy assimilation into the diegesis, while simultaneously foregrounding a desire for stability if not outright stasis in this landscape of hurried motion. For this reason, Ma’s interpretation argues that this disorientation is specifically tied to Asia’s postcolonial era: “*2046* picks up where *In the Mood For Love* leaves off, set in a time of economic depression, general strikes, political unrest, and violent protests triggered in part by popular discontent with the unreformed colonial regime and inspired by the Cultural Revolution taking place on the mainland.”²³¹ For Ma, this reality

²³¹ Ibid., 138.

coalesces in how the film's "[c]hronological progression cedes to a looping trajectory of repetition and return in these works, as we witness Wong's characters struggle again and again with the impossibility of making time stand still."²³² Of course, part of this upheaval relates to the rapid modernization and capitalization of Hong Kong, and these opening images fashion this upheaval through its kaleidoscopic whirl of technologically induced travel and a spoken desire for this dizzying speed to not just slow down but stop altogether.

Adding to this fact is that "2046" is not clearly (or only) a *time* in the future, but also a *place* reachable by train, and further a place where "nothing ever changes." The dynamic between the onrush of time and capitalist development clashes head on, here, with the desire for a place where time stands still, or to put it in Ma's words, where "the countervailing propulsions of speed and nostalgia"²³³ play out. The film's opening moments, therefore, clearly establish a schism between the liquid nature of life Bauman argues defines modernist life and the discontent such a lifestyle instills. Ma further helps to illuminate this point, writing:

If the time machine [i.e., the train] in *2046* appears as but a logical next step in a series of representations of a time that is anything but orderly or predictable, of characters who nearly project themselves out of the present moment by the force of their longing, the locomotive form of time travel envisioned by the film carries a further significance [...] [in that] the doubling of cinema and trains in such accounts places particular emphasis upon the spatial transfigurations wrought by moving image technology, the train encountered in *2046* underscores time's penetration by technology.²³⁴

²³² Ibid., 139.

²³³ Ma, *Melancholy Drift*, 139.

²³⁴ Ibid., 125.

Understood in this way, these opening shots start to coalesce around a shared theme of how the technologies of capital, the modernization of life, and the inevitable acceleration of society violently redefine the notion of time from a concept that grounds life to one that shucks it by the way side, cultivating rapid and impulsive change as essential aspects of society.

In response to the onrush of change Hong Kong undergoes, we see in reciprocal fashion how the characters respond to a world that is getting faster and less predictable. For this reason, “2046” not only serves as a symbolic location for the manifestation of modernity’s speed and automation, but also an imagined place where time stands still, where the past can be accessed, and the on-rush of the present slows to a desirable halt. Rey Chow’s analysis helps to elaborate this point, arguing: “the spectacular, indeed visually extravagant, images of Wong’s film are offered as a paradox: the more colorful and beautiful they are—and the more locally concrete they seem to be—the more they serve as an index to the capricious (that is, impermanent) nature of the human universe that revolves around/behind them.”²³⁵ Suggested here is that *2046*’s extravagant style, prominent in these opening moments, is intimately tied to the propulsive changes of modern life, so that the film’s aesthetic serves as a way to read the affective experience of such disorienting instability. What I think is also suggested here in the film’s opening moments is how *2046* shows not merely the negation of stability as a by-product of capitalism’s revolutionizing power, but rather where one looks for stability is displaced from the exterior, social structures of urban life to the interior, personal psyches of its residents. The train, therefore, serves as both a metaphor for the rush of modernist time, as well as a protective shell where those left weary by the shocks of modern life can leave to a place “where nothing ever changes.”

²³⁵ Rey Chow, *Sentimental Fabulations, Contemporary Chinese Films* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 77.

2046 takes these themes one-step further by not just staging an imagined future but also the imagined past of 1960s Hong Kong. What is fascinating about this oscillation between past and future is how it so seamlessly jumps from one period to the next, tying people, places, and time periods together without distinction. In this way, *2046*'s style works to flatten time, allowing the past and present to coincide in projections of a possible future, or at least an alternative present. What is important to note here is how these movements—from past to present to future, from one place to the next, from one relationship to another—come together. Classically speaking, these shifts in time and space would be inherently disorienting as the editing cuts to places and periods without any ostensible cohesion. But this is what makes the oscillation between content and style so fascinating as we discover momentarily, revealing a strong tendency in its characters' attempts to find romance and companionship as a path to stability and comfort in a life otherwise consumed by the automated movement on display in the opening. But as we will see, as each subsequent romance fails, we find the underlining melancholy that results as a perverse alternative, suggesting that even a bad feeling that can be relied upon is better than having no reliability at all.

With this point, we are once again on familiar ground, returning to an idea that in many ways sounds similar to Lauren Berlant's "cruel optimism." As you will remember, Berlant argues that contemporary subjects are often left clinging to something, or someone despite the toxic or counterproductive impact it has on their life. She argues that such attachments occur precisely because the world no longer can support a society where life adds up to something. Instead, she explains, we harbor these toxic attachments because the "subjects who have x in their lives might not well endure the loss of their object/scene of desire, even though its presence threatens their well-being, because whatever the content of the attachment is, the continuity of its

form provides something of the continuity of the subject's sense of what it means to keep on living on."²³⁶ In other words, maintaining attachments that sustain the good life fantasy, no matter how injurious or cruel, allows people to endure the day-to-day when the day-to-day has become divorced from our hopes and dreams. Berlant is essentially concerned with conditions of living or the state of the "present," which she describes as structured through "crisis ordinariness," and turns to affect and aesthetics as a way of apprehending these crises; by tracking the various impasses we face today, she suggests that it becomes possible to recognize that certain "genres" are no longer sustainable in the present and that new emergent aesthetic forms are taking hold, alternative genres that allow us to recognize modes of living not rooted in normative good life fantasies.

For Berlant, the waning of genre frames different kinds of potential openings within and beyond the impasse of adjustment that constant crisis creates. One might work around the cruelty of optimism or the setup for complaint by scaling back the intensity of one's investments in genre, especially in the genres of the happy ending or the good life. As those genres come to seem more fictitious and less attainable, the culture of crisis and precariousness that sets in, we are left to seek alternative possibilities. For Berlant, genre is a loose affectively-invested zone of expectations about the narrative shape a situation will take. Further, the waning of genre means that contemporary forms of recognition are up for grabs, and so the communal investments in those forms of recognition (what Berlant likes to call "fantasies of the good life") might also change. We find a perfect illustration of this point as the opening moments of the neon cityscape transition to the high contrast lighting of a Singapore gambling hall that is a clear homage to film noir. These transitions in style also suggest that the film's form remains fluid, changing with

²³⁶ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 24.

each passing vignette to more appropriately present the experience of its characters through the narrative and aesthetic conventions that conform to Chow's affective disposition. The gambling hall is therefore notable as a space that invites the hallmark conventions of film noir, a place where hope and despair collide in a pendulum swing between fortune or ruin.

The gambling hall scene opens with a shot framing the top of a stairwell as Chow ascends the steps in smart black suit. The stairwell is dark, lit by a single overhead light, casting shadows of his movements. At the same time a woman (Gong Li) outfitted in a black dress, embodying the look and feel of a femme fatale, is descending the stairs before abruptly stopping when she encounters Chow. The two give each other a forlorn look as if they know each other, while the poorly lit stairwell reveals little else but the emotions on their face. The acting here is important for how it embodies a shared effort of restraint, both Chow and the mysterious woman give each other poker faces, as it were, revealing nothing to the other. Upon being asked of his intentions, Chow states he has no prospects here and that he plans to return to Hong Kong in order to seek better opportunities. There is a pregnant pause that follows. The woman seems surprised and visibly tries to conceal her confusion and disappointment stemming from her shock. It is clear that these two have shared time together and that this encounter marks the end of whatever transpired before. When Chow states that he is leaving in two days the woman questions him as to why. In the background the environment dramatizes the internal struggle each repress, a soft rain falls and a clap of thunder reverberates through the darkly lit stairwell before Chow turns and relays that he had hoped they would leave together. The woman turns her back to Chow and intimates that her past prevents her from leaving with him, an informal rejection to his offer and also a clear indication that both are hiding more than they are revealing to one another about who they are and how they feel.

