

# **The aesthetics of absence and duration in the post-trauma cinema of Lav Diaz**

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by me. No parts of it have been included in another thesis.



## Abstract

Aiming to make an intervention in both emerging Slow Cinema and classical Trauma Cinema scholarship, this thesis demonstrates the ways in which the post-trauma cinema of Filipino filmmaker Lav Diaz merges aesthetics of cinematic slowness with narratives of post-trauma in his films *Melancholia* (2008), *Death in the Land of Encantos* (2007) and *Florentina Hubaldo, CTE* (2012).

Diaz has been repeatedly considered as representative of what Jonathan Romney termed in 2004 “Slow Cinema”. The director uses cinematic slowness for an alternative approach to an on-screen representation of post-trauma. Contrary to popular trauma cinema, Diaz’s portrait of individual and collective trauma focuses not on the instantaneity but on the duration of trauma. In considering trauma as a condition and not as an event, Diaz challenges the standard aesthetical techniques used in contemporary Trauma Cinema, as highlighted by Janet Walker (2001, 2005), Susannah Radstone (2001), Roger Luckhurst (2008) and others. Diaz’s films focus instead on trauma’s latency period, the depletion of a survivor’s resources, and a character’s slow psychological breakdown.

Slow Cinema scholarship has so far focused largely on the films’ aesthetics and their alleged opposition to mainstream cinema. Little work has been done in connecting the films’ form to their content. Furthermore, Trauma Cinema scholarship, as trauma films themselves, has been based on the immediate and most radical signs of post-trauma, which are characterised by instantaneity; flashbacks, sudden fears of death and sensorial overstimulation. Following Lutz Koepnick’s argument that slowness offers “intriguing perspectives” (Koepnick, 2014: 191) on how trauma can be represented in art, this thesis seeks to consider the equally important aspects of trauma duration, trauma’s latency period and the slow development of characteristic symptoms.

With the present work, I expand on current notions of Trauma Cinema, which places emphasis on speed and the unpredictability of intrusive memories. Furthermore, I aim to broaden the area of Slow Cinema studies, which has so far been largely focused on the films’ respective aesthetics, by bridging form and content of the films under investigation. Rather than seeing Diaz’s slow films in isolation as a phenomenon of Slow Cinema, I seek to connect them to the existing scholarship of Trauma Cinema studies, thereby opening up a reading of his films.

## Acknowledgments

Although writing a thesis can be the loneliest of experiences, I wasn't as lonely as I sometimes thought I was. This thesis is the product of help, of support, and of encouragement by wonderful people.

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I want to thank John Izod for his referring me to the now famous *Sight & Sound* article on Slow Cinema, which set everything in motion back in 2010. I'll be forever in his debt. I'm also grateful for his valuable critiques on my work. Extra credit goes to him for not suggesting the washing, the ironing, the car cleaning, and the baking when I didn't feel like working on my thesis.

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I'm also eternally grateful for a scholarship I was awarded from the School of Arts and Humanities, University of Stirling, and I thank all those members of staff who have (secretively) put my name forward for it!

I dedicate this thesis to my husband Jérémy Oulhen, who, slowly and patiently, walked a long way with me.

## **Notes on translations**

Unless otherwise stated, translations of French and German material into English are my own. Where possible, I have included the material in its original language in footnotes. German and French citations follow the languages' respective punctuation systems. Translations of dialogue extracts have been taken from the DVDs Lav Diaz supplied me with.

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## 1. Introduction - A haunting absence

Something of the past always remains, if only  
as a haunting presence or symptomatic  
revenant. (LaCapra, 2001: 49)

### A journey into the past

In an interview given at the Locarno Film Festival (Switzerland), where his film *From What Is Before/Mula sa kung ano ang noon* (2014) won the Pardo D'Oro for the Best Feature Film, filmmaker Lav Diaz said: "The people who come [to see my films] are the followers and the curious ... The curious will be converted or they will hate you more, depending on how they will see the work, depending on the condition they are in when they enter the film" (Diaz, 2014a). When the bi-annual AV Festival with its tagline "As Slow As Possible" took place in March 2012, I was far from a follower of Diaz's work. Despite my growing interest in so-called 'slow films' from all over the world, I had not heard his name before. Nor had I even the smallest notion of Philippine cinema more generally. In his equation I was one of the curious, who could not quite believe that an eight-hour film with the title *Melancholia* (2008), which promised post-film viewing depression, could be "worth my time", could be - to be more exact - interesting enough to keep me awake. I did not take it seriously - until the film started, that is.

In the film's opening scene, a young woman tends to her clothes in a claustrophobic room (Fig. 1). The frame is tight, and the room's walls are overbearing. The camera is static, and while we see the woman at times from the side or from behind, an unidentifiable hammering in the background disturbs the soundscape. It reminded me of a similarly continuous and suspenseful ticking in Béla Tarr's *The Man from London/A londoni férfi* (2007). I am not even sure

whether or not I know to this date where the ticking came from. Perhaps it originated from a large clock on a wall, but I cannot be certain. This is precisely what directors such as Tarr and Diaz give rise to in their films; by exposing the viewer to sounds from unknown sources they generate uncertainty, complementing the films' often non-linear narratives and transmitting to the viewer the characters' feelings of anxiety in the face of oppression by an external, often unseen force.

After having watched the woman folding her clothes for three minutes, a cut brings us onto a long narrow balcony. The camera is not positioned directly on the balcony, though. Instead it is in another room, and framed itself by a door frame. After staring for a little while into the nothingness of the empty balcony, a woman (the same woman as before?) appears on the balcony. She wears high heels, a tight leather mini skirt and an even tighter leather top. Is she a sex worker perhaps? From the long distance to the camera it is not entirely clear. The camera is not close enough to make out details. She smokes, repeatedly dials a number on her phone, and then disappears indoors again. The camera remains on the balcony, focused on nothing in particular. By remaining with a frame void of action or even characters, Diaz creates one of those now famous *temps morts*, or dead time, Michelangelo Antonioni had already used and infuriated his audience with in the 1960s, causing "boredom, frustration, and irritation" (Mroz, 2012: 49). Halting narrative progression, Antonioni's *temps morts* slowed down temporality and stood in contrast to contemporary film at the time, when the prime aim in film was narrative progression and character development. As we will see, Diaz pursues a similar aim, but he takes the duration of dead time to the extreme with the purpose of supporting his films' narratives of terror and post-trauma.





**Figure 1 A woman tends to her clothes.**

*Melancholia* - Lav Diaz (2008)

For some reason, I was hooked by this succession of two scenes. Nothing that would be deemed striking or particularly memorable took place on screen. While I was familiar with the ‘nothingness’ Tarr portrayed in his films, Diaz’s films seemed to be an entirely different form of slow film that I had come across until then. His films place emphasis on the mundanity of life in the Philippines; waiting, walking, drinking coffee, more waiting. I had been familiar too with Tsai Ming-liang’s focus on the most banal events of everyday life, a common trope being his long-takes of characters peeing, but Diaz showed a different way of life; a life of struggle in the aftermath of traumatic events. Diaz’s films thus stress not only the mundanity of rural life, they connect this mundanity to the wider subject of Philippine history.

In the subsequent eight hours of *Melancholia*, I found myself being shifted between everyday life and highly traumatic situations, between the normal and the abnormal, between a sense of calm and severe pain and anguish. Going from one extreme to another, those eight hours' running time took me to the dark side of the Philippines; disappearances, extra-judicial killings, and endless slow suffering. I felt empty after the film, but I also felt as though the director had taken me on a unique journey through his country and its history. The next day, I briefly met Diaz and told him how overwhelmed I had been by his work. That brief chat, and another screening of his films at the AV Festival – *Century of Birthing/Siglo ng pagluluwal* (2011) – caught my interest in Diaz's filmmaking and his country's history to such an extent that I would not let it go anymore for a long time to come. I was converted, and left the circle of the curious. I am now one of Diaz's followers but a curious follower nonetheless.

Both *Melancholia* and *Century of Birthing* struck a chord with me. Diaz seemed to stress feelings of absence and loss in his films. His approach to the representation of post-trauma without showing violence or atrocity on screen created an uncanny feeling in me throughout the viewing process. His focus on history and the portrayal of oppressed and suffering characters in relation to an overwhelming external, yet unseen power, reminded me of an experience I had when I was a teenager.

When I was around 14 or 15 years of age, my school organised a day trip to a local concentration camp. It was a compulsory trip as part of our learning about World War II, and, on top of that, it was an expected duty for us Germans. We went to Oranienburg, a city approximately forty minutes away from my hometown. It is a city which has still not reached peace since the end of the war, with unexploded

bombs and rockets still being found and in need of diffusal on an almost weekly basis. The concentration camp Sachsenhausen is situated in the immediate surroundings of Oranienburg. It was one of the smaller camps, and in contrast to Treblinka, for instance, it was not a designated extermination camp. In other words, it was not purposely built for the Final Solution that had been pursued by the Nazis since 1942. Instead of becoming victims of systematic genocide, prisoners in Sachsenhausen were likely to die of inhumane treatment over long periods of time (Stiftung Brandenburg, no date).

We were given a guided tour through the camp, which has been rebuilt into a museum and which now seeks to tell the stories of the deceased. That day left a lasting impression on me. It generated an uncanny feeling, but it was not only because of my presence at a place where atrocities had been committed on a daily basis. What struck me most was what was *not* there. The museum as it is today is a skeleton of the former camp. While some buildings and sites of death have been preserved, Sachsenhausen is, compared to other museums, not as direct in its representation of atrocities. It was certainly a landscape of death, though not of death seen. Instead, it was a landscape of death sensed. Of the over 200,000 prisoners, of which most died of starvation, forced labour or disease, only their ghosts remained.

With the liberation of the concentration camps, especially Auschwitz, the world witnessed horrific footage of the conditions in the camps. The photographs and short videos showed images of starved men, women and children - walking skeletons, degraded and seemingly reduced to mere animal status. While these images were important at the time, they could merely present an outsider's view of what life in the camps must have been like. I only understood much later that

the absence of shocking footage and the presence of myself in Sachsenhausen, a place haunted by history, conveyed not only an image but a sensation of trauma.

Seven years after that class trip, a chain of traumatic events triggered an abnormal stress reaction inside my brain and I was subsequently diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder in summer 2010. The conception of the term PTSD came as a result of the Vietnam War, and its veterans rallying for the public recognition of their shell shock symptoms. In 1980, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) defined PTSD as a clinical symptom in response to the veterans' rally and it has henceforth been in persistent use, especially as a legacy of America's War on Terror after 9/11 (Elm, Köhne and Kabalek, 2014: 7). Similar to the representation of life in concentration camps through graphic images, writing on PTSD has so far tended to focus on what is visible to an outsider; a high degree of anxiety in the victim-survivor, aggression, social withdrawal, and other debilitating factors (Yehuda, 2002). Once I was able to live with PTSD, I began to see a widely understudied, yet striking point of post-trauma which resonated with my experience during my viewing of Diaz's films and, curiously, my visit of Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

Post-trauma is preceded by loss. Carol A Kidron names "physical and cultural genocide, slavery, forced migration, urban and domestic violence, natural disasters and terror attacks" as potential triggers for post-traumatic stress disorder (Kidron, 2003: 514). Loss – of life, of agency, of safety – is inherent in all of these triggers and leaves the victim-survivors with a sensation of absence. Dominick La Capra (2001) sees clear differences between loss and absence, and insists that the two cannot be used interchangeably. While I partly agree with LaCapra's argument, my personal experience showed that post-trauma is

preceded by loss, and is from then on governed by absence. Dirk de Bruyn (2014) correctly argues that “trauma is largely defined by what is *not known or what is not said*” (De Bruyn, 2014: 160-161, emphasis added). Absence and loss, therefore, are unmistakably linked to one another and together they create the complex condition that is called post-trauma.<sup>1</sup> An example is necessary at this point.

Imagined situations, which cause a high degree of uncertainty, accompany survivors and victims of PTSD through their daily life (National Institute of Mental Health, no date). One case in point is an excessive fear of death. Especially in the initial period after the traumatic event, survivors often expect a lethal blow from nothingness, as any situation, but especially those which resemble the initial traumatic event, is considered to be life threatening. Rachel Yehuda points out that “experiencing ... a traumatic event challenges a person’s sense of safety”, which leads to hypervigilance in the survivor (Yehuda, 2002: 110). Thus, post-trauma indoctrinates a degree of paranoia in survivors and victims, therefore forcing them to live with a persistent sensation of death, often without immediate or overt death threats being present. In this way, post-trauma is governed by a *perceived* danger, or *sensed* threats, even though the original traumatic event has long been in the past (National Institute of Mental Health, no date). Anne Rutherford describes it aptly: “Like the insect attuned to a differently-marked perceptual world, the trauma survivor picks up resonances imperceptible to the unaffected, their residue reverberating through the fractures in the psychic shield”

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis, I consider trauma as an event and post-trauma as a condition that may or may not follow a traumatic event, depending on the individual. An event becomes only traumatic for an individual if s/he reacts to it psychologically, mainly with post-traumatic stress disorder, regardless of whether this condition turns into a chronic, long-term mental illness or whether it accompanies the victim-survivor for a short period of time. At times, this opposes other scholars’ approach. Where this is the case, I have pointed to it by bracketing the term trauma in single quotation marks. Equally, I use the expression (post-)trauma when speaking about both event and condition.

(Rutherford, 2013: 89). The relation between post-trauma, absence, power and time would shape up for me when I began to study Diaz's films, first as part of a wider interest in Slow Cinema, then as a more specific case study of the representation of post-trauma in film. Diaz's films represent post-trauma as what Ulrich Baer, studying the representation of 'trauma' in photography, describes as "a disorder of memory and time" (Baer, 2002: 9), and this thesis seeks to illuminate this disorder throughout the following chapters.

The films under investigation in this thesis stand out in the way they reject images of the traumatic event, and focus instead on the event's effects on human psychology. They explore the condition that is called post-traumatic stress disorder. This absence of imagery is the result of what Gil Z. Hochberg (2015) calls "failed witnessing": "The stimulus is too overwhelming to experience in real time, and the witnessed traumatic event leads to a momentary shutdown of all sensory organs, most notably the eyes" (Hochberg, 2015: 140). Thus, the individual suffers from virtual blindness with regards to the traumatic event. This blindness – the absence of imagery of traumatic events – is a defining characteristic of Diaz's films, and I will return to the subject of absence time and again in the following pages.

As will become apparent throughout the discussion that follows, Diaz focuses on individual points of crises in the aftermath of traumatic events, while at the same time telling the story of his country. In her study of time in Chinese independent cinema, Jean Ma identifies a characteristic that can be detected in Diaz's films alike, namely a strong "fixation on absence, evanescence, and the ghost of history" (Ma, 2010: 12). His films, especially those in focus in this thesis, are what Annette Kuhn calls "memory texts", in which "time rarely comes across as continuous or sequential" (Kuhn, 2010: 299). Rather, the films contain fragmented

episodes that develop in a non-linear, disorderly fashion and therefore use the representation of time as a reinforcement of the nature of memory.

### **Lav Diaz's rubber hour(s)**

Before I go into more details about Diaz's representation of post-trauma, however, I would like to use this introductory chapter in part to explore Diaz's background, which will supply the reader with sufficient information for a thorough comprehension of his approach to filmmaking.

Diaz was born on 30 December 1958 in what is today Datu Paglas on the island of Mindanao, Philippines. The region has had a long history of violent clashes between Christians and Muslims; an aspect that has been taken up by Filipina filmmaker Adjani Arumpac in her personal documentary *War is a Tender Thing* (2012), which explores these clashes metaphorically through a study of her parents' divorce; her father a Muslim, her mother a Christian.

With their children still young, Diaz's parents had moved from the urban centre of Manila to Mindanao in order to teach the poor. They came into direct contact with the aforementioned clashes. Despite the risks the move posed, his parents' decision to leave the capital is still having a profound influence on Diaz's filmmaking, which is in some ways an extension of his parents' approach to teaching and living (Diaz, 2014a). For him, film is a means to "investigate, examine, confront and challenge the Pinoy [Filipino] psyche" (Guarneri, 2010). Diaz went regularly to the movies with his father in town. It is of little surprise, then, that Diaz dedicated his Locarno Film Festival award to his father: "He brought me cinema, he's a cinema addict, and he started this passion in me" (Blaney, 2014). Ultimately, however, it was the experience of seeing Lino Brocka's *Manila, in the*

*claws of the light/Maynila, sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (1975) which triggered his desire to become a filmmaker (Vienna International Film Festival, 2009).

Diaz worked for a few years for the Filipino film studio *Regal*, under whose umbrella he produced films such as *Serafin Gironimo* (1998) and *Hesus, The Revolutionary/Hesus Rebolusyonaryo* (2002). This period of Diaz's (commercial) filmmaking is distinctly different from his later arthouse films. This new period appeared to have started with the production of *West Side Avenue/Batang West Side* in 2001. Since he left the studio system with its clear hierarchical structure behind in the early 2000s, Diaz has worked closely with his cast and crew in making his films. Rather than being the sole author of his films, the director's work is the product of extensive conversations and discussions on set with his long-standing collaborators. While he writes scene after scene on his own, usually the night before the shoot takes place, his script is open to the interpretation of his actors and actresses who bring in their own ideas and experiences once the camera is running, which have an effect on the continuation of the script. In addition, already filmed scenes are then discussed collectively. Diaz considers "everyone" an author of his films, thereby pointing to the complex issue of authorship in the context of his filmmaking (Diaz, 2015b). This approach is linked to the detachment of the author of the script from the centre of a cinematic work, which started in 1960s structuralism and was reinforced even further in 1970s with post-structuralism taking into account ideologies, contexts, and even the spectator in the creation of meaning (Hayward, 2000: 23-26).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Despite Diaz's collective approach to filmmaking, I consider him an auteur in my work, that means as the person who is the sole creator of meaning. The reason for this is the sheer complexity a non-auteurist approach would have involved, given the prescribed maximum word count of this study. Even though I am aware that I marginalise the very essence of his filmmaking, namely its collaborative nature, I chose to narrow down the focus to only one agent in the filmmaking process,



Today, Diaz is primarily known for his films' extensive lengths, their distinct visual aesthetics and the two-fold film themes, which employ depictions of a suffering individual as a metaphor for wider social ills, both in the Philippines and in the world. Bernhard Hetzenauer (2013) makes a valid point about the aesthetics of Hungarian director Miklos Jancsó, who influenced the work of Béla Tarr, but whose aesthetics can also be detected in Diaz's work. Especially in relation to Diaz's representation of post-trauma and terror, these aesthetics are decisive. Quoting a German anthology of Hungarian film, Hetzenauer notes that in Jancsó's famous long-take films, "scene after scene, a network is created around places and people, which [is] so impenetrable and suffocating like the terroristic violence depicted in his films" (Hetzenauer, 2013: 8).<sup>3</sup> Duration is key in Jancsó's films and is a signifier of the suffocating violence the characters are confronted with. We can infer a parallel here between Jancsó and Diaz, though it is vital to note that both directors also differ in their approaches to the representation of terroristic violence throughout their countries' history. Jancsó's *The Red and The White/Csillagosok, katonák* (1967), for instance, stands in stark contrast to the depiction of violence in Diaz's films, emphasising on-screen violence on top of long duration in single takes throughout the film's ninety minutes running time. The film highlights the brutality of clashes between Tsarists and Communists during the Russian Revolution through the depiction of violent fights, the sounds and images of guns, and performed death. Diaz, on the other hand, tends to position these elements off screen. His choice of rejecting graphic images of atrocities is the

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the director, and the relationship between his own traumatic experiences and his films in order to secure the best possible reading of Diaz's representation of post-trauma.

<sup>3</sup> „Jancsós Einstellungen spannen, Szene für Szene, ein Netz über Schauplatz und Menschen, das so undurchdringlich und erstickend [...] [war] wie die terroristische Gewalt, von der der Regisseur in seinen Filmen berichtete.“

result of his development as filmmaker. In contrast to his latest films, he used archival footage in order to position the narrative of his eleven-hour film *Evolution of a Filipino Family* (2004) historically, for instance. In later films, Diaz has done away with archival images. While *Evolution* contains graphic material in parts, which at the time underlined Diaz's urgency of showing life and death under Martial Law, his use of graphic archival images has completely disappeared from his recent works. This shows that Diaz has not always preferred absence to presence. Rather, he has developed his vision of cinema and its representation of violence over several years of filmmaking.

I would like to go into a bit more detail here about the visual characteristics of Diaz's films in order to position the films under analysis appropriately. After the release of his five-hour film *Batang West Side* in 2001, the longest Filipino film at the time (Vera, 2014), Diaz's films have become more and more recognisable due to their distinct characteristics. Apart from *Batang West Side* and his more commercial *Hesus, The Revolutionary* (2002), all of Diaz's later films are marked by a grayscale or stark black-and-white aesthetic, which is reminiscent of the films of Béla Tarr. Asked about his affinity for monochrome textures, Diaz revealed that he considered black-and-white as a more supportive aesthetic in narratives of struggle, poverty, history and (post-) trauma (Diaz, 2014a). On top of monochrome textures, Diaz tends to rely on a static camera and long shots, which capture vast and open natural spaces.

Regardless of these varied characteristics, however, his films are most known for and talked about because of their exceptional length, which the director uses as an expression of a pre-Hispanic Malay past when time was considered as spatial. "Space is still the dominant philosophy [today], not time", he says in an

interview with Anna Tatarska, “The concept of time was imposed by the West, the Spanish” (Tatarska, 2013). The Malay philosophy, on the other hand, was “founded on the patterns of nature; the meaning of existence is appropriated by nature’s way” (Picard, 2012). With a running time of eleven hours, his ten-year project *Evolution of a Filipino Family* (2004) stands out as the most monumental work in the director’s career. Many of his films contain static long takes of up to twenty minutes, as can be seen in *Death in the Land of Encantos* (2007). But if the narrative demands it, Diaz stretches the duration of his long takes even more to an extreme. In *Heremias Book I* (2005), Diaz includes a fifty minute long take, shot at night, with barely perceptible action in the background. The action is instead delivered through dialogue, and the viewer is challenged by excessively loud music. The usually static camera in his films creates open frames, which the characters enter and exit freely. Diaz only cuts when an event has come to an end. In his article “(On) Time: Lav’s (R)Evolution” (2007), Paolo Bertolin proposes that Diaz represents “jam karet”, or “rubber hour” in his films. Jam karet is a specific perception and practice of time in the Malay peninsula and, Bertolin argues, characterises Diaz’s films in that the filmmaker demonstrates “the possibility and desirability of stretching time” based on “pre-modern, rural space-temporal dimension” (Bertolin, 2007).

As will be noted in my analysis of *Florentina Hubaldo*, CTE in Chapter 6, Diaz has repeatedly aimed to create films that have a potential effect on the viewer. Jam karet and the films’ long duration are part of the director’s strategy to make the viewer struggle not only with the films, but also with him- or herself. In a recent interview, he notes “You have to struggle yourself. You want to be part of it [the film]? Then struggle. The dynamic is you have to interact with it physically

and mentally” (Diaz, 2015a). Films of up to eleven hours long require physical stamina of the viewer, draining his/her energy in the process. In addition, Diaz’s films, especially those under investigation in this thesis, contain a lot of scenes which the director likens to gaps in classical Russian literature (Daz, 2015a). These scenes often appear unrelated to the overarching narrative of a film. Yet, even though they become decisive in the end, they initially frustrate the viewers’ expectation of a succinct and coherent linear narrative. These two elements – long duration in order to effect a physical struggle and scenes of waiting or “nothing happening” in order to effect a mental struggle – form the backbone of Diaz’s attempt to involve the viewer in the process of suffering his characters endure in the films’ narratives and his crew as well as he endures during the shooting.<sup>4</sup>

If the aspect of duration and time in Diaz’s cinema appears almost self-explanatory given his films’ extensive running times, the thesis title’s reference to absence in relation to the word ‘representation’ may at first appear odd to the reader. It does, however, stem from all of the above observations. The absence I refer to throughout my thesis has several connotations and is not only related to absence as a result of trauma, even though this will be my main focus. Visually, Diaz’s aesthetics of absence manifests itself in his preference of dialogue and sound over gore violent imagery in his depiction of post-trauma. Visual imagery of traumatic events is largely absent. Apart from this, there is the aspect of absolute silence – the absence of sound – which characterises, for instance, his film *Florentina Hubaldo*. Considering the narrative of Diaz’s *Melancholia*, analysed in Chapter 4, absence stands for the desaparecidos, or the disappeared; people who

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<sup>4</sup> Diaz considers both the shooting and the viewing of his films as physical. For a full account of his view on the role of the viewer, please see further Diaz, 2015a.

are kidnapped by military or governmental forces, taken to secret locations and who are usually never seen again. In *Encantos*, on the other hand, absence is a marker for the landscape of death, and the remnants typhoon Reming left behind. Absence (as well as duration, as indicated in the title of my thesis) is present in all of Diaz's films. But, as I hope will become clear in the following pages, 'absence' draws wider circles; there is an absence of writing not only on Lav Diaz but also a lack of in-depth studies of Philippine cinema and the country's traumatic history.

Even though *Norte, The End of History* helped Diaz to become more popular in his own country after its screening at the Cannes festival in May 2013, his films have largely remained unobtainable in the Philippines. Winning the Golden Leopard at the Locarno Film Festival in 2014 for *From What Is Before*, Diaz left an even larger footprint not only internationally, but also in his native country. Even though a major retrospective in the Philippines has still not been organised, the time seems more than ripe for a more thorough study of his films and the context they are bedded in.

### **The traumatic history of the Philippines**

Across Diaz's oeuvre it is apparent that he returns to similar themes in each film, often working on the traumatic history of his country and the on-going wounds that colonialism and dictatorship left on individuals and on Philippine society as a whole. Yet the films under investigation do not explicitly depict historical events. Raya Morag suggests that the lack of direct historical references may generate a richer representation of 'trauma' (Morag, 2009: 25), and her argument hints at a possible reason for Diaz's approach of situating atrocity off-screen; a point I will return to time and again throughout the following chapters. Yet, the absence of

imagery of the traumatic events, as highlighted above, is also a signifier for the victim-survivor's virtual blindness at the time the traumatic event occurred (Hochberg, 2015: 140). Diaz positions characters and viewers in the aftermath of traumatic events, or even uses metaphorical treatments in order to allude to atrocities which have occurred, as we will see in Chapter 6 in my analysis of *Florentina Hubaldo, CTE* (2012). This film, in particular, can be difficult to comprehend with little or no knowledge of the historical background Diaz uses for his films. It is thus my intention here to give a brief overview of historical events Diaz refers to in his cinema. Although the scope of my work does not allow for a coherent analysis of Philippine history and its effects on society, which would be adequate in relation to Diaz's oeuvre, I want to point at least to a few significant events here that have shaped the Filipino consciousness and, by extension, Diaz's filmmaking.

The Philippines had been subject to colonising authorities from the West for four centuries. Diaz refers to himself less as a Filipino but as a Malay, rejecting the term 'Filipino' (Diaz, 2014b). Now a legacy of Spanish colonisation, the Philippines received their name in honour of King Filipe of Spain at the beginning of Spanish colonisation. The Empire's colonisers, amongst them the well-known Ferdinand Magellan, arrived at the more than 7.000 islands in 1521. It was with the expedition by Miguel Lopez de Legazpi in 1565 that the colonisation of the country began in earnest:

Christianity had been introduced to replace the old-time paganism, a centralized government had been established over the ruins of the ancient barangay-kingdoms, new cities and towns had been built, and Spanish civilization was propagated. (Zaide, 1949: 158, cf. Constantino, 1975)

Religion played a major role in the expansion of the Spanish Empire. “To bring the light of Christianity to the natives,” writes Renato Constantino, “was to be the primary justification for the Spanish presence in the islands” (Constantino, 1975: 65). On top of these changes, tributes had to be paid. If Filipinos were unable to pay the demanded tribute during regular collections, the colonisers would respond by plundering, torture, or even killing (Zaide, 1949: 172). Throughout the centuries that followed the initial colonisation, the Western occupation found its way into the basics of Filipino life. Zaide writes that “the Filipino diet and dress were Europeanized”, and that people were given Hispanic surnames, replacing the old Malayan names (Zaide, 1956: 80). While Spain introduced several European (Christian) values to the Philippines, it simultaneously denied the native populations Western rights as fundamental as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, or even freedom of religion (Zaide, 1956: 119). As a result, the dissatisfaction in the population had grown and led to the Philippine Revolution in 1898 when Filipinos were striving for independence. Independence was declared in 1899, but the First Philippine Republic lasted only a short time as American forces invaded and occupied the country, and henceforth became the second colonising power from the West to occupy the Philippines (Zaide, 1956: 225). In effect, the Spanish-American War, which led to America’s occupation of the Philippines, ended in the Spanish Empire selling the islands to the new coloniser for \$20 million (Del Mundo, 1998: 48). Tofighian writes, “the change of occupational power led to many changes in culture and traditions, from a conservative catholic view to a more liberal American perspective. Furthermore, the norms, values and authorities (formal and informal) were scrutinised and questioned” (Tofighian, 2006: 30). In other words, with the arrival of American

troops Spanish culture was replaced with American culture; the English language was introduced, American values and ideas of democracy were taught at school, and the dollar became currency.

Considering the Philippines as a strategic geographical point in Southeast Asia, Japanese forces invaded Manila after the attacks on Pearl Harbor in 1942, and occupied the Philippines as part of their global war against the US. Banning the American currency and the Filipino flag as well as prohibiting the local population from singing the national anthem, the Japanese conquerors forced their culture onto the native population (Zaide, 1956: 342). It was only in July 1945 that the Philippines were liberated, though the country was again under American rule for a short time after that.

David Lloyd remarks that “every element of the colonized culture that cannot be translated and assimilated to the development of colonial capitalist modernity must either be erased or encoded as a symptom of underdevelopment” (Lloyd, 2000: 219). Philippine culture as well as the culture the locals had adopted from their previous colonisers was eradicated. Nick Deocampo describes this period as a “string of colonization [that] has created layers of cultural formation and expression ... each layer of cultural expression was challenged with the entry of other cultural influences” (Deocampo in Tofighian, 2008: 82). It is this colonial development that Diaz has described as a “repeated bashing of the head against a wall” (Diaz, 2012b), an accumulation of traumatic stressors, in relation to his six-hour film *Florentina Hubaldo* which will be examined in Chapter 6.

This brief overview of the colonial history of the country shows the continuous shifts in external powers which aimed to erase everything that had existed before Magellan set foot onto the islands in 1521. While Western powers



exercised force so as to demonstrate their power in what was for them a strategically important part of the world, and also waged war over the country against each other, natives struggled to maintain their Malay culture. When America handed over control of the country to the local population in 1946, it was hoped that the people could finally re-create their country, their identity, and their own customs and values.

Yet this hope was short-lived as President Ferdinand Marcos declared Martial Law on 21 September 1972 and effectively turned the country into a dictatorship. Marcos had been in power for seven years at the time and Martial Law was the beginning of what he called “constitutional authoritarianism” (Rosenberg, 1979: 13). Potential opponents – political opponents, social activists and journalists - were arrested immediately after the declaration of Martial Law. In his study of the Philippines under Martial Law, Albert F. Celozza (1997) identifies “terrorist tactics” that have been employed throughout Marcos’s authoritarian rule. He writes, “to discourage, weaken, and punish his opponents, Marcos used the armed forces and paramilitary groups who arrested and imprisoned more than 60,000 citizens and harassed or liquidated alleged subversives” (Celozza, 1997: 1).<sup>5</sup> When scores of journalists, activists and lawyers were arrested, the country became a prison in itself. According to Celozza, in the initial phase of Martial Law “Filipinos were prohibited from traveling outside the country. The entire country was sealed off from the outside world” (Celozza, 1997: 40). In the early 1980s, disappearances and extra-judicial killings became more prominent (Celozza, 1997: 81); a form of terror that persists in the country even today (Ingawanij et al 2009).