A moment like the above puts into context how Berlant's cruel optimism works to expose the costs associated with the premium we place on so-called positive modes of thinking and feeling. This scene is pregnant with cynicism, stubbing out any hope that these two may find happiness or solace in each other or at large, but also showing through the pauses of their conversation something unspoken, perhaps the dying remnants of hope of optimism, or perhaps just the fated resignation that this encounter will end in disappointment like others that may have transpired before. Cynicism itself is a defining marker of film noir often-juggling issues related to fate, despair, and missed opportunity. Here, *2046* fashions this cynicism in order to reveal how it persists, or lingers, in those who may hope to escape it but are ultimately fated to accept it. We see this in how each avoids eye contact, conversing with eyes averted, cast downward. It is also apparent in the slow, meticulous cadence of their speech as each inquires about the other, exploring possible alternatives to their parting, but knowing ultimately that this inquiry is more play-acting than sincere. Chow and the woman in black appear both trapped by their cynicism, but also unable to come to terms with it, to fully recognize it, or let it go.

Likewise, in popular and political discourse, cynicism is denounced as the mark of an ineffectual subject who chooses to opt out, rather than reach for supposedly obvious markers of capitalist achievement. *2046*'s appeal to film noir though refuses these characterizations, instead considering cynicism as an affect bound up in neoliberal sociopolitical shifts. Genre operates here as a way to reinforce the affective disposition needed to withstand the real pain and torment that upheaval and transience can cause. The aesthetic nods to film noir reinforce this, trading on the stylistic conventions of the genre to establish these points. The cinematographic choices in this scene emphasize the thematic connections to film noir, in moods of longing and entrapment. In this scene, Chow and the woman in black are seen through a confusion of angular shapes from

the shadows cast upon them and the oddly angled or tightly framed camera, creating the appearance that they are caught in a tangible vortex or enclosed in a trap. Additionally, we can understand Wong's use of sidelight to reflect character ambivalence, while shots of Chow and the woman in black are lit from above to conform to a convention of visual expression that associates shadows cast downward on the face with the fated and resigned.

With this idea in mind, we pick the scene back up moments later where Chow and the mysterious woman sit across a table where they have agreed to play a game of high card to determine the course of their future. At this moment, the camera frames Chow's face looking at his card. The card's identity is hidden to us, just like Chow's, both faces initially reveal nothing, but as Chow flips his card revealing the King of Hearts his true face is revealed in reciprocal fashion as the romantic longing the card embodies. The camera at this point cuts to the reverse-shot of the woman who pauses, clearly contemplating the significance of her next action. As she looks down at the table, refusing to meet Chow's eyes the slightest of smiles crosses her face before she composes herself and flips her own card. As she turns the card in her hand the camera cuts back to Chow, hiding its face but revealing his own. While the viewer does not know the identity of card, it is clear from Chow's reaction that he will be travelling back to Hong Kong alone. A further pause impregnates the scene as Chow takes in his fate, the camera cuts back to the woman and under the light of the overhead lamp, an Ace of Spades stares back. Each drop their hand and accompanying card, Chow's shoulders shrink and his voice over narration states, "She found an indirect way of rejecting me."

Though Berlant's project ultimately leaves cynicism unexplored, she lists it as one of a number of affects that can erupt as neoliberalism's promise begins to falter. It seems fair to suggest that *2046*'s use of film noir argues that cynicism registers the feeling of the failure of

that promise for some, perhaps many, of us; the recognition that the hope on offer is often unattainable, and can perhaps even be damaging. In this, *2046* positions cynicism as an affect that complements, or occurs in tandem with, rather than in opposition to Berlant's cruel optimism—an affect that recognizes and registers the cruelty of a world in which agency is often severely circumscribed by the narrow frames of the persistent fantasies that ultimately function to shore up a patriarchal mode of neoliberal capitalism. And, in a scene like the above, we see it operate as a way to stifle hope, reinforcing disappointment as brute fact of life.

Therefore, *2046* suggests through its promiscuous use of film noir conventions that feeling cynical in our time registers the frustration of agency under neoliberalism—even if agency is limited to the sense of market transactions, which begin to dwindle at the crisis point of neoliberalism. Vitality, then, cynicism is not the absence of hope but the situation of hope's impossibility, at least in terms of the frames in which hope is offered: cynicism is the scene or mood in which certain hopes are recognized as being implausible. In this context, to claim cynicism, in spite of, or perhaps because of, its negativity can be seen as an oppositional gesture, but one that, rather than leveraging momentum, calls attention to the failure of momentum, a relationship ending before it truly starts, or at least the diminution of a space where such an idea can be believed. Cynicism is a necessary affect, but one that always needs to be repressed and vilified in order to maintain a fantasy of self-motivated success.

4.3 Wong Kar-wai's Stylistic Plurality

Situating the above claims more broadly into the logic of the film, we should note that at this point *2046* has yet to establish any semblance of consistency, jumping from the abstract art styling of Christopher Doyle's cinematography in the opening shot to the neon CGI of a science fiction inspired Hong Kong before turning to the noir styling of the gambling hall in Singapore.

The shifts in style during these opening moments seem to stymie a rhythm or pattern where we could read these disjunctions as a formal, narrative, or even cultural logic, much like they stymie or disrupt momentum in the narrative of life, like finding love or belonging in an other. But we can quite easily understand through the very experience of trying to keep up with and make sense of these dramatic shifts that this is a world with no regard for formal consistency. We find an illustration of this with the gambling hall itself, where games of chance and skill are governed by rules but the outcomes are never certain and, more often than not, impossible to control. Like the game of high card Chow and the curious woman in black play, *2046* is not without form and its accompanying cinematic conventions so much as it shifts from the particularities of one genre to the next without warning. These stylistic shifts signal to us that, like gambling or even the marketplace, outcomes cannot be predicted based on present knowledge or intuition, nor can they be relied upon from one day, or scene, to the next.

A scene like this also opens up the surface of the film to show that aesthetics, as Berlant states it, is not “equivalent to what happens to people but [rather] to see that in the affective scenarios of these works and discourses we can discern claims about the situation of contemporary life.”²³⁷ Berlant employs aesthetics as a relationship between the rhythms of genre art and the tempos of society. In other words, the destruction of the good life “manifests itself in an emerging set of aesthetic conventions that make a claim to affective realism derived from embodied, affective rhythms of survival.”²³⁸ Berlant not only ties our experience of the world to aesthetics, but she endows aesthetics with the ability to “habituate our sensorium by taking in new material” and “provide metrics for understanding how we pace and space our encounters

²³⁷ Ibid., 9.

²³⁸ Ibid., 11.

with things.”²³⁹ The cynicism that structures film noir’s ethos is thus a state of being or feeling that is as obviously undesirable as neoliberal capitalism is assumed to be common sense.

As such, the lack of aesthetic consistency reinforces the turbulent landscape of *2046* and generates an immediate desire for something to anchor life for the characters and the viewing experience for spectators amidst these abrupt disjunctions. Failing at conventional methods, we can begin to establish a reading strategy for these shifts in style through the discrepancy that develops between the muted gestures of the actors and the desires they share in conversation, or narration. These discrepancies are littered throughout the film, already present in the voiceover narration that signals a desire for a place where time stands still within the constant motion of modern life displayed in the alternating “2046” scenes. We find it also in Chow’s encounter with the mysterious woman in Singapore, where each seems forlorn yet ultimately silent over the reality that their time together is coming to an end. The strain between the desire for time to stand still and life’s constant motion play out in the melancholy mood that pervades each of the film’s disparate sections. Whether that is in the film’s present, past, or imagined future, it is hard to find a moment that is not pregnant with a sense of fated resignation, or thwarted longing.

The gambling hall scene stages a definitive early moment in the film, throwing whatever life Chow and the mysterious woman had into opposite directions. After the game of high card the camera reciprocally cuts back into the neon panorama of Hong Kong’s possible future. A train flies forward and the accompanying shots that pan across the effervescent light of the city are complemented by an uptick in the rhythm of the music. Chow narrates that the year is 1966 and riots are commencing in Kowloon, as black and white news footage is juxtaposed with CGI shots of “2046.” Shots of Chow interlace this montage, he narrates that he has taken residence in

²³⁹ Ibid., 12.

a small hotel, and that he is writing for a newspaper to pay his rent. There is an obvious connection being made here between the rapidly changing nature of Chow's life and the rapidly changing nature of Hong Kong. These parallel trajectories play out in a series of shots of Chow in slow motion, often sitting or standing in his hotel room, making his subtle movements seem weighted by the sadness he is clearly feeling.

The montage of Chow's life, which alternates between his working life (as a writer) and his nightlife (as an eligible bachelor), does not appear to provide any real meaning for him, as he states at one point, "As long as I make ends meet, it doesn't matter what I write," while adding, "I became an expert with ladies. Lots of one-night stands. Never mind. Nothing lasts forever anyway." Most prominently we see Chow revel in cynicism in his admission that he gets paid by the number of words he writes, and this interestingly corresponds to his numerous one night stands in how they are both expressed through numerical quantity. Whether that be ten yuan for every ten thousand words of writing, or one woman for each night he goes out, both are introduced on the merits of their quantity while also being dismissed as merely a means to an end (making end's meet, or combating loneliness). Here, numbers add a particular type of certainty that has been lacking up to this point in the film. They also seem to mark aspects of his life he refuses to assign emotional value, instead relying on brute numerical quantification as a way to assuage the repressed pain of his disappointment. This seems to be a clear distinction from Singapore, where his genuine concerns for the woman in black seemed stifled in Leung's patient portrayal. Although it is clear he is emotionally disinvested in these parallel ventures in writing and womanizing, they provide a means of measurable value that is otherwise lacking in Chow's life. But this montage, detailing the aftermath of Chow's return to Hong Kong after being

spurned in Singapore, comes to a halt when Chow runs into an old friend, Lulu (Carina Lau), who played a significant role in Wong's *Days of Being Wild*.

In many ways, Chow's one night stands and serial dating replicate the structure that society is built on: disposability, discontinuity, and impermanence. But what remains, and what is elevated to the surface with his encounter with Lulu, is how Chow remains steadfast in life through the feelings he can conjure from his past. As we will see, these feelings are not joyous or even optimistic. Instead, they are suffocating in their melancholy. But it is the reliability of that feeling that is its strength, providing both a consistent structure to the experience of life that can be called upon seemingly at will in times of need. The melancholy affects that Chow cultivates provide a unique alternative to the numerical systems of measurement that otherwise serve to help make sense of the various disruptions to his life. In other words, we find the way Chow measures time, money, and relationships as an increasingly important way to quantify life in Hong Kong's modernization. But at the same time he holds within himself an alternative method for making sense of the world that seems to change at a whim. During the film's most turbulent moments, Chow conjures and luxuriates in his sadness so that it colors his whole life, both his disposition to the world and how he is to act within it.

Chow's encounter with Lulu brings this point to the fore. Their initial encounter is shot in the same shot/reverse-shot pattern we saw previously in the gambling hall. The camera hovers over Lulu's shoulder as Chow's face is framed in the center of the shot, while the reverse shot inverts these positions. This is significant for how it essentially replays his last meaningful encounter in Singapore verbatim, suggesting this is another opportunity, another chance to find a path out the self-destructive lifestyle he has embraced. Here, like in Singapore, the conversation takes center stage, framing this encounter as a question of temporality or as Chow

puts it, “Love is a matter timing. It’s no good to meet someone too soon or too late.” 2046 evidences that grim axiom that all timing is bad timing in the temporal oscillations of the modern city. During their conversation, Lulu intimates she does not immediately recognize Chow, but when he asks her about performing in a show in Singapore in 1964 she pauses. What at first appears to be a line from a strange man seeking attention now takes Lulu by surprise halting her entirely. Curious to know more, she asks if he was really in Singapore at that time. From here, Chow recalls a number of vivid details—a conversation about an ex-lover, dancing the cha-cha, meeting at a casino—painting a picture of their time together that Lulu has apparently forgotten. At the same time, the film cuts to a close-up of Lulu’s face staring off screen as the signature waltz from *Days of Being Wild* begins to play softly in the background. Wong is a master at staging scenes such as this, where the film communicates the emotion of temporal dislocation by recalling signature moments of his previous efforts. Like Lulu, the spectator cannot help but be transported back to that earlier moment with the characters, even if it lasts only a few seconds before the music dies down again. But as much as these memories conjure up the past they cannot stop or undo the time that has transpired in between, as Lulu confesses to Chow, “I’m not the same person anymore.”

Here, we find yet another disjunction, this one temporal in nature that places Lulu between her past self and the person she has become. A conspicuous outcome of this play with temporality is repetition, especially evident in the rich motif of doubled—and redoubled—names, places, lines of dialog, intertitles, gestures, compositions, musical cues. Together they spin a web of coincidence engulfing Chow and film viewers in the same apperceptive nimbus, a state of immanent déjà vu in which we believe we have already experienced the same or nearly identical cinematic moment. In the above scene, for example, we find the signature waltz begin

to play at the exact moment Lulu enters the scene. While we may not immediately recognize Carina Lau, the music ends any doubt that this is Lulu from *Days of Being Wild*, working to evoke emotion and create atmosphere but even more importantly serving as an identification tool for the various characters that enter and exit across Wong's oeuvre, and more importantly here, Chow's life. Wong's characters are often constituted through their fragmented identities and because of this the variety of styles works to show the inner struggle they endure and quests for clarity they seek. The inevitability of change Wong offers in his cinema is easy to discern here by reuniting Chow and Lulu after more than ten years since the release of *Days*. And, this cinematic nostalgia for a former film and its characters brings with it a nostalgia that often evokes melancholy for a time we can no longer access, or only access by proxy in a fleeting memory that the music here signals. In the end, we are left to reflect on the transience of time and the way memory registers affectively: Maybe it was another film by Wong. Or maybe we are just mistaken. Our cognitive tendency is to construct legible patterns, distinguish planned from random repetition, assume the presence of cause and effect. Yet as much as *2046* invites us to discover an overarching logic, to find ways of making everything fit, it also engages us to an extraordinary degree in the sheer beauty and aesthetic uniqueness of the here-and-now image, asking us to recognize the present in light of the past's labyrinth of lost loves and surrendered desires.

For this reason, the surface connections between Wong's style and time seem endless in scenes such as the above: slow motion and the longings created by memory and nostalgia; non-linear plots and the disorienting experience of commercial culture; long takes and the mystery of change; quick cuts and the secret affinities between simultaneous actions, etc. In large part, as Bordwell states, these aesthetic choices run parallel with an ever-growing sense of

precariousness within Wong's cinema: "Treating time as at once an unmanageable flux, a stretch of reveries, an instant revelation, and an undying memory, [Wong's] films invite critics to search for allegories of impermanence."²⁴⁰ Much like the previous filmmakers we have explored concerning the relationship between time, space, and lived life, Wong explores subjectivity through an exacting attention to environmental change and social custom. In various ways, his aesthetic attempts to create the conditions of experienced time from a subjective point of view that determines how individuals interact with each other and within their environment.

Within the disaffected posturing of Chow, the highly stylized presentation, and the ambiguous narrative that grounds *2046* is an important insight into the social, cultural, and political fabric of contemporary life. Wong's reputation as a political filmmaker remains underdeveloped largely because his films play out as suffocatingly intimate portrayals of personal crisis and drift. Because of this, Wong's style is often interpreted as a dazzling exercise in cinematic mixture but too often treated as mere surface appeal. Peter Brunette, though, has importantly pointed out that this particular line of criticism misses the fundamental nature of Wong's cinema. "Wong's films are sometimes dismissed because they are all 'surface' with no depth," Brunette explains before adding, "His depth, and thus the real source of power, can be found on the surface."²⁴¹ While, similarly, Curtis K. Tsui notes, "form is the essence of [Wong's] films—it is, in many ways, the narrative of his work. [...] It's not a case of style over substance; rather, it's style as substance."²⁴² For Tsui and Brunette, Wong is a polystylistic filmmaker, mobilizing a varied set of techniques to reorder, recombine, and, ultimately, revise viewer's notions of where substance is found in the modern world. The stylistic pluralism offered in a film

²⁴⁰ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 273.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, xvi.