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<sup>5</sup> The numbers are contested. Amnesty International refers to official estimates of 30,000 arrests, while at the same time pointing to an interview with Ferdinand Marcos in which he claimed that approximately 50,000 arrests had been made (cf. Amnesty International, 1976).

A report from Amnesty International, released four years after the proclamation of Martial Law, speaks of “systematic and severe torture, and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment during the interrogation process” in ‘safe houses’, and of “indefinite detention, in many cases for several years, without being informed of the charges and without trial of the issues” (Amnesty International, 1976: 53).

In her harrowing account of life under Martial Law, Vicky Pinpin-Feinstein (2013) describes widespread arrests she witnessed as a teenager. She herself was just fifteen when she was arrested and thrown into a detention centre without knowing the reason for her incarceration. She writes, “in the first days, weeks, and months of martial law, thousands were sent to prison, shuffled from one military camp to another, slammed in detention centers, and tortured in safe houses” (Pinpin-Feinstein, 2013: 82). She further refers to disappearances, to extra-judicial killings, to repressions, and to “tortured and mutilated bodies ... dumped on roadsides for public display” (Pinpin-Feinstein, 2013: 82). She concludes, with reference to almost four centuries of colonialism prior to this dictatorship, “when Marcos unleashed his repressive tactics on a people who had already been subjugated, vanquished, and tyrannized by former colonial rulers, the result was a population that was brought to its knees” (Pinpin-Feinstein, 2013: 109).

Agnes Heller poignantly argues that “trauma ... is like a gunshot which hits the psyche with deadly force. As a result the traumatic wound never heals. One can dress the wound. Yet even if the wound is properly dressed, the scar will never disappear” (Heller, 2007: 105). Even though colonialism has come to an end, and Marcos’s dictatorship has since been replaced by a democratic leadership, the scars of past traumatic events extend through generations. Oppression, extra-judicial killings, and arbitrary arrests of journalists, activists and critics are still

commonplace in the country. Recent reports by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International repeatedly point to the on-going problem of torture and disappearances (Human Rights Watch, 2007, 2011; Shetty, 2014). Thus, rather than dealing exclusively with historical events or contemporary history, Diaz's films repeatedly shift between past and present. While referring to the maltreatment of the people throughout history at the hands of colonisers and dictators, his films also involve an investigation and evaluation of the present. In *Melancholia*, for instance, he uses recent incidents of disappearing activists as a background for a wider study of the tradition of taking to the hills and organising resistance fights. *Florentina Hubaldo, CTE*, on the other hand, is a metaphor of 'colonial rape' and comprises a succession of traumatic events. At the same time it is a portrayal of the effects of poverty in a country where forty per cent of the population live on less than \$2 a week (Aldaba, 2009), and where rice farmers prostitute their daughters in order to survive (Diaz, 2014a).

As pointed out earlier, Pinpin-Feinstein argues that Marcos' ruling, after centuries of colonialism, brought the country to its knees. In their study on the complex relationship of past and present, Diaz's films demonstrate that the Philippines have not yet moved forward, as past maltreatment of the population has seeped into contemporary society. Furthermore, his persistent return to the theme of oppression and lawless forces acted out on film characters appears as compulsive repetition. Diaz uses his filmmaking as a form of therapy for himself, but also for his people, to rid himself of the traumatic events he himself endured through the infliction of terror. Under Marcos' Martial Law, Diaz witnessed atrocities committed against men, women, and children. He, too, was beaten by the military. In his own words:

I've seen people breaking down, begging for their lives, losing their minds. I've experienced being hit with an armalite rifle's butt and then hitting the ground, gasping for air. Our barrio was attacked and bombed by fighter planes and decimated bodies were flying all over. I saw Muslim bodies, young and old, pregnant women and babies, being piled up near a highway after a massacre, their house turned to ashes in the background. I saw tortured and burned bodies of Christians after a massacre, their houses still burning in the background. (Tioseco, 2006)

Similar to his protagonists, Diaz appears to be caught in a cyclical loop, repeatedly returning to the same aspects of history which he has experienced himself and which have shaped him and his filmmaking. Just like a traumatic event, "terror destroys the flow of time" (Sofsky, 1997: 78). Terror, and by extension post-trauma, locks a victim-survivor into a continuous past, a cyclical recurrence, as Wolfgang Sofsky describes it. For Raya Morag (2009) the repeated return to similar themes of a traumatic history signifies the repetitiveness of 'trauma' which is re-enacted on screen. She contends, "post-traumatic films that relate to the same historical-traumatic event create a body of work in which each additional film is a repetition (additional re-enactment)" (Morag, 2009: 24). Diaz translates his personal experiences of the brutal times under Marcos into his films. Asked whether filmmaking constitutes a form of therapy for him, he replied:

For one [sic], it's a cleansing process, personally. And ... the cleansing process adjusts to my culture, to my people. We need to confront all these things, all the traumas, all these unexamined parts of our history, of our struggle, so that [we] can move forward. It's a kind of cure. ... I always want to tell stories about these struggles. Personally, I want to cure myself of the trauma of my people. (Diaz, 2014a)

Diaz is thus an artist who follows the paradigm of Sonya Andermahr and Silvia Pellicer-Órtin who argue that "art in its different manifestations has frequently been used as a healing device by writers, minorities and societies in general, either because of the things that are explicitly *said* or because of the way in which it

draws attention to what has been *silenced*" (Andermahr and Pellicer-Órtin, 2013: 2, emphasis original). Both aspects are prominent in Diaz's work, whose intention is the telling of a silenced history that has long been neglected in official teaching in the Philippines, both at school and university level (Pierson, 2009).

### **Diaz's concentrationary universe**

What struck me during my research on Diaz's films was the repeated shift between his on-screen representation of post-trauma and my memories of the concentration camps. I unconsciously established a relation between the two. I detected similarities in the uses of time in his films as a form of power, altering between duration and the instant in order to expose the victim or film character as well as the viewer to shock and uncertainty about when the next traumatic event may happen. What became of significance was the particular relation of Diaz's emphasis on slow death – the prolonged depiction of a character dying of his/her physical and mental traumas – and the aim of a specific form of terror that was generated in concentration camps; the idea of reducing an individual to bare life in omnipresent anxiety and uncertainty over a long period of time, thereby increasing the death drive of the subjected individual. The particular time-consciousness I encountered in my reading about concentration camps explains why Diaz's films merged with my memories of visiting a concentration camp, the experience of which will infuse my reading of his films. It opened up a new area of study which included state-sponsored terrorism, still ripe in the Philippines even decades after the fall of president Marcos's dictatorship. There was something that needed to be mapped out in more detail, and I will explore what I call Diaz's

'concentrationary universe' in this section in order to provide the reader with a clear foundation for my reading of the films in question.

The representation of the Philippines' brutal history and its psychological effects on the people diverts from the classic depiction of trauma in film to which I will return in greater detail in Chapter 3. In his films, Diaz creates a very specific and unique atmosphere of post-trauma and terror, which echoed the feelings I had when I visited Sachensenhausen concentration camp and struggled to live with PTSD a few years later. Diaz's films demand a novel approach and one way of doing this is using the lens of the *concentrationary*.

Throughout this thesis, I will repeatedly refer to aspects of what David Rousset has termed "l'univers concentrationnaire", or concentrationary universe (Rousset, 1951). In his book of the same name, Rousset identifies a system that was specific to concentration camps where death was executed slowly through the repeated infliction of miseries on the camp inmates. Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman have studied the aesthetics of the concentrationary in art, in particular in cinema (2011, 2014), and they note that the concentrationary universe was aimed at "the destruction of the human in conditions where, he [David Rousset] argued, 'everything was possible'" (Pollock and Silverman, 2014: 3). In the films under investigation, Diaz uses the aesthetics of duration and absence in order to create such a system in which characters are slowly destroyed.

Even though the concentrationary universe has the Nazi camp as its locus, Pollock and Silverman point to the widespread existence of townships and secret prisons in South Africa and Chile (Pollock and Silverman, 2014: 10), thereby suggesting a geographically borderless system. For instance, in an interview, Diaz remembered the use of 'hamletting', a practice that originated in the Vietnam War.

US forces had used strategic hamlets during the war, but this strategy of forced relocation of the population in order to starve off rebels was also used in other Southeast Asian countries, amongst them the Philippines under Martial Law. Celozza explains that hamlets in the Philippines were utilized “to isolate rural villages from the NPA [New People’s Army]. They [the military] moved and resettled inhabitants of entire villages to remove them as potential bases of guerrilla support” (Celozza, 1997: 81). Entire villages were gathered into one place, so that the activities of rebels could be observed. Diaz himself was interned in a hamlet, a schoolhouse, with approximately one hundred and fifty other families. Curfews prevented the people from leaving the schoolhouse; farmers were allowed to go to their farms only when guarded by the military; food was distributed by the military. In his own words:

We were all put there. We just stayed there. The military [gave] you food. You’re like prisoners, for like how many months there? You cannot go to the farms. There’s a curfew. Basically if you get out of the school you get shot. It’s like a prison house. You’re free inside the schoolyard, but you cannot get out. It’s like a concentration camp also. ... In a way it’s our concentration camps. It’s our own version of it. (Diaz, 2014a)

As I am hoping to demonstrate, the camp is not, however, a necessity for the creation of a concentrationary universe. I argue that this particular system is characterised by a certain experience and temporal perception of prisoners. Thus, what I would like to point out for the purpose of my research is the link between the concentrationary system and time.

Pollock and Silverman attempt a characterisation of the ‘concentrationary’ by juxtaposing concentration and extermination camps, which differed in their approach to the murder of political prisoners, Jews, Roma and Sinti, and homosexuals. They write,

The extermination camp subjects its victims to immediate death, often within the hours of arrival at the extermination point. Its space is void of life, attended only by a small work detail and its SS guards. In the concentration camp, however, death is not the main object; terror and the enactment of the terrifying idea that humans *qua* human beings can become superfluous are its purpose and its legacy. (Pollock and Silverman, 2014: 11, emphasis original)

In principle, concentration and extermination camps differed from one another in their uses of time. It was a difference of speed and slowness. In his book *The Order of Terror* (1997), German sociologist Wolfgang Sofsky describes it this way:

The death factory was an apparatus that functioned smoothly, virtually trouble-free, working at high capacity and *speed*. A death train arrived at the ramp in the morning; by the afternoon, the bodies had been burned, and the clothing brought to the storerooms. (Sofsky, 1997: 259, emphasis added)

In concentration camps, on the other hand, prisoners often died slowly as a result of a continuous infliction of hardships. Paul Neurath, survivor of Buchenwald and Dachau concentration camps, contends, “The camp usually kills its victims in less spectacular ways. It is comparable not so much to a ferocious murderer who runs amok, as to a dreadful machine that slowly, but without mercy, grinds its victims to bits” (Neurath, 2005: 47-48). Matthew John adds, “The horror of the concentration camp system lies not with the abrupt and immediate extermination of human life, but rather with *the slow and agonizing decay of the body and mind*” (John, 2014: 83, emphasis added). This slow decay of body and mind is a marked characteristic of Diaz’s films. All of his characters are struggling against a gradual mental breakdown. There is thus a parallel between the characters in his films and the time-consciousness in concentration camps. More specifically, there is a similarity in the respective treatments of slow death. Neither Florentina in *Florentina Hubaldo*, nor Hamin in *Death in the Land of Encantos*, or even Renato in



*Melancholia* see a quick death. Their death comes as a result of repeated inflictions of violent and non-violent attacks. Death is present in all of Diaz's films, but it always comes slowly, which aggravates the characters' suffering to an almost unbearable degree.

Michael Rothberg intimates that "the concentrationary universe [is] a borderland in which extremity and everydayness coexist and abut each other" (Rothberg, 2000: 129), adding that these two aspects of it never merge into a single new unity. As we will see in Chapters 4 to 6, this coexistence of extremity and the everydayness is characteristic of Diaz's films, which shift frequently between one another. As the director himself said, the concentrationary "applies so much to the character of the Filipino psyche ... It's exactly the word for this kind of suffering" (Diaz, 2014a). Furthermore, I am hoping to demonstrate throughout my work that a chief characteristic of Diaz's films is the focus on suffering. His films represent characters, who are or have been a target of oppressive governmental forces, regardless of whether it is the coloniser or the dictator, and turn into living corpses as a result of it. What stands out in his films *Melancholia* (2008), *Death in the Land of Encantos* (2007), and *Florentina Hubaldo, CTE* (2012) is that the characters are caught in a web of persistent fear and terror. This atmosphere of fear and terror is complemented, if not initiated through Diaz's use of off-screen space where he positions the characters' persecutors.

The aim of the concentrationary system can be summarised as "submit[ting] inmates to a prolonged process of psychological disintegration, reduction to bare life and, hence, to becoming a living corpse" (Pollock and Silverman, 2014: 11). The emphasis of Diaz's 'trilogy of post-trauma', as I call it, is placed on psychological terror and mental warfare as well as mental torture,

which, as we will see in more detail in my reading of his films, create living corpses on screen. In the words of Diaz:

At some point, death will come. It's like a premeditated thing. ... hell is coming, and it's always like that. It's like a concentration camp. You're compartmentalised; this is the new group, we need to orient them on how to work on these things, then, next compartment, we will not feed them, and the next compartment is the gas chamber where we kill them. So it's a part of compartmentalisation. There is slow death. (Diaz, 2014a)

His focus on psychological processes in the characters is supported by the aesthetics Diaz employs in these films, first and foremost by the particular length of his films. The in-depth depiction of fear, angst, and paranoia over the course of, at times, nine hours is a particular aesthetic of Diaz's concentrationary universe. It is further supported by the use of long-takes. As Sam Littman contends with regard to contemporary Romanian cinema, "the long-take len[ds] itself perfectly to expressing psychological realism" (Littman, 2014).

### **Third Cinema**

The emphasis on traumatic colonial and/or dictatorial histories is common in Third Cinema. Although I do not intend to argue for Diaz being a representative of contemporary Third Cinema, I feel it necessary to briefly map out a few characteristics of Third Cinema and the way Filipino directors have both adopted and adapted certain aesthetics, such as the long-take, long shots, and the use of non-professional actors.

Writing on Lav Diaz has so far focused on the director's aesthetics and their evocation of a sense of slowness (Flanagan, 2008; Kenji, 2013). What has been largely neglected is that with all of his films, Diaz attempts to create a form of cinema, which would be unique to his country. William Brown was the first to

acknowledge that the director's films are "uniquely Philippine because of Diaz's *mise-en-scène* and location shooting" (Brown, forthcoming: no pagination, emphasis original), although I would add to this the specific stories Diaz tells. In particular, the director aims to represent Malay traditions, which have been almost completely eradicated, in his films (Diaz, 2013, personal communication). His latest film, *From What Is Before* (2014), for instance, includes scenes of traditional Malay cults, amongst them shamanic dancing and the burning of a dead body, which allows him to "reclaim the past of the Philippines" (Guarneri, 2014). He told Anna Tatarska in an interview, "we had this very rich Malay culture before [the Spanish colonisation], where everything was governed by space, admiring the natural abundance" (Tatarska, 2013). Conventional time keeping as it is known today had been of little importance in people's lives as their days were governed by the movement of the sun. Diaz's use of long-takes for the (temporal) representation of the pre-colonisation period in the Philippines is indicative of his attempt to insert Malay traditions into his films. Further, the extensive lengths of his films derive from traditional epic folk tales, such as *Biag Ni Lam-ang*, which once more indicates the director's intention to connect his filmmaking to ancient beliefs and culture. What is more is his focus on a specific cultural struggle as a result of colonialism and violent clashes between religious groups, each group fighting for the supremacy of their culture.

While he acknowledges that he has not yet managed to produce an entirely Malay film (Diaz, 2013, personal communication), Diaz seeks to move closer to a distinct form of Philippine cinema. In so doing, Diaz's films can be considered part of a wider Third Cinema culture which had thrived in the 1960s and 1970s. Even though Third Cinema tends to be equated with Third World Cinema, this is not

necessarily the case. Mike Wayne states that Third Cinema is “primarily defined by its socialist politics” (Wayne, 2001: 1), rather than by its geographical origin. Therefore, not all Third Cinema films are made in Third World countries, even though the majority is indeed produced in former Western colonies. It is for this reason, as Susan Hayward notes, that films that comprise the Third Cinema canon “have in common a desire to address the effects of colonialism (as in Africa and India) or neo-colonialism (as in Latin America, some African countries and Asia, including the Indian continent), exclusion and oppression (all of these countries or continents)” (Hayward, 2000: 391). Hayward places emphasis on films from Latin America and Africa, whereas (Southeast) Asia seems to play a marginal role. Yet, Diaz’s films, as well as Kidlat Tahimik’s films as we will see, share Third Cinema’s drive to expose the consequences of Western colonialism and its subsequent oppression of the people.

Analysing the films of Filipino filmmaker Kidlat Tahimik, most widely known for his film *Perfumed Nightmare/Mababangong bangungot* (1977), Joseph Palis notes that “Filipino filmmakers continue to borrow from Third Cinema’s alternative aesthetic tradition” (Palis, 2008: 53). Apart from Tahimik, Anthony Sanchez’s films, too, show characteristics of Third Cinema, addressing issues of exclusion and poverty in his four-hour film *Imburnal/Sewer* (2008) through the use of long-takes and by providing extended screen space to non-professional actors. Diaz also uses aesthetics that are specific to Third Cinema which Teshome H. Gabriel summarises in his influential work *Towards a Critical Theory of Third World Films* (1995), which unfortunately does not touch upon films from Asia. The average shot length (ASL) in *Florentina Hubaldo*, for instance, analysed in Chapter 6, is over two minutes. In Diaz’s other films *Melancholia* and *Death in the Land of*

*Encantos/Kagadanan sa banwaan ning mga engkanto* (2007) the ASL is over three minutes. With the exception of *Melancholia*, all of Diaz's films place their emphasis on nature which to him creates a "huge emotional impact" on the viewer (Carpio, 2010a). This is often achieved through wide-angle shots at the expense of close-ups, which he calls "manipulative cinema" (Carpio, 2010a), as close-ups direct the viewer's attention deliberately to an event or an object without giving him or her the freedom to explore the frame independently. Similar to Third Cinema filmmakers, Diaz makes use of non-professional actors. Except for the recurring Angeli Bayani, who stars in *Norte, The End of History/Norte, hangganan ng kasaysayan* (2013), *Century of Birthing*, *Encantos*, and *Melancholia*, his usual cast consists of unknown actors and actresses, such as Perry Dizon and Malaya (both star in *Melancholia*).

In addition to those aesthetics, Diaz's cinema contains other aspects that are recurrent and prominent in Third Cinema films. Wayne contends that Third Cinema is concerned about "the dialectics of history" (Wayne, 2001: 14), using history in order to explain the present. Most importantly, filmmakers tend to argue that "the past needs to be retained as a vital part of identity and as a vital resource for alternatives to the present social order" (Wayne, 2001: 26). Diaz makes history the focal points of his films, and counteracts the process of fading memory akin to other Third Cinema directors. In Chapter 6, I will return to the possible dangers of memory loss in relation to society as a collective entity and I will argue that Diaz's films act as a tool against forgetting.

### **Outline of chapters**

This thesis aims to develop already existing work on Diaz in the form of academic work, blogs, such as Harry Tuttle's *Unspoken Cinema* blog, and forum entries on film website like *MUBI* or *MovieMeter* as well as on film reviews by critics such as Jonathan Romney, Peter Bradshaw and Justin Chang. Much has been written in a more journalistic context about the films' aesthetics in relation to slowness, emphasising Diaz's use of long-takes, of extreme long shots, the use of minimal dialogue, and the films' exceptional length. This exclusive focus on aesthetics has led to a neglect of the films' content and their social-historical context. In interviews, Diaz repeatedly refers to historical, political and societal aspects which underlie his films' narratives. Nevertheless, these aspects have to a great extent not been picked up for a more nuanced analysis of his oeuvre. With the following work, I want to begin to fill these present gaps in academic writing.

What drives me in this work is the question of how Diaz represents individual and collective traumatic experiences without complying with the standard aesthetic techniques used in contemporary Trauma Cinema, as highlighted by Janet Walker (2001, 2005), Susannah Radstone (2001), Roger Luckhurst (2008) and others. While Diaz focuses on similar characteristics of post-trauma as other more popular films and TV series, such as *The Hurt Locker* (Kathryn Biegelow, 2008), *Homeland* (Howard Gordon, Alex Gansa, 2011- ) or *The Mark of Cain* (Mark Munden, 2007), he employs different techniques in order to represent the same symptoms: cyclical narrative, anxiety, personality splitting, overwhelming sensual attacks from external sources, and others. It is my intention to explore the characteristics of Diaz's post-trauma cinema, which is composed of several elements: duration through the use of long-takes and an extended running time, the focus on the aftermath of traumatic events without making a visual link

to those events, the conveyance of violence through dialogue and sound, and the inherent absence of violent imagery. Emphasis is placed throughout the films on the psychological narratives of traumatised characters.

Furthermore, I am interested in Diaz's long post-trauma films with regards to Nerea Arruti's argument that "temporality is one of the cornerstones of trauma theory" (Arruti, 2007: 3). Arruti highlights the role of time and its many variations. Yet, temporality is not only a cornerstone of trauma theory. At the same time it is a cornerstone of artistic representation of trauma, particularly in film. Following the work of Jill Bennett, Anne Rutherford points out that "there is a 'temporal collapse' in artworks and discourse that focus on the 'reduction of trauma to the shock-inducing signifier', rather than on *the duration of post-traumatic memory*" (Rutherford, 2013: 100, emphasis added). This is precisely where Diaz's films intervene, using, partly, slowness in order to represent the duration of trauma.

In addition, she writes, "trauma is both event and condition" (Rutherford, 2013: 100). As will be shown later on, the films under analysis here do not focus on traumatic events as such, but on the aftermath, specifically on the post-traumatic effects the events, which Diaz never shows, have created. In his films, trauma is a condition. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 3, this differs greatly from contemporary trauma film, which focuses on traumatic events without undertaking an in-depth exploration of subsequent conditions. As I will argue below, Rutherford's definition and other scholars' usage of the term "trauma" is problematic, because its wide definition allows for the terms "trauma" and "post-trauma" to be used interchangeably without distinguishing clearly between a traumatic event and the psychological reaction to it.

In Chapter 2, I lay out my methodology. My study of Diaz's films is necessarily limited due to the amount of films the director has produced since the late 1990s. The overwhelming length of some, if not most of his films is a limit in itself. With over 70 hours of film material, excluding most of his short films, this thesis can only focus on a snippet of Diaz's oeuvre. Furthermore, Chapter 2 addresses my use of textual and content analysis as well as the use of interviews in order to contextualise Diaz's films.

Chapter 3 comprises a view on existing literature on the main subjects I will address throughout Chapters 4 to 6. I will start by mapping scholarship on Trauma Cinema. A review of key texts by Caruth and Walker establishes the foundations of Trauma Cinema aesthetics. By reviewing further texts which have been published on the subject until autumn 2014, I intend to show that the subject area has progressed little since the conception of the term Trauma Cinema. Furthermore, I will position Diaz in the field of Slow Cinema. Pointing to now standard texts on the subject, such as Flanagan's *16:9* article, Romney's *Sight & Sound* review of films in the first decade of the 2000s, and Tuttle's take on what he calls 'Contemplative Cinema', I argue that the area is to a large degree confined to a study of form over content. This, I suggest, is futile in the context of Diaz. Considering the violent background of the films' narrative under investigation, I will briefly map recent scholarship on the subject of violence on screen and the impending ethics involved, arguing that Diaz's aestheticical choices are ethical choices in relation to the danger of rendering his films' narrative a spectacle for the viewer. Connecting Slow Cinema with what Asbjørn Grønstad (2012) calls "the unwatchable", I consider the implications of a transgression of aesthetic practice, which Slow Cinema is known for. Aiming to move the discussion on from the aesthetics of film,



which seems to have dominated writing on Slow Cinema thus far, I shift the debate to the films' contents and thereby bring in Diaz's concerns with torture, murder, extra-judicial killings, and rape. This chapter's review of literature on Trauma Cinema, Slow Cinema, and on-screen violence and ethics of filmmaking aims to serve as a foundation for the reader in which s/he can navigate while reading my analyses of Diaz's films.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 focus on an in-depth analysis of *Melancholia* (2008), *Death in the Land of Encantos* (2007), and *Florentina Hubaldo, CTE* (2012) respectively. These three films all contain the main components of Diaz's post-trauma cinema: duration, mise-en-scène and sound. These components overlap and interact with each other rather than function separately. Nevertheless, some films are more noticeable in their foregrounding of one component than others. It is my intention in the present work to study each component in more detail while at the same time referring to overlaps in the ways in which duration, mise-en-scène and sound are employed in order to represent post-trauma. Therefore, rather than looking at these films chronologically, I will first of all make a case study of *Melancholia* as the most evident and coherent piece of Diaz's study of duration and time in the context of terror and post-trauma. While these elements play a significant role in all of his films, it is *Melancholia* that stands out in its focus on time as a form of power and punishment. I will then shift the focus to the visual and auditory aesthetics of *Encantos* and *Florentina* in Chapters 5 and 6 respectively, looking at the framing, the use of handheld cameras and at Diaz's play with sound and silence respectively. At the public Q&A at the Locarno Film Festival, Diaz described filmmaking as a learning process for him as well as his cast and crew. He is therefore still experimenting with aesthetics, and seeks the most

ideal approach to filmmaking. Taking this into account, the third and last case study will be dedicated to his six-hour film *Florentina Hubaldo, CTE* (2012), which, to me, is the clearest example of his post-trauma cinema and which he describes as “my most accomplished work at that point” (Diaz, 2014a). Rather than focusing exclusively on the films’ aesthetics, however, Chapters 4 to 6 seek to establish a link between form and content. Where possible, I therefore add to my reading of Diaz’s films a historical and social context.

Informed by the personal accounts of William Pomeroy and the studies of Sofsky, Greenberg and Ayars, and Bevernage and Colaert, Chapter 4 looks at Diaz’s use of duration in his eight-hour film *Melancholia* for an evocation of terror. It studies the effects of time as a tool of psychological warfare and the subsequent mental paralysis in the persecuted and the victim-survivors. Furthermore, Chapter 4 stresses Diaz’s use of psychological warfare, both for the characters and for the viewer.

*Melancholia* is remarkable for its emphasis on duration in its representation of the characters’ gradual progression towards insanity. This chapter revisits links between the aesthetics of Diaz’s films and the concentrationary universe I have mentioned earlier in my introduction. Furthermore, I introduce the theme of haunting as a symbol of a character not being able to accept the sudden disappearance of a loved one and finding closure as a result of it. Gil Z. Hochberg describes haunting as “the appearance of a *visible absence*” (Hochberg, 2015: 42, emphasis original), which we can find in Diaz’s use of ghosts. This section argues that the protagonists are locked in a paralytic state. They are repeatedly trapped between knowing and not knowing about their partners’ fate, a form of paralysis which suspends the progression of linear time

and forces relatives to live a life marked by the cyclical recurrence of memories. This, I argue, is part and parcel of the symptomatology of post-trauma, and plays a vital role not only in *Melancholia* but in the other two films under analysis. In short, Chapter 4 looks at the ways in which duration and absence function as a representation of paralysis. I focus on Diaz's treatment of time as well as the mise-en-scène which, together, establish an atmosphere of terror and post-trauma.

In *Encantos*, space acts as embodiment of anxiety and tension, and Chapter 5 seeks to build on material noted in Chapter 4 by studying the use of framing and mise-en-scène in relation to terror and post-trauma. Chapter 5 describes Diaz's aesthetical approach to torture and extra-judicial killing in *Death in the Land of Encantos*. Following on from my reading of Diaz's use of horrific images in *Melancholia*, this chapter notes the director's ethical approach to the depiction of death, or the lack thereof, in the aftermath of typhoon Reming, which ravaged parts of the country and has functioned as a backdrop to *Encantos'* narrative. Instead of creating an entirely fictional film, Diaz based his film on documentary footage which he recorded in the most devastated areas, and merges interviews with survivors and a fictional narrative about Hamin, a persecuted poet-artist.

In Chapter 5, I expand on the notion of framing and mise-en-scène as an aesthetic reinforcement of the character's mental deterioration and psychological disintegration. I undertake an analysis of Diaz's use of vast and empty landscapes in order to demonstrate that the director does not confine himself to one aesthetic characteristic in his representation of post-trauma. Rather, Chapter 5 shows that Diaz's varies his approaches. If Chapter 4 and my reading of *Melancholia* focus on Diaz's use of long duration, Chapter 5 shifts this focus to primarily visual aspects of

his post-trauma cinema. Chapter 4 and 5 therefore comprise two main features of Diaz's post-trauma cinema: time and mise-en-scène.

This is developed further in Chapter 6 and my analysis of *Florentina Hubaldo, CTE* where I place emphasis on Diaz's use of sound for the generation of a terrorising and traumatising atmosphere for both the protagonist and the viewer. Whereas in the previous two films under investigation Diaz positions the viewer as such, as a viewer, in Chapter 6 I argue that he stresses the necessity and the role of the viewer as listener in the process of recovery in the aftermath of traumatic events. Diaz's use of time, mise-en-scène and sound create a complex take on the subject of post-trauma, telling the story of a young woman who is prostituted by her father. In *Florentina*, Diaz pushes previously encountered aesthetics of absence, rupture and post-trauma further. This chapter looks, amongst others, at post-trauma's most characteristic symptom: the repetitive nature of intrusive memories. Diaz's six-hour film is an accumulation of repetitive elements, with the main character, Florentina, repeatedly attempting to tell her story. Her traumatic memories, however, gradually disappear due to traumatic brain injuries which she obtained as a result of her father's violent behaviour towards her. Florentina's obsession with remembering and telling, though marked by growing amnesia, is an expression of her need to tell the story in order to survive. It is also an attempt to incorporate her traumatic memories, locking her into a persistent past seeping into the present, into a linear narrative, which would stop the endless cycle of repetition.

Apart from the focus on sound, Chapter 6 also opens another new area in trauma studies, namely that of chronic trauma. If *Melancholia* and *Encantos* are depictions of individual suffering as a result of a single traumatic event, *Florentina*

is a film about chronic trauma and serves as metaphor for ongoing oppression at the hand of Spanish and American colonisers throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, followed by a brutal dictatorship under President Ferdinand Marcos.

In my conclusion, I summarise viewpoints gained and established throughout the thesis. I briefly engage with the question of what is gained by films such as Diaz's beyond the knowledge of atrocities committed over centuries, considering film as a form of therapy. Moreover, while the films under analysis seem to be similar in their representation of post-trauma, there are subtle differences in their approaches to post-trauma on-screen and I will note these in my final comments. Furthermore, I will suggest possible avenues of research in future, where my reading of Diaz's films in the context of terror and post-trauma could be applied. In parts, I will look beyond Film Studies and, instead, suggest a closer look at Theatre Studies where similar aesthetics can be detected.