²⁴² Curtis K. Tsui, "Subjective Culture and History: The Ethnographic Cinema of Wong Kar-wai," *Asian Cinema* 7.2 (1995): 94.

like *2046* works to complicate and dramatize the viewer's perception and comprehension in order to highlight the disorienting nature of modern urban life. Surface style, as Brunette and Tsui note, takes on new resonance in Wong's capable hands, operating not as an appeal to spectacle but instead a commentary on where substantive value lies more generally, on the surfaces that we can touch and that touch us back in ways we cannot anticipate. In this sense, objects on screen, such as Lulu, and the style in which they are presented, slow motion and to the score of a previous film, communicate the affects and emotions that seem unable to be expressed in a world that moves too fast to contemplate at any single moment.

Taking the above points seriously can also help us think about the kind of world Wong envisions with *2046*, and the specific type of subjectivity needed to navigate it. For example, we can begin to see how *2046*'s style plays out on the surfaces of the diegesis when we consider how, for example, the use of scopophilia works to show the compulsive bond between sexual craving and optical power, an exchange that translates onto a larger scale by masking or otherwise dividing portions of the CinemaScope frame such that we are always looking past foreground obstructions into a relatively narrow playing field, as witnessed in Chow's encounters with the woman in black and Lulu. A secondary effect of this technique is to keep in flux the potential identification audiences may have with specific characters, turning intimate interiors into grand emotive stages. Keeping this in mind, we can see that *2046*'s privileging of color, light and movement over clear, composed shots helps to establish the disorientation and ennui his characters experience. In many ways, these techniques suggest that we can only access the interior realities of social life through the ornate exteriors of his films, often times reinforcing those interior realities of life through a saturation of exteriorized style.

At this juncture of *2046* we are starting to understand the mechanism by which affect operates within neoliberalism. As the film settles into a pattern of depicting the unsettling and jarring moments of Chow's life, we see him seek solace through a dependency of bad feelings (melancholy), bad choices (womanizing), and measurable means of value (money, publishing records), which he utilizes to manufacture the feeling of safety and continuity he cannot find in the world. Berlant describes a similarly compelling and destructive orientation between subject and structure in terms of optimism, which for her refers to "the force that moves you out of yourself and into the world in order to bring closer the satisfying something you cannot generate on your own but sense in the wake of a person, a way of life, an object, project, concept, or scene."²⁴³ Importantly for Berlant, optimism does not necessarily feel optimistic, but can include a range of orientations—frustration, curiosity, ambivalence, anxiety, dread—towards the fantasy of the good life, which she argues remains the "moral-intimate-economic"²⁴⁴ locus of subjective orientation, even as it becomes increasingly difficult for many individuals to realize this in their own lives. We see this in Chow's attempts to make good on his desire for companionship with women, or peace of mind in his work. For Chow, these efforts never congeal into a lasting fixture, instead they are fleeting and in their transience they cause as much pain and distress as they do joy and relief.

The oscillation between these affective extremes divides Chow between his external appearance as a cool, confident bachelor, and his internal struggles as an aging loner, lost amidst the accelerated pace of modern change. In this regard, Stephen Teo has remarked upon the relationship between interior and exterior life in Wong's films as a situation divided between competing modes of aesthetic orientation for the viewer: "While the interior nature of Wong's

²⁴³ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 1-2.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

work, illustrated by his monologues, conveys an intimate quality, his visual skills often involve a large and complex palette incorporated in a canvas and design of epic proportions. The encompassing of both an intimate literary quality and a structurally complex epic design in his work illustrates a ‘discontinuity in our very being.’²⁴⁵ It is the discontinuity conveyed here that *2046* addresses through its style, providing consistency in mood while simultaneously emphasizing its absence in everyday life. The ramifications of this divide bring us back to the issues of self-division and discontent I introduced at the outset of the chapter. For just as optimism describes a relation between self and something for Berlant, *2046* presents a relation between exterior and interior through Chow’s attempts at emotional indifference. Like his encounter with Lulu, Chow’s muted pain works as a site of subjective stabilization and orientation, a sense or feeling registered individually, but indicative of a larger social situation or system (here, capitalism) that demands change without any roadmap for managing its traumatic blowback. As Berlant reminds us, it is not the experience of particular optimisms that are significant, but the “affective structure of an optimistic attachment.”²⁴⁶ Thus, if the desire we derive from optimism orients us towards satisfaction, then indifference would register the limits placed around satisfaction, the subjective registration of the failure of the fantasy, its unreachability, or its falsity.

To help illustrate these points further, let us now turn to the space of the Oriental Hotel, which plays an integral role in establishing the milieu of *2046*. Not only does it assume the role of the film’s central location, it also reveals the values and tendencies of those who occupy it. While we could take a look at any number of facets the hotel offers for interpretation—say, its architectural design, the interior decorating, or even its ambiguous location within Hong Kong—

²⁴⁵ Teo, *Wong Kar-wai*, 5.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

it is hard to avoid the suspicion that much of what we see maps to Chow's mental state. The reason behind this is that nearly every encounter that occurs within the hotel is mediated by money. This fact communicates clearly that money is the universal signifier between parties, such that without it, nearly all intersubjective encounters become mired in a sea of ambiguity and misunderstanding. For those who occupy the hotel money is not important in itself, at least not in any explicit sense, but rather expresses their disposition in ways they are unwilling or unable to do so on their own. For this reason, we should take seriously the role money plays amongst the hotel's occupants for what it can tell us about the human condition under capitalist modernization. Therefore, I want to highlight this space as a contested ground between human desire and monetary calculation in order to more fully render the complications concerning how desire and its accompanying affects play out in capitalist lifestyles for those who suffer it.

We should note that like any hotel occupancy is determined by a binding contract based upon the exchange of money for room and board. In fact, one of the earliest scenes in the film finds Chow looking for residency in Hong Kong at the hotel after his return from Singapore. The hotel owner, Mr. Wang (Wang Sum), is suspicious of Chow at first, uncertain of whom this well dressed stranger might be, and what brings him to the hotel in the first place. Chow's appearance here is important too for those who remember him from *Mood*. The changes time has wrought on Chow are not insignificant, as he is a new man in many respects. No longer a full-time newspaperman, married and fully within what most would recognize as Berlant's "good life fantasy." Now, Chow is an aging divorcé, he gambles terribly and writes genre fiction successfully. He also sports a sly moustache emblematic of the night-crawling lothario in which he has transformed himself—presumably as overcompensation for his timid obsession with married neighbor Su Li-zhen that forms the narrative core of *Mood*.

Regardless, upon learning that Chow is a journalist Mr. Wang has a sudden change of heart, expressing to Chow that in a past life he trained as a singer and therefore would be happy to grant occupancy to a “fellow artist.” Mr. Wang’s skepticism initially appears to be a tactic to dissuade deviant occupants from inquiring about occupancy, and that concern is consummated during the next scene, where we learn that Lulu has been murdered in the film’s namesake room, which Chow attempts to rent. Additional supporting details concerning Mr. Wang’s current occupants eventually percolate to the surface, such as the numerous call girls and johns who reside in the hotel, suggesting that occupants with a steady income are in demand. Chow’s profession as a journalist more so than, let us say, his finely tailored suit and impeccable grooming, signals to Mr. Wang the kind of occupant he seeks, which is to say an occupant who can serve as a reliable source of income. In fact, we find an entire economic logic at work within the hotel in these opening moments, supporting the idea that the flow of money is a central and perhaps only genuine act that can transpire between its walls.

Mr. Wang’s warm greeting is also instructive for how the good life fantasy of modernist Hong Kong takes a strong financial bent. Within the walls of the Oriental Hotel relationships of all kinds abound. There are the daily comings and goings of the prostitutes and their clients; Mr. Wang’s daughters, Wang Jin-wen (Faye Wong) who engages in an affair with a Japanese man (Takuya Kimura) and his other daughter Wang Jie-wei (Dong Jie) who runs off with a drummer who performs in a local night club; and, the hotel staff who are always busy moving from one place to the next, offering various accounts of the hotel’s residents. The hotel itself houses a plurality of people, but what binds them together is more than just the confines of building, it is also the contract they have entered upon paying rent to Mr. Wang. This common ground works

to bring the disparate occupants together, providing an ostensible connection that clearly defines the subjective positions they are to take in relation to one another.

The correlation between human interaction and financial transaction becomes even more apparent in the following scene when Chow's friend Ping (Ping Lam Siu) pays a visit and begins to inquire about the possibility of meeting Bai Ling, the beautiful prostitute who lives down the hall. The meeting is, of course, predicated on Ping utilizing Bai Ling's services, and Chow assures him he will make such arrangements. In the following scene, Bai Ling comes to Chow's room unannounced, and this constitutes their first face-to-face meeting. The camera captures their encounter from within Chow's room from over his shoulder. This encounter has been foregrounded in a previous scene that found the pair exchanging a knowing glance as they passed each other in the hotel's corridor. Bai Ling occupies center frame, out of focus until she greets Chow. He turns to see her wearing a dazzling gown and mischievous smile. His interest is peaked when Bai-ling asks about his evening. Chow is both surprised and visibly pleased with this unexpected attention as the camera reverses to catch his response. He stares down, presumably at her legs showing through the gown's side slit, moving his head up in a meditated fashion to her feet; then ankles; then to her thighs and waist until a broad, boyish smile breaks over his face. When Chows asks if she is looking for him, the camera reverses again, Bai Ling positioned on the right hand side of the frame, concealing her left hand. As she lingers in the doorway her face moves in the opposite direction as Chow's: from his face and then to the ground as a sly smile now breaks over her face. Then in a single movement Bai Ling pulls Ping into the scene by his ear, revealing that she had been hiding Ping behind the doorway with her left hand. Suddenly the romantic tension is gone, and Chow is quickly trying to assuage Bai Ling's disgusted fury by yelling at Ping that he is confused and that he has tried to proposition

the wrong woman. Bai Ling rushes off and Chow is left to pick of the pieces of his careless negotiation.

4.4 Crystal Liaisons

These initial encounters are merely a prelude to film's most explicit meditation on the strain and confusion that envelops human interaction in the modernist landscape, for it is the romantic engagement between Chow and Bai-ling that aligns most explicitly the tripartite of aesthetics, affect, and capital. In a later scene, on Christmas Eve, Chow and Bai-ling run into each other unexpectedly in the hallway of the hotel. At first there is some lingering tension stemming from their last encounter, but after some persuading Chow talks Ba-ling into joining him for dinner after she admits she has no one else to keep her company that evening. The restaurant is shot in warm hues with Nat King Cole's rendition of the "The Christmas Song" playing softly in the background. Bai-ling is obviously heartbroken during this scene, rarely making eye contact with Chow, speaking more to herself in an act of consolation than she is communicating anything to her companion. Over the course of the meal, Bai-ling shares that she had planned to spend Christmas in Singapore with a boyfriend, but was stood up and is now resigned to spending the cold winter months in Hong Kong alone.

As the evening wears on, Bai-ling and Chow slowly slip into drunken intoxication over drinks. Bai-ling asks Chow if he has ever been to Singapore and when he says he has, she asks if he can describe it to him. As Chow begins to recount his time in Singapore the camera cuts to a slow-motion, black and white tracking shot of the woman in black. As Chow continues to describe his experiences the camera cuts again to a match shot of Chow and Bai-ling walking side-by-side down the street. This is clearly the same shot, now devoid of color, of the mysterious woman in black Chow met at the gambling halls earlier in the film. The shots in the

restaurant that framed Chow and Bai-ling in alternating singles, with the one just out of frame so as to clearly represent their division, now make way for a series of shots that frame the pair together. The match cut is obviously significant for the transposition it establishes, replacing the woman in black walking away from Chow in Singapore with Bai-ling who walks with him at his side.

The above transposition signals that the events that have transpired, Bai-ling opening her heart to Chow, and Chow finding solace in her company act as a sort of “return of the repressed,” bring the previous romantic failures into alignment with this possible future in the present. As they continue to talk the camera cuts to their feet, their footsteps are in unison, and their romantic union seems imminent. But immediately afterward the scene takes an interesting turn in how it frames this union. When Bai-ling inquires into the women Chow sees, he states that he is not serious about any of them, and that all a man like himself has is time. When Bai-ling inquires further, Chow states that the nature of his time with women consists of each “borrowing” the other’s time. When Bai-ling asks for clarification—who is borrowing whom that evening—Chow states that it does not really matter, he is borrowing her and she is borrowing him in a reciprocal fashion. Bai-ling is annoyed with this answer, seemingly unwilling to accept that two people can engage in a genuine relationship through a system of temporal exchange. Chow quickly points out that he is not trying to seduce her but simply looking for a friend, describing their relation to the other as “drinking pals.” When Bai-ling asks, “Is this okay?” revealing her own hesitation about engaging in a relationship based on the exchange of time together rather than an ideal notion of love, Chow states that it is but “It’s hard.”

In the scene that follows, Bai-ling agrees to “exchange time” with Chow, and although she is put off at first by his description, it seems to work so far as the temporal exchange is

reciprocal. Bai-ling grabs Chow's hand and begins to pull him off-screen as the camera once again cuts to a profile shot of them moving out of frame together. At this point, we find them both in the back of a taxicab; the shot is black and white suggesting we are once again experiencing Chow's memories bubbling to the surface. The shot is a vital one and for those that have seen *In the Mood for Love* it is instantly recognizable. Chow and Bai-ling are framed together in the backseat, the shot unfolds in slow-motion, and a string laden orchestral piece augments the action. Chow slowly places his head on Bai-ling's shoulder thus reproducing one of the signature shots of Chow and Su Li-zhen from *In the Mood for Love*.

In that film, the taxi twice provides a space where romantic curiosity is tested between the two. In the first instance, the taxi is shot from the rear exterior before cutting inside to Chow's and Su's hands. As Chow moves his hand over hers, she pulls away signaling that while their interest in one another is mutual it cannot be more than platonic. The second instance, though, deviates from this initial hesitation, Chow moves his hand over hers and she firmly grasps his hand back, pulling it onto her thigh. Here, this small gesture signals a titanic shift, the unspoken romance of their spouses are engaging in and that they have been acting out has now developed into its own organic liaison. This moment in *In the Mood* is important because it effectively communicates all the repressed emotion between Chow and Su, and thus serves to concretize what had been up to that moment mere innuendo. For *2046*, Wong again confronts his audience with a scheme of repetition; repeating situations, bits of dialogue and shots in order to amplify the film's mood as well as craft his narrative. There are two kinds of repetition used to connect these moments between films, those with variation and those without. In the first ones, the repetition emphasizes the variation; in the second, the repetition itself is called to attention. These scenes show either a regression of the characters, as in the diner scene, a way for them to

give meaning and logic to a situation or an emotion that has none, or a progression, as in the taxi scene, towards a better understanding of themselves. For *2046*, we can read this repetition as a sign of hope, Chow once more presented with an opportunity to make good on his past failures, and stymie the pathological loneliness he cannot seem to shake. But, on the other hand, the reproduction of this shot also foretells that Chow's engagement with Bai-ling is already fated, suggesting that he is reproducing the exact conditions of his past that he is unable, or perhaps unwilling to let go.

From here, we could easily deduce that Chow is simply and selfishly using Bai-ling, and that all the talk about each using the other to suffocate the pain of their past relational failures is true. But as the taxicab scene unfolds the camera's focus moves from their faces to their hands. Chow, slumped over in a drunken stupor, places his hand over top of Bai-ling's. But almost as quickly she removes his hand, placing it back on his lap before Chow, ultimately, pushes back and places his hand on hers as the camera fades to black. The subtlety of this gesture reveals Chow's sincerity and also his own affective prison, caught between the contradictions of what he wants, what he says, and what he does. The hope that Bai-ling represents to Chow is a chance at redemption, but it also means becoming vulnerable to the chance of failure, yet one more disappointment to suffer. Here, Chow's melancholia serves as a way to preempt the possible pain of the future by cultivating a known pain of the past. While neither situation seems ideal from the outside, for Chow the advantage of the latter supersedes the hope of the former for how it orders and grounds the present. Bai-ling, for example, is not a subject where Chow's desire is invested in a possible future, so much as a comfort to be borrowed to stabilize his understanding of the present.

This plays out most prominently in the following two scenes, the first of which finds Chow meeting Ping and number of other friends at a restaurant for dinner. The discussion they have revolves around a bet Chow has made with his friends where they will buy him dinner if Bai-ling shows up and he will pay if she does not. There is a certain careless fun to this bet amongst friends, friendly teasing and good-natured ribbing. But under the surface appearance there is an interesting correlation happening between Chow's monetary gambling, a certain recklessness he champions in the face of uncertainty, and the deep felt pains of his past that he invests so much time and energy reliving. Predictably, Bai-ling never shows up and as Chow reluctantly takes his friend's chiding about trusting another woman the camera cuts to Bai-ling laughing on the payphone in the Oriental Hotel. Bai-ling is clearly laughing at Chow's expense and the conversation reveals that she orchestrated the entire bet with Ping as a practical joke. Later, as he drunkenly raps on her hotel door, they exchange flirtations about the evening's events.