Given the analysis of content and form with their connection to culture and history, my contribution to the field is twofold. First of all, I expand on the current notion of Trauma Cinema, which places emphasis on speed and the unpredictability of intrusive memories. Techniques such as rapid cuts, swift camera movements and flashbacks which disrupt the linear narrative, are pervasive in popular Trauma Cinema. It is at this point that I draw from the work of Lav Diaz in an effort to expand on the notion of Slow Cinema and connect it to aspects of trauma and post-trauma, thereby looking specifically at the content of Diaz's films. His post-trauma cinema is defined by aesthetics that are considered to be characteristic of Slow Cinema – excessive long-takes, static camera, extreme long and long shots, and an in-depth focus on character development. Length, not only the overall film length, but also the duration of the takes, is assigned a

particular significance in relation to post-trauma. Hetzenauer proposes that it is “duration [which] forms the basis for an understanding of the individual and his/her living conditions” (Hetzenauer, 2013: 15) and this is precisely where Diaz places his emphasis.<sup>6</sup> It therefore has to be the starting point for an analysis of the representation of post-trauma in his films.

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<sup>6</sup> “Die Dauer des Hinschauens bildet die Grundvoraussetzung für ein Verständnis des Menschen und seiner Lebensbedingung.”

## **2. Methodology**

### **Methodological approach**

This thesis aims to explore the aesthetic as well as the narrative particulars of Diaz's films. In my literature review I will point to the absence of coherent analyses of form and content in the context of Slow Cinema. Countering this current development, I linked form and content of Diaz's films in my work, thereby generating a more coherent picture of the director's work. My research was therefore primarily based on formal and content analyses. Most vital in respect to my analysis of Diaz's film aesthetics were shot lists which helped me to establish an overview of the camera position, its angle, the shot length and the mise-en-scène in each shot. The completed shot lists for each film allowed me to compare and contrast the films' aesthetics and it simplified my investigation as to how Diaz uses certain aesthetic forms in order to represent post-trauma on screen. Content analysis was the second step, and was done in similar shot lists with specific emphasis on the narrative, which I then linked to the historical, political and social context of the Philippines. In order to construct a social-political and historical context, I consulted secondary literature, which, as it turned out, and I will return to this point in my literature review, were one-sided Western accounts of the gains of colonialism and the American's installation of Ferdinand Marcos as president of the Philippines, who led the country into Martial Law (Benitez, 1954; Kuhn and Kuhn, 1966; Constantino, 1975).

Considering the difficulty in finding literature which illuminated the potential gains as well as the side-effects of colonialism and Martial Law, I had to find alternative routes so as to generate a more balanced view on the subject.

Consequently, I made use of first hand accounts of resistance fighters, such as William Pomeroy, and of survivors of Marcos' brutality like Vicky Pinpin-Feinstein. Yet the use of interview material also had to extend to the subject of trauma and post-trauma in a more general context. Looking at the particulars of the concentrationary system and the specific time-consciousness of the prisoners, it was necessary to look into first-hand accounts of survivors of the Holocaust or the dictatorships in Argentina and Chile in order to get a sense of how prisoners perceived time and their surrounding during their imprisonment.

In addition to drawing from personal accounts with regards to (post-) trauma, I also used material from interviews conducted with the director on several different occasions, as well as from an interview I personally conducted with Diaz in August 2014 during the Locarno Film Festival. As scholarly work on his films was extremely limited at the time of writing, the use of interviews became imperative for an appropriate contextualisation of Diaz's cinema. My own interview with Diaz followed the university's code of research, adhering to prescribed ethical practices.<sup>7</sup>

### **Choice of films**

With around fourteen feature films that are often more than five or six hours long (at times even longer), choosing only a few of them for a detailed analysis is a problematic task. Diaz's repeated return to similar themes – the breakdown of society, persecution, struggle, oppression – aggravates this situation as the choice of films needs to be based on a coherent line of thought. As much as his entire

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<sup>7</sup> For more information on the University of Stirling's code of research, please see further University of Stirling (2009). Code of good research practice. Available from <http://www.goodresearchpractice.stir.ac.uk/documents/newCODEOFGOODRESEARCHPRACTICE.pdf> (accessed 10 October 2013)



oeuvre begs for a thorough and elaborate analysis, a complete study of Diaz's cinema is unfathomable in the limits of this present work.

I have chosen to work on three films only: *Death in the Land of Encantos* (2007, nine hours), *Melancholia* (2008, eight hours) and *Florentina Hubaldo CTE* (2012, six hours). These three films comprise what I consider a loose trilogy on post-trauma. The traumatic events that have shattered the protagonists have already occurred and are now seeping into their present lives. This sets the three films I will be looking at in more detail in the following chapters apart from the rest of Diaz's films. These films show a gradual and persistent cinematic development in relation to aesthetics in more general terms, and the representation of post-trauma in particular. What stands out in these films is their similar approach to an evocation of post-trauma through an emphasis that is placed on the absence of on-screen violence and an invisibility of the perpetrators, as well as on an aesthetic of duration via the use of long static takes, which reinforce the gradual shifts occurring in the characters' psyches. While all of Diaz's films are concerned with the traumatic history of the Philippines in one way or another, the actual post-trauma visualised with the help of one character who stands in for society is more visible in some films than in others.

In the films under investigation, Diaz undertakes an in-depth analysis of the effects of traumatic events on the psyche of individuals, and, by extension, (Philippine) society. Indeed, Diaz's films can be regarded as a succession of loose trilogies. *Heremias Book I: The Legend of the Lizard Prince/Heremias Unang Aklat: Ang Alamat ng Prinsesang Bayawak* (2005), *Century of Birthing* (2012) and *Norte* (2013) share the depiction and exploration of religion and redemption. In *Heremias*, a travelling salesman overhears a conversation between three young

men, shot in an extensive fifty-minute long take, revealing their plan of raping a girl. Even though Heremias seeks help from the Church and the police, he is turned away. He subsequently offers to fast for forty days in agreement with God so as to save the girl. *Century of Birthing* is not only a film about a filmmaker, who struggles to finish his film; a depiction of Diaz himself. The parallel narrative tells the story of a young virgin, a member of a sect-like religious group, who loses the group leader's approval after having been raped by a Japanese photographer and tourist. The film follows her expulsion from the sect and her subsequent loss of sanity. In *Norte*, wealthy Fabian commits a murder, but goes unpunished as suspicion falls on Joaquin. A husband and father of two, he is arrested and found guilty of a crime he has not committed. Crucially, while Joaquin adapts to his new life in prison, Fabian struggles with his guilt and loses his sanity while trying to seek redemption. Diaz's aforementioned return to similar themes, in particular his focus on a character's psychological disintegration, becomes evident in these examples.

According to Diaz himself, his new film *From What is Before* (2014) completes his Martial Law trilogy, which he had started with his five-hour long *Batang West Side* (2001) and which he continued with his eleven-hour epic *Evolution of a Filipino Family/Ebolusyon ng isang pamilyang Pilipino* (2004) (Diaz, 2014b). While these two and the aforementioned three films mainly depict trauma-in-the-making, they do not explore post-trauma as a condition to the same extent as the films under investigation here. *From What Is Before* can, and should, chronologically be positioned at the beginning of Diaz's oeuvre, depicting mysterious, though clearly set-up events until President Marcos declared Martial Law in 1972. The film thus focuses on a time *prior* to the infliction of trauma.

*Evolution*, on the other hand, depicts the struggle of two families under Martial Law, and therefore continues where *From What Is Before* ends. Interrupted by several scenes of archival footage recalling Tarkovsky's style in *The Mirror/Zerkalo* (1975), *Evolution* draws a picture of the traumatic time of a country under Martial Law. While post-trauma is directly visible in the character of Hilda, for instance, who is described by neighbours as a "lunatic" after having been raped and beaten in Manila, the focus remains first and foremost the historical events and their repercussions for the people. Alexis Tioseco described *Evolution* accordingly as depicting the infliction of a wound (Tioseco, 2008). This wound precedes the period of traumatic events that is under investigation here. While Diaz's other films complement an understanding of my chosen trilogy, a focus on them would demand a separate, much broader research project.

Returning briefly to Diaz's perhaps most commercially successful film *Norte*, I feel it is imperative to clarify in more detail why I have chosen not to work on this comparatively popular film. First and foremost, the film differs considerably from Diaz's other films, and especially from the three films that I am studying. This is partly a result of a higher budget. Diaz himself explained in an interview that the comparatively high amount of money invested in the film changed his filmmaking. He describes at length,

There was so much money wasted, and this is a thing I didn't like about the shooting. We rented the camera package: very expensive... If we had bought it, the camera could have been used by me and by other fellow-filmmakers, or it could have been rented out by the producers to generate funds. Creating a flow of money and a circulation of ideas to develop film-projects and make more films in our country: to me this is a very important "political" aspect in filmmaking. It is part of the struggle.

So you see technology is an economic issue that has consequences on many levels. Clearly, it affects how the film looks: for example, *Norte* is a color

film and there is much more camera movement than in my other movies. It is not the camera movement you find in commercial cinema, though. It is not flossy camera movement. It's more about quietly following the characters. It's still about duration and space as before, but at the same time it is something new for me. (Guarneri, 2013)

The film's aesthetics, while similar, differ from all of his films that were released after *Batang West Side* (2001) and *Hesus, The Revolutionary* (2002). With four-and-a-half hours, *Norte* is shorter in length, which comes as a result of fewer long-takes and consequently more cuts. Whereas Diaz regularly lingered on empty spaces in all his previous films, scenes of 'empty time' in *Norte* are cut short. This allows for less in-depth character development on screen than is usual for Diaz's work. In addition, the film feels more generic and universal. The story, while supposedly using the Marcos era as a historical background, contains a lot more universal elements than is the case in his other films. Being based on the well-known Russian novel *Crime and Punishment* (1866) by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, the identification with the film's characters is simplified for the audience which, I suggest, has been done in order to reach a wider international audience. This leads me to the next point on why I see Diaz's films in a global context rather than create a case study of local Philippine independent film more specifically.

### **The global stage**

While at the beginning of my three-year research, I attempted to contextualise Diaz's films in the larger output of Philippine cinema, it proved to be an almost impossible endeavour. This is mainly because there are few directors in the Philippines who approach the subjects of history, trauma, political oppression and other equally pressing issues (Ingawanij et al, 2009). Diaz himself describes the

intention to make films that deal with the dark history of the Philippines as “career suicide” (Diaz, 2014a). The inaccessibility of the films made this project even more difficult. Few independent Filipino films are available in a legitimate way. Moreover, the Philippines have only just recently established a national film archive in 2013. Thus, films such as Mike de Leon’s *Sister Stella L* (1984) or Gérardo de Leon’s novel adaptation *Noli me tangere* (1961) are not available on VHS or DVD in the country. His and other now classic films had been screened at festivals around the world, but are now lost (Wee, 2005). This explains the difficulty of getting hold of film copies, not only in the West, but also in the Philippines itself.<sup>8</sup> While Filipino critic Noel Vera announced in 2007 that five of Lino Brocka’s films would be released on DVD, this never seemed to have materialised (Vera, 2007). The distributor behind the plan, CineFilipino, has created a YouTube hub for “hard to find Pinoy movies”, as they advertise it (CineFilipino YouTube channel, no date). Yet, these films have no subtitles and are therefore inaccessible to an international audience. On top of the inaccessibility of Filipino films, there is a lack of literature on Filipino/a filmmakers, which could have enriched my reading of Diaz’s films. Lino Brocka stands out (and alone) as a director whose work has attracted scholarly interest. Mario A. Hernando’s *Lino Brocka: the artist and his time* (1993) was the first, and up to now, last book published on a Filipino filmmaker in English.

It is of little surprise, then, that I began to make links to non-Filipino films throughout the writing process, which were easily and legitimately available for a closer analysis. I want to point out two main reasons as to why Diaz’s films can

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<sup>8</sup> In fact, the only existing copies of Filipino classics are those on illegal torrent website or YouTube, which have, controversially or not, helped to preserve this part of Philippine culture.

indeed be seen in the light of directors as varied as Ari Folman (Israel), Roberto Rossellini (Italy), Patricio Guzmán (Chile), and others. First of all, Diaz's films circulate primarily beyond national borders. Prior to the success of *Norte, The End of History* (2013), his films had hardly been seen in his native country. According to the director, his biggest audience can be found in Europe, especially in Eastern European countries such as Poland and Slovenia (Diaz, 2014b). Because of their circulation and reception at international film festivals, Diaz's films are global in nature, while nevertheless retaining aspects of Philippine society and narrative. This is not uncharacteristic for a slow-film director in general and a Filipino director more specifically (cf. Trice, 2015).

Orhan Emre Çağlayan identifies the “transcending [of] national and cultural boundaries” (Çağlayan, 2014: 4) as a key characteristic of Slow Cinema. Several filmmakers, amongst them Lisandro Alonso, Carlos Reygadas, Lois Patino and Liu Jiayin, experience this phenomenon. Their films play at major European and North American film festivals throughout the year. Nevertheless, they have often failed at attracting local distributors. This raises issues as to the films' target audience and their representation of national issues. Chinese filmmaker Jia Zhang-ke, whose films have generally circulated more often outside China, made an interesting remark as to the discrepancy between his specifically Chinese themes and his films' global circulation. He suggests that there is neither an Asian nor a European tradition of cinema. Rather, Jia points to a tradition of world cinema, which is characterised by the influence of filmmakers on each other throughout the history of cinema. He says,

I'm a director who has been influenced by many other directors, and I don't limit myself particularly to the influence of Asian cinema. ... In cinema I

don't think there are different regions, and we need to face and accept the idea of a single tradition. (Mello, 2014: 346)

A second reason for my linking Diaz's films to world cinema is based on the films' theme of (post-) trauma. Jill Bennett argues that "trauma is not something immaterial that happens to the individual, leaving the world unchanged - rather, it has a *palpable extension within the world*" (Bennett, 2005: 49, emphasis added). Even though Diaz's films are explicitly about the Philippines, their aspects of trauma demand an interpretation beyond local frontiers without, however, neglecting specifically national circumstances. Some themes of Diaz's films - disappearances, extra-judicial killings, and dictatorships - are not specific to his country. Rather, they have surfaced in other countries, specifically in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, at almost the same time (in the 1970s) and have developed in similar ways. Furthermore, these countries are connected in their support from the American CIA in the training of local police forces in torture, therefore creating a global network of related and interconnected political movements (Gildner, 2008).

This thesis will fill gaps that are apparent in academic writing at the moment. It will go beyond existing reviews of some of his films, which tend to stress the use of cinematic slowness. Instead, I seek to position Diaz's aesthetics in the broader cultural context, and connect it to the wider historical background of the Philippines because I consider this essential for an understanding of the stories his films tell and the aesthetics the director uses.

### 3. Literature review

#### Trauma Cinema

Lav Diaz uses slow-film aesthetics for his representation of post-trauma. I would like to begin this literature review by mapping out existing work on Trauma Cinema before I review literature on Slow Cinema. These two sections serve as a foundation of my reading of Diaz's films.

Michael Elm, Kobi Kabalek and Julia B Köhne argue that film has been closely linked to traumatic events since cinema's inception (Elm, Kabalek and Köhne, 2014: 5). In fact, after World War I several films were produced in the Weimar Republic which dealt with what had been called shell shock or war neurosis (Kaes, 2009). But the trauma genre per se surfaced only in the late twentieth century and became especially prominent in literature and cinema after 11 September 2001 (Gibbs, 2014: 2). As such, the year 2001 saw a special issue of *Screen*, which focused on the relation between traumatic events and their effects on an individual, and the subsequent cultural output. In her contribution to *Screen's* dossier on Trauma and Screen Studies, Susannah Radstone poses the question what screen studies should focus on in its analysis of trauma films: "should the focus fall primarily on narration, or on mise-en-scène or on editing and so on? Or does trauma make itself felt in ... these media in the relation between their texts and their spectators – and if so, then how?" (Radstone, 2001: 189). Radstone expresses her concerns about a possible return in screen studies to debates on passive spectatorship if trauma theory were to merge with screen studies (Radstone, 2001: 191), which may put at risk a continuation of existing scholarship of the spectator as an active agent. Therefore, she refers to two crucial points – aesthetics and spectatorship – which I will touch upon throughout this



literature review.

In “Trauma cinema: false memories and true experience” (2001), Janet Walker attributes the beginning and rise of Trauma Cinema to the 1980s and 1990s. She describes trauma films as a non-realist depiction of shattering events, which are characterised on-screen by “non-linearity, fragmentation, nonsynchronous sound, repetition, rapid editing and strange angles” in addition to flashbacks (Walker, 2001: 214). Furthermore, she mentions what she calls a “quality of exaggeration” in style for an evocation of ‘trauma’ which is employed in an attempt to adequately transmit the quality of the traumatic events (Walker, 2001: 213). Walker specifies these stylistic evocations in more detail in her book *Trauma Cinema – Documenting Incest and the Holocaust* (2005). She writes that trauma films “[draw] on innovative strategies for representing reality obliquely, by looking to mental processes for inspiration, and by incorporating self-reflexive devices to call attention to the friability of the scaffolding for audio-visual historiography” (Walker, 2005: 19). More specifically, Walker summarises the features of Trauma Cinema by referring to medical diagnostics: “The catalog of film topics encompassed by Trauma Cinema finds its best description ... in the list of diagnostic features for post-traumatic stress disorder...” (Walker, 2005: 19). She uses several examples that illustrate her point. One of them is Steven Spielberg’s award-winning film *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), in which fragmented editing and unconventional camera angles were used for a simulation of shell shock effects on soldiers. Walker further refers to Oliver Stone’s *JFK* (1991). In this film, the linear narrative is disrupted by traumatic events, which exemplify the effects of shocks to the life narrative of individuals. In more general terms, she summarises the aesthetics of Trauma Cinema as containing “rapid editing combined with patterns

of color and volume to evoke internal states; and the representation of dreams, hallucinations, stories, and fantasies” (Walker, 2005: 24). Mary Ann Doane has described modernist techniques, especially those that initiate fast changes in or between frames, as “potentially traumatic for the spectator” (Doane, 2002: 15). It thus appears evident why the above-mentioned techniques – swift camera movement, rapid editing, and auditory shock moments - lend themselves for a representation of traumatic events and post-trauma. Echoing these modernist techniques, Maureen Turim, too, emphasises what she calls “traumatic flashback films” (Turim, 2001: 210), in which flashbacks, which are “often abrupt, fragmentary, and repetitive, marked by a modernism of technique” (Turim, 2001: 207), act as a dominant stylistic device. Yet there is a concern about the use of modernist techniques and their potential to render (post-) trauma a spectacle for the viewer. While acknowledging that modernist techniques are valuable assets for the representation of trauma, Michael S. Roth suggests a disadvantage of these techniques, pointing out that “the truth-as-correspondence promised by realism is undercut by modernist innovations. These innovations often call attention to the processes of representation so as to emphasize that we never have unmediated access to the occurrence to which we are trying to refer” (Roth, 2012: 94). These modernist techniques can be found in contemporary Trauma Cinema. Roth is critical of these techniques, as they are too prominent and visible in order for a trauma narrative to develop. I would go further and argue that while these techniques can give an insight into aspects of (living with) post-trauma, they simultaneously create a spectacle, which shifts the focus of the narrative away to the mere visuals.

Films analysed in the context of ‘trauma’ tend to connect the present with the past, often through repetitive flashbacks causing “shock, disorientation and perceptual fatigue” (De Bruyn, 2014: 116) in both survivor and viewer in order to make an unmistakable statement on what exactly the traumatic event was that caused a character to behave the way s/he does in the present. These flashbacks serve to illustrate what Michaela Krützen termed “backstory wounds” (Elm, Kabalek and Köhne, 2014: 5). The infused shock is achieved by a sudden shift in temporality. The flashback is introduced with speed in order to represent its unpredictability. Béla Balázs notes in his *Theory of the Film* (1952) that the flashback’s speed also adequately transmits the speed of the original thought-processes of the individual (Balázs, 1952: 124). Flashbacks, in particular, generate for the viewer a clear link between cause (traumatic event) and effect (PTSD). Abel suggests that cause and effect of violence are co-present in classical cinema (and, I would add, in popular Trauma Cinema), the link between the two being initiated by the use of shot-reverse-shot sequences (Abel, 2007: 6). Furthermore, flashbacks add the element of repetition to a trauma film, but it is only one of several elements which allow the director to show circularity in a character’s narrative. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 6, for instance, repetition is a major element in *Florentina*. There is a link between the present narrative and past events, but the temporality within the film is not altered. The repetition and the loop *Florentina* is caught in is the present rather than the past, which sets the film apart from other contemporary trauma films. Therefore, instead of explicit visual techniques such as flashbacks and rapid editing, Diaz represents post-trauma through the use of repetition in the present narrative, long duration evoked by long takes and the overall length of the film as well as the play of presence and

absence of sound and visuals. Koepnick identifies slowness in visual art as “a powerful means to remember and rework traumatic residues and reanimate painful histories seemingly frozen in the past” (Koepnick, 2014: 46). Koepnick thus sees a clear link between slowness and ‘trauma’, and further suggests that slowness offers “intriguing perspectives” (Koepnick, 2014: 191) on how ‘trauma’ can be represented as opposed to its traditional depiction via the aesthetics of speed. Following Koepnick’s argument, this literature review seeks to make a contribution to the study of Trauma Cinema because the aspects of narrative and slowness in relation to the nature of post-trauma have so far been overlooked in existing scholarship.

Because of its many possible techniques in order to evoke a sense of trauma, cinema is considered as most suitable for the representation of traumatic events. Accordingly, Roger Luckhurst describes cinema as “particularly effective” (Luckhurst, 2008: 178), and John Hodgkins considers film as “commonly well suited” (Hodgkins, 2009: 56) with regards to trauma representation. As Jill Bennett contends,

although words can clearly serve sense memory, vision has a very different relationship to affective experience – especially to experience what cannot be spoken as it is felt. The eye can often function as a mute witness by means of which events register as eidetic memory images imprinted with sensation. (Bennett, 2005: 35)

Elm, Kabalek and Köhne (2014) similarly argue that film has the capacity to “re-enact, reactivate, or re-produce” trauma (Elm, Kabalek and Köhne, 2014: 5). There is thus an apparent consensus in scholarship that cinema is a particularly useful vehicle for what Elm et al call “pathways to insight into dreadful scenes of actual horror, cruelty and violence without petrifying our bodies” (Elm, Kabalek and

Köhne, 2014: 2). Moreover, Leshu Torchin ascribes a “witnessing function” (Torchin, 2012: 3) to film, which, in its function as testimony, “portray[s] distant atrocities with the intention of ending them” (Torchin, 2012: 5). Torchin does not make clear for whom the atrocities portrayed appear distant. Her argument implies that there is little distinction between viewer and filmmaker in popular films. Her opening example, *The Interpreter* (2005), directed by American filmmaker Sydney Pollock, narrates the story of genocide in a fictional African state. Therefore, both filmmaker and viewer are distant and remote from the geographical space portrayed in the film. Torchin’s work, while extensive in parts, neglects works by filmmakers who portray the traumatic history of their own countries, who, in doing so, diminish the geographical distance between them, the subject matter, and potentially the viewer. The latter, however, is dependent on how and where these films circulate, which is, in the case of slow films, often in a global environment, as noted in my methodology.

Walker’s close attention to non-realist aesthetics, deriving from modernist cinematic techniques, is of interest here. Diaz’s films are repeatedly seen in the light of neo-realism (cf. Flanagan, Tuttle), which contradicts Walker’s general definition of Trauma Cinema as being a *non-realist* depiction of ‘trauma’. Indeed, Diaz moves away from this non-realist depiction of ‘trauma’ Walker mentioned, and incorporates other aesthetic elements for a more realist portrayal. In doing so, he generates a kind of cinema that is similar to that of Kurdish Iranian director Bahman Ghobadi. Discussing Ghobadi’s ‘trauma aesthetics’, Philippa Lovatt argues that his type of cinema “record[s] the experience of war from the perspective of those whose lives have been radically and violently disrupted by it [the conflict], but who have had no active role in shaping its outcome” (Lovatt, 2011: 54). The

emphasis is placed on the depiction of the innocent and how their lives have been altered through external forces, without having agency over their own fate. In their focus on the individual, Ghobadi's and Diaz's films need to be seen in a light different from popular Trauma Cinema. They in fact belong to a body of independent Trauma Cinema, which E. Ann Kaplan (2001) identifies in her contribution to *Screen's* special issue. Strikingly fitting to the aesthetics of Diaz's cinema, which I will analyse in more detail throughout this thesis, Kaplan argues that "rather than focusing on traumatic cultural symptoms, independent cinematic techniques show paralysis, repetition, circularity – all aspects of the non-representability of trauma and yet of the search to figure its pain" (Kaplan, 2001: 204). Kaplan's focus on paralysis, repetition and circularity points to the significance of long duration in the representation of post-trauma in independent films. Koepnick identifies slowness as a means of

revealing and commemorating the anguish of history. It excavates the sediments of grief that constitute even seemingly innocuous landscapes and, in doing so, it visualizes the trajectories of conflict, antagonism, and loss that haunt each and every historical moment. (Koepnick, 2014: 207)

It thus appears as though Diaz's aesthetics and his particularly long films are suitable to the representation of post-trauma and of historical memory. This significance will surface time and again in Chapters 4 to 6. Especially the time spent on character development is of interest. Post-trauma usually creeps up quietly and slowly. It often takes months before survivors and victims feel the repercussions of a traumatic event (Caruth, 1991: 186). It also takes a long time to adjust to a life with post-trauma. Furthermore, there is the aspect of physical and psychological depletion. Kai Erikson describes 'trauma' as becoming "a dominating feature of your interior landscape ... and in the process threatens to drain you and

leave you empty” (Erikson, 1995: 183). First of all, Erikson’s use of landscape is significant here in that he uses a painterly, or at least artistic term so as to refer to a state of mind. This resonates strongly with Diaz’s approach in filmmaking, especially in *Encantos*, as I will show in Chapter 5. The landscape surrounding the traumatised character, Hamin, acts as a visual reinforcement of his mental deterioration, while his psychological state mirrors that of the landscape of death around him. Second, Erikson points to two essential factors of post-trauma that Diaz’s aesthetics support vividly: drainage and emptiness. Diaz’s characters carry the weight of survival after a traumatic event. Repeated reliving of the event, anxiety, numbness, anger and aggression drain the characters’ energy. Their cognitive reactions slow down in the course of the film, and they appear to be merely sleepwalking through life. This drainage and emptiness is expressed through a combination of slowness within the frames, long-takes as well as the use of ravished landscapes and destroyed or makeshift housing as locations.

As can be detected in this brief review, the key works on the subject of Trauma Cinema derive from the 1990s and early 2000s. The field has, however, not moved forward since then. Dirk de Bruyn’s book is one of the most recent attempts at enriching previous work. Yet his research moves little beyond the already long established characteristics of aesthetics of Trauma Cinema. The study of Trauma Cinema, as of trauma itself, is primarily focused on an individual victim. Recent literature on trauma (cinema) follows psychological symptoms of ‘trauma’; the works of Caruth, La Capra and Walker are repeatedly used as a framework through which visual depictions of ‘trauma’ are interpreted. This compulsive repetition has so far not allowed unique research to flourish in the area. Raya Morag’s research on perpetrator ‘trauma’ and Milena Bubenechik’s book on

colonial and therefore chronic 'trauma' stand out in their novel approaches. Furthermore, Trauma Cinema studies has so far placed emphasis on horror and war movies. Linnie Blake, for instance, looked at the ways in which 'trauma' is conveyed in horror films from several countries as varied as America, Japan and the UK (Blake, 2008). Before Blake, Adam Lowenstein had picked up the study of 'trauma' as represented in horror film (Lowenstein, 2005). But Lowenstein, like other scholars, focuses only on Western developed nations, particularly those which have committed atrocities.

The most recent work on the representation of 'trauma' in cinema is the edited collection *The Horrors of Trauma in Cinema: Violence, Void, Visualization* by Michael Elm, Julia B. Köhne and Kobi Kabalek (2014). This collection addresses the ways in which filmmakers from geographical backgrounds as varied as the US, Israel/Palestine and Germany deal with the subject of 'trauma'. While the collection is a comprehensive view on 'trauma' aesthetics as described by Caruth, Walker and others, it is another example of a study of 'trauma' limited to primarily Western countries. Previously explored facets of 'trauma' in cinema are often repeated rather than expanded on. The forthcoming edited collection *Scars and Wounds: Trauma on Film in National and International Contexts* (Hodgin and Thakkar, forthcoming) makes an intervention in this area, allowing for a look at largely understudied films from around the world, such as, for instance, Diaz's films and their representation of post-trauma as a result of historical traumatic events (Mai, forthcoming).

Having looked at various aesthetics of Trauma Cinema, and having established that the films under investigation have post-trauma at their core, I would like to question the validity of the term 'Trauma Cinema' as it is used in



existing scholarship. Erikson makes, to me, a valid point, which describes the difficulty of adequately positioning Diaz into circles of trauma film directors. Erikson writes, “in classic medical usage ‘trauma’ refers not to the *injury* inflicted but to the *blow* that inflicted it” (Erikson, 1995: 184, emphasis original). This means that trauma is the actual event, whereas the injury is, or has become known as post-traumatic stress disorder. While in effect, scholarship on Trauma Cinema talks about post-traumatic effects on individuals, which are translated onto the big screen through rapid editing, swift colour and sound changes as well as a shaky camera movement, the term ‘Trauma Cinema’ is still widely in use. Yet the term is not entirely correct. It is at this point that I would like to expand on existing scholarship, and propose, rather, the use of ‘Post-traumatic Cinema’, a term which Raya Morag already used in her book *Defeated Masculinity – Post-traumatic Cinema in the Aftermath of War* (2009), but which has never become a major focus in Film Studies scholarship. Morag parallels the latency period before traumatic memories erupt with the time it takes before films about traumatic events to appear in cinema culture (Morag, 2009: 17). One example is Denis Villeneuve’s *Polytechnique*, which was made twenty years after a massacre at the École Polytechnique in Montreal in which a presumed anti-feminist gunman killed fourteen female students. Lu Chan’s *City of Life and Death/Nanjing! Nanjing!* (2009) is a special case because the film was controversial in its treatment of Japanese atrocities against Chinese civilians. It was released – after several delays – sixty-two years after the rape of Nanking in 1937. Even though other films about the subject matter had been made before Chan’s film, it took around ten years before filmmakers began to incorporate these traumatic events into their films.

This, Morag argues, resembles the latency period of 'trauma', not only for the individual survivor-victim, but also for society and culture.

Joshua Hirsch proposes that post-traumatic cinema "is defined less by a particular image content ... than by the attempt to discover a form for presenting that content that mimics some aspects of posttraumatic [sic] consciousness itself" (Hirsch, 2004: 19). He goes further, suggesting that "posttraumatic [sic] cinema becomes a question of *upsetting the spectator's expectations*" (Hirsch, 2004: 19, emphasis added). It is here that Diaz's positioning as a filmmaker portraying post-trauma becomes most relevant, because his use of aesthetics conforms neither to classical film in general nor to classical Trauma Cinema in particular. In her analysis of Isabel Coixet's *The Secret Life of Words* (2005), Maseda identifies an approach to 'trauma' that applies equally well to Diaz's post-trauma cinema under investigation here: "the trauma symptoms are not explained verbally, but visually" (Maseda, 2014: 56). Diaz's aesthetics create a different kind of cinema, upsetting the spectator's expectations and therefore creating a more realist approach to post-trauma.