This leads to a scene of Chow and Bai-ling in bed, sharing intimate thoughts, and passing the time in mutual contentment. But when Chow gets up and walks into the bathroom he comes back out fully dressed to Bai-ling's disappointment. Although the bet turned into a joke, the bet itself is important as it signals that Chow is treating this relationship as he has promised: based upon mutual exchange. When Bai-ling states that he can stay over for the duration of the evening Chow refuses stating that he is exhausted before pulling a wad of cash out of his pocket, offering it to her. "This is all I have," Chow remarks, "It's \$200, please take it." Bai-ling refuses, "I'm not selling," she says but Chow insists, grabbing her wrist and forcing the money into her hand. We can even read this gesture as a sort of inversion of the taxicab scene described above—the intimacy found in their hands, now soiled by the economic principal of exchange.

While Chow tries to explain that the money is not for sex, it is obvious he is trying to keep his distance, at least emotionally, and in this way the bet turning sour reciprocally sours the intimacy they had established. Revealed in this act is Chow's attempt to bring order and clarity to situation that has become ambiguous and is approaching genuine intimacy. Essentially what we see between Chow and Bai Ling is a relationship beginning to flower, but whereas formerly this relation was constituted on a system of exchange, it has begun to expand, evolve and become something else entirely. Also suggested here is that Chow was hurt by Bai-ling's joke, or better put, he was caught off guard by how much he would have been hurt had it not been a joke. This initially appears as a type of flirtation, but the sincerity in Chow that the joke reveals settles into a strange economic transaction, where Chow tries to redraw the lines of intimacy, placing them fully back into an agreed upon business transaction, giving their liaison order and clarity.

The transaction thus acts as an exteriorization of Chow's inner struggle, placing his feelings in the object, and thus freeing himself from the burden of his own emotional attachment. Hurt and embarrassed, Bai-ling takes a single dollar bill, "Fine," she says, "I'll take \$10. Think of it as a discount rate. If you ever want to come over again, I'll charge you the same." While the scenes before this moment kept both Chow and Bai-ling in the same frame, this exchange is presented in a shot/reverse-shot style, separating the two from each other as we have seen previously with Chow and the women he has pursued. Although each are civil, the pain on Bai-ling's face is palpable, her pain masked by a desperate smile that breaks over her face while Chow holds a posture that betrays any suggestion of how he feels. As he walks out of her apartment the camera stays on Bai-ling in a long take, she holds her head down eyes shut, as a single tear breaks over her cheek she begins to smile and walks out of frame.

The emotional tension between Chow and Bai-ling raises the question of what happiness might look like in the midst of what Berlant would surely recognize as an impasse. For neoliberalism, happiness is privileged as the assumed focus of action, or engagement, while indifference is defined by its passivity, and its corresponding blockage to the pursuit of happiness. If indifference describes an impasse—a subject caught in the bind between knowing and doing, who might feel dissatisfied, disaffected, disenfranchised, but cannot see a way in which to counter the forces producing such feelings—then its antidote is seen in momentum, in a path out of the circularity that Berlant describes as a dog-paddling motion turning laps in the ripples of contemporary crisis. Affectively, the antidote to indifference becomes a reassertion of the pursuit of happiness. Though not all crises are constituted by neoliberalism they are all implicated in what Wendy Brown has called the spread of “neoliberal rationality”²⁴⁷—or the migration of market rationality—into all areas of life. And here we see this on full display through the exchange of money, prostitution, and careful deliberation concerning “discount rates.”

The implications of Chow and Bai-ling’s bedroom negotiation frames crises within the terms of neoliberalism, that is, understood through the rationale and language of the market. Under the rigorously individualistic model of neoliberalism, the individual faces crisis alone—in a society in which the notion of social good has eroded, and the myth of self-actualization has come to mean that if one is unhappy, it is because one has not pursued one’s own happiness rigorously enough. Berlant notes the curious fact that in the current moment of crisis, the fantasy that subtends the breakdown remains intact, if not stronger. That is, the founding mythology of

²⁴⁷ Wendy Brown, “Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 39.

happiness as construed by capitalism dovetails nicely with notions of self-actualization that render the individual the primary unit by which to measure success and failure. Likewise, capitalist subjects such as Chow and Bai-ling labor under the assumption that happiness moves us in positive and desirable directions, that action in the direction of greater happiness—often defined as the reassertion of normative, comfortable frames—is both a social and personal good. But here we find a perversion of this norm when the moment of constituting the presumed happiness of social and romantic engagement turns into a financial transaction between (business) partners. And, in these terms, this moment gives us a stunning example of not what happens when capitalism goes wrong, but instead when it goes right, suggesting that rote quantification is the only adequate method for determining success.

This significant moment between Chow and Bai-ling is punctuated by a montage set to the sounds of strings in minor key. The montage depicts them together, going out to dinner, drinking late at night, enjoying the company of friends before returning to her hotel room. As in the previous scene, the camera cuts from the bed to Chow dressing, a repetition of the same, a routine whose path is now well worn. Chow tells Bai-ling goodnight before breaking her off another dollar bill, the same \$10 fee as before. This time the camera stays with Bai-ling during the aftermath, as she rolls over in her bed she pulls a small box out from underneath. As she opens the box and puts the bill inside the camera cuts to an overhead shot revealing two giant stacks of cash marking each night they have spent together. Of course the money is of no genuine consequence for Bai-ling, as we watch her carefully fold of the bill and place it in the box, suggesting the value of these bills are the function they serve as tokens of their time together. As the montage concludes, we find Chow and Bai-ling once again engaged in each other's arms outside her hotel room. She invites him in but he refuses stating that he does not

have any cash on him. Bai-ling smiles as the camera cuts to a close-up of their eyes locked before stating, “You can owe me.” Chow pauses before answering: “No. I don’t like to be in debt.”

The financial exchange is designed, at least from Chow’s perspective, to communicate that the sexual relationship will not entail a personal relationship beyond sex. The monetary nature of this transaction interestingly provides a material marker of how time has become an externalized construct, something in other words that we can touch, hold, and count. The exchange of one’s time acts, then, like an exchange of currency and Bai-ling’s hoarded bills eventually become an external marker for the time spent with him, a symbol of the past that resonates into the present. This serves to both protect him from potentially new traumatic encounters but also to preserve the stability to be found in his nostalgic longing for the past. For Bai-ling, the exchange of money for sex acts as a way to account for the love she desires, as each bill represents one night with Chow. By saving the bills, Bai-ling has externalized her investment by saving the money, investing her present actions for the promise of the future. The disparity between these two points represents two very different relationships to time. Chow’s position remains invested in the past where his love for Su Li-zhen lives in a state of unaltered melancholy, providing him with a consistent reminder of life’s unpredictable and disappointing reality. While for Bai-ling, her hope is invested in a possible future with Chow, each carefully folded bill marking her commitment to this investment.

For Berlant, the opposing gestures above concerning Chow and Bai-ling’s handling of money would be understood as a definitive moment of emergence in which one lives with both a sense of anticipation and confusion—uncertain in precisely what might emerge and the effects it will have for one’s life. Chow and Bai-ling thus act as subjects of the impasse that seek to make

sense of their mutual entanglement, to collect clues, but somehow cannot make their way out of the moment, surrendering themselves to a melancholy impassivity that manifests as a “style of composure” in a “gestural economy”²⁴⁸—an emotionlessness that speaks to the impossibility of an emotional congruence between self and structure, between present and future. By invoking this affective prison of melancholy and the space of the impasse, *2046* looks to the attachments underlying a seeming state of affective vacancy to show how they stabilize in the negative the whirring rush of time and its accompanying changes.