In conclusion, then, Diaz's films challenge current notions of Trauma Cinema, suggesting that, as Catherine Wheatley proposes in her reading of Michael Haneke's cinema, "the traumatic impact of events taking place around the world is misaligned with the tradition of fast-paced, inconsequential events" (Wheatley, 2009: 51). Contrary to popular Trauma Cinema, whose focus is shock through speed via the use of quick cuts as well as rapid and unstable camera movements, Diaz represents post-trauma through an aesthetic of long duration, which highlights the duration of post-trauma as condition and its long-lasting impact on the individual. So far, no attempt has been undertaken to connect the subject of

(post-) trauma to other, more alternative film genres. As the study of the content of slow films is still limited, it is of little surprise that the subject and representation of (post-) trauma has not yet found its way into Trauma Cinema studies. This thesis makes a beginning at merging Trauma Studies with Slow Cinema. In order to do this, I would like to explore current writing on cinematic slowness and Slow Cinema in the next section.

### **Early cinema, cinematic time and Slow Cinema**

In this section, I want to map out the context in which Diaz is predominantly seen, namely as a director at the forefront of what Jonathan Romney has termed “Slow Cinema” in 2004 in a review of Tsai Ming-liang’s *Goodbye, Dragon Inn/Bu san* (2003) for the journal *Screen Daily*. Now a benchmark definition of Slow Cinema, Romney described the apparent increase in cinematic slowness in 2010 as a form of “cinema that downplays event in favour of mood, evocativeness and an intensified sense of temporality” (Romney, 2010: 43). Characterised primarily by the use of long-takes - “the *sine qua non* of Slow Cinema” (Çağlayan, 2014: 28, emphasis original) - static long shots, little dialogue and an extended focus on the individual, Slow Cinema has become a point of discussion in recent years, the majority of which has taken place in online forums and in blogs. Harry Tuttle’s *Unspoken Cinema* blog is a case in point. His website had been the main forum for aficionados of Slow Cinema, or as he calls it Contemporary Contemplative Cinema (CCC), until about 2011. Based on an initial profile of thirty films, which include Alexandr Sokurov’s *Mother and Son/Mat I Syn* (1997), Carlos Reygadas’s *Japan/Jápon* (2002) and Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s *Three Monkeys/Üç maymun* (2008),

Tuttle concludes with a description of Contemplative Cinema by noting its four most visible characteristics: plotlessness, wordlessness, slowness, and alienation.

To Matthew Flanagan, on the other hand, Slow Cinema has five distinct characteristics: “an emphasis upon duration (in both formal and thematic aspects); an audio-visual depiction of stillness and everydayness; the employment of the long take as a structural device; a slow and undramatic form of narration (if narrative is present at all); and a predominantly realist (or hyperrealist) mode or intent” (Flanagan, 2012: 4). Flanagan’s PhD thesis on Slow Cinema, which is still one of the guiding works in the field, is an extension of his 2008 article in the Danish magazine *16:9*, which published his work on the increasing visibility of cinematic slowness. Flanagan considers the emergence of cinematic slowness as a result of the “trauma of the Second World War” (Flanagan, 2012: 4) and uses the terms durational and observational film as composites of Slow Cinema (Flanagan, 2012: 24, 40).

This section of my literature review will form the basis for subsequent chapters, all of which address the role of duration in Diaz’s representation of post-trauma. Slow Cinema, after all, “offers ... an extended experience of duration on screen” according to Çağlayan (Çağlayan, 2014: 1). I also aim to counter current Slow Cinema scholarship in its repeated neglect of the films’ content. Current writing on Slow Cinema largely tends to confine itself to the films’ aesthetics that clearly oppose popular films with only hesitant attempts at studying the films’ content and context, or without regarding them as films beyond the recurring debate on slowness in film (Flanagan, 2008; Tuttle, 2007, 2010; Bordwell, 2011). For example, “slow film”, in the words of Jakob Boer, “is thought to be an expression of widespread discontent with and anxiety over the ever-increasing

speed of everyday life that is imposed upon citizens of the modern globalised world of neoliberal capitalism” (Boer, 2015). The focus of work on Slow Cinema has therefore narrowed down to a debate on temporality, privileging form over content and neglecting equally important aspects of the films. In 2004, Romney already noted the limit of his own creation, because the term ‘Slow Cinema’ reduces the films to their relative slowness, which is, in reality, a subjective factor for the viewer. Surprisingly little work has been done to connect these particular aesthetics to the films’ content or the filmmakers’ cultural background. Recent studies by Brown (forthcoming), Davis (forthcoming) and Lovatt, who, in her analysis of Liu Jiayin’s *Oxhide I* and *Oxhide II*, argues for a need to include sound in the study of Slow Cinema (Lovatt, forthcoming), are three of the few exceptions in this. Antony Fiant’s French-language book *Pour un cinéma contemporain soustractif* is another example, although Fiant does not refer to Slow Cinema as such (Fiant, 2014). His study of minimalist filmmakers and their works is nevertheless useful for an understanding of the characteristics of Slow Cinema. Fiant, like Davis and Lovatt, focuses on filmmakers who are considered part and parcel of Slow Cinema: Lisandro Alonso, Béla Tarr, Wang Bing, Pedro Costa and others. Nevertheless, he takes a different approach to the directors’ films by focusing on elements which have so far been largely neglected. In detail, Fiant studies the representation of lonely and socially marginalized characters, the role of the body on screen and spaces as refuge points for persecuted characters (Fiant, 2014: 37-57). He also explores the role of the frame in the representation of those characters. In so doing, Fiant looks (if only partially because anything else would have demanded a separate book) at the content of slow films and reads this content through the films’ respective aesthetics and vice versa.

What becomes apparent in the writing of Çağlayan, Flanagan, Tuttle and even Fiant, is an emphasis on duration in slow films via the use of extensive long takes. Diaz's and other slow-film directors' tendency to show events in their entirety goes back to early filmmaking, despite Matthew Flanagan's (2008) and Nuno Baradas Jorge's (2012) suggestion that the films' roots lie in Italian Neorealism and Modernist Cinema. Çağlayan, too, considers Slow Cinema as an "exaggerated revision" of modern art cinema of the 1960s (Çağlayan, 2014: 9). Flanagan's article "Towards an Aesthetic of Slow in Contemporary Cinema" (2008), for instance, contextualises what he calls "an aesthetic of slow" around directors such as Béla Tarr, Carlos Reygadas, Pedro Costa and Hou Hsiao-hsien. Flanagan considers European modernist cinema of the 1950s and 1960s as the origin of Slow Cinema's aesthetics. In so doing, he focuses exclusively on the films' aesthetics instead of considering them in a wider context. It is without doubt that the aesthetics of contemporary slow films can be traced back to European modernist cinema, more specifically in fact to video and experimental film. On the other hand, I suggest that the approach to slow-film-making shares similarities to that of the Lumière brothers first of all, and has then developed throughout the history of cinema becoming particularly visible in European modernist cinema. In an interview with Gary M. Kramer, for instance, filmmaker Tsai Ming-liang makes a remark which echoes my own approach, saying "I am very confused about why people insist on discussing long takes. In the very beginning, weren't all films consisting of long takes?" (Kramer, 2015)

In a contribution to a catalogue published alongside the exhibition *Making Time* at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Palm Beach, Peter Wollen explores the uses and the treatment of time in video and film. Wollen (2000) draws a link

between today's approach to time in artists' videos and the first Lumière actualities. In ways similar to contemporary slow films, the early films by the Lumière brothers contained continuous actions, which were not interrupted by cuts, but were instead filmed in their entirety or until the film ran out. This is precisely how directors such as Tarr and Tsai Ming-liang have worked throughout their career. Making reference to several video artists who deliberately slow down the act of film exhibition, such as Douglas Gordon and his *24 Hour Psycho*, Wollen demonstrates that the Lumières' use of long-takes has found its way into film and video over time.

Bruce Jenkins (1996) reminds us that experimental film and video art in the 1960s and 1970s already divided artists into two opposing camps. Throughout the 1960s, for instance, especially with the surfacing of Andy Warhol's cinematic works, there had been a shift apparent in American avant-garde cinema, which was to divide the movement into two groups, each of which approached cinematic time differently. According to Jenkins, American filmmaker Jonas Mekas created "a simple contrast between those films by the 'quick' (Brakhage) and those that steeped themselves into the 'slow' (Warhol)" (Jenkins, 1996: 198). Warhol was known for stretching possibilities of recording real time to an extreme. His early cinematic work was founded on experimentations with duration, which resonates with the particularly long films in Diaz's oeuvre.

His minimalist and highly durational videos *Eat* (1964) and *Sleep* (1964) are examples of this. Even though it needs to be noted that the cinematic slowness in Warhol's *Eat* is deliberate and heightened, which is not necessarily the case in the general output of Slow Cinema with the exception of Tsai Ming-liang's *Walker* series, the director nevertheless takes a significant position in "the exploration of

[cinematic] time” (Davis and Needham, 2013: 10). Warhol’s films are an example of an overlap between long duration and cinematic slowness, similar to what I will analyse in the context of Diaz’s films. Yet, even though these two elements overlap, they are not interchangeable in that long films are not always slow or vice versa.<sup>9</sup> While the use of long-takes is often highlighted in writing on Slow Cinema (Flanagan, 2008; Tuttle, 2007; Çağlayan, 2014), the long-take in itself does not create cinematic slowness. On the contrary. Sebastian Schipper’s two-hour long one-take heist movie *Victoria* (2015) is an example of how long-takes can be used to reinforce the characters’ sense of agitation, fear and stress in the face of a bank robbery gone wrong. The two-hour long take contains elements of speed, such as driving, fast character action, and shootouts between robbers and the police. In order to use the long-take for a production of cinematic slowness, it is necessary to infuse the long-take with elements which evoke slowness in themselves, such as no or minimal camera movement, little to no dialogue and movement of the characters, and *temps morts*. These elements support the idea of stagnation, or of a slow progression of a film’s narrative. Regardless of how long a film is, it is the choice of aesthetics in single scenes which decides upon its respective pace.

Suggesting that due to the absence of motion in *Sleep* and *Empire*, for instance, Warhol’s films are reminiscent of painting or still photographs, Davis and Needham describe the director’s early films as an “exercise in durational cinema” (Davis and Needham, 2013: 27). In similar ways, Flanagan speaks of Slow Cinema as “durational film” (Flanagan, 2012: 5) and this is where I, too, seek to position the present research. Given the sheer length of Diaz’s feature films, there are parallels to be identified here in that duration and the slow progression of time are

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<sup>9</sup> The OED defines duration as “the time during which something lasts” (Hornby, 1995: 347).



the main thrusts of Diaz's cinema and its exploration of post-trauma and history. Duration takes on a significant role in the representation of post-trauma. Writing about what he calls "a cinema of stasis", Justin Remes argues that an "awareness of time" is at the heart of static films and that the oftentimes extensive duration of these films offer the viewer "space for meditation, for immersion in an image [and] for sober reflections on the nature of movement and stasis, time and space, cinema and art" (Remes, 2015: 13, 22). Although Remes refers to Slow Cinema only in the conclusion of his book *Motionless Pictures*, many of his reflections about the significance of cinematic slowness, duration and stasis are applicable to Diaz's films. Edward Scheer suggests that 'durational art' "implies a specific construction of time, a deliberate shaping of it to effect a particular experience for the viewer or the audience" (Scheer, 2012: 1). This is important in that Diaz has repeatedly pointed out that he wanted to make the audience experience what he shows on screen (Carpio, 2010a).

### **Duration, memory, death**

In his study of Contemplative Cinema, Tuttle argues that "Slow Cinema doesn't modify time, it restores the perception of time we usually have in life" (Tuttle, 2010). Further, Erik Bordeleau considers the temporality in Slow Cinema as a "radical temporal realism" (Bordeleau, 2009). Diaz indeed links his use of long-takes with the capturing of "real time": "In *Ebolusyon* [Evolution of a Filipino Family], I am capturing real time. I am trying to experience what these people are experiencing. They walk. I must experience their walk. I must experience their boredom and sorrows" (Wee, 2005). This echoes with suggestions by Adrian Chan who considers Béla Tarr as a filmmaker who creates "a new kind of time and

temporality” (Chan, 2007), and, I would add, brings aspects of durational cinema to the fore, in particular in his seven-hour film *Sátántangó* (1994). Asked about the reason behind his long-takes, Tarr responds that his aim is always “to make the film a real psychological process” (Schlosser, 2000). He therefore establishes a link between the duration of his films and the mental processes of his characters, thereby also linking duration and memory. Ira Jaffe (2014) sees a link between cinematic slowness, absence and the representation of death, connecting these attributes to slow films’ particular aesthetics of stillness and empty framing.

The interplay of duration, memory and death, as well as of duration and post-trauma is one of the main points I will repeatedly highlight throughout this thesis. For duration becomes a vehicle for the transmission of “the unspoken inner struggle of characters” (Kovács, 2008). Kovács’ argument chimes most strongly with that of Jessica Morgan in *Time after Time* (2004), in which she proposes that the respective speed in film (and video) stems from and represents the internal temporality of the characters. She connects cinematic time to human psychology, which has a particular resonance with post-trauma. As mentioned earlier, post-trauma develops slowly over time and depletes an individual’s resources in the process. Even though the victim-survivor faces challenges such as a sudden onset of aggression and anxiety, post-trauma expresses itself by ‘slowing down’ the individual due to insomnia, depression, and high adrenaline levels, which deplete his/her resources (Van der Kolk, 1989: 444).

In his book chapter on still photography in Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s film, Glyn Davis argues that photographs and photographers are common elements in Slow Cinema, citing sources as varied as Gus van Sant’s *Elephant* and Lav Diaz’s *Century of Birthing* (Davis, forthcoming: no pagination). Davis connects

the presence of stillness in Apichatpong's *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Life* (with or without the help of still photographs) to the film's subject of death and dying. While Davis makes a valid point, he stops short in regarding this as a general characteristic of slow films. The films of Lav Diaz, Tsai Ming-liang, Béla Tarr and even Yulene Olaizola and Michela Occhipinti deal with the subject of death in its many facets. Apichatpong's use of still photographs is only one expression of this general characteristic of Slow Cinema.

### **Slow Cinema's cultural roots**

As indicated, Slow Cinema is repeatedly linked to Italian Neorealism and its impact on contemporary art cinema. David Bordwell goes as far as suggesting on his blog *David Bordwell's website on cinema* (2011) that the increase in long-takes is the result of a competition among directors. Diaz is not exceptional in challenging this belief. In 2002, *museum in progress* (mip) invited filmmakers and artists to discuss the use of slowness in their work at a public symposium. Artist Hanne Darboven, for instance, rejects the term 'slow' completely in relation to art, echoing the approach of Diaz, who contends that there is neither slow nor fast cinema; "It's cinema time" (Carpio, 2010b). Other guests, such as filmmaker Deimantas Narkevicius, give an insight into the origins of the slowness in their work. Narkevicius, for instance, explains

For 50 or 60 years, the area where I was living was disconnected from the rest of the world. Time was slow, in fact I would say it was practically at a standstill. And then suddenly, at the beginning of the 90s, things changed radically and everything speeded up ... When I started my narrative works ... I was looking for individuals who had lived through that time, the so-called slow time. (Museum in Progress, 2002)

Narkevicius's account on how his geographical and temporal background has influenced his cinema resonates with Diaz's and other slow-film directors' intention to portray a kind of life that used to be free from mechanical clocks and where nature governed time. Their approach challenges current attempts to position Slow Cinema as a result of stylistic influence from previous film movements and the alleged aim of countering popular cinema. Yet slowness is not always a deliberate rejection of Hollywood cinema's speed. In fact, the tempting and widespread conclusion that directors who pursue an aesthetic of slow deliberately counter Hollywood cinema needs to be handled with caution. Karl Schoonover suggests,

slow film is not ... simply in a pointless headlock with Hollywood's temporal economy. Rather it speaks to a larger system of tethering value to time, labor to bodies, and productivity to particular modes and forms of cultural reproduction. (Schoonover, 2012: 68)

In his book *On Slowness*, Koepnick goes a step further and argues that "aesthetic slowness is far from merely reactive, let alone reactionary" (Koepnick, 2014: 46). Slowness is instead a pointer to the complexity of time, allowing space for the instant as well as for long duration to appear in a singular work. The merging of the (fast) instant and (slow) duration will take on a significant meaning later on in my work in the context of Diaz's creation of terror for both his characters and his audience.

Even though the suggestions that slow-film directors act directly and deliberately against Hollywood's fast-paced cinema abound in the writing of Tuttle (2007, 2010), Bordwell (2011) and Boer (2015), it is vital to note that this is not necessarily the case with all films and their directors. In his review of Béla Tarr's films, Ian Johnston (2009) challenges this common take on Slow Cinema,

concluding that Tarr's films "are not simply a formalistic reaction against the ubiquitous fast-cutting of modern cinema", but an attempt to follow "the logic of life" (Johnston, 2009). Furthermore, Diaz, for instance, contends that "[the choice of the long-take aesthetic] just came in the process. I think it is a framework that has come naturally. It is not deliberate" (Carpio, 2010a). British director Ben Rivers (*Two Years at Sea*, 2011) revealed at a panel discussion at Newcastle's Slow Cinema Weekend that his films' narratives govern their relative cinematic speeds. Interviewed about her film *Fogo* (2012), Mexican filmmaker Yulene Olaizola argues similarly, explaining that "the time that passes in a slow way, or the contemplative mood, is related to how the people live there [on Fogo Island], always in a close relationship with nature, with weather. And of course time in places like Fogo seems to occur slower than in a city for a example" (Olaizola, 2014). Olaizola establishes a link between the location where the story is set and the film's cinematic speed. Even filmmaker Tsai Ming-liang, known for setting his films in bustling urban centres, returns in his films to the slowness he experienced while growing up in Malaysia. He told Ella Raidel in an interview

there is no comparison between Taiwan and my hometown [in Malaysia] ... I have strongly felt the difference between Taiwan and Malaysia. I constructed my identity based on those two locations, both of which have a very different pace. In Taiwan, everything is exceptionally fast. This speed feels uncomfortable. I think the distance that I have is a result of these two different perspectives. (Raidel, 2011: 32)<sup>10</sup>

It is striking that many slow-film directors come from developing countries or even former Western colonies, such as Mexico, Paraguay and the Philippines in the

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<sup>10</sup> „...es gibt keinen Vergleich zwischen Taiwan und meiner Heimatstadt. ... Ich habe diesen Unterschied zwischen Taiwan und Malaysia stark gespürt. Meine Identität konstruiert sich ja aus diesen zwei Orten, die beide sehr unterschiedliche Geschwindigkeiten haben. In Taiwan ist alles sehr schnell. Diese Geschwindigkeit fühlt sich anstrengend an. Ich glaube, die Distanz die ich habe, ergibt sich aus diesen zwei sehr unterschiedlichen Betrachtungspunkten.“

case of Diaz. Slow-film directors therefore seem to infuse their films with their particular social-historical and geographical background, or use the narrative as guidance for their films' respective aesthetics. One example is the repeated return of ghosts in Diaz's films. Ghosts in Philippine New Cinema, according to Bliss Cua Lim, "have the effect of splintering and gendering national time" (Cua Lim, 2009: 150). By infusing his cinematic works with the presence of ghosts, Diaz disrupts linear time the way it has been introduced by the mechanical clock, and therefore also challenges the linear progression of conventional narrative (Cua Lim, 2009: 161). The disruption of linear time, the "coexistence of other times" (Cua Lim, 2009: 11), is not only an expression of pre-Hispanic times in the Philippines. I would like to add that it echoes the psychology behind post-trauma, which disrupts linear temporality and instead merges past and present to form an indistinguishable and disorienting time period.

### **Slow Cinema and the film festival**

These particular aesthetics of slow films are not the only characteristic that makes these films stand out. There is an equal concern in current writing about the distribution of the films and their invisibility outside film festivals (Çağlayan, 2014: 29). Bordwell suggests that slow films are specifically aimed at festivals. While this is a noteworthy characteristic of Slow Cinema, Bordwell stops short of explaining why slow films are predominantly found at festivals without attracting distribution. Tsai Ming-liang and Béla Tarr are the main exceptions to this. Both directors have succeeded in securing distribution of their films beyond film festivals. Yet, the majority of slow films are unavailable to the general public. In fact, Çağlayan suggests that the slow narrative progression as well as a lack of

causality within the narrative are “virtually unacceptable for a regular film-goer [sic]” (Çağlayan, 2014: 30). Lav Diaz’s films serve as an example here. The director stated at a roundtable discussion at the Slow Cinema weekend in Newcastle in 2012 that there was no market for his films due to the specific aesthetics of his cinema (Diaz, 2012a). DVDs of his films can only be bought from the director himself. With that, he is not alone, especially if the length of his films is considered. Chinese director Wang Bing equally challenges the industry model with his long and comparatively slow documentaries. *Crude Oil/Caiyou riji* (2008) stands out in the director’s oeuvre with a running time of fourteen hours. His nine-hour documentary *West of the Tracks/Tie Xi Qu* (2003) had for a long time been the only film that had secured DVD distribution, and this occurred only with the help of Tiger Releases, which is part of the Rotterdam Film Festival. His almost three-hour long documentary *Three Sisters* (2012) was released through arte EDITIONS. But it is only available in France and Belgium directly, and the French subtitling limits the film’s accessibility.

These films’ aesthetics combined with at times non-standard running times do not allow for a voluntary choice by directors to submit their films to, and have their works screened exclusively at international film festivals. The absence of distributors taking the risk of buying distribution rights to slow films, I argue, is the result of the industry’s supply-demand model. Often, slow-film directors are denied wide releases of their films, which render festivals the only platform where they can showcase their work. This comes mainly as a result of the viewers’ exposure to popular film and the inherent training of the viewer that comes with it. Bordwell makes the link explicit and acknowledges that slow films are difficult not only to discuss, but also to distribute, because the filmgoer is a trained viewer

(Bordwell, 2011). In order to analyse and interpret a film appropriately, s/he looks for specific patterns s/he is familiar with from popular movies. Yet while this is a successful pursuit with regards to the vast majority of films produced, slow films demand a specific and novel approach, similar to other arthouse films. Consequently, Slow Cinema does not follow the entertainment model that provides fast pleasure and escape. The novel approach, which is necessary, creates a boundary between film and viewer, and hampers wide distribution in a market that is aimed at profit on the basis of quick pleasure. This is one reason why filmmakers such as Tsai Ming-liang have begun to consider museums and galleries as exhibition venues for their kind of cinema (Maerkle, 2014).

In conclusion, then, we can say that what is apparent in current discourse on Slow Cinema or on cinematic slowness in more general terms is that the debate has developed little since the conception of the term. Even in the most recent books on the subject (Lim, 2014; Jaffe, 2014), there is no real push evident in bringing the debate forward and extending it to directors whose work have received comparatively little attention in film scholarship. On top of that, the repeated return to the same arguments about the films' slowness renders current material weak, and regressive at times. This thesis seeks to make a substantial contribution to the discourse on Slow Cinema, finding new ways as to how extended duration can be interpreted as part of the films' narratives on post-trauma, mourning and death. It also seeks to make an intervention in current scholarship on Slow Cinema, suggesting that it is futile in the context of Diaz's films to focus on Slow Cinema *per se* because his films challenge more than only cinematic time. Even though Diaz is indeed considered as a director of Slow Cinema, his films demand a more thorough and detailed approach and



investigation. His films are complex, multi-layered analyses of the past's influence on the present and how it prevents Philippine society to move forward. While time in form of long duration plays a significant role in Diaz's investigation of post-trauma, other areas of scholarship likewise need to be taken into consideration.

### **Violence and the ethics of filmmaking**

Trauma Cinema and Slow Cinema are two frameworks Diaz's films can be interpreted through. Both approaches may involve a necessary engagement with the representation of violence and a required ethical treatment of the subject matter. For instance, Diaz's approach to post-trauma includes a rejection of abject images. Even though his films deal with the brutal history of colonialism and dictatorship, Diaz does not convey this brutality in graphic images. Instead, he seeks alternative ways, either through the use of dialogue and/or sound. This, I believe, is an aesthetical as well as an ethical choice. It thus seems appropriate to map existing literature on ethics, violence and cinema at this point in order to enhance the following film analyses.

From explicit sex scenes in the films of Lav Diaz, Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Tsai Ming-liang to on-screen violence, mainly directed at animals, in Béla Tarr's, Lisandro Alonso's and Carlos Reygadas' films, it seems as though Slow Cinema not only challenges its viewers in regards to form and length. In fact, Asbjørn Grønstad suggests in relation to what he calls "transgressive cinema" that it is not only the content for which transgressive cinema is infamous for. Most significant in the debate on Slow Cinema is that 'the unwatchable' relies heavily on cinematic form (Grønstad, 2012: 24). Hence, it is the aesthetics – the way of approaching the representation of a film's content – that could be

considered transgressive. Unwatchable cinema, he argues, “is after all about films that misbehave, that fail to conform to conventions and norms, and that make spectators uneasy” (Grønstad, 2012: 24); a statement that applies well to Slow Cinema’s challenging aesthetics of long takes, long shots, and little dialogue.

Without explicitly referring to Slow Cinema, though, Grønstad identifies a cinema of the “unwatchable”, and suggests that the “cinema of lethargy” (Grønstad, 2012: 66), whose term implies a cinema of slowness, is part of a growing body of films that confronts the viewers with abject images. This is precisely the case, Grønstad proposes, because lethargic cinema “labors to supplant the orthodoxies of a literary, plot-driven cinema with a cinema of gestures, bodies and landscapes” (Grønstad, 2012: 66). In focusing on the corporeal, for instance, it appears only a small step between the representation of the body and an abject or violated image of it. Indeed, Marco Abel suggests that “violent images are the lifeblood of TV and abound in the history of cinema; the history of literature and the arts in general would be unthinkable without them” (Abel, 2009: 1).

But precisely because violence is the lifeblood of film and TV, “death has [subsequently] become objectified and trivial” (Kuczok, 2008: 33), as Wojciech Kuczok argues in his treatise *Höllisches Kino*.<sup>11</sup> Interesting in this context is, then, the concern that, according to photographer Nadia Yaqub, “it is impossible for a photograph to convey to viewers the experiences of violence that are depicted within it” (Yaqub, 2013: 154). Yaqub further refers to photographer Alfredo Jaar, who documented the Rwandan genocide and remarked later on that “people did not react to these kinds of images” (Jaar in Yacub, 2013: 155). Kuczok suggests that

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<sup>11</sup> „Der Tod ... ist als fester Bestandteil der meisten Filmhandlungen verdinglicht und total alltäglich geworden.”

viewers have become used, and, I would add, numb and indifferent to the floods of images of violence. This is in line with Susan Sontag's argument that "shock can become familiar. Shock can wear off" (Sontag, 2003: 73). She, too, points to a degree of numbness the viewer can generate in conditions of oversaturation through new media, which explains the absence of empathic reactions in viewers of photographs of the Rwandan genocide. Consequently, the threshold to incite a reaction in the viewer through violent and abject imagery has persistently increased throughout the history of cinema. Kuczok intimates that nowadays "it is not enough to kill. There needs to be torture as well" (Kuczok, 2008: 43).<sup>12</sup>

But not all artists pursue this direction. According to Grønstad, the unwatchable does not need to contain graphic images of violence or sex. Instead, it refers to "virtually anything in the image that may insult our sensibilities, that makes us want to avert our eye, or that forces us to reconsider our investments, be they visual/aesthetic or political/moral" (Grønstad, 2012: 15).

If Grønstad's foray considers mainly the visually abject, I contend that the meaning of the term 'unwatchable' in regards to visual arts such as cinema is a double-edged sword. While Grønstad focuses most strongly on the unwatchable as a form of imagery which is difficult to stomach for the viewer, I would like to extend the notion of the unwatchable and refer to the literal meaning of the term: scenes that cannot be watched, because they are staged off-screen. Grønstad suggests that viewers can be tested with explicit imagery or even with "a conspicuous absence of *any* action" (Grønstad, 2012: 66, original emphasis). He identifies here a particular form of the abject in cinema, which he links to the films of Austrian filmmaker Michael Haneke. "What is most terrible" he suggests "is that

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<sup>12</sup> „Es reicht nicht aus, zu töten, es muss gefoltert werden.“

which is off-screen, that which cannot be shown on account of its psychic banishment, its cultural silencing” (Grønstad, 2012: 156).

Yacub notes that photographer Jarr’s strategy in reaction to the increased numbness and indifference of the viewers involved a stronger focus on absence instead of presence. Rather than showing explicit imagery of violence, he “[relied] on the store of photographic images of violence that spectators have already witnessed, inviting them to contemplate the violence that has been inflicted far away” (Yacub, 2013: 155).

Using Jacques Rivette’s concern about the problems of cinematic realism regarding the Holocaust as a starting point, Griselda Pollock argues that a representation of violence “would inevitably produce a simulation of violence and of death which the spectators would consume knowing it to be an image of death that is not real, however realistically the film attempts to deliver it scenographically and dramatically” (Pollock, 2011: 265). Pollock goes further by suggesting that films made by major studios have to be profitable for investors. It is therefore indispensable that what is shown needs to be tolerable for the viewer. In extension this means that the films need to receive a favourable film classification. She suggests that “as a result of inevitable modifications of the event’s horror to accommodate the tolerability of being shown / seen, the viewer may derive from the fact that the cinema has made the scene bearable” (Pollock, 2011: 265). In other words, commercial cinema has a tendency to misguide the viewers in regards to the gravity of violence and its effects on the characters.

This preference of invisibility goes back to classical Greek theatre. In his book *The Reality Effect*, Joel Black looks at the history of the representation of sex and violence in the arts. He notes that the performing arts have long tended to

position violent acts off-stage (Black, 2002: 27). This applies in particular to the theatre of Greek tragedy, as Andrew Horton points out in his study of Theo Angelopoulos, a director who equally positions violence off-stage (Horton, 1997: 34). The absence of graphic violence in Lav Diaz's films has thus a long history to draw on. Further, Black suggests that "distancing spectators from violent acts and catastrophic events ... [gives] audiences the degree of detachment necessary for *imaginative engagement*" (Black, 2002: 27, emphasis added).

Poetic absences the way Diaz creates them, are not always welcomed by the audience. In her study of literary and cinematic representations of the 2/28 Incident in Taiwan, Sylvia Li-Chun Lin (2007) refers to criticism directed at director Hou Hsiao-hsien and his film *A City of Sadness/Bei qing cheng shi* (1989). The 2/28 incident, which occurred before the end of World War II, marks the beginning of four decades of Martial Law in Taiwan after local protests about the administrative control from China over Taiwan were brutally put to an end. *Sadness* uses the 2/28 Incident as one of its cornerstones. Yet Hou was attacked for *not* representing the atrocities committed by the state in explicit imagery. Rather, the director tended to cut to peaceful nature shots at the height of dramatic tension. He therefore privileged absence over explicit spectacle just as Diaz does today, but both critics and viewers alike attacked him for his choice (Lin, 2007).

Black refers to pre-twentieth century society in which "the impulse to 'show everything' was by no means considered ethically acceptable or aesthetically desirable in Western art" (Black, 2002: 27). What the viewer will encounter in most of Diaz's films is a visual absence of violence, just as Horton describes with regards to Angelopoulos' *The Travelling Players*: "The horror is that there is no blood, no shouting, no demonstration. Instead, there is silence and a

cold beauty” (Horton, 1997: 68). Diaz’s filmmaking thus conforms much to what Geoffrey H. Hartman referred to as ‘classical poetics’, which expressed itself through “limited direct representations of violence or suffering ... and [which] developed instead a powerful language of witness or indirect disclosure” (Hartman, 1996: 85).

The absence of violent imagery fits well to what Saul Friedlander has described as “distanced realism”, in which reality is, as he writes, “perceived through a filter: that of memory (distance in time), that of spatial displacement, that of some sort of narrative margin which leaves the unsayable unsaid” (Friedlander, 1992: 17). The distance Friedlander notes in relation to memory and traumatic events is transmitted in the directors’ work through the prominent use of off-screen space, which is utilised to establish a spatial distance between what is and what is not shown/seen. Accordingly, Anne Rutherford adds that debates around the subject of ethics and cinematic representation have tended to revolve around the two binaries showing or not showing (Rutherford, 2013: 87), thereby referring to aspects of aesthetical choices as ethical choices.

In interview, Diaz contends that

I don’t need to show it [violence]. It’s there. ... It’s stronger, because it’s more inert, more inside. The fear is more inside. The fear to confront it. If you see it, then it’s just a horror film. ... While if you show [violence] in a more primal way you gain that kind of momentum that evil is just around the corner. And you know it. (Diaz, 2014a)

The debate on absence of explicit imagery has particularly poignant meanings in relation to trauma studies. While referred to in the aforementioned statements by Diaz, the absence of on-screen violence is not only a matter of the viewer’s engagement with the text. Absence is, as briefly indicated in my introductory

chapter, an aspect of post-trauma. E. Ann Kaplan correctly points out, “Trauma ... is characterized by two main phenomena: *visuality* (including sound) and *absence or delay of symbolization*” (Kaplan, 2005: 126, emphasis added).

“Traumatic realist texts”, Rothberg suggests, “search for a form of documentation beyond direct reference and coherent narrative, but do not abandon the possibility for some kind of reference and some kind of narrative” (Rothberg, 2000: 100-101). Later on Rothberg points to “a necessary absence” (Rothberg, 2000: 104), an absence that at times concerns the actual traumatic event the texts deal with. The emphasis is thus placed on *pointing to* instead of showing atrocity. Rothberg repeatedly refers to the aspect of ‘experience’ in traumatic realist texts, confirming my own reading of Diaz’s films, in which cinematic techniques are used to evoke, to some extent, experiences the characters go through.

By not using explicit visual material in regards to torture, rape and extra-judicial killings, Diaz is likely to avoid a significant danger in Trauma Cinema; that of secondary traumatisation. With reference to George Hartman, Jill Bennett suggests that secondary traumatisation is “visited upon the viewer of graphic imagery who vicariously experiences a milder version of the shock experiences by the primary witness of the tragedy depicted” (Bennett, 2005: 9). Diaz’s rejection of explicit violence thus appears to be an ethical decision that is noticeable in many of his films. The aim is less a violent portrait that could traumatise the viewer. Diaz’s films, in particular, function more as a therapeutic method for working through traumatic events. While revisiting his country’s violent past, the actual violence is not the main focus, neither for Diaz nor for the viewer. Even though Hartman’s position is controversial (cf. Bennett, 2005), gore images of torture and

killing can potentially re-traumatise Diaz and his people, so that the choice of minimising explicit imagery is based on responsibility and morality. For Libby Saxton, the choice of what to show and what to transmit through absence is an expression of a filmmaker's ethical vision (Saxton, 2008: 15), and therefore needs to be considered as such.

Using the Holocaust and imagery of concentration camps as a reference point for her studies, Saxton suggests further that "images of atrocity might effectively shield us from the event itself, replacing a traumatic absence with a redemptive presence" (Saxton, 2008: 60). It follows that not showing violence directly, in particular the form of violence executed as part of totalitarian or even colonialist regimes, could, in effect, cause the opposite effect of what the filmmaker intends to achieve. Gerard Wacjman is more direct in his proposition, contending that "every image of horror lays a veil over the horror; every image, because it is an image, protects us from the horror" (Wacjman in Saxton, 2008: 61). There is thus an agreement amongst scholars such as Saxton and Wacjman who argue for a stronger impact of absence as opposed to the presence of violent atrocity on screen.

Intriguing in the context of visual absence of violence, Saxton proposes that "witnessing is intimately connected to non-seeing, blocked vision and blindness" (Saxton, 2008: 117), which echoes Hochberg's remarks about "failed witnessing" (Hochberg, 2015: 140). Although she focuses specifically on cinematic depictions of the Holocaust, in particular those of concentration and extermination camps, Saxton's foray is similarly applicable to the cinema of Diaz and others, who represents the traumatic history of his country and his people through an absence of on-screen atrocity.



It is, however, not only the aforementioned (non-) representation of violence, which demands an ethical response of the filmmaker. Diaz walks a thin line by attempting a representation of (post-) trauma. By focusing on traumatised characters in his films, he opens his work up to a debate, which has been at the forefront of trauma scholarship: the apparent un-representability of 'trauma'. Main arguments in this field point to "the necessity of keeping the dignity and mourning of those involved [but also] the need to avoid making someone else's suffering a spectacle" (Maseda, 2014: 48). Cinema, with its vast range of techniques and possibilities to evoke certain emotions in the viewer, and its aim - in parts at least - to entertain a given audience, make evident the danger of using spectacular camera effects in order to evoke a feeling of post-trauma. There is a risk of giving prominence to visual techniques, which may not necessarily be truthful or representative, rather than to the victim-survivor and his/her story. Critics have pointed to the "proliferation of trauma as spectacle and simulation that exposes [victims] and open theirs and the public's wounds" (Maseda, 2014: 52), noting the increased move towards using the subject of 'trauma' for the entertainment of a cinema audience.

John J. Michalczyk makes a valid point in this context, considering specifically the danger of representations of atrocities. He acknowledges that film can be what he calls a "stepping stone" in understanding historical moments (Michalczyk, 2013: xvii). Yet, the persistent drive to generate profits with film can potentially act against the authenticity of cinematic representations of traumatic events and of post-trauma. "On the other hand," he writes, "the need to telescope the events to a two-hour feature and the necessity of adding tension, excitement, action, and on occasion, sex and violence, may create a less authentic production"

(Michalczyk, 2013: xvii). Michalczyk suggests that cinematic representations of atrocities are often governed by industry frameworks, which are not always and not necessarily aimed at authenticity, but at entertainment and visual pleasure.

Of interest here is that Shohini Chaudhuri (2014) seems to infer that in order to produce an 'ethical' film, the director must break with classic conventions. She writes, "The mainspring of classic narrative – causality, closure, coherence, often work towards creating a *moral* tale of good and evil, which is unsuited to a properly *ethical* treatment of the subject of atrocity" (Chaudhuri, 2014: 14, emphasis original). Diaz's and other filmmakers' choices of challenging popular notions of film aesthetics thus appears to be a requisite for the production of an ethical approach to the representation of post-trauma. In using off-screen space for atrocious events and in refraining from using deliberately exaggerated aesthetics (Walker, 2001) such as rapid editing and swift camera movement, Diaz avoids the debate on rendering post-trauma a cinematic spectacle, thereby potentially transgressing the feelings of survivor-victims.

### **The case of Lav Diaz**

Given his standard aesthetical practice – the use of long-takes, of long shots and little dialogue - Diaz's films have been repeatedly seen in the context of Slow Cinema, a term which has been coined as early as 2004 by film critic Jonathan Romney (2004), despite the widespread referral to Romney's 2010 *Sight & Sound* article about films of the first decade of the 2000s as a starting point. Although several slow-film directors have received a lot of attention in recent years due to their increased visibility at major international film festivals such as Rotterdam, Venice, Locarno and even Cannes, Diaz has remained a comparatively unknown

figure, especially in academic writing. William Brown is one of the first to write about Diaz's cinema in more detail. His book chapter *Melancholia: The Long, Slow Cinema of Lav Diaz* (Brown, forthcoming) explores the origins of Diaz's aesthetics of slowness and their connection to narratives of history and memory. Brown concludes that Diaz is the only filmmaker in the Philippine New Wave who consistently uses extreme durations and Slow Cinema aesthetics (Brown, forthcoming: no pagination). Brown's chapter points to the historical references Diaz makes in *Melancholia*, in particular those of disappearances as a result of political opposition. To him, "*Melancholia* is clearly rooted in a specifically Philippine history" (Brown, forthcoming: no pagination).

Aside from Brown's forthcoming chapter on Diaz's *Melancholia*, however, no academic work has been done on Diaz's cinema. On the other hand, Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul, in particular, became a director of interest after he won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Festival in 2010 for his film *Uncle Boonmee who can recall his past lives/Loong Boonmee raleuk chat* (Ferrari, 2006; Ingawanji and MacDonald, 2006; Kim, 2010, 2011; Teh, 2011; Lovatt, 2013). Being not only a filmmaker, but also an artist, he has attracted book publications mainly as a result of his installation works, such as *Primitive* (Gioni and Carrion-Murayari, 2011) and *Photophobia* (Bjerkem, 2014).

Malaysian-born filmmaker Tsai Ming-liang equally attracted widespread attention for films such as *The Hole/Dong* (1998) and *I don't want to sleep alone/Hei yan quan* (2006) as well as his short films *Walker* (2012) (Chow, 2006; Bordeleau, 2012; McKibbin, 2012; Bordun, 2013) and *Journey to the West/Xi you* (2014). Five books have already been published about his oeuvre; Olivier Rivière's *Tsai Ming-Liang* (2004), Joshua Willey's *Cinematic Absence: An Absence of Tsai*

*Ming-liang's "Goodbye Dragon Inn"* (2009) and the German-language work *Subversive Realitäten: Die Filme des Tsai Ming-Liang* (Raidel, 2011). Most recently, Song Hwee Lim's *Tsai Ming-liang and a Cinema of Slowness* (2014) has been published, in which Lim explores the many ways the filmmaker, a leading figure of the Second Taiwanese New Wave, achieves a sense of slowness throughout his oeuvre.

In Europe, Béla Tarr has seen extensive coverage of his work, mainly in film analyses and reviews by film critics and bloggers (Frampton, 2001; Chan, 2007; Flanagan, 2009; Johnston, 2009). Since Tarr quit filmmaking after the completion and release of *The Turin Horse/A torinói ló* (2011), his work, too, has been picked up in monographs. Jacques Rancière's French-language book *Béla Tarr, Le Temps D'Après* (2011, also available in English since 2013 under the title *Béla Tarr, The Time After*) and András Bálint Kovács's *The Cinema of Béla Tarr: The Circle Closes* (2013) are studies of Tarr's cinematic aesthetics. Employing a Lacanian reading of Tarr's films, Bernhard Hetzenauer takes a more philosophical approach to the Hungarian director in his German-language book *Das Innen im Aussen – Béla Tarr, Jacques Lacan und der Blick* (2013).

While literature on slow-film directors from around the world begin to amount, Lav Diaz has remained a director who has so far been widely overlooked. Patrick D. Flores' article (2012) on the long-take in Philippine film is telling. A professor at the University of the Philippines, Flores investigates the uses of long-takes in Philippine cinema and their evocation of spatialised time, focusing primarily on Ishmael Bernal's *Manila by Night/City After Dark* (1980). Surprisingly, he mentions Diaz only in passing at the end of his article. Flores' omission is symptomatic for a wider absence of scholarly work on the filmmaker. On the one

hand, more and more retrospectives of his films are organised around the world. In 2009, a three-months long retrospective of Diaz's films was programmed under the title *Death in the Land of Melancholia* (wisekwai, 2009). The most recent one was held in Sao Paolo in 2013, where eighteen films of his were screened between 18 and 31 October 2013 (Hessel, 2013). In autumn 2015, the gallery and art centre Jeu de Paume in Paris and the Cinematek in Brussels will host the most complete retrospective of his work in Europe. And even though his commercially most successful film *Norte, The End of History* (2013) had been covered extensively in reviews after the Cannes festival, substantial writing, especially scholarly writing, on his work remains absent.

### **Trauma in Philippine literature and cinema**

Before I begin my analysis of Diaz's films, I would like to look at the general output of local films and literature which deal with the traumatic history of the Philippines. This allows the reader to position my work on Diaz in the wider area of Philippine cinema and scholarship.

There is a slight, if almost invisible tendency in contemporary independent Philippine cinema to deal with the country's history and its effects on today's society. Film acts as a medium to speak up against atrocities committed in the past and in the present. In this section, I will point to a few examples from Filipino directors, who have, similar to Lav Diaz, used traumatic events as the centrepiece of their cinematic works. This will aid a contextualisation of Diaz's work not only as part of global art cinema, as I have established earlier in my methodology, but also as part of Philippine independent cinema.

Cinematic depictions and representations of the traumatic history of colonialist oppression and of dictatorial persecution of opposition are generally rare in the Philippines. Moreover, William Brown notes that Diaz's films are exceptional in their study of Philippine history because of their unrivalled length (Brown, forthcoming). Alexis Tioseco described the dire situation as far back as 2009:

I think there's very few filmmakers in the Philippines in the vein of Lav Diaz and his work, at least in the sense that he tackles political problems while also presenting the broader context for them. Many filmmakers will just say 'this is happening' without trying to expand on that and ask why. ... a lot of them [the filmmakers] are very young, still maturing not just in terms of their aesthetics but also in terms of their understanding of society. You can see a lot of frustration in their work with regard to the political situation, but not necessarily a maturity in the way they deal with it. (Ingawanij et al, 2009)

Moreover, Tioseco misses a supportive film culture in the Philippines that would help films such as Diaz's to be seen more widely in his home country. Diaz claims that filmmakers tend to avoid directing independent cinema, because it would be

career suicide for them to do serious work, to tackle history hardcore, or to move beyond the convention. ... They are more worried about their career. They do things for their career. They don't do things for culture. It's a different perspective actually that defines these people. (Diaz, 2014a)

There are nevertheless filmmakers, who, according to Diaz, make an attempt to put the Philippines' traumatic history on screen. Amongst them are Raya Martin, John Torres, Anthony Sanchez and Jet Leyco. Raya Martin is perhaps the most prominent among them, having tackled history in two of his films: *A Short Film About the Indio Nacional/Maicling pelicula nang ysang Indio Nacional* (2005) and *Independencia* (2009).

In an attempted trilogy, Martin tackles Spanish and American colonisation of the Philippine islands and the inevitable consequences for the people. He is

particularly interested in history that is absent in Philippine schoolbooks. In an interview with Mickaël Pierson, Martin gives an example of this: “During the colonisation, there was this tradition of taking to the mountains. That was the case with the Spanish, and recommenced with the Americans. But it’s a part of history that isn’t taught at school” (Pierson, 2009).<sup>13</sup> While colonisation as such is a recurring theme in history classes, guerrilla fights, which were set up to tackle the advancement of colonisers and which were organised in the mountains to which the locals fled en masse, are not part of the national curriculum.

In his debut feature *A Short Film about the Indio Nacional* (2005), Martin portrays the oppression of the local population by Spanish colonisers, especially by Spanish friars.<sup>14</sup> He borrows aesthetics from early silent film, using black-and-white film stock, title cards, and accompanying music in lieu of dialogue. The film is set towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century leading to the people’s revolution against their oppressors.

A young Filipina is said to have died from slavery. Then, two men are seen throwing a friar, bound hand and foot, into a river, counting “One, two, three hundred years!” indicating the length of Spanish colonisation. In a later scene, a young man is welcomed in the circle of the Katipunan, a group of people that pursued Philippine independence from Spain. The revolution itself, which took place between 1896 and 1898, is only alluded to in the film. Instead, Martin shows social injustices and abuses at the hand of the colonisers, which lead to the Philippine Revolution, “the first national armed uprising of the Filipino people for

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<sup>13</sup> “Il y a aux Philippines cette sorte de tradition de fuite vers les montagnes dans les périodes de colonisation. Ce fut le cas avec les Espagnols. Cela a recommencé avec les Américains. Les professeurs n’enseignent pas cette partie de l’histoire.”

<sup>14</sup> Despite the film’s title indicating that it be a short film, it is, in fact, a feature film running over ninety minutes.

independence” (Zaide, 1956: 162). Similar to Diaz, Martin refrains from projecting explicit images of colonial violence on screen. Social injustices are merely talked about and referred to. Yet, the focus remains the reaction of Filipinos and Filipinas to the treatment of their oppressors.

*Independencia* (2009), the second of Martin’s envisioned trilogy, was made in the style of a 1930s film, using studio aesthetics akin to Hollywood’s. As in *A Short Film*, Martin refers to specific wrongdoings of the colonisers and the natives’ subsequent reaction. *Independencia* is set during the approaching colonisation of American troops during the Spanish-American War in 1898. A mother and her son flee to an abandoned cabin in the woods in order to avoid being captured by American soldiers. Roaming through the woods, the son finds an unconscious young woman. A voice-over indicates the presence of Americans. One man is heard saying: “Wait ‘till they hear what you did to that woman.” The rape of the woman, a symbol of power and exploitation in terms of both sexual abuse and colonialism, is suggested, but not shown. Later in the film, we learn of her pregnancy. It is unclear whether the pregnancy is the result of the past rape, or of a sexual relationship with the unnamed Filipino who has rescued her.<sup>15</sup> It is significant, however, that the rape, which in itself is an act of oppression and control, is later followed with a scene, which demonstrates another form of colonial power of the Americans. A young boy is shot in a marketplace for supposedly stealing an egg. An American soldier poses for the camera next to the body of the dead child while an American news commentator exclaims: “This should be a lesson to all who do questionable things” (Fig 3). These two scenes of colonial execution of power on the most

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<sup>15</sup> The characters do not have names. They are merely referred to as mother, son, stranger, and child. This indicates that Martin shows the life of a universal rather than that of a specific family. He thus refers to universal social injustices and reactions to the oppressors.



vulnerable in society – women and children – reinforce the image of colonisers as ruthless oppressors.



**Figure 2 An American soldier poses next to the body of a dead child.**

*Independencia* - Raya Martin (2007)

This brief scene functions as a news report or a possible propaganda video. Except for this short insertion and a scene at the end of the film, the colonisers are visually absent from the film.<sup>16</sup> As in *A Short Film*, Martin tends to allude to abuses and injustices, but refrains from showing them directly. Akin to Diaz, he portrays the strains on the people through the example of one small family, using therefore the story of three individuals to represent collective memory. Furthermore, Martin refrains from close-ups so as to keep a distance to the universal characters, and, as indicated above, shot his film in black-and-white. The absence of colour in these

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<sup>16</sup> The origin of the report is unclear. Alexis Tioseco notes that the news report is in fact real archival footage from the American Edison Film Company (Tioseco, 2012: 189). Adrian Mendizabal, however, speaks of a “fictitious tale of American troops gunning down innocent people” (Mendizabal, 2012).

two films is a clear indication for the reference to historical subject matters and to memory.

Clodualdo del Mundo shows in his book *Native Resistance: Philippine Cinema and colonialism, 1898-1941* (1998) that the theme of colonialism in Philippine cinema has its roots in the early days of native filmmaking. In early silent films, filmmakers transferred their pacifist views onto celluloid. They “chose to bash the old colonizers [Spain]” (Del Mundo, 1998: 56), focused on literary adaptations of the national hero José Rizal, and, especially in the case of Julian Manansala, resident filmmaker active in the 1920s, produced films that were too controversial for the still extant Spanish community (Del Mundo, 1998: 59). Moreover, del Mundo considers culture, and therefore cinema, as “a site of decolonization” (Del Mundo, 1998: 125). The hunger for independence and the discourse of colonial oppression happened not only in politics, but also in Philippine film. However, del Mundo concludes his essayist work by pointing to the failure of indigenous filmmakers to break the colonial look (Del Mundo, 1998: 127). Rather than creating an entirely new film form and new film aesthetics, filmmakers have merely indigenised previously known forms, such as the *sarswela*, so as to gain control over the foreign medium film.<sup>17</sup> This means that filmmakers failed to create a distinct form of Philippine cinema. Instead, it was a combination and accumulation of Western elements. Diaz himself argues that

ever since the introduction of film as the newest, most popular medium of expression, Hollywood has been a tremendous influence on Philippine cinema. Cinema was one of the imperialist tools the Americans brought with them when they bought the Philippines from the Spaniards (or, conversely, when the Spaniards sold the Philippines to them) back in 1898. (Diaz, 2002)

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<sup>17</sup> The *sarswela* is an indigenized version of the Spanish *zarzuela*, a musical drama that often had a love story at its centre.

I want to refer to another filmmaker Diaz mentioned in an interview as a director who is representative of a new generation of responsible artists. Compared to Martin, Jet Leyco deals with a more contemporary history in his films, specifically in *Leave it for tomorrow, for night has fallen/Bukas na lang sapagkat gabi na* (2013). Leyco picks up the theme of Martial Law and dictatorship in a film that is different from Diaz's. *Leave it for tomorrow* is what Walker would call a non-realist representation of the trauma of Martial Law. With its repeated shifts between colour and black-and-white, its use of sounds reminiscent of science-fiction films and its smooth transitions from twenty-four frames per second to slow motion, the film is a highly aestheticised work that is more aligned to the popular Trauma Cinema discussed earlier (Fig. 4-5). It is divided into four parts, each of which makes reference to rebels fighting in the jungle against governmental forces. The rebels are seen either in hiding, or as dead bodies in the back of a van on their way to be used as a propaganda tool by the government so as to make it undoubtedly clear what would happen to rebels and their supporters if caught. This is precisely the strategy Pinpin-Feinstein describes in her first-hand account, mentioned in my introduction. Leyco's mixture of aesthetics creates a rich work which transmits a feeling of horror, ghostliness, haunting and terror.



**Figure 3** *Leave it for tomorrow, for night has fallen* - Jet Leyco (2013)



**Figure 4** *Leave it for tomorrow, for night has fallen* - Jet Leyco (2013)

Contemporary directors such as Martin and Leyco are amongst a generation that follows into the steps of classic directors, such as Mario O'Hara and Mike de Leon.

O'Hara is perhaps best known for his depiction of the Japanese occupation of the Philippines during the Second World War in *Three Godless Years/Tatlong taong walang Diyos* (1976). After decades of silence, it was one of only a handful of films that "re-examined the trope of the collective Japanese hatred" commencing in the 1970s (Palis, 2008: 86). Similar to the treatment of widespread sexual abuse of women in *Florentina Hubaldo*, which I will look at in more detail in Chapter 6, and Martin's *Independencia*, *Three Godless Years* has the rape of a woman by a Japanese soldier at its centre. Rather than focusing on society as a whole, O'Hara singles out the effects of colonialism on women. While this has been alluded to in other films I have mentioned so far, O'Hara puts it at the centre of his work.

Rosario, a young woman, engaged to be married to Crispin, a young man who leaves her behind to fight against the Japanese army, is raped by Masugi, a Japanese soldier. Filipino film critic Noel Vera comments that this is "a familiar story with wartime Filipinos; the family's young women taken aside by Japanese soldiers and brutally used" (Vera, 2007). When she discovers that she is pregnant, she has to decide whether or not to live with her perpetrator in order to ensure the safety of her child. After having given birth, Rosario is shunned and persecuted by society for collaborating with the Japanese. The occupation turned the Philippine people against themselves as Rosario is executed in the end for her shameless collaboration and the alleged betrayal of her country.

Nick Deocampo, also a director from Diaz's generation, represents life under Martial Law in the Philippines in his short film *Revolutions Happen Like Refrains in a Song* (1987). He shows video footage of the EDSA revolution, a peaceful revolution that ousted president Marcos in 1986. Remembering the Martial Law years, Deocampo speaks in a voiceover of a "totalitarian regime", of

“[growing] up first in hunger, then in fear.” He continues, “I saw many of them who grew up in those twenty years, keeping to what little decency was left to remain human.” The aspects of totalitarian terror and degradation of humans to a point when they become “prostitutes, criminals and rebels”, as Deocampo claims, is characteristic of a concentrationary system and feeds into my earlier suggestion concerning a concentrationary atmosphere in Diaz’s films. Although Deocampo makes specific reference to the twenty years of president Ferdinand Marcos’ rule, his observations are still applicable to today’s Philippine society, and it is here that Diaz’s films contribute to a cinematic depiction of the country’s present malaise.

Despite a slowly growing number of filmmakers, who use the film medium to work through the trauma(s) of the past, next to nothing has been written about the traumatic past of the Philippines. There are several books that deal with the history of the country, but this has not been seen in the light of trauma and the changes it has caused in Philippine society (Benitez, 1954; Constantino, 1975; Friend, 1965; Tan, 1987; Zaide, 1949).<sup>18</sup> Some of the books take a pro-American approach, in which the effects of colonialism and dictatorship are marginalised to a point where emphasis is placed on the gains those historical periods have brought to the country. But the theme of *desaparecidos* in the Philippines, for instance, which Diaz picks up in his film *Melancholia* (2008), has not yet seen detailed analysis in academic work or even outside scholarly work. The information that can be gathered derives from human rights reports, such as from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. During my research, I could not find a book or similar literature dedicated entirely to the Filipinos and Filipinas

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<sup>18</sup> It is surprising how little contemporary material there is on the history of the Philippines. The most comprehensive works were written in the 1950s and 1960s.

who (were) disappeared. Diaz's film is a means to put the disappeared into focus. While there has been extensive work on the issue in South America, work on the disappeared in the Philippines is as absent as the desaparecidos themselves. For instance, there have been several documentaries about the theme of state-terrorism in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. *Spoils of War/Botín de guerra* (David Blaustein, 2000) and *Grandchildren (Identity and Memory)/Nietos (Identidad y Memoria)* (Benjamín Ávila, 2004) are only two examples, which Ana Ros points to in her book *The Post-dictatorship Generation in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay: Collective Memory and Cultural Production* (2012).

The lack of scholarly work on trauma and the Philippines stands in contrast to work that has been done with regards to other countries. There is a particularly strong interest in the representation of trauma in Israel and Palestine, studied in detail in *Palestinian cinema: landscape, trauma and memory* (Gertz and Khleifi, 2008), *Waltzing with Bashir: Perpetrator Trauma and Cinema* (Morag, 2013), *The politics of loss and trauma in contemporary Israeli cinema* (Yosef, 2011), and *Deeper than oblivion: trauma and memory in Israeli cinema* (Yosef and Hagin, 2013). Thomas Elsaesser analyses the representation of trauma in German cinema in his book *German cinema - terror and trauma: cultural memory since 1945* (2014). China, too, saw its films being the target of academic writing, exemplified by Michael Berry's book *A history of pain: trauma in modern Chinese literature and film* (2008). After the traumatic events of 9/11, the representation of 'trauma' in American film and literature became the spotlight in scholar work. Antje Dallmann, Reinhard Isensee and Philip Kneiss' edited collection *Picturing America: trauma, realism, politics, and identity in American visual culture* (2007) is one of the more recent examples. Finally, persistent conflicts across the African continent

have attracted similar attention. Lizelle Bisschoff and Stefanie Van de Peer's edited collection *Art and trauma in Africa: representations of reconciliation in music, visual arts, literature and film* (2012) was a starting point for academic interest in the representation of trauma in African films. Yet, Philippine cinema is absent from this landscape of scholarly work in film studies and (post-) trauma. With an ever-increasing output of scholarly work with regard to (post-) trauma and its representation in cinemas, it appears implausible that the Philippines have not yet been considered in this emerging area. Given the aforementioned examples, the interest in trauma lies predominantly in the West or in developed countries in general, thereby neglecting a much wider history of traumatic events. Jeffrey C. Alexander suggests that while

it has been Western societies that have recently provided the most dramatic apologies for traumatic episodes in their national history ... it has been the non-Western regions of the world, and the most defenceless among them, that have been subjected to some of the most terrifying traumatic injuries. (Alexander, 2012: 28)

Ratiba Hadj-Moussa and Michael Nijhawan (2014) express a similar concern, connecting the persistent focus on Western traumatic events to the political order in the world. They argue that the particular attention to 9/11 "creates a visibility for particular forms of suffering within a hegemonic political order, yet further marginalizes the experiences of suffering of those living in the Southern Hemisphere or the marginalized spaces of neoliberal capitalism" (Hadj-Moussa and Nijhawan, 2014: 4). It is therefore imperative to broaden the area of trauma studies beyond the traumatic histories of the Holocaust and 9/11, which are the driving and most visible events picked up in trauma studies.



This thesis aims to close several gaps that have become apparent throughout this literature review. First of all, the following chapters will connect the representation of post-trauma to an aesthetic of slowness, which suggests that Diaz creates a new form of post-trauma cinema, which has so far not been studied in detail in academic work. Second, by focusing on Diaz's work exclusively, I will add to the limited field of Philippine studies, in particular in regards to film studies, in the West. In an extension to my second point, the following chapters will look at an understudied aspect of Philippine independent cinema which deals specifically with the country's traumatic history. While Western countries and their cultural output have been at the forefront of trauma scholarship, I want to shift the current focus to a different part of the world. While these three points are, I believe, significant areas to explore, more work needs to be done in future. My work can only be the beginning of a closer look at the attempts of young Filipino filmmakers to work through their country's past, telling forgotten or even denied histories.

#### 4. The desaparecidos of the Philippines – *Melancholia* (2008)

The abducted remain deprived of any identity, one does not know whether they are dead or alive ... This generates ambiguities of all kinds, of which the psychological injuries are the gravest results. The relatives end up relating themselves to absences which convert into 'ghosts.' [...] One has to confront the absence, which, because of its extreme painfulness, is not a common process of mourning. It is a 'mourning without object.' It is emptiness, absolute loss, death without a corpse and without burial.

(Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Bevernage, 2012: 39)

##### **Introduction**

A man, perhaps in his forties, sits on a chair, having a soft drink and repeatedly checking his watch. He wears sunglasses for no obvious reasons. To his left, there are two empty chairs facing an equally empty bed. After a little while, a woman in a tight leather skirt and jacket enters the room and sits down. She wants to talk to the man. She addresses him as "Julian", but this makes him angry. A second, slightly younger woman enters, dressed as a nun. Her presence appears awkward and out-of-place. She sits down and remains silent. The man tells the two women from seemingly opposite spheres of society that they will be able to see a live show for free. Then, he turns off the light. Left with a black screen and sounds of footsteps on a wooden floor, the viewer is positioned in a limbo for about a minute. All of a sudden, the man turns on the light again. The camera that is on a level with the previously empty bed now captures a couple having sex (Fig. 6). The "live show" is a sex show the man has organised for the two women, who, seen in the shot's background, are now ashamed and embarrassed of watching what is happening in front of them. And so is, perhaps, the viewer. This graphic scene,

exceptional in Diaz's oeuvre, is shot in a long take of three to four minutes, leaving viewer and characters in an uncomfortable limbo of forced-upon voyeurism. Linda Williams refers to graphic sex scenes, such as the one pictured in Fig 6, appropriately "on/scenity", which she describes as "the gesture by which a culture brings on to its public arena the very organs, acts, bodies, and pleasures that have heretofore been designated ob/scene and kept literally off-scene" (Williams in Grønstad, 2012: 62). By bringing those organs and bodies to the fore, Diaz shocks the viewer into awakening; a characteristic of his filmmaking which we will re-encounter in Chapters 5 and 6.

Aesthetically, the couple's bodies fill a large part of the screen and it is difficult to see beyond the staged sex act. The close-up, low-level framing of the act itself prevents the viewer from diverting his or her view. It creates a tunnel vision instead, in which the focus is one particular area of the visionary field with little or no peripheral vision.



**Figure 5 A staged sex show for the film's characters.**

*Melancholia* - Lav Diaz (2008)

This restricted visionary field, here initiated by the man's staged sex show, serves as a visual metaphor for the characters' attempt to come to terms with the loss of their partners. Their lives are ruled by the overwhelming sense of their partners' absence, who are the *desaparecidos* - the disappeared - of the Philippines. The above named characters are Alberta (Jenine, the prostitute), Rina (Sister Carmella, the nun), and Julian (Danny, the pimp). They engage in a form of immersion therapy in order to tackle feelings of pain, loss and sadness. The therapy is also an attempt to find closure in light of the overbearing uncertainty of what has happened to their loved ones on the island of Mindoro in Spring 1997.