The relationship effectively ends in a scene absent of Chow. Bai-ling is meeting Ping for a drink while Chow is away gambling in Singapore. Ping presents Bai-ling with a diamond encrusted silver watch, a token of affection from Chow. But over the course of their cocktail, Ping warns Bai-ling that Chow is not serious, stating that he is: “Well off at the beginning of the month, broke by month’s end.” Ping’s statement doubles as a description of Chow’s behavioral pattern, at first he is generous and in good spirits, but over time he becomes depleted and withdrawn. Accepting her fate, Bai-ling leaves the watch on the table and walks off. When Chow returns to Hong Kong in the following scene, Bai-ling presents him with an ultimatum, either commit to her or end their liaison for good. When Chow responds the conversation returns to the monetary language of exchange once more. “Retail is fine,” Chow states in a disaffected manner, “wholesale is out of the question.” Here, Chow reminds her that he is available to her so long as the relationship remains predicated on exchange and not heartfelt emotion. Implied in this exchange is that accessing Chow’s emotional availability is allowable so long as it does not lead to a sense of ownership. Like the hotel reside in and lifestyle they partake of, life’s modern axiom is defined by transience, the moment, a fleeting feeling. The soft string accompaniment

²⁴⁸ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 5.

that has provided the aural backdrop for each of these encounters once again swells in tune to the rising emotion of the scene. Finally, Bai-ling lets Chow know that she is buying his time tonight, putting a dollar bill in his hand before exiting.

We started our analysis with the liquidity proposed by Bauman; however, there is another more critical way to look at liquidity as we have seen on display, proposed by Esther Leslie, that the film demands. In “Liquid, Crystal, Vaporous: The Natural States of Capitalism” Leslie mixes together a number of ideas that ties together the many strands of analysis the film has presented for our consideration. Leslie’s essay works to show how the shape of liquid crystals organizes a substance’s molecules in a crystalline form yet allows them to move fluidly like water. In doing so, Leslie fashions a description of capitalism that accounts for both its solid and fluid features, suggesting that the two are much more entwined than most theories, like those of Bauman and his derivatives, have allowed. “[L]iquidity is, for Bauman, that of modernity, not capitalism, for that would imply something too fixed or nameable,” Leslie explains, “Modernity seems vague and always reinvented, imprecise and undefineable.”²⁴⁹ Leslie’s summation of Bauman is that he too quickly demarcates the lines between capitalism and modernity, assigning the former as rigid and fixed, while the latter is characterized as variable and erratic. Leslie though argues that this distinction is erroneously rooted in discursive posturing as opposed to material conditions, suggesting that the difference between these metaphors is more dialectical than it is definitive: “The rhetorical battle between liquid and crystal forces, between solidity and melting, is underway in earnest as capitalism effloresces. The liquidity of exchange and the freezing of time and space produce concepts that in turn melt back into our world and fix the forms of future

²⁴⁹ Esther Leslie, “Liquid, Crystal, Vaporous: The Natural States of Capitalism,” in *After Capitalism: Horizons of Finance, Culture, and Citizenship*, ed. Kenan Ferguson and Patrice Petro (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 156.

actions. But hope insists on flow, on change and liquidity. Despair turns to the crystalline and frozen.”²⁵⁰ What is suggested here is how the dividing line between the solidity of the past and the liquidity of the present can just as easily be repositioned to show their value anew.

Here, Leslie provides language to the powerful and needed supplement *2046* offers to Bauman’s theory of liquid modernity for how it necessarily repositions the ethical and political value of these terms. Supplementing these thoughts with her own, Leslie importantly takes into account the solidity of contemporary life within the larger social state of liquidity in order to reveal the deeper contradictions of capital at hand:

Nowadays, it is often the liquidity that is emphasized, metaphorically, but this forgets the crystal moment, the freezing of social relations, the embedding of certain gestures and modes. Liquid modernity is the gleaming puddle on the surface, but liquid crystal capitalism is something more contradictory, producing images and forms for capital but also providing the material of its dreams, its oppositions, its breakdowns. It invades our dreams, forms our myths, our gestures and movements. The form itself necessitates a rallying between the poles of liquidity and crystallinity, not mobilizing one or the other but keeping their dynamic interplay at the fore. And dynamic interplay, their making and unmaking, is already part of their own rhythm. [...] Liquid crystal is like the market. It is free, and it is fixed.²⁵¹

For Leslie, the contemporary moment, that of modernity in the stage of late capitalism, is more complex than meets the eye, suggesting that the technology of LCD screens and the iPhone bring these contradictory descriptors into a more robust and therefore more accurate relationship. But while these material objects may prove to be instances of liquid crystals, the physical form

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 159.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 163.

that necessitates the metaphor of her essay, they do not map the conditions of living in a liquid crystal state, or account for the affective and therefore the singularly human experience of navigating it.

We find some final evidence of this point as Chow and Bai-ling part for the final time and the film shifts once more to “2046.” In this context, the train becomes an interesting onscreen object in more ways than one, as a site of constant motion and as transportation to a place where time stands still. It is interesting to note that to arrive at a place of personal stasis (the ability to find and stay in an memory of heightened sensation) necessitates the rapid movement out of the present landscape and into the private space of the individual. Here, the private cars of the train (transposed from the private rooms of the hotel) double-back as symbolic spaces for the psyche. But another more revealing detail follows when the train’s manager relates that the android companions designed to keep its passengers company have been a success, they have also been found to accumulate various defects and malfunctions over time. This culminates in the film’s most prolonged and engaging scene of Chow’s story inside the train cars. What’s interesting here is how Chow works through his real life struggles in the fictional “2046” world, revealing his own “affective exhaustion” transposed here in android attendants who occupy the train cars.

Here, the voice-over narration of the film’s opening picks back up and continues over a slow-motion montage of the android attendants accompanying the passengers, stating that glitches have occurred where emotional reactions are delayed, such as a tear that was meant for one moment does not surface until days later: “If you affect them [android attendants] and they want to cry, it won’t be until tomorrow when the tears start to flow.” In some respects we can retroactively read the principle of delay that manifests itself here in the previous moments we

have looked at, such as the high card game with the woman in black, or the exchange of money with Bai-ling. The conceit of these delayed reactions extends to the way in which Chow is essentially reacting to his failed affair from *In the Mood*, this being the ultimate delay as it spans years, and how it affects him as a human being. In the main narrative itself, all the key characters with the exception of Chow shed tears copiously, obviously time has hardened Chow. As such, *2046* suggests that the more time extends into the future, the more emotion is stilted, delayed, or surfaces as a glitch in the case of the android attendants. In Chow's case, Wong shows that emotion is never entirely obliterated, but what the delays point to is a personal and affective position that is distorted due to the overlapping and accelerating frames of reference available that span an increasingly larger swathe of time. This is what the acceleration of modernity produces: not a blurred, inconceivable rush but a plethora of affective references that overload, wear out, and exhaust the individual until they are left with no other choice but to disassociate altogether.

The weight of the above scene is certainly palpable, bringing together the aggregation of time Chow is experiencing where all of his present encounters become colored by his past, so that his affective state is short-circuited, running in circles, bringing him back time and again to a previous moment, yet all the while playing out in the present. The emotional exhaustion that is on display here, the delayed reactions, highlight how endurance becomes a question of managing the disappointments and failures of coupling, as much as any other material reality. And, while Chow's fictional stand-in certainly seems tired—of chasing love, of being disappointed, of being rejected, or even running away from what is an otherwise ideal situation—he also reveals a determination that belies his hardened exterior.

The juxtaposition between Chow's actual encounters with Bai-ling and his imagined reencounter with the women of his past that play out in the train cars bring several things together. First, Chow's disposition in the world has transformed from exuberant commitment to resigned independence. His unwillingness to engage emotionally with another person (e.g., Bai-ling) serves him well in controlling the possible contingent ruptures that may lead to further disappointment and trauma. Second, we see an equal yet opposite form of control play out in "2046," where Chow imagines a future where he can relive the sensations of the past through an automaton servant that can help replicate those memories. The androids play a further role in filling out this picture of the shift in societal norms from a culture of solid commitment to fluid disinvestment. While they ostensibly serve the desires of humans, Chow instills another piece of this puzzle in his story, suggesting that after so many journeys to "2046" fatigue begins to set in and the automatons emotional responses become stifled, delayed, and that their programmed control eventually breaks down, registering genuine human emotion. Here, we see the polar ends of this struggle—to make sense of a changing world, to pause the onrush of time, to manage the adjustments needed to adapt to society's values—come together. Manufacturing the cool, disaffected persona needed to survive the present only buries the past's vibrant life deeper into the recesses of the psyche. While the pain of the past remains very real, it is also the stabilizing force used to make sense of the present, so that all of Chow's experiences are understood retroactively in this light.