*Melancholia* stands out in the films under analysis because of Diaz's use of duration. While all of his films make particular use of time and therefore embody the filmmaker's intention of producing a distinctively Malay cinema, in *Melancholia* duration as an expression of psychological terror and post-trauma comes to the fore. In addition, his eight-hour feature *Melancholia* distinguishes itself by its structure. Divided into three clear parts, *Melancholia* is an episodic telling of a narrative that stretches over ten years. The first part depicts the protagonists acting out their respective roles as pimp, nun and prostitute in the mountainous town Sagada. Diaz gives the viewer only scarce information as to who these characters are and whether, if any, there is a connection between them. Uncertainty for the viewer is hence established early on and pursued throughout the film. This elaborate section of around two to three hours, which keeps the viewer in the dark about the overall narrative, is followed by an equally long portrayal of the characters' 'real' life personalities as editor (Julian) and school headmaster (Alberta), illuminating in more detail the strong connection between the protagonists based on the mutual loss of their partners. The film then takes a radical turn towards the past, making use of an extensive flashback in which Diaz depicts the fight of activists against the military on the island of Mindoro.

As with all of Diaz's other films too, *Melancholia* unravels in a non-linear form, which in its structure supports the theme of the desaparecidos as well as that of post-trauma. Throughout the film, events and people are referred to and talked about for a long time before we are, if at all, visually introduced to them, which positions them as characters which are absent and yet present at the same time, blurring the line between life and death the same way ghosts do in *Encantos*, which I will discuss in Chapter 5. As previously mentioned, Cua Lim argues that

ghosts in Philippine New Cinema splinter national time and insert a coexistence of tempi into the films. *Melancholia* introduces us to this theme, which is characteristic of Diaz's cinema in general.

In this chapter, I will look at three major aspects of *Melancholia* – absence and psychological warfare, paralysis, and the use of shocking footage of skulls - which correspond to the three sections of the film. In the first section of this chapter, I will look at the ending of the film, the last section of it being a portrait of underground activists on the island of Mindoro waiting for their certain death. This section is not only interesting in its treatment of absence, but also in the way it transmits a sensation of psychological warfare to the viewer. I will return in more detail to the aesthetics of the concentrationary, mentioned in my introductory chapter, so as to demonstrate how the effects of terror on the psyche of the characters are represented through Diaz's particular aesthetics. As in other films by Diaz, atrocities, and moreover the people behind the atrocities committed, have a deceitful off-screen presence. I will look specifically at the treatment of time and Diaz's aesthetics of framing and lighting to connect the ideas of the concentrationary to the film's visual characteristics. This section expands on previously mentioned notions of time as a means of power, and simultaneously aims to introduce the uses and the meaning of duration for subsequent chapters.

In the second section of this chapter, I look in more detail at the trauma therapy the three characters engage in, and connect their endeavour to Ernest Becker's Terror Management Theory (Greenberg and Ayars, 2013). The disappearance of their loved ones has left the characters with a persistent sensation of fear and terror, which they attempt to manage by transforming into several different personalities in society. As can be detected from a close reading

of their psychological development, however, this specific form of therapy aggravates their sufferings and leads to madness, a growing sensation of melancholy and even suicide. Diaz's use of long duration here, combined with cinematic slowness, is indicative of the characters' paralysis.

Furthermore, this chapter introduces the reader to Diaz's framing of characters in claustrophobic indoor spaces, thereby transmitting visually the characters' entrapment in their mental trauma and in their melancholy. The particular framing as indication for a character's mental state returns in *Encantos* and will be one of the main foci of Chapter 5. In *Melancholia*, all characters struggle with filling a certain void that has opened up as a result of kidnapping and disappearances. The characters lack closure, hope, and explanation, and attempt to find a cure to persistent traumatic returns and melancholy.

In the final section, I study Diaz's use of explicit imagery of real skulls and bones, and interpret it as the filmmaker's intention to take a stance against extra-judicial killings and disappearances. In using these explicit imageries, Diaz diverts from his usual aesthetic of absence, shocking the viewer into awareness of human rights violations in his country. I will link Diaz's visual depiction of the remains of dead activists to the films of Ari Folman and Patricio Guzmán in order to draw connections between the depictions of local tragedies and global affairs. While the human rights violations Diaz points to in *Melancholia* are not widely known in the West, others, such as the disappearances in Chile under Pinochet's dictatorship, have been picked up more frequently by scholars. I thus use these examples so as to demonstrate the similarities between Diaz's depiction of human rights violations and those of other filmmakers while pointing to the evident lack of scholarly work on the subject in relation to the Philippines.

Overall, this chapter aims to introduce main characteristics of the films under investigation; the use of long duration, a persistent reference to the absent presence of people, and the theme of haunting. All of these elements appear time and again in Diaz's oeuvre and they will be explored in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6. Throughout this chapter, I make repeated use of William J. Pomeroy's two books, *The Forest* (1963) and *Bilanggo* (2009), which are two of the few first-hand accounts of resistance fights in the Philippines and which enable me to draw a more complete picture of the resistance fight beyond the cinematic depiction on Diaz's film.

### **Psychological torture and mental warfare**

Diaz's *Melancholia* portrays the guerrilla tradition of taking to the hills in the Philippines. Set in the jungle on the island of Mindoro, which is located south of Manila and consists almost entirely of mountains and forests, the third and last part of the film depicts the armed struggle of three social activists against an off-screen enemy, said to be the military. Only one man of the trio is given an identity. His name is Renato Munoz (Roeder Camanag), Alberta's husband, an activist who went underground to fight government forces in the late 1990s. As I will show later in this chapter, the forest plays a decisive role in relation to both the narrative and to Diaz's aesthetics. This element returns in his six-hour film *Florentina Hubaldo*, to be analysed in Chapter 6.

As noted in Chapter 3, director Raya Martin referred in an interview with Mickaël Pierson (2009) to aspects of colonialism in the Philippines, such as guerrilla fights, which were to tackle the advance of the colonisers and which were organised in the mountains to which the locals fled en masse. This part of history,



however, is largely neglected in the Philippine national curriculum. Diaz works in a similar vein to Martin, and, like him, he challenges the absence of colonial resistance in schools by making it visible on screen.

The 'flashback' section of *Melancholia*, which I would like to explore in more detail here, is approximately ninety minutes long, and could be considered as a film on its own or even an epilogue. Even though there are links to other parts of the film, the viewer does not necessarily need to see the entire film in order to understand this sequence. In separating this scene from the other two narrative strands, Diaz returns to the element of self-contained stories, which he had already used in his eleven-hour feature *Evolution of a Filipino Family* (2004). At the end of *Evolution*, an epilogue depicts a woman abandoning her son in the streets of Manila. While this epilogue supports and complements the story of the feature film, the short is self-contained and is comprehensible outwith the lengthy narrative of *Evolution*. The use of an epilogue at the end of *Melancholia* is telling in that epilogues, regardless of whether they concern literature or film, aim to bring closure to the narrative. As noted earlier, *Melancholia's* characters cannot find closure because of the disappearance of their partners. Diaz, in ending his film on an epilogue, allows this closure to happen for the viewer, and, in so doing, brings desired certainty about the fate of the disappeared.

Furthermore, *Melancholia's* flashback section, which positions the viewer temporally in the late 1990s, is the only part of the film that is set entirely in nature, more specifically in the woods. In Chapter 6, I will argue that the Florentina character in Diaz's *Florentina Hubaldo CTE* (2012) seeks refuge in the woods when she needs to escape from (sexual) violence at the hands of the men her father sells her to. I will also argue that the forest, despite its being a place of

refuge, aggravates her suffering. A similar depiction of the forest can be found in *Melancholia*. Instead of open and vast landscapes, the way they had been used in *Heremias Book I* (2005), for instance, or *Death in the Land of Encantos*, the characters are now almost embalmed by the thickness of the jungle. This thickness of the jungle, however, does not represent safety for the fighters. In fact, the meaning of the forest is altered in regards to the context of guerrilla fighting in Diaz's film. The altered meaning is based on guerrilla and underground fighters' as well as on Diaz's personal experiences of those spaces. As Jan Karski, for instance, a former Polish underground activist during the Nazi occupation, wrote in his autobiographical book *Story of a Secret State*:

My work in the underground had completely altered my mental outlook. Whereas formerly I might have remarked only on the beauty of the scenery, I observed that the forest afforded superb concealment for meetings, the passage of couriers and, grimly enough, for assassinations. (Karski, 1944: 216)

Diaz himself considers the forest as dangerous (Diaz, 2014a), and he generates a similar feeling in his film, creating an atmosphere of terror and anxiety through the use of oppressive silence, scenes of almost endless waiting for a certain death, and the portrayal of madness as a result of being surrounded by the military with no chance to escape.

Similar to *Encantos*, studied in the next chapter, *Melancholia* is remarkable for its treatment of absence, in particular in the aforementioned third part. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, in *Florentina Hubaldo* Diaz resorts to the off-screen sound of rape so as to refrain from visually depicting violence and atrocities. In *Melancholia*, Diaz continues his pursuit of 'visual absence' by revealing atrocities through dialogue.

The events in 1997, which led to the disappearance and presumed death of the three resistance fighters portrayed at the end of the film, are revealed in dialogue fragments or voice-overs, the latter of which are prominent when Renato writes letters to his wife. In them, he discloses the fighting spirit and his two companions' psychological conditions. Intriguingly, voice-overs do not always accompany Renato's letter writing. Towards the end of the third part, and therefore towards the growing solitude of Renato following his companions' deaths and towards the end of his own life, the viewer is denied access to the content of the letters he is writing. The voice-over is suppressed, and the viewer is left with the visual cues of the three men's mental deterioration. Sarah Kozloff identifies voice-over narration as an enhancement of character identification (Kozloff, 1988). At the same time, voice-overs as an expression of interior monologues also suggest a character's isolation. In this specific case, Renato is not entirely on his own when writing the letters, but with his fellow resistance fighters nearby. Writing his letters, Renato escapes into his own world, and enters into communication with an absent loved one. The denial of identification through the lack of voice-overs in the last stages of the armed struggle renders the situation the character finds him- or herself in more universal rather than specific to one individual in a specific country. The tragic story of three Filipino men becomes a depiction of the universal suffering in resistance fighting, a theme we will re-encounter later on in Diaz's *Florentina*.

As noted before, Diaz refrains from visually depicting the enemy. The visual absence of the military the activists fight against allows for an in-depth study of the psychological development of the persecuted and the oppressed. In other words, Diaz highlights psychological warfare and mental torture, where the

concentrationary comes to the fore. After the death of seven members of their rebel group, the three men are isolated in the woods on the island of Mindoro, which is, according to a local spy, surrounded by the military; “They said they’ll make sure you all die.” Rather than portraying the standoff directly, Diaz conveys the gravity of the situation through the oppressive silence of the characters. Dialogue is scarce in this section of *Melancholia*, which stands in stark contrast to the rest of the film. The men have little to say to each other. Except for brief instructions to one another as to where to hide or move to, they are mentally in their own individual world and attempt to come to terms with their hopeless situation of certain death on their own. William J Pomeroy, resistance fighter with the Philippine Communist Huk (short for Hukbalahap) in the 1950s, found himself in a similar situation and describes his feeling of despair in his book *The Forest*: “That feeling is here now, where men with guns *whom we do not even see* stalk us in the forest” (Pomeroy, 1963: 110, emphasis added). Pomeroy refers specifically to the visual absence of the enemy, caused by the thickness of the woods. Diaz’s choice of not showing the activist’s opponents is an extension of Pomeroy’s experience of being blinded by and subsequently trapped in the forest.

Diaz’s depiction of the woods differs from that associated with fairy tales, in which forests are mysterious places that need to be traversed in order to achieve a certain goal. In his analysis of the Brother Grimm fairy tales, Jack Zipes notes that a recurrent theme in the Grimm tales is to “get lost in the forest and then return wiser and fulfilled” (Zipes, 1988: 43). Further, he considers the forest as a “place where society’s conventions no longer hold true. It is the source of natural right, thus the starting place where social wrongs can be righted” (Zipes, 1988: 45). This is a decisive argument in relation to activism and revolutions, which have often

been organized in forests. Pomeroy explains that “this [the forest] is the enduring place of renewal, where Filipinos have always come to reinvigorate themselves with that which is enduring in them as people, their dignity and their desire to be free” (Pomeroy, 1963: 16). The Philippines are, however, not the only country with a tradition of taking to the hills. There had been a similar phenomenon in South America during Spanish colonisation. In Western Europe, it was the French Maquis, who organized resistance in the forest against the German occupation during the Second World War.<sup>19</sup> What Diaz represents is therefore not only a phenomenon specific to the Philippines, but a universal one. As I will demonstrate in my analyses of *Encantos* and *Florentina*, it is a common feature of Diaz’s films to connect the local with the global, and *Melancholia* follows this tradition.

Based on fairy tale imaginations, as Zipes notes, the forest incorporates a feeling of mysticism and enchantment. Diaz, on the other hand, represents the forest in this section as a lethal trap, which the characters cannot escape from and in which they will find their deaths. This allows me to draw parallels to Stella Hockenhull’s study of the representation of landscape in British film and its connection to Romanticism and the Sublime in painting. She suggests that, particularly in horror films, “what should be tranquil, pastoral paradises develop into hazardous remote locations” (Hockenhull, 2014: 80) – precisely what is happening in Diaz’s *Melancholia*. The tendency of depicting nature as threatening is not new. In fact, as far back as the Medieval Times, the forest had been regarded as sinister, gloomy and as “the home of wild beasts” (Fumagalli, 1994: 14). The sinister aspect of the forest, in particular, is evident in *Melancholia*. The armed

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<sup>19</sup> For more information on the French Maquis, and eyewitness accounts, please see Kedward, H. R. (1993). *In Search of the Maquis - Rural Resistance in Southern France, 1942-1944*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

men are surrounded by the military and have no way out of their suffering. It is thus impossible for the characters to traverse the forest so as to achieve their goal of liberation from governmental oppression. More important than the denial of achievement, however, is the denial of escape for the characters. They are trapped and cannot move forward, which means that they are caught in a loop, which resembles the loop triggered by trauma and, by extension, PTSD. Paralysis and stagnation are fundamental to Diaz's films, and these two aspects will be the focus of my analysis of *Florentina* in Chapter 6.

In creating a sense of oppression, claustrophobia and uncertainty, the forest in *Melancholia* symbolises what has been called the concentrationary. As I discussed earlier, Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman (2011) use the term in their analysis of Alain Resnais' Holocaust film *Night and Fog* (1955). Comparing concentration and extermination camps during the Second World War, Pollock and Silverman argue that "in the *concentrationary* existence, men and women were forced to experience another kind of destruction that made death a preferable outcome even while death was, however, denied to them" (Pollock and Silverman, 2011: 9, emphasis original). Furthermore, they suggest that "living in the permanent anxiety of [death's] unpredictable imminence infected all obligatory living ... with anguishing terror that changed the very meaning of living and dying" (Pollock and Silverman, 2011: 9). This blurred line between life and death takes centre stage in a scene, in which one of the fighters loses his sanity and shouts out for the army to finally shoot him, as he cannot bear the uncertainty about the time of his death anymore. In a tense night-time scene, he is heard shouting "I can't take this anymore! Hey, I'm here! I'm here. Come and kill me!" Witnessing the man losing his sanity, it appears as though his hopeless situation

has increased his death drive. The waiting for death or torture is often considered worse than the actual death (Slahi, 2015). Gerda Klein, survivor of the Holocaust, describes death as “a luxury”: “to go to sleep and never wake up again” (Klein in Des Pres, 1976: 74).

It is this “luxury” the now insane fighter in *Melancholia* is demanding, screaming and shouting for the military to finally end his suffering. However, this is, in effect, denied for a long time, which only increases his insanity and his death drive, a similar aspect we can observe in *Encantos* in which Hamin’s death drive increases proportionately to the growing threats to his life. The forest, therefore, becomes a place of trauma, and encourages death instead of paving the way for positive transformation, as the Grimm brothers had imagined. In the words of Pomeroy, the forest is “a green lid upon endurance, hunger, and suffering” (Pomeroy, 1963: 97).

Aside from one fighter’s brief outburst of frustration, however, the three characters are mainly silent, which suggests that they are resigned over their situation. The men are seen pacing from one hiding place to another. At other times they sit motionless and wait for their “certain death”, as Renato describes it in a letter to his wife. Here, Diaz positions the viewer in situations akin to those of the characters. Similar to the characters, we do not see the enemy, whose presence is no more than a sensation based on accounts of a local spy. Diaz plays on what Thomas Weber describes in the context of Michael Haneke’s *Caché* as an “aesthetic of audience uncertainty” (Weber, 2014: 42), which confronts the viewer with “the incommensurable, something closed off to viewer reception” (Weber, 2014: 45), and therefore puts the viewer into a similarly stressful situation as the characters.

It is the theme of uncertainty that visualises the aspect of the

concentrationary most clearly. Curt Bondy writes in relation to uncertainty in internment camps that “the uncertainty about the duration of the imprisonment is probably what unnerves the men most” (Bondy in Cohen, 1988: 128). Although the resistance fighters are not in an actual prison or camp, they are nevertheless surrounded by the military, which traps them in their current location. Though their prison has no visible borders, it exists nonetheless. Uncertainty here, as Bondy interestingly points out, is connected to duration, and the uncertainty is not so much about *whether* death strikes, but *when* it will strike. Viktor E. Frankl makes a significant remark in this context about the prisoners’ arrival at a concentration camp where, he argues, a change in the mind of prisoners occurred: “with the end of uncertainty there came the uncertainty of the end. It was impossible to foresee whether or when, if at all, this form of existence would end” (Frankl, 2004: 57).

Time, in form of long duration, as oppression and torture is key in *Melancholia’s* third part, but it plays an important role in later chapters, too. All the viewer can do is sit and wait with the desperate and hopeless resistance fighters, a situation that becomes burdensome after an hour for viewer and characters alike; a ‘power game’ in the eyes of Michel Foucault: “Time penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power” (Foucault, 1991: 152). While Foucault speaks about time in general, in the context of psychological warfare, long duration is a particularly strong example of exercising power. It aims to create a terrorising atmosphere and to lock the target into a state of paralysis.

Relentless rain is a constant companion, and serves to reinforce the men’s treacherous conditions. It is not only the sound of the raindrops persistently beating down on the men which indicates the pressure they are under. The heavy



rain also drenches the soil the men walk on. The vast landscape of mud accompanies the breakdown of the resistance fighters, and their sinking deeper into an increasingly hopeless situation. The use of medium shots as opposed to the often-preferred long or extreme long shots, as we will see in *Encantos*, is telling. The medium shot frames the characters as being close enough to the camera in order for their emotions and facial expressions to be identified by the viewer. At the same time, however, the medium shot positions the characters in their surroundings, and therefore contextualises their emotions. It thus establishes a link between the fighters' downfall while waiting for their death, and the oppressive nature of the thick jungle (Fig. 7). Pomeroy opposes the nature of resistance fights in the forest and those of a regular army, giving an insight into the uncertainty in the forest that can be detected in Diaz's film:

In a regular army, where one is exposed to hardships, the hardship is of limited nature, for one always knows that a time will come when he will be relieved and will go behind lines to comfort; if he misses a meal or has rations that are poor he knows that great forces behind him will supply him soon and that it is only for a time that he knows denial. ... But for us [guerrilla fighters] it is a permanent way of life, the hardship and the hunger. Either we become the master of it, or we break. (Pomeroy, 1963: 94)

In *Melancholia*, likewise, the forest has become a trap and exercises pressure on the resistance fighters until they break. They are crushed by time and by the overpowering anxiety of "death's unpredictable imminence", as Pollock and Silverman describe it in their study of camp inmate behavior (Pollock and Silverman, 2014: 9). Instead of pursuing a brief and lethal shootout with the armed men, the military forces generate a persistent and permanent state of uncertainty for them, which leads to paranoia, hopelessness and hyper-vigilance – all symptoms which can be connected to post-trauma's onslaught.



**Figure 6 (In)visible standoff between the resistance fighters and the Philippine army.**

*Melancholia* - Lav Diaz (2008)

What may come to mind for the viewer throughout the hour-long (in)visible standoff between activists and soldiers is perhaps a feeling of boredom, and indeed, this part of the film offers no spectacle. Rather, it is devised as a waiting game defined by silence and paranoia. Diaz employs the tactics of boredom – lack of on-screen action and silence - in order to unnerve the viewer, while simultaneously pursuing the psychological development of the three men. Yet, while the English-language term ‘boredom’ appears suitable to describe the on-screen situation, it may, in fact, be useful here to use the German word *Langeweile*

instead.<sup>20</sup> As Hyeonseok Seo suggests, boredom can mean a “decline in excitement [or a] loss of motivation and absorption” (Seo, 2003: 6). The German expression, on the other hand, is a rather literal translation of ‘a long time’, or ‘long duration’, specifically pointing to a lengthy amount of time spent without doing anything profound, which is exactly what the three armed men do. The German term does not imply a lack of motivation, or a lack of excitement. It is instead a term open to interpretation according to the context it is used in. In *Melancholia*, it is precisely the ‘long duration’ of empty time that is significant. The lack of on-screen action, while important, is subordinate to this as the men are eventually crushed by time which “flows like tar” (Pomeroy, 2009: 68).

Captured and arrested, Pomeroy describes his ten-year imprisonment as political prisoner in the Philippines in his book *Bilanggo* (2009). He describes a peculiar non-perception of time in prison, which could well act as a substitute for Diaz’s resistance fighters’ struggle with empty time in the forest. Pomeroy writes,

The hours. In the beginning, in the cell, they are an obsession. One can lie, intent on the thought of time slowly moving and be smothered by minutes ticked off on an unseen timepiece, unseen because there are no clocks in the underworld. Time moves without measurement... (Pomeroy, 2009: 66)

The certain death, yet uncertain point of death causes a slow deterioration of the characters’ mental states, in similar ways we will see in my analyses of *Florentina Hubaldo* and *Encantos*. As pointed out earlier, one of the men loses his sanity. His behaviour becomes incomprehensible; his coordination appears robotic; and his bodily movements are erratic and, in fact, inexplicable. When night falls, his visual and aural perception is distorted by anxiety and hallucinations. Pomeroy, too,

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<sup>20</sup> In his doctoral thesis on the aesthetics of boredom, Hyeonseok Seo (2003) pursues a similar approach.

writes about a similarly trapped situation, and describes the forest as being “full of ghosts” (Pomeroy, 1963: 175) and “full of phantoms” (Pomeroy, 1963: 184), resulting in paranoia amongst the fighters. What becomes evident in the filmic portrayal of this increasingly insane fighter is that “in [the terror’s] wake, it leaves its victims powerless, uncertain, full of tormenting fear of the next attack to come” (Sofsky, 1997: 78), as Wolfgang Sofsky writes with regards to the effects of terror in the concentrationary system.

Just as we will encounter in the character of Hamin in *Encantos* in Chapter 5, the fighter’s mental state crumbles slowly and gradually. It is a result of a combination of factors; paranoia over encountering the potential killers on the island, his fear for his safety and at the same time the realisation that he as well as the other two resistance fighters will eventually be killed. In the words of Frankl,

A man who could not see the end of his ‘provisional existence’ was not able to aim at an ultimate goal in life. He ceased to live for the future, in contrast to a man in normal life. Therefore the whole structure of his inner life changed; signs of decay set in which we know from other areas in life. (Frankl, 2004: 57)

It is this uncertainty that prevents the fighter from developing a desire to continue life. His death drive heightens with every moment spent in the paralytic state of not knowing.

### **Suffocating mise-en-scène**

Having analysed Diaz’s use of duration, I would like to begin introducing the use of visual aesthetics as a reinforcement of the characters’ struggle, which will become clearer in subsequent sections of this chapter. Seo argues, “absence is doubly articulated ... in both the *mise-en-scène* and the cinematic construction” (Seo, 2003: 138). I have already referred to aspects of rain and mud, and their metaphorical

significance for the slow dilution of hope and strength. Yet, there is also the use of grey scale aesthetics that supports the theme of hiding, and thus of absence. Grey scale aesthetics render the location and the characters uniform in that there is little visual difference between the three men and the jungle (Fig. 8). Instead, the difference is one of movement. While the jungle is static, the three armed men are initially always on the move in order to find a suitable hiding place. The use of black-and-white is not new in Diaz's filmmaking. With the exception of his early films, such as *Batang West Side* (2001), and his 2013 feature *Norte, The End of History*, he has made consistent use of black-and-white so as to portray poverty and suffering more adequately.<sup>21</sup> In *Melancholia*, on the other hand, the grey scale aesthetics take on a new role and a new dimension. As previously mentioned, it is for the viewer, as it is for the military, a challenge at times to spot the characters in the thick forest because they merge with the surrounding. If the film had been in colour and Diaz had used artificial lighting, the characters would have been easily spotted in the jungle, and the theme of hiding would have been less supported visually. In the words of Pomeroy: "We are indistinguishable from the forest. It is over us and around us. We are part of it, merged with root and vine, tall tree, and the green moss-covered stone" (Pomeroy, 1963: 134).

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<sup>21</sup> "Suffering is better in black-and-white." (Diaz, 2014a)



Figure 7 The resistance fighters blend into their surrounding.

*Melancholia* - Lav Diaz (2008)

The unnerving situation of the invisible standoff is emphasised by night shots, which allegedly show the men as they sit and wait for their death. It is almost impossible to see something in those shots (Fig. 9). Diaz does not make use of artificial lighting, so that the darkness of the night embalms everything. The night space acts here as a reinforcement of the gradual disappearing of the rebel fighters, but also supports the visual absence of the enemy. Most significant, however, is that the darkness functions as a literal translation of the desaparecido's invisibility. Pomeroy describes it as "night and forest merg[ing] into a solid mass" (Pomeroy, 1963: 29), and with regards to his later imprisonment, Pomeroy claims that "no prisoner likes the coming of the night, for

in the darkness the hours have no moorings; time has no shape, and this life has no end” (Pomeroy, 2009: 66).

Not being able to see – a strategy Diaz has used earlier in the film in relation to the staged sex show – can be unnerving for the viewer, who is rendered impotent, helpless, and, most important, blind. This element will become essential in Chapter 6 in which I argue that Diaz positions the viewer as listener by depriving him/her of visual access to atrocities. In *Melancholia*, the sounds of the night – light rain, and the disorienting sounds of cicadas – take over the visuals. On-screen actions are perceived only vaguely, and have to be deciphered by the viewer. Seo suggests that preventing the viewer from seeing clearly creates anxiety in him or her (Seo, 2003: 107). Here again, Diaz draws metaphorical and sensorial parallels between on-screen characters and viewers. They are forced to struggle with anxiety based on the invisibility of the enemy and the uncertainty of when something is going to happen. Diaz explains, “I want them [the audience] to have a sense of that reality” (Diaz, 2014a). From the local informant and from one of Renato’s letters we know that death is upon them. Death is certain, but, as noted earlier, the point of death is unpredictable. Thus the anxiety felt by the characters is based on long duration and the absence of a clear understanding of when the invisible executioners will strike. Again, the concentrationary becomes visible here. The concentration camps with their persistent infliction of terror created a consciousness in the prisoners that was marked “by total uncertainty: tormenting anxiety; abrupt changes between hope and desperation, self-preservation and self-abandonment” (Sofsky, 1997: 87). The lack of hope and the subsequent rise of desperation take centre stage in *Melancholia*’s third part and are primarily

expressed through the use of duration in the form of endless waiting and silence without narrative progression.



**Figure 8** Diaz's night-shots render the viewer and the characters blind.

*Melancholia* - Lav Diaz (2008)

In his autobiographical book on his internment in Auschwitz, Primo Levi (1987) describes a similarly unnerving situation. Having arrived in Auschwitz after four days without water, he says,

we are tired, standing on our feet, with a tap which drips while we cannot drink the water, and we wait for something which will certainly be terrible, and nothing happens and nothing continues to happen. What can one think about? One cannot think anymore, it is like being already dead. (Levi, 1987: 28)



It is the blurred line between life and death in a concentrationary system that is made explicit in Levi's statement. Levi's observation about the slow death of camp inmates is applicable to the resistance fighters, but it also has currency for the other two films studied in the present work. Again, as we will discover in Chapter 5, Diaz portrays characters on the verge of death, and yet still alive, creating a character that cannot be temporally or spatially positioned. Shifting between life (present) and death (past), Diaz's characters are as a-temporal as post-trauma, which looks the survivor-victims into past events. Yet because they seep into the present, these past events make it difficult for the survivor to establish a temporal orientation in his/her life.

The focus on resistance fighters and their plight in the context of persistent oppression has a well-known predecessor. Roberto Rossellini's neorealist drama *Rome, Open City/Roma, Città aperta* (1945) depicts, similar to Diaz's film, the resistance fight of locals against an oppressing force. There are, however, also several differences between the two films. The most evident aspect is the directors' approach to on-screen violence. Rossellini did not refrain from showing violence on screen. Contrary to Diaz's tendency to provide the viewer with audible stimuli of violence through the use of sound and dialogue only, Rossellini placed emphasis on conveying brutality through images on screen. Indeed, *Rome's* three main resistance fighters are killed on screen for the viewer to see. In the case of Manfredi, one of the three main characters and member of the resistance, the killing is preceded by on-screen torture.

As indicated above, Diaz, on the other hand, highlights aspects of psychological warfare in *Melancholia*. Yet there is one scene, which is decisively different from all other scenes of violence in the other feature films chosen for this

thesis. It is this scene that brings its treatment of resistance fighting close to that of Rossellini's.

After approximately one hour into the third part of *Melancholia*, an extreme long shot shows an empty river landscape. One of the resistance fighters has visibly lost his sanity. The psychological warfare – the certainty of death and the unbearable duration of the invisible standoff – has broken his morale. In heavy rain, he dances in the river, shouting obscenities and challenging the soldiers to appear from their hiding places. His shouts are what Saeed Zeydabadi-Neijad calls in her analysis of madness in Iranian film a “metaphoric protest [as] a response to the pressures [the character] experiences in such an oppressive environment” (Zeydabadi-Neijad, 2013: 191). Renato and the other man run towards him and try to drag him out off what appears to be a convenient line of fire. Just as Pina is shot by an off-screen source in *Rome* (Fig. 10), the three men in *Melancholia* are similarly shot at by an off-screen source (Fig. 11). Two of them die in the shootout. Renato remains the last resistance fighter alive on the island.



**Figure 9 A resistance fighter is shot.**

***Rome, Open City* - Roberto Rossellini (1945)**



**Figure 10** Two resistance fighters are shot.

*Melancholia* - Lav Diaz (2008)

The incidents in *Rome* and *Melancholia* happen without warning. The scene in *Melancholia* is particularly shocking as the viewer is unfamiliar with on-screen violence in Diaz's films. While Rossellini used a closer framing of the corpse and positioned it almost in the centre of the frame, Diaz retains his focus on the natural surrounding and stresses the sound of the gunshots. The bodies of the dead are marginalised in the frame. The fighters' deaths from gunshot wounds unravel in extreme long shot, so that the viewer has little access to the on-screen violence despite its visual depiction. The result, however, is the same in both films. As Karl Schoonover writes, "we witness as their eyes close to the world around them. In

the process, we lose access not only to their individual perspectives, but also to the Resistance point of view generally” (Schoonover, 2012: 125).