4.5 Endurance, Speed, Aesthetics

One of the fundamental issues this dissertation has explored concerns the various ways life continues to be altered by the machinations of capitalism. With *2046*, we have just looked at how one significant way society is changing relates to the abandonment of traditional social

ideals, such as reliability and security. Instead, the emerging market values of financial capitalism and political principles of neoliberalism suggest that the rigidity found in former ways of life are now no longer viable options today. The themes I am touching on here are of course not new, but what is unique is how films like *2046* are documenting these issues through their stylistic approach, exposing not only the severity of these new customs but also what is lost when they are adopted outright and on a global scale.

Over the course of this chapter, Chow's disposition has congealed the disparate and worrying issues I have raised more broadly in this dissertation, from the unsettling speeds of modern life to the transient nature of contemporary living. As we have seen, the disorienting nature of *2046* raises the question of endurance as a form of solidity, a ground by which we can make sense of the world, even if that world is rooted in the pain of the past. That is, in a world of incessant change, of unexpected happenings, of events that have no discernible or underlining meaning, the issue of consistency, security, and stability become real questions in the daily lives of the modern subject. Chow (or any other character for that matter) does not express these sentiments explicitly, but they are made available to us through the film's stylistic choices, which communicate the isolation found within contemporary life, and the appeal to memory as a source of reliability. This is why the film mystifies through its elliptical storytelling and collage of styles; because it alternatively reinforces the precarious quality of everyday life, so that what at first appears nonsensical for the viewer at the level of narrative finds meaning in the way it crystallizes Chow's disposition toward life vis-à-vis its style.

As such, Chow offers for our consideration the question as to where endurance is to be found in times of rapid change that foreclose the possibility of societal or cultural continuity. And, as we have seen, endurance, as a heuristic device, has helped reveal how contemporary

living privileges hyper-adaptation and -adoption as individual and social ideals, so that the priority of current social life has given precedence to lifestyles that can sustain rapid and contingent change, and that also privilege adaptability as value itself. *2046* brings these points together by replicating the incoherence of social change through its disparate use of style, forcing the viewer to adapt to a plethora of techniques and adopt a mode of spectatorship that can account for these abrupt aesthetic shifts. The issue of endurance, here, lies in how *2046*, despite its shifts in style, maintains consistency through the melancholic affects experienced by the viewer and characters alike. How affect can stabilize life that is under constant revision from new social formations, cultural appropriations, or market forces becomes an increasingly valuable inquiry into contemporary living for what it tells us about being human under the conditions of late capitalism.

It is because of these issues, the complications between solidity and liquidity, the seemingly irresolvable contradiction between the fixed nature of capitalism and the fluidity of modernity, that makes *2046* so fascinating as bookends to this dissertation. Wong's film does not privilege solidity or liquidity but in fact offers us an image of liquid crystals, a solidified substance that moves at all times, a captured affect that bounces in and out of society's whirring pace. Images that crystallize this conception of time are most prominently displayed in the juxtaposition between the onrush of modernity and Chow's inability to escape his past. Throughout the film we find Chow ruminating on the past, drawing parallels between his present situation and those that came before and much of his time on-screen finds him trying to make peace with these traumas. The way he does this is to abandon his youthful attempts to anchor himself to something or someone, which was clearly his strategy throughout *In the Mood for Love* as it related to the dissolution of his marriage. This change in demeanor, from the hopeful

disposition of *In the Mood For Love* to his weary stance in *2046*, suggests that his former attitude was inadequate to sufficiently manage the challenges contemporary life poses to him. And, in response, his newfound attitude of detachment provides the armor he needs to shield him from the forces that bear such blunt impacts.

In this regard, Chow serves as perhaps the quintessential subject of this dissertation, a vessel by which we can both see and feel the weight and weariness that a life of increasing speed necessitates. *2046* also importantly brings to our attention one of the most significant issues of the contemporary moment: in accumulating an increasing number of experiences we in fact end up with less substance, less meaning, ultimately feeling like more is never enough. And, if we consider this personal struggle to feel adequate amidst all the information and possibilities that abound in the contemporary world, we must also acknowledge that any desire to slow down and therefore combat the fevered, forward onrush of “more” will very quickly need to negotiate the socio-economic ethos of speed and temporal compression that defines the global economy. In this way, we have seen time and again how the tendencies of financial capitalism become entrenched as the cultural and social values of our time. In fact, with Donald Trump’s surprising victory in the 2016 presidential election we see this first hand: despite his ineptitude as a thinker, leader, and statesman, he is lauded by his constituents for enacting the policies he promised during the campaign and doing so with haste. In this new political climate, we can clearly see in his attempts to roll out massive changes to the economy, military, and immigration that the speed in which policies are brought to Congress are in fact more powerful and therefore more desirable than policies that are beneficial for those affected by them.

Recent events, then, seem to suggest that the fad of “slow cinema” films produced over the last decade may prove to have more legs than we originally thought, even as the art cinema

continues to move in varied and disparate stylistic directions. In fact, as we much as we discuss, lament, or even champion the simultaneity of multiple times and spatial orders we experience, slow cinema remains steadfast in its oppositional stance to hold this multitude of realities together long enough so they can be offered up for our contemplation what it might mean to be present in this present, to remain steadfast amidst the conditions of accelerated temporal passage and spatial contraction. As we have seen in the films discussed over the course of this dissertation, slowness importantly asks us to explore what it means to live in the present that no longer can sustain, or tolerate a single integrated dynamic of life. Because of this, the aesthetic that has developed for this cinema is vital for providing through its artificial construction a stable point of observation. Observation, in this sense, can mean many things: perhaps, witnessing the disintegration of a way of life, or wearing away of a subject's individuality, stamina, or desire. But in the end, what is gained through these often times unpleasant and challenging aesthetic encounters is access to the fact that our current pluralistic fascinations with an ever changing present where proximity and distance, immersion and critique, affect and cognition are entirely intertwined.

For the films we have discussed, we see this entwinement in how the aesthetic practices of the art cinema have asked us to scrutinize dominant forms of mobility and their associated values. We find in the bodies of Jim Jarmusch, the long takes of Pedro Costa, the *mise-en-scène* of Lars von Trier, and the imprisoned psyche of Wong Kar-wai's lonely urbanites images that question the presumed value of acceleration and tactics for how alternative modes can adapt to and interact with the contingencies of our surroundings. Expanding how we see acceleration, these filmmakers have helped us to explore the contemporary moment's spatial and temporal relationships, not to halt or change the future, but instead to reveal the multiplicity of our

changing social, cultural, and political landscapes. In this, art cinema confronts through its singular style how economic and technological principles related to accuracy and control are often times more myth than reality, revealing time and again how contingencies challenge the good life that ubiquitous computing and neoliberal deregulation promise. And, in this, the aesthetic we have studied urges viewers to hesitate and pause in order to behold time as an overlapping and indivisible dimension, asking us all the time to confront and allow the contingencies of life to enter our lives, even as the world around us seems to only privilege the measurable, divisible, and automatized.

For the films discussed in this dissertation, the particular aesthetic form has proven to matter as both a source of meaning making and outlet for exploring the viability of sensory perception and embodied experience under the stresses of financial capitalism and neoliberal governance. Put another way, the art cinema's challenge to dominant modes of movement and practice, mainly the acceleration of lived life, through alternative modes of experience has done real work in encouraging subjects to see the everyday forces of life through a magnifying glass directed at the illicit and harmful damage that has occurred but is often ignored and overlooked in light of economic and political persuasion. If alternative and subversive aesthetic forms still hold true to their modernist legacy in the contemporary moment, that is to combat the hegemonic by fracturing singular modes of understanding, then slowness must be seen, if not praised for its attempt to open the possibility of sensory encounters to the unintentional moments and outcomes of lived life. During an epoch that seems to simultaneously treat the endurance of the human body and spirit as a necessity and threat to the programmed outcomes and certainties of economic and cultural progress, perhaps we should consider anew the possibility to be found in extended moments of aesthetic rupture, boredom, or violence to perceive time and space, life and

living as heterogeneous modalities neither intended for or obligated to the seamless reconciliation of capital.

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