### **Melancholic therapy**

Having looked at the end of the film and Diaz’s aesthetics of absence for depicting trauma-in-the-making, I want to return to the beginning of the film now and take a closer look at the way the main characters Julian (Perry Dizon), Alberta (Angeli Bayani) and Rina (Malaya) attempt to deal with the disappearance of their partners. Significantly, and poignantly at the same time, Karen Randell and Sean Redmond (2012) use the term ‘nonpeople’ in order to describe disappeared people. “The absented bodies”, they write, “are abducted, kidnapped, ushered away in the middle of the night; they are placed in a limbo ... and denied sovereignty (the right to exist) in nowhere and *no-time* prisons” (Randell and Redmond, 2012: 8, emphasis original). What is particularly evident in Diaz’s *Melancholia* is not this limbo the desaparecidos are placed in. It is the limbo of the relatives, of those left behind, the director focuses on.

The Terror Management Theory (TMT), which is based on Ernest Becker’s work *The Denial of Death* (1973), suggests that humans are in a constant state of fear of death. This fear is suppressed with the help of culture and society in that these provide people with reasons to live, and with opportunities to make their lives meaningful. More specifically, culture supplies people with the possibility of becoming immortal. Jeff Greenberg and Alisabeth Ayars argue that

cultures allow us to feel *literally* immortal by providing conceptions of a soul that continues beyond death. Cultures also offer *symbolic* immortality by providing avenues for our identity and contributions to be preserved after our physical death. (Greenberg and Ayars, 2013: 20, emphasis original)

Greenberg and Ayars therefore suggest that our surroundings diffuse the conflict between the desire to live eternally and the simultaneous realisation that life is finite. Yet, as Sheldon Solomon and Mark J. Landau remark, it is impossible for humans to escape this fear of death if culture and society are not in line with an individual's convictions:

Difficulties arise ... when personal predilections, social dictates, or historical conditions (or some combination of these factors) make it difficult or impossible to live up to prevailing standards or confidently subscribe to one's cultural worldview. (Solomon and Landau, 2013: 56)

In other words, if an individual does not believe in its culture's value system, it becomes problematic for him or her to suppress the inherent fear of death.

Through the kidnappings and disappearances of their partner, Alberta, Rina and Julian have been put into a state of terror and experience a persistent fear of death. According to Elsaesser's assessment this is precisely the function of terror – “to create ... survivors and witnesses whom the act traumatizes” (Elsaesser, 2014: 36) without taking lives. While culture and society are generally considered as easing this fear, it is in this case the very societal construct that has brought death upon the characters. Therefore, the mechanisms inscribed in TMT are not applicable and the individuals have to find other means in order to ease their fear of death. What we see in Diaz's *Melancholia* is thus a self-devised coping mechanism.

Alberta, Rina and Julian engage in what may be called immersion therapy. For five years they were immersed in different roles in society, from nurse to hairdresser to pimp to prostitute. The original aim of the immersion, or exposure therapy, devised by Julian, was to confront fears and anxieties, which are often induced by associative memories. Diaz invented this form of therapy after having

read works of B. F. Skinner, Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. He intended to create a situation, which would help the characters to cure themselves. He says,

In the country, they have groups also, a counselling group, among the desaparecido families where the way of cleansing and helping each other is to gather, to be together on Sundays, have prayers, that kind of thing. ... [I thought], maybe I can push this higher, make it more like a psychotherapy thing where people can assume different personas to cure themselves. (Diaz, 2014a)

Alberta explains the reasoning behind this form of therapy in a conversation with Rina, who doubts the success of the immersion and is for the second time on the verge of suicide. It is worth quoting some of the conversation at length, as another crucial aspect of the film will become apparent in it.

Rina: Do you think what you're doing is right?

Alberta: It's a process, right? I don't have to rationalize it. ... Julian has explained this process so many times. You're not stupid, Rina. You're very intelligent. We need to go through this process. So that we could regain our feelings. So that we could survive. So that one day, we could live again.

Rina: You know, we've been doing this for five years. We're still the same. You know, Julian is just fooling us. We're not really going to be healed. After this, then what? When we go back to Manila, we are still the loneliest people. The most wrecked. The living dead. It's not true that we will be cured by this. This has no cure! ... We might get more wrecked than cured.

...

Alberta: Let's go back to five years ago. Five years ago, you were a goner. We saved you from suicide. Julian saved you from suicide. As with me five years ago, my life had no purpose. I was at a dead end. I was ready to go. ...

Rina: Alberta, I don't know right from wrong anymore. I'm so tired. I'm caught in a frenzy.

While Alberta questions the effects of the therapy only later in the film, it is Rina first of all, who has stopped believing in the success of the immersion. The feelings of uncertainty, loss, and grief are crushing her. There appears to be an underlying

sense of melancholy in her, and in the character of Julian, the book publisher-turned-pimp, who, by the end of the film, takes on the assumed personality of God, possibly in the belief that as God he has control over his previously uncontrollable situation.

Diaz tends to select precise titles for his films, and it is no different with *Melancholia*, whose title acts as a clear reference point to effects beyond grief that the characters are going through as a result of their partners' disappearances. However, melancholy is fully personified by only one character, Julian. He has devised the immersion therapy in order to free Alberta, Rina and himself from the emotional pain the loss of their partners have caused. Yet, Julian's therapy cannot prevent Rina's suicide and he himself sinks deeper into melancholia as a result of it.

In his treatise *Madness and Civilization*, Michel Foucault establishes a difference between melancholia and mania. He writes that

the mind of the melancholic is entirely occupied by reflection ... [and] is fixed on a single object, imposing unreasonable proportions upon it ... Melancholia, finally, is always accompanied by sadness and fear. (Foucault, 2001: 119)

Foucault refers to a degree of obsession in the mind of the melancholic as a result of loss. This 'fixtured on a single object' is reminiscent of post-trauma behaviour, in that victims show a clear obsession with the 'absent' and the 'perceived', as noted in my introductory chapter. While all three characters show these symptoms to a certain degree, it is only Julian, whose loss turns into severe obsession. Russian novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn describes a similar heaviness in his book *Cancer Ward* (1971): "[w]hen melancholy sets in, a kind of invisible but thick and heavy fog invades the heart, envelops the body, constricting its very core. All we feel is



this constriction, this haze around us” (Solzhenitsyn, 1971: 65). In a form of tunnel vision, Julian is transfixed on the disappearance of his partner. Yet it is not only the death of his partner he mourns and has difficulties to come to terms with. He also suffers gravely from Rina’s suicide as a result of his failing therapy methods.

Julian is haunted by his partner’s absence, an element I noted in Chapter 3 in the context of Cua Lim’s evaluation of ghosts in Philippine cinema as an indication of splintering time. In one scene in the second part of the film, Julian sits behind his desk and encounters difficulties concentrating on his work. He puts his head on his arms, and begins to cry. A woman dressed in white appears on the left hand side of the frame, walks towards him, and puts her arm around him so as to comfort him. This perceived presence of ghosts is an indication of post-trauma as a result of the disappearances of the characters’ loved ones. The relationship between Julian and the female ghost is neither clear nor fully explained by the end of the film. From the context of the film, however, it is possible to conclude that she is Julian’s disappeared wife, but this can be no more than an assumption given that Diaz refrains from establishing her role clearly. She seems to appear twice more in the film, which ascribes certain significance to her.

The scene, which introduces the aspect of haunting described above, ends with a cut to a night-time scenery in the woods. Seemingly the same woman, who earlier put her arms around the grieving Julian, stands in the forest, and sings a song of sorrow, disappearance and death (Fig. 12). Framed in a medium long shot, the scene is a visual portrayal of loneliness and resembles the night-time scene encountered earlier in the woods. Here again, we encounter the theme of the forest as a refuge and as a place of getting lost. Yet, the tone of the singer’s voice

and the song itself imply something different. The woman's song is, in fact, an expression of deep grief as a result of disappearances:

I wait for you. I wait, I wait, as darkness envelops, as the streets calm. I turn my sights to the doors of yearning and as the advent of sorrow appears, brought on by weakness, I will always remember the reason for your departure. The air is chilly. The heart is cold. The sky is frail. The melody faint. I search for you. I search, I search.

Using the theme of grief as a backdrop, *Melancholia* is what Richard Armstrong would perhaps term a mourning film, a film that “negotiate[s] the emotional consequences of loss as it reverberates through the bereaved” (Armstrong, 2012: 12). Armstrong further proposes that mourning eventually ends in acceptance, while melancholy does not. As mentioned above, acceptance cannot be reached because of a lack of closure. The character of the therapist in *Melancholia* reinforces Armstrong's argument, when she discusses the effects of desaparecidos on their families with Alberta, emphasising the inability of relatives to find closure. Edlie L. Wong writes, the disappeared “[leave] an ever-present and haunting absence in its wake” (Wong, 2007: 174). It is precisely the element of haunting, indicated by the lonesome woman singing in the forest at night, that adds an additional layer to mourning in the film.



Figure 11 The female ghost is a pointer to a haunting past.

*Melancholia* - Lav Diaz (2008)

Using Sigmund Freud's work as a backdrop, Belén Vidal argues that melancholy is the "inability to accept the death of a desired object leading to denial that provokes its perpetual return" (Vidal, 2012: 98). Freud, however, makes an essential point that Vidal neglects, but a point that is crucial in the context of the desaparecidos. In his paper *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud (2001) proposes that, contrary to the process of mourning, in melancholia "the object [of love] has *not perhaps actually died*, but has been lost as an object of love" (Freud, 2001: 245, emphasis added). This can be applied to the desaparecidos and their relatives. Bodies are not always found so that the fate of the disappeared often remains uncertain. By extension this means that the characters' love object has been lost without death being

certain. Diaz himself describes melancholia as “an abyss. You can never cure melancholia, especially if it’s about loved ones who are missing. They don’t know what happened to them. There is no closure. It’s terrible” (Diaz, 2014a). Death, which would bring closure for the relatives, is denied, and haunting replaces the way to acceptance of the past.

This part is crucial in one way. Wong contends that “those who witness and survive [disappearances] continue to suffer psychic violence as they are forced to occupy a paralytic state in between knowing and not knowing” (Wong, 2007: 174).

Basing her arguments on the thoughts of Diana Taylor, Chaudhuri adds,

[disappearance] is a trick or spectacle that manipulates appearances to promote the illusion of normality, while striking terror into the population, especially relatives of the disappeared, who are left paralysed with uncertainty regarding their loved ones’ fate. (Chaudhuri, 2014: 85)

Paralysis implies a suspension of movement, thus a state of stillness. Again, we find the theme of characters being locked into a state of uncertainty, which prevents them from continuing their linear life narrative. Rather than progressing, their narrative is slowed down artificially by external forces. This is precisely what LaCapra, based on Freud’s work, describes, arguing that “melancholia [is] characteristic of *an arrested process* in which the depressed, self-berating, and traumatized self, locked in compulsive repetition, is possessed by the past, faces a future of impasses, and remains narcissistically identified with the lost object” (LaCapra, 2001: 65-66, emphasis added). Moreover, the paralytic state arcs back to the aspects of the concentrationary described earlier, and the repeated foregrounding of terror and fear, thereby forcing those left behind into a confusing state between life and death with no exact temporal signifiers of past and present. Santiago Mellibovsky, father of a young woman who was disappeared in Argentina

under the military junta in the 1970s, describes the pain those left-behind are confronted with: “There is no anaesthesia for this pain. No scarring over. They say time heals – but no. ... Time doesn’t heal, it makes you go crazy” (Mellibovsky in Feitlowitz, 1998: 96, original emphasis).

Acceptance, crucial to escape the paralytic state, is made more difficult for Julian. On top of his loss of his partner, he has to come to terms with the suicide of Rina. In this respect, it is possible to conclude that Julian additionally suffers from what is commonly named secondary trauma (Baum, 2013). Secondary trauma refers to a form of trauma, which develops in people who want to help a traumatised person, but who fail at doing so for various reasons. It tends to affect mainly professionals such as doctors, nurses, carers as well as war veterans who themselves have not been directly involved in traumatic events. Julian’s immersion therapy, designed to heal the wounds of the past, increases the characters’ feeling of melancholy and grief. This is particularly true of Rina, who finds relief and closure for herself only in suicide. In their analysis of *Birth* (Jonathan Glazer, 2004), John Izod and Joanna Dovalis argue with respect to Anna, the main protagonist who has lost her husband ten years earlier, that she is locked up in her grief and does not, or cannot mourn the loss of her husband. Crucially, they argue that mourning “would involve a process, a moving forward, and an accommodation with the imaginal world and memories” (Izod and Dovalis, 2015: 31) of the past, which, if we consider the actions of the bereaved and traumatised characters in *Melancholia*, is absent in at least two of the characters, who are as stuck in their grief as Anna is in *Birth*. Considering the overall development of the characters throughout the film, only Alberta moves forward despite the difficulties this brings. Julian, in particular, moves within a circle of immersed personalities

leading him to an entirely unrealistic life as “God”. Bevernage points out that “‘reality’ demands that the bereaved accepts that the lost one has become absent” (Bevernage, 2012: 149). Yet, due to the lack of certainty of their partners’ fates, characters in *Melancholia* cannot accept the absence of their partners. Instead, they seem to live in a state that is *not* real, induced by the pursuit of a self-devised immersion therapy. They lead fictional lives based on an assumption that going through this experience would enable a better, pain-free life. Oggs Cruz describes it this way:

Though in reality, they [the characters] are all survivors who have subscribed to the extremist idea that in order to cope with the fact of having a loved one disappear and be presumed dead, they should shed their identities and see the world through the eyes of another. (Cruz, 2008)

As we have seen earlier in relation to the altered meaning of the forest, and as we will see again in Chapter 6, the immersion therapy, which is considered as a way out of pain, causes a breakdown of two characters. Julian cannot accept the past and dives deeper into melancholy. “When absence ... becomes the object of mourning,” writes LaCapra, “the mourning may (perhaps must) become impossible and turn continually back into endless melancholy” (LaCapra, 2001: 68); a characteristic that is increasingly visible over the *Melancholia*’s eight hour running time.

Julian’s deterioration after Rina’s suicide is accompanied by heavy rain. He’s drenched in water and is in utter despair (Fig. 13). While water can act as a medium of cleansing, the heavy rain is more reminiscent of the pouring down of emotions in Julian’s mind. We will come across a similar motif in Chapter 6, which discusses Diaz’s *Florentina Hubaldo* and the use of heavy rain for the evocation of shock and mental deterioration.



Figure 12 Julian sinks deeper into melancholy.

*Melancholia* - Lav Diaz (2008)

Following his devastation and his inability to cope with his failure at protecting two people in his immediate surrounding, his immersion takes an extreme turn. He takes on the role of God, as he describes himself at the end of the film, and distances himself from his surrounding.

### **Liminal spaces**

Richard Armstrong suggests that mourning films often have as its centre point a character's "interior journey [which] is interwoven with a geographical journey" (Armstrong, 2012: 79). Indeed, in *Melancholia* the characters travel to different places in order to find closure and inner peace. The immersion into the roles of

prostitute, nun and pimp occurs in Sagada, a small village north of Manila. Instead of placing the narrative action in vast open spaces, as is usual for Diaz's filmmaking (seen most clearly in *Heremias Book I* (2005)), over a third of the film is set in interior locations. The indoor spaces are often cramped and claustrophobically small, which supports the idea of the characters being confronted with "moral and psychological entrapment, unbridgeable alienation" (Chatman in Mroz, 2012: 53).

In her analysis of costume dramas, such as *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), Julianne Pidduck (2004) looks at the uses of space in costume film. She identifies interior spaces as spaces of "intricate human interaction". Referring specifically to the use of windows in costume films, Pidduck implies that interior spaces are confined and therefore suggest suffocation. This observation resonates with the use of interior spaces in *Melancholia*, which generate a claustrophobic environment supportive of Diaz's portrayal of suffering and despair. Emotions appear to be trapped, just as the characters are caught up in their plight. The cramped spaces – in particular the tiny hotel rooms where Alberta, as prostitute Jenine, meets her customers - serve as a reminder of the confinement and suffocation the desaparecidos leave behind for their relatives (Fig. 14). The degree of narrowness expresses the confined state of the characters as a result of political persecution. It equally suggests a metaphorical imprisonment of the characters. The disappearance of their loved ones has opened a traumatic cycle, a loop, in which they have to navigate. The tight framing is used to support the idea of pressure on the characters. It creates anxiety for the viewer as well as the character. Diaz's aesthetics of liminal spaces are almost identical to those found in Béla Tarr's early social-realist films, which Kuczok describes as a "Trilogy of Tight Spaces" (Kuczok, 2008: 82). In his early films, Tarr leaves next to no breathing



space for his characters. I will note a similar approach in the next chapter in which I analyse a scene set in a café where Hamin, the film's protagonist, meets his torturer. The increased anxiety and pressure on Hamin is visually reinforced by the use of tight framing, which renders the space claustrophobic, and thus symbolises the crushing effects of post-trauma. On the other hand, Chaudhuri thought-provokingly suggests that it is often those who are feared, for instance by the state, whose spaces reduce in size instead of those who fear (Chaudhuri, 2014: 116). She links the role of activists challenging the status quo and claustrophobic places, but suggests that these places do not necessarily diminish in size because of the activists' own fears. On the contrary, due to the growing pressure they exercise on oppressive forces, it is those forces which attempt to fence their places of activity. Diaz's notion of 'hamletting' in the Philippines, mentioned in my introductory chapter, comes to mind, which was used on the one hand to starve off support for rebels and on the other to observe potential supporters.



Figure 13 Alberta meets a customer in a small hotel room.

*Melancholia* - Lav Diaz (2008)

In his analysis of cinematographic space, Graham Cairns concludes that Yasujiro Ozu constructed his cinematographic space around a static camera, with the effect that “the actions of the protagonists also tend to restrict themselves to limited spaces” (Cairns, 2013: 164). Diaz uses a similar approach. He does not make use of the usual open framing, which would allow characters to move around freely within the frame. Instead, the characters are often locked in the depicted interior space, as can be detected in Fig 14. This is indicative of their limited space in relation to both post-trauma and therapy. As previously pointed out, the immersion therapy locks all three characters temporarily into unreal lives. The lack of closure in relation to the disappearances of their partners also locks them

into a narrative that is paralytic rather than progressive, and it is this element that Diaz foregrounds even more in *Florentina Hubaldo*.

Diaz's tight framing of indoor spaces generates a discrepancy between the sensation of the spaces, and their actual meaning. As mentioned, the tight framing never shows a room in full. Rather, rooms appear small, and suffocating. Yet, they also have an air of intimacy, precisely because of their smallness. But this intimacy is countered by the fact that the characters tend to be alone in those rooms. What is most interesting at this point is the work of Gaston Bachelard who argues that the house protects the dreamer (Bachelard, 1994: 6), referring specifically to the house as 'home'. While in some ways, Diaz's characters can be considered as dreamers in regards to their aim of changing politics and with it society, it is more important here to focus on the aspect of protection in the light of their therapy, which suggests a second role of indoor spaces in *Melancholia*. Throughout the first part of the film, the characters express brief concerns about other underground resistance fighters who could recognise them during their immersion therapy. This becomes particularly crucial after a character with only little screen space challenges Alberta by claiming that he knows her and her husband Renato Munoz. They had been friends until Renato went underground. As will be noted in my analysis of *Encantos*, significant narrative turns in Diaz's films are initiated through dialogue. Only much later does the viewer realise that the man spoke the truth, and that Alberta tries to disguise her real identity. The main point, however, is that no one is supposed to know about Julian's form of therapy. The more time the characters spend in their respective indoor spaces, the lower the risk of being exposed. It is here that Bachelard's notion of protection becomes significant.

Bachelard refers only to 'home', thus a private space, in his work. Diaz's depiction of places is more complex. It is therefore essential to distinguish between public and private spaces here. In his study of what he calls mourning films, Armstrong concludes that "the mourning film's interior drama is frequently played out in a domestic, or pseudo-domestic, setting" (Armstrong, 2012: 176). He also suggests that many of these places of mourning are public rather than private, as is the case in *Melancholia*. The places frequented by the characters are predominantly public places; hotel rooms and cafés as well as a school office and a concert hall. It is peculiar therefore that mourning happens outside the private, and is instead shifted to the public space.

Aesthetically, public and private spaces are treated differently with regards to their framing. In the second part of the film, Julian and Alberta are seen in private spaces. While the latter is visiting her mother's place, Julian is seen in his own house. Contrary to the tight framing of public spaces so as to indicate paralysis and claustrophobia triggered by disappearances, private spaces are characterised by more openness through Diaz's use of open framing (Fig. 15). The characters can walk freely within the frame, and can also leave and enter as they please. Returning to Bachelard's argument, quoted above, the private space is protected, which provides the characters with breathing space. This is decisively different in regards to the public spaces, which – especially concerning the roles Julian and Alberta take on – put the characters at risk.



Figure 14 Diaz uses open framing in the depiction of private and therefore safe spaces.

*Melancholia* - Lav Diaz (2008)

This danger stems partly from the darkness of the night, which Julian and Alberta choose for their respective sex trades. As Michel Pastoureau suggest in his book *Black – The History of a Color* (2008), darkness is “always associated with evil, impiety, punishment, error and suffering” (Pastoureau, 2008: 30). In line with this, Alberta expresses her fear of the dark around an hour into the film. Due to the lack of artificial or extra lighting, the night in Diaz’s *Melancholia* takes on a stark black-and-white aesthetic, which sets it apart from the dominant grayscale aesthetics throughout the rest of the film. The stark black-and-white aesthetics in *Melancholia* bring to mind Béla Tarr’s novel adaptation *The Man from London* (2007). Tarr’s and Diaz’s film both deal with characters, whose ambiguities are

reinforced by the chosen aesthetics. The immersion therapy undertaken by Alberta, Rina and Julian positions them between light and darkness, between hope and despair, but also between life and death. This binary opposition is further supported by the use of architectural structures that divide the frame vertically in the middle (Fig. 16).



**Figure 15 Vertical architectural structures divide the frame in the middle, indicating a binary opposition.**

*Melancholia* - Lav Diaz (2008)

Six scenes in the first part of the film, which deal with the trauma therapy, contain this form of double framing, and function as a “metaphorical placeholder for the existential border between the within and the outside”, as Hetzenauer identifies in

Tarr's films (Hetzenauer, 2013: 18).<sup>22</sup> It is a visual manifestation of the characters' double identities, as they live two lives at once and a pointer to a "period of change in [the] individual's life cycle" (Izod and Dovalis, 2015: 63). Five of those scenes are directly connected to Alberta, which is a subtle pointer to the complications with the other two characters, who experience difficulties in switching between personalities. Rina commits suicide after years of therapeutic immersion. She therefore ends the switch between personalities, and therefore her shift between life (white) and death (black). Julian, on the other hand, gets lost in his own therapy, claiming at the end of the film that he is God. Alberta is the only one who continues to alter her personalities.

On top of this, she is in a double-edged situation. On the one hand, she is a woman suffering from the disappearance of her partner. On the other, she has to be a stronghold for her adopted daughter, Hannah. Hannah is only spoken of during the first three hours of the film. Her relationship to the group is unclear and is only revealed four-and-a-half hours into the film. She goes missing frequently, steals and prostitutes herself in the streets of Manila, and is not seen by anyone for months. Metaphorically, she becomes one of the disappeared herself. Based on the work of sociologist Gabriel Gatti, Ana Ros suggests that "sons and daughters [of the disappeared] inherit a void, an erasure, a 'catastrophe of meaning'" (Ros, 2012: 27). There is a clear indication that children of the desaparecidos are left with a feeling of emptiness, which they desire to fill. Hannah fills her void partly with socially unacceptable behaviour, and thus becomes a rebel in her own ways, akin to her parents, social activists, who went missing in March 1997.

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<sup>22</sup> „ein metaphorischer Stellvertreter für die existentielle Grenze zwischen Innen und Außen...“

Alberta attempts to accommodate and support the teenager as best as she can. In a night-time scene on a beach, she shares her knowledge of Hannah's parents, without, however, mentioning their activism. The frame is divided into two almost equally sized halves. In the bottom part of the frame, there is a peaceful campfire that visually accompanies the sound of cicadas. In the top part of the frame, Alberta is sitting in the sand with Hannah's head on her lap. Hanna is looking up to her while Alberta tells her about her mother's appearance, her beauty, and how her parents got to know each other. It is as though Hannah wants to create an image of the time before her parents disappeared. She was eight when this happened, but she does not seem to remember. As Ana Ros argues, "[t]hese children typically experience the need to learn as much as they can about their parents, from the details of their private lives to their political struggle" (Ros, 2012: 26). Alberta is the only key to the lock of Hannah's memories of her parents.

### **Digging up the dead**

As Diaz's film attempts to convey through his portrayal of characters, the *desaparecidos* "are not like 'ordinary' dead but are, instead, in between life and death," as the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* argued controversially in the context of Argentina's disappeared (Bevernage, 2012: 23). They are people, who, akin to ghosts, represent a fine line between absence and presence, which gives way to a form of continuous haunting, a theme we will encounter time and again in the following chapters. Indeed, Bevernage describes the *desaparecidos* as "a population of ghosts" (Bevernage, 2012: 25). *Desaparecidos* introduce a degree of vagueness about where they have been taken, and what exactly happened to them. Diaz counters this vagueness by pointing to specific times when and places where



events occurred, therefore portraying what Torchin describes in relation to the depiction of genocide witnessing in *The Interpreter* (dir Sydney Pollack, 2005) as a “transparent display of information” (Torchin, 2012: 2). This sets *Melancholia* apart from his other films, in which events are often not named directly, but only pointed to.

In *Melancholia*, however, Diaz supplies the audience with exact information. For instance, the partners of Alberta, Rina and Julian disappeared on 8 March 1997 in Samar, Mindoro. Diaz revealed in an interview that the detail refers to an actual event: “I reference a major event where somebody was abducted. I think it was about a son of a publisher who became a cultural activist, fighting for the rights of farmers, and he was abducted in broad day light in some part of the city.” (Diaz, 2014a)

Furthermore, Diaz includes shots of a group of people – Julian among them – who journey into the jungle and search for possible remains. According to Diaz, this group of people contains real activists, who have lost their loved ones and are still looking for them. While one man is digging up bones in the background, an alleged foreign news reporter gives a report about the findings. She gives the names of two men who have disappeared, Manuel Tirano and Gigi Fernandez, whose skeletons those are suspected to be. She also reveals that the skeletons have been found in a remote village in Digos in Mindanao. The information given serves to make the disappeared visible.

As in *Encantos*, to be analysed in Chapter 5, Diaz merges fact and fiction in this scene. Due to the documentary aesthetics employed here, it feels as though the director has accompanied a real group of people who dug up skeletons after two children allegedly found them while playing in the woods. A seemingly small

handheld camera, which pans across people's faces, the grayscale aesthetic and the sounds of photo cameras on top of the filming of a film crew being present at the scene evoke a feeling of an event unfolding in front of our eyes. Diaz inserts a fictional element, however, by giving on-screen space to Julian in this group, who witnesses the events. It is a deeply unsettling scene, a moment of rupture and shock. Yet at the same time it marks an end of uncertainty for the desaparecidos's relatives. It is also a scene that is interesting for its treatment of absence and presence in relation to the disappeared. Even though the disappeared are physically *absent*, the recorded footage of the skull acts as a pointer to their absent presence (Fig. 17). They have not entirely disappeared, and, as previously stated, continue to influence the lives of their relatives indirectly. Laura Malosetti Costa (2014), in her analysis of Argentinian memory work after the dictatorship years, describes the 'appearing' of the disappeared as an essential factor in memory work. She writes,

In the context of a politically-targeted genocide, effected through disappearance, 'appearing' – i.e. making public a suppressed presence – functions as a political act. Thus making visible the invisibilized has always been one of the main strategies of the resistance and the protest for truth and justice. (Malosetti Costa, 2014: 225)

Costa's argument about the unearthing of the disappeared leads me to Minghelli's characterisation of the filmmaker as archaeologist (Minghelli, 2013: 79), which finds its most suitable and most literal application here as the focus is on visualising the absent through the exhumation of bodies. Yet it is not only the filmmaker-turned-archaeologist, who inhabits a special role in this scene. Through the subject matter and its aesthetics, Diaz positions the viewer as (eye)witness in this scene. This differs greatly from *Encantos* and most strikingly from *Florentina*,

in which Diaz positions the viewer as listener. The viewer is present at a vital stage in the lives of bereaved after the disappearances of their loved ones. The exhumation and therefore the making-present of death marks closure for relatives of desaparecidos. Diaz makes the “invisible visible and absence present”, to use Libby Saxton’s words (Saxton, 2008).



**Figure 16 Images of real skulls and bones function as (traumatic) ruptures.**

*Melancholia* - Lav Diaz (2008)

The sequence is dominated by the sound of photo cameras, their shutters being an indication of contemporary media’s sensationalism. But they are also a sound of documentation, of making visible the disappeared. The camera is handheld throughout, panning from the people’s faces and tilting to the skull in the soil. It is

a shocking image, unusual for Diaz's tendency to reject violent images. Even though there is no direct violence, the viewer has never before encountered real dead bodies in Diaz's films. On the contrary. Real death, as opposed to performed death, is hinted at and spoken of, but never shown. In further handheld shots, which show close-ups of the skull, we can see a man finding more bones in the soil. Candles have been lit around the area where the skeletons have been found. It is a quiet, eerie, and stunning scene. It is a scenery of real death more than any other scene we see in Diaz's films.

Diaz's treatment of 'digging up the dead' as consequence and symptom of a traumatised people bears similarities to Patricio Guzmán's documentary *Nostalgia de la luz* (2010), in which the filmmaker tackles the invisible history of the Chilean disappeared by juxtaposing astronomers' search for answers about the past in the universe with the mothers' searches for answers by digging in the vast Atacama desert in the hope of finding the remains of their disappeared loved ones. While the approaches of Guzmán and Diaz differ, their use of shocking material, at times in black-and-white, is similar as can be seen in Figures 18 to 20. This way of framing and exposing the dead stems from an urge to remember what has been forgotten by society.



**Figure 17 Digging up the dead.**

*Nostalgia de la luz* - Patricio Guzmán (2010)



**Figure 18 Archival footage of excavations I.**

*Nostalgia de la Luz* - Patricio Guzmán (2010)



**Figure 19 Archival footage of excavation II.**

***Nostalgia de la Luz* - Patricio Guzmán (2010)**

By showing footage of skeletons, Diaz contradicts his approach to the representation of death on-screen in his nine-hour feature *Encantos*, which I will analyse in the next chapter. In it, Diaz decided not to include footage of dead bodies and instead places emphasis on the absence of imagery of death in a landscape ravaged by typhoon Reming. The question is why Diaz has changed his approach. All of his films are implicitly about death, brought about through torture, extra-judicial killings, colonialism or other factors. *Melancholia*, however, does not generate a sensation of death. It is a film about disappearances, which leaves the viewer as much in the dark about what happened to the activists as the characters themselves. The decision to include footage of remains of activists clarifies the issue rather bluntly; the disappeared have been killed. Without this scene the viewer would have perhaps struggled to make a connection between disappearances and death, in which they usually result. In addition, it also brings

closure to the viewer and releases him/her from a paralytic state similar to that of the disappeared's relatives.

An almost identical approach to making the invisible visible so as to reach closure can be found in what has become known as Spain's "exhumation movement", in which organisations rally for the exhumations of republican victims of extra-judicial killings under Franco's regime (Bevernage and Colaert, 2014). Exhumations are part of what Bevernage and Colaert identify as an element of trauma-therapy-closure time, short TTC (Bevernage and Colaert, 2014: 441). Recovering the dead is a means to embark on a therapeutic dealing with the past, and aids closure for those the desaparecidos left behind (Bevernage and Colaert, 2014: 442). More generally, the authors refer to exhumations as "master metaphors for traumatic memory, therapy, and closure" (Bevernage and Colaert, 2014: 446).

Given his approach to the representation of atrocities, it is possible to suggest that Diaz intends to make a definite point here, which he reinforces by the recorded footage of digging up the dead. In *Encantos* the insertion of footage of corpses was not necessary, as the pictures of this scenery had been widely disseminated in national and international news. The pictures generated an image of devastation before Diaz films was released. Diaz was thus able to rely on the sensation of death. The viewer knew about the thousands of dead people. Therefore, Diaz could rely on other means, such as dialogue and sound in order to emphasise the devastation in the area. The case is rather different with the disappeared, who are usually kidnapped and never seen again. Therefore, no visual proof of their fate exists. Diaz challenges this in *Melancholia* by using footage of the excavation of bodies that belong to two desaparecidos.

Diaz explains how this scene came about:

It's always like this with the Human Rights Commission bodies, and Amnesty International. They come, dig...the military always bury the dead, especially the executed activists or rebels. They do it fast. The graves are so shallow. It's just there. If it rains, the skulls will come out. So I decided to do a scene like that where the activists and some of their kins are digging [up] these things. (Diaz, 2014a)

Diaz's decision to disrupt the fictional narrative and to include footage of skeletons is reminiscent of Ari Folman's approach to the depiction of atrocities in his film *Waltz with Bashir* (2008). Based on the director's search for his memory of the Lebanon War in 1982, the film treats the Sabra and Shatila massacre, in which the Lebanese militia killed mostly Palestinians in a refugee camp in response to the assassination of Bachir Geymayel, president of Lebanon at the time. Folman, while depicting the killings, refrains from graphic violence on screen. The use of animation diffuses the strength of the images, and conveys a rather unreal, and in a perverse way, entertaining look at the war. It is "a kind of mask", as Chaudhuri puts it (Chaudhuri, 2014: 152), which offers distancing to filmmaker and viewer.

Raz Yosef explains:

Folman creates a distance for himself, and for the viewer, that makes the traumas of the war and the massacre accessible. ... directly approaching the trauma through traditional photographic documentary footage would have been too shocking and threatening. (Yosef, 2011: 88)

Using animation instead of documentary footage, Folman makes use of what Saul Friedlander calls "aesthetic distancing" (Friedlander, 1992: 17), in which certain aesthetic choices help the filmmaker to distance himself and the viewer from images that could be too traumatic. Cambodian director Rithy Panh approaches his personal memories of the Khmer Rouge genocide in the 1970s similarly. His most personal film about the traumatic events, *The Missing Picture/L'Image manquante*



(2013), is an animation done with clay figures, which aims to portray the suffering of the time without showing explicitly gore images.

After having shielded the audience away from direct on-screen violence, Folman abruptly cuts to real documentary footage of the aftermath of the massacre at the end of the film (Fig. 21-22). The graphic images are inserted without warning, and make unmistakably clear that the massacre did occur. First of all, the use of documentary footage announces Folman's realisation that he was indirectly involved in the massacre. His hazy memories become clear portraits of Israeli violence. Furthermore, animations tend to generate a feeling of fantasy. The use of animated pictures would not support Folman's transformation from a man on a quest to seek the truth about his involvement in the Lebanon war to a man whose memory fragments merge, creating an unmistakable image of his role as soldier at the time atrocities in the refugee camp were committed.



Figure 20 A scene of violence shown as animation.

*Waltz with Bashir* - Ari Folman (2008)



Figure 21 At the end of the film, Folman shifts from animation to documentary footage.

*Waltz with Bashir* - Ari Folman (2008)

Diaz is pursuing a similar strategy to that employed in *Waltz with Bashir*. As mentioned several times previously, he refrains from depicting on-screen violence. His films are furthermore fictional depictions of atrocities that are spoken about but never shown. The abrupt insertion of real footage of a skull and bones has an effect similar to that of Folman's *Waltz with Bashir*; the viewer is reminded that despite fictional representations, the atrocities that are pointed to have indeed occurred. The real documentary footage seemingly acts as evidence of crimes that often go unpunished. It functions as what Griselda Pollock calls "indexical evidence of a terrible event" (Pollock, 2011: 273), allowing certainty to arise in relatives of desaparecidos and in the films' viewer.

## Conclusion

*Melancholia* stands out in the films under analysis in its foregrounding of duration. All of Diaz's films make use of duration, first and foremost as an expression of the Philippines' Malay ancestry and the ancient belief that time was spatial. At the same time, however, duration is an element of post-trauma and the terror that often precedes it. In *Melancholia*, duration is key to the portrayal of terror and the subsequent paralysis the resistance fighters and their relatives are caught in. Endless waiting for a causally certain but temporally uncertain event in *Melancholia* is Diaz's most explicit treatment and employment of time for his depiction of post-trauma. I will refer time and again to the element of duration in the next chapters, yet it is *Melancholia* that is the clearest example of time as power and punishment.

Furthermore, the film introduces the theme of haunting as an expression of what Cua Lim describes as splintered time. Past and present are not two temporal frameworks separate of each other. Rather, they overlap. In the context of disappearances, the aspect of haunting infers an inability of coming to terms with events. Desaparecidos are often never found again. This means that relatives cannot find closure as to their whereabouts. Lack of closure paves the way for paralysis and the past's overbearing of the present. This aspect will become most explicit in my next chapter, which picks up the theme of haunting and expands on it in relation to Diaz's *Encantos* and his treatment of post-trauma in the wake of a natural disaster and of torture.

*Melancholia* contains elements which are specific and recognisable as Lav Diaz's filmmaking: the use of long-takes, the preference of black-and-white over colour, the recurrent themes of post-trauma, loss, and despair as well as

references to the Philippines' troubled history. There are, however, decisive differences between *Melancholia* and his previous and subsequent films. This does not only concern the structure of the film, which is based on three clearly identifiable parts. It is also Diaz's treatment of post-trauma and the way in which he tackles political silence over the kidnapping, disappearance and killing of social activists.

Diaz conveys post-trauma through the use of space, but he alters the meaning of certain spaces, such as the forest. In *Melancholia*, the forest and cramped interior spaces stand for the paralytic trap the characters find themselves in as a result of the traumatic loss of their loved ones. This spatial trap is a metaphor for a blockage that occurs after a traumatic event has occurred, which limits the individual's movement in terms of a literal progression in life as well as a movement towards acceptance of the past. The suffocating spaces, embodied here by the forest and cramped public spaces, enhance the anxiety and paranoia felt by the character.

Most striking in *Melancholia* is Diaz's referral to specific times and places in relation to the disappeared. Whereas he tends to hint at societal wrongdoings in all of his other films, he makes explicit statements in form of naming two men who have been disappeared, of giving precise dates of their disappearance, and of identifying locations of where their bodies have been found. Moreover, he includes footage of a group of people who witness the digging up of skeletons, which is the most explicit reference to, and evidence of violence in Diaz's films.

What becomes clear throughout the film is that Diaz not only tackles the theme of the disappeared as an isolated incident. Rather, he explores the aspect in a broader context, focusing on the effects of disappearances on the lives of those

who the desaparecidos leave behind. The raw psychological warfare that breaks the armed resistance fighters in the forest draws larger circles, and, in extension, crushes their relatives as well.

Using footage of an exhumation, however, which contradicts Diaz's earlier approach of not putting dead bodies on screen, poses ethical questions in relation to the portrayal of death and the dead. In the context of on-going exhumations in Spain, Bevernage and Colaert refer to concerns amongst parts of the public that "horrific images of bones [show] a disrespect toward the dead" (Bevernage and Colaert, 2014: 443). While Bevernage and Colaert do not refer to cinematic representations of exhumations, it is an equally, perhaps even more sensitive issue in film. The question that needs to be asked and answered is where the line is drawn between public interest and private mourning, between creating a spectacle at the cost of the dead and making visible the literally buried truth about state terror, which Chaudhuri identifies as "a legacy of colonial histories maintained by present-day politics" (Chaudhuri, 2014: 2).

As will become evident in the next chapter, *Melancholia* is a stepping-stone between *Encantos* and my next chapter on *Florentina Hubaldo*. Whereas in *Encantos*, Diaz refrains from showing any form of atrocity directly on screen he positions *Melancholia* on the other side of the spectrum between showing and not showing. The images of skulls and bones are a rupture in Diaz's aesthetics of absence. At the same time, they show a development in Diaz's filmmaking that seeks to find the most appropriate and most ethical aesthetics in regards to the contents of his films.

In the next chapter, I would like to expand on the notion of framing and on the use of specific camera angles as the filmmaker's tools for a reinforcement of a

character's mental deterioration. *Encantos* transmits post-trauma primarily through its mise-en-scène. Duration, even though part and parcel of all of Diaz's films, moves into the background. I will also return to the subject of haunting and I seek to explain how ghosts in *Encantos* function as a signifier of guilt and post-trauma, thereby reconsidering Cua Lim's concept of splintered time.

## 5. The ghosts of activism – *Death in the Land of Encantos* (2007)

...haunting is one way in which abusive systems make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life ...  
[haunting] is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely.  
(Gordon, 2008: xvi)

### Introduction

The scenery is one of death. Two characters sit under the rooftop of a house that is buried in lahar and debris. The roof is the only thing that was spared by the storm. The houses, it seems, have become coffins for their owners. Splintered wood, a fridge out of place, and boulders speak of a past apocalyptic event.

What we see is not a set built for a film. Rather, a director uses a location haunted by disaster for his film. Diaz's nine-hour feature, *Death in the Land of Encantos* (2007), is set in the aftermath of typhoon Durian, or Reming, as it was locally called. Following a major eruption of Mount Mayon in the region of Bicol, the typhoon's onslaught unleashed disaster in the area in Autumn 2006. When Reming made landfall, the rain caused mudslides from Mount Mayon and turned ashes and rocks into a deadly mixture of lahar, which swept through the neighbourhoods surrounding the volcano. Many of the over one thousand people who lost their lives were buried alive.

*Encantos* is a portrait of Benjamin Agusan (Roeder Camanag), a persecuted poet-artist, who returns to the Philippines in order to bury his lover. He had spent the previous seven years in Kaluga, Russia, having received a grant and residency

in order to teach at the local university.<sup>23</sup> It appears as though Diaz has chosen this city in order to comment on the political situation in the Philippines and the persecution of artists. During the period of the Russian Empire (1721-1917), Kaluga was a common exile location for persecuted artists and politicians. Benjamin Agusan, too, has been persecuted by Philippine paramilitary forces, because of his art's assumed role in inciting revolutions. I will go into more detail about his persecution and torture later in this chapter. Whether or not his stay was intended as an attempt to seek exile in Russia, however, is unclear and left open in the film.

Throughout the film, Benjamin (Hamin hereafter) confronts memories of his mother's insanity, his sister's suicide, his father's lonely death, and his failure at being a father himself – he has a son with fellow artist Catalina (Angeli Bayani), which is revealed only hesitantly. His journey through past events triggers a slow descent into madness and a death that remains unexplained. In *Encantos*, Diaz's focus on the individual's psychological disintegration as a result of external (governmental) forces, which I have noted in Chapter 4, returns here and is explored in more depth.

In this chapter, I go into more detail about Diaz's merging of documentary aesthetics with fiction film, which I introduced in the context of *Melancholia* and its use of seemingly factual material of activists digging up skeletons of alleged desaparecidos, blended in with the fictional story of Julian, Alberta and Rina. *Encantos* developed out of documentary footage the director recorded in the

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<sup>23</sup> The theme of departure and return was perhaps inspired by José Rizal's novel *Noli Me Tangere* (1887). Rizal is a national hero in the Philippines, and his book was said to incite and support the First Philippine Revolution. He was sentenced to death and was executed in 1896.



aftermath of the natural disaster. His decision to exclude recorded material of injured victims and the dead in the final version of the film is an example of his ethical approach to filmmaking. It contradicts his approach in *Melancholia*, in which he used explicitly shocking material. Nevertheless, it shows the malleability of the director's responsibility, as Diaz notes (Diaz, 2014a), which adjusts to the respective needs of the narrative, without the filmmaker confining himself to a strict set of aesthetical and ethical rules.

Expanding on the treatment of space and framing in *Melancholia*, I further analyse the role of landscape in Diaz's *Encantos*, looking specifically at the use of Dutch camera angles, the varying shot lengths, and the use of framing and their ability to transmit the inner feelings of desolate characters. In her analysis of time in contemporary Chinese cinema, Jean Ma detects

a topography of haunted spaces and spectral glimmers, of restive parts that invade the boundaries of the present, of nostalgic longing and melancholic fixation, inhabited by characters who endure and resist the experiences of loss, mourning, and trauma in idiosyncratic ways. (Ma, 2010: 7)

Ma's view on Chinese cinema is equally applicable to the use of space in Diaz's films, and it is in this chapter that I explore the uses of haunted spaces in more detail after having touched upon it in Chapter 4. I will note the similarities between Diaz's use of landscapes for the representation of characters' inner struggles and traditional Chinese landscape painting. Both represent nature as the governing force, and position Man in the background. This analysis reveals the inferiority of Diaz's characters in the face of oppression. At the same time it is characteristic of the director's intention to create aesthetics that resemble Malay culture at a time when nature was considered to be the dominant force in governing people's lives.

In Italian cinema of the post-war era, Minghelli identifies a “commitment to the documentary visibility of the present and a silent engagement with a yet unspeakable past” (Minghelli, 2013: 3). According to Minghelli, this commitment had lead neo-realist filmmakers to focus on aspects of memory, often expressed through a focus on landscapes. The documentary visibility of the present Minghelli mentions becomes particularly evident in Diaz’s *Death in the Land of Encantos*. It is of significance, however, that Diaz combines aspects of memory, and post-trauma more specifically, with the aesthetics of the natural landscape, which to him, always functions as a template in his films. The combination of traumatic memories and desolate landscapes finds its expression in Diaz’s black-and-white aesthetics, which he considers as more expressive of the subject matter which his films depict (Diaz, 2014a).

Using an analysis of the choices of landscape as a background for the discussion of the characters’ inner struggles with coming to terms with loss and death, I will undertake a reading of the roles of ghosts in *Encantos* and their evocation of haunting memories and Hamin’s mental decline. In alignment with classic Trauma Cinema, Diaz uses flashbacks. He does not use clear temporal markers and therefore makes orientation difficult for the viewer. Yet the flashback has a significance in this film that cannot be detected in his other films to the same extent, namely that of “a haunted present and an overtaking of reality by interior life” (Ma, 2010: 30).

I further explore the references to torture and extra-judicial killings Diaz makes throughout the film, expanding further on characteristics of the concentrationary, introduced in Chapter 1 and explored in relation to Diaz’s use of duration in Chapter 4, through a close reading of Hamin’s persecution. This section

allows me to demonstrate one of the marked characteristics of Diaz's films: atrocities are not shown but often revealed in dialogue between characters. It will become evident that whereas *Melancholia* had a strong focus on long duration and the burden that comes with it for the resistance fighters who wait for their certain death, *Encantos* is a more visual approach to the depiction of post-trauma, highlighted by framing and the use of particular camera angles.

### **From documentary to fiction**

*Melancholia* and *Encantos* share the characteristic of blurring the line between fact and fiction. Shortly after typhoon Reming had hit the country, Diaz travelled to the affected region in order to create "a document in the aftermath of [the] apocalyptic disaster" (Baskar, 2007; cf. Falgui, 2008). He recorded footage of the devastation, and conducted interviews with survivors, some of which he included in his final film. Diaz describes his intention in an interview: "I just wanted to help. Document the things because my intention then was, okay I want to do a lot of footage and give it to friends in the media or give it to CNN or somebody else there" (Diaz, 2014a). Jonathan Kear proposes that "such primary source documents [interviews], whether visual or verbal, serve as testimony to the 'real'" (Kear, 2007: 134), which further underlines Diaz's intention of capturing unmediated footage of the aftermath. The aesthetics I will describe in the following sections are supportive of Diaz's documentary approach. This is especially true for the way he frames the action. Diaz wanted to be a mere observer, and intended to be "journalistic", as he called it (Diaz, 2014a), thereby minimising the ethical question of authorial control (Marguelies, 1996: 31).

Reming was not only a regional disaster. Diaz felt personally affected by the tragedy as areas that he had used for his films *Heremias Book II* (no release date) and *Evolution of a Filipino Family* (2004) had been destroyed (Diaz, 2008; Tioseco 2008).<sup>24</sup> In an interview with Alexis Tioseco, he describes the horror he encountered when he arrived in the Padang area:

When I got there, it was hell. The smell of death was everywhere. All you could see was utter disarray, devastation, destruction, insanity, pain, sadness, unbearable suffering. Villages were gone, hundreds of people buried alive, hundreds missing. (Tioseco, 2008)

When watching the footage on his computer, Diaz decided to merge it with a fictional narrative, an “aesthetic decision” as he describes it (Tioseco, 2008), which would mirror the pain and the loss of the typhoon survivors. But, as Chaudhuri proposes, “every aesthetic choice is also an ethical choice” (Chaudhuri, 2014: 19). The decision to show or not to show is an expression of the director’s sense of responsibility towards the subject matter s/he depicts. This not only concerns the possible effects of potentially traumatising images on the viewer. Maintaining the dignity of cinematically represented victims through a choice of material that can be shown is of equal importance. Diaz’s rejection of shocking imagery, which stands in contrast to his approach in *Melancholia*, thus needs to be explored a little further.

*Encantos* is a film made “a memoriam” (Diaz, 2008):

I’m so connected with some of the people who died in that barrio, because it’s a vast area and in this particular area where some of the scenes of *Evolution of a Filipino Family* and *Heremias Book II* – I shot it there, and

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<sup>24</sup> Diaz inserts a scene from *Heremias Book II* in *Encantos*. The scene is preceded by a factual and at the same time fictional interview with the film character Sir Claro, who expresses his concern about the foreshadowing of the disaster that hit Bicol in Diaz’s film. In *Book II*, one of the characters foresees the village’s burial by volcano Mayon. Claro says, “It’s as if the film has foretold the calamity.”

they're all gone. So I felt so connected to the place, I said ... I want to do a homage to those friends who died. (Diaz, 2014a)

Diaz's homage is supported by his use of black-and-white, which tends to be associated with past events. His monochrome aesthetics are also reminiscent of the post-apocalyptic scenery of Padang and other regions, which Noël Rosal, mayor of Legazpi City, described after the disaster as "the black desert" (Marquez, 2006).<sup>25</sup>

### **Tilted landscapes**

In *Melancholia*, Diaz uses space as a symbol and reinforcement of the characters' confinement in the aftermath of their relatives' disappearances. The particularly tight framing creates a sense of paralysis. In *Encantos*, it is not the indoor space that is utilised as a metaphor of psychological confinement. Rather, Diaz uses the vast open, but more importantly destructed spaces of the Philippines in order to visually reinforce the characters' inner struggles.

Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner argue that the meaning of a cinematic landscape is dependent on framing and on movement (Harper and Rayner, 2010: 17). David Melbye adds that a filmmaker can allude to the landscape as being allegorical to a character's state of mind with the help of specific framing, editing and juxtaposition (Melbye, 2010: 1). Allegorical landscapes can be found

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<sup>25</sup> In the context of *Encantos* as a document of disaster, it seems appropriate at this point to refer to Diaz's documentary about the aftermath of typhoon Yolanda – *Storm Children: Book One/Mga anak ng unos* – which premiered at the DMZ Documentary Film Festival in South Korea in September 2014. Diaz's documentary is a portrayal of children and their daily life in the ravished areas of Tacloban and its surrounding areas. Shot in black-and-white, it is a raw film, which records the struggle and pain of the people. For this film, too, Diaz went to the affected areas in order to record the damage done and the suffering endured. Similarly to his approach in *Encantos*, he follows the lives of survivors and interviews them. He therefore gives them a voice. Contrary to *Encantos*, however, Diaz did not construct a fictional narrative around the material he recorded in Tacloban. He preserved his observational approach. Yet there is a tendency apparent in his filmmaking which combines a journalistic aesthetics with narrative cinema.

throughout the output of several directors, although some filmmakers make heavier use of allegories than others. Béla Tarr, for instance, has made extensive use of bleak empty landscapes to mirror the mental states of the film characters, considering landscape as “always one of the main characters of the film” (Kovács, 2009). *Damnation/Kárhozat* (1988) and *Sátántángo* (1994), in particular, are known for their depiction of ruins. The image of puddles and heavy rain drenching the people is reminiscent for the characters’ inner struggles, reducing the people to bare life until they are no different from dogs, as becomes strikingly clear in *Damnation* (Fig. 23).



**Figure 22** Karrer becomes a man equal to a dog at the end of the film.

*Damnation* - Béla Tarr (1988)

As we have seen, vast, empty or devastated landscapes are commonly used to express psychological turmoil. Catherine Fowler and Gillian Helfield, for instance, refer to the relationship between land and its inhabitants as a “pre-eminence of physical and social landscape” (Fowler and Helfield, 2006: 6). For Minghelli, on the other hand, landscape is a place of haunting, “both silenced and visually expressed” (Minghelli, 2013: 7), embodying memory and ‘trauma’ in post-fascist Italian cinema. Further, Minghelli argues – and this is specially true for the position of landscape in *Encantos* – landscape is “more than a site of contemplation, it contemplates; more than a site of memory, *it remembers*; an enigmatic monument standing in the place of a historical repression” (Minghelli, 2013: 7, emphasis added). As I will note later in this chapter, the landscape as an entity that remembers has a poignant significance in relation to the area of Padang which was devastated by typhoon Reming and which subsequently became the sole memorial for the approximately one thousand dead.

Even though camera movement and editing influence the meaning of landscape in film, I would like to shift the attention to Diaz’s choice of framing in this section for two main reasons. First, Diaz’s landscape shots are predominantly static. It is therefore the framing rather than the camera movement that creates meaning. Stasis is a common denominator in slow films, particularly in the films of Tsai Ming-liang, Albert Serra and Pedro Costa. These and other directors make use of open frames, which do not require a movement of the camera. Characters enter and exit the frames freely and independently of their framing. Béla Tarr, in contrast, is a major exception in that his films are highly choreographed. While he started his filmmaking using predominantly static frames in his social realist films, his later films *Sátántángo* (1994), *Werckmeister Harmonies/Werckmeister*

*harmóniák* (2000), *The Man from London* (2007) as well as his last film *The Turin Horse* (2011) are remarkable in their heavy use of choreographed camera movement, particularly a type of movement that is independent from the character.

In addition to using a static camera position, Diaz has diverted from his usual way of framing, which tends to be centred and frontal, as is the case in *Melancholia* and *Florentina*, to be analysed in the next chapter. In *Encantos*, on the other hand, he has made prominent use of Dutch angles. Diaz employs this technique in twenty-five long takes, all of which are unmistakably linked to the destroyed landscapes in Bicol and the loss, grief, and mental upheaval of the fictional characters and the survivors (Fig. 24-26). The canted angle indicates a feeling of disorientation and instability for the characters, but the visual specificity transmits these feelings simultaneously to the viewer. The canted angle may also suggest the visible instability of the natural environment, exemplified in *Encantos* through the use of a post-disaster landscape.





**Figure 23 Tilted camera I.**

*Death in the Land of Encantos - Lav Diaz (2007)*



**Figure 24 Tilted camera II.**

*Death in the Land of Encantos - Lav Diaz (2007)*



**Figure 25 Tilted camera III.**

*Death in the Land of Encantos - Lav Diaz (2007)*

The absence of equilibrium in nature and characters alike is further supported by the shifting focus of the visual field between sky and soil. After the first interview with a survivor of the catastrophe, in which a man, hunched in a rain cape, speaks about the loss of his family members, Diaz shifts to a scene of the fictional narrative. Hamin sits on a wooden makeshift bench, and is visibly distressed over the damage he has discovered. The camera approaches him and a man (possibly Lav Diaz himself) asks him for an interview. As pointed out earlier, Diaz blurs the line between fact and fiction, and interview sequences such as these, interspersed throughout the film, are indicative of his approach.

Hamin refuses, while a second man approaches in the background. The man is Teodoro (Perry Dizon), or Teo, a fellow poet and a friend of Hamin's. In honour

of their reunion, Teo recites one of Hamin's poems in a ten minute long-take. In this uninterrupted long-take long shot, the camera captures the destruction around the two men, and the sound of eerie tranquillity. In the context of Angelopoulos' films, Horton describes this form of quietude in nature as reminiscent of a "muted landscape" (Horton, 1997: 81), which finds its application here. The only audible sound, except for the characters' voices, is the wind that is a remnant of the passing typhoon. The soundscape is void of everything we usually hear in Diaz's films: the chirping of birds, the barking of dogs, and the cuckooing of roosters. The soundscape is entirely different from *Melancholia*, with its prominent setting in bustling Manila. It sounds as though the region has been emptied of life. It feels strikingly similar to Otto Dov Kulka's description of the landscape he encountered when he returned to Auschwitz in 1978, more than thirty years after the end of the war. He specifically points to silence as a remnant of death. He writes,

And the silence. An overwhelming silence. Not even the sound of a bird was heard there. There was muteness there, and emptiness there. There was astonishment that these landscapes – which had been so densely crowded with people, like ants, with armies of slaves, with rows of people making their way along the paths – were silent, were deserted. (Kulka, 2014: 6-7)

The same is true for the location used for this scene. Where houses, farms and people used to be, there is no longer a sign of life. The typhoon and the mudslides have buried life and have replaced it with death.

When Hamin and Teo leave, the camera stays behind. In the resulting *temps mort*, the frame emphasises soil over sky. The landscape in ruins takes approximately two-thirds of the frame, while the sky is given only a minimal presence respectively. It is worth citing an extract of Hamin's poem at this point,

which illustrates a general feeling of devastation, with reference to nature and man.

Daily you see land and sky, heaven and hell  
No corner left in the world, no haven for everyone  
A hundred thousand echoes will sink and rise  
Behold the blood on the window of a vanished maiden  
Angling for the star atop a mango tree  
You were a tyke when the chapel fell  
You were a kid when murders proliferated  
A mysterious song persists in memory  
A face from the past being glimpsed  
A once muddy place turned into a street  
The mountain pounded and crushed into gravel  
Before burying your childhood friend.

First of all, it needs to be noted that this poem as well as all other poems recited in the film had been written by Diaz himself. Second, Hamin's poem is an exploration of pain, loss, devastation, and a repeated reference to hell. In figurative terms, the preference of soil over sky, or, in other words, of Hell over Heaven, in the aforementioned *tempo mort* visually supports the content of the poem.

In addition, in a later scene, Catalina and Hamin discuss recent events. In a long shot, they are seen having a drink together amidst the surrounding devastation. Catalina asks, "Where do you think is God, now that our region is in terrible crisis?" Hamin responds by saying "Sometimes it's really hard to understand God's justice." Characters question the existence of God, thus a minimal framing of the sky can be regarded as supportive of this questioning. Yet, the repeated prominence of Hell (soil) over Heaven (sky) in Diaz's framing simultaneously acts as a general pointer to Hamin's life.

Dissanayake contends that landscapes are symbolic and "can externalize inner dramas of characters; they act as visual analogies for complex psychologies

of characters” (Dissanayake, 2010: 191). Harper and Rayner go further by suggesting two forms of cinematic landscapes; first, the “metonymic” landscape, which is based on “an identifiable range of designations”, and second, the “metaphoric” landscape, which is a “landscape of suggestion” (Harper and Rayner, 2010: 20).

Using Harper and Rayner’s distinction, I would like to suggest that the landscape in Diaz’s *Encantos* is both metonymic and metaphoric. On a metonymic level, the landscape shows ramshackle houses and rice fields, indicating the dominance of farming and poverty in the area, making the loss as a result of the typhoon even more poignant. Metaphorically, the landscape mirrors the inner struggles of the survivors, but also that of Hamin, and his slow descent into madness. It is an indicator for the loss of lives and the peoples’ difficulties to deal with the hardships that the natural disaster has caused. Accordingly, in the film’s third interview, we see a woman sitting on the remains of a house. In the background, people are clearing and cleaning up what they can. In tears, the woman says “Our livelihood is gone. We now suffer extreme difficulties.” Supporting the narrative, Diaz’s landscape thus “bring[s] all the weight of atmospheric and human reality to nourish [the] situation” (Rancière, 2013: 70), as Rancière concludes in his analysis of the significance of landscape in Tarr’s films.

While Douglas Wilkerson suggests that landscapes function as “a means of expression, a presentation of the inner being of the artist” (Wilkerson, 1994: 43), stressing the role of the filmmaker, it appears to be more accurate to assume that the depicted landscapes in *Encantos* are an expression of the characters’ and the survivors’ inner struggles. Adequately, the landscape in *Encantos* symbolises what David Melbye calls “landscape of the mind”, which he describes as a “particular

approach to cinematic space in which natural, outdoor settings serve as outward manifestations of characters' troubled psyches" (Melby, 2010: 1). The persistent use of canted angles throughout the film is representative of what Melby has called troubled psyches in that the Dutch angle transmits a sensation of something being out of joint, thus a lack of equilibrium, as indicated earlier.

Equally significant is the way Diaz treats the post-disaster landscape. Frames are either void of characters – “a landscape emptied of human presence” (Minghelli, 2013: 139), as Minghelli proposed in relation to Antonioni's films - or characters inhabit only minimal space in the frame. Several shots show nothing but destruction; the remnants of the lahar, the boulders which had been washed into the villages, broken trees, and whatever is left of houses in ruins. The focus on nature, and more specifically on disarray, allows for a focus on the destruction. The dominant framing of the destruction gives it its own screen space as a standalone “narrative”, therefore implying that *Encantos* is not just a film about a persecuted artist. At the same time, it is a study of peoples' losses and their despair after a natural disaster. Almost every frame of the film contains marks of destruction, leaving the viewer no place to escape to as a relief from suffering. In a different context, Joshua Hirsch views Claude Lanzman's *Shoah* as “[trapping] the spectator in this haunted present, where signs of the catastrophic past appear whatever one does or wherever one turns” (Hirsch, 2004: 73). With its persistent recording of destruction and devastation, *Encantos* follows a similar strategy, positioning the viewer into a gruesome state of omnipresent death.

Martin Lefebvre (2006) proposes two distinct yet overlapping modes of spectatorial activity. The “narrative mode” addresses the intellectual part of film viewing. The “spectacular mode” is the mode of contemplation, in which the

narrative is suppressed and the visuals are highlighted (Lefebvre, 2006: 29). Lefebvre argues that most films shift almost seamlessly between the two modes. He writes that “the interruption of the narrative by contemplation has the effect of *isolating* the object of the gaze, of momentarily freeing it from its narrative function” (Lefebvre, 2006: 29, emphasis original). In using shots, which are void of life, Diaz shifts the focus from fictional narrative to factual imagery. He momentarily isolates the destruction as a reminder for the tragic background of the film in order to raise awareness of and document the calamities in the area.

### **Characters as dots**

At this point I would like to return to a consideration of the positioning of characters within the frame. In an analysis of Gus van Sant’s *Gerry* (2002), Tiago de Luca analyses the significance of the landscape in relation to the characters. He observes that the “landscapes dwarf human presence” so that the characters are “insignificant dots within the frame” (De Luca, 2014: 175). This “dwarfing of human presence” is achieved mainly through the use of extreme long shots, whose classical role Diaz alters for his purposes. In conventional narrative cinema, extreme long shots are predominantly employed to establish a scene, whenever a change of location takes place. This is, in parts, executed in a classical form in *Melancholia*. Diaz, on the other hand, uses extreme long shots throughout the film, regardless of whether or not location changes occur, which renders the original purpose of the extreme long shot obsolete. In *Encantos*, Diaz’s shots do not have the function of establishing a new location. They are instead a means to record as much as possible from the debris and the devastation. As previously pointed out, *Encantos* is not only a film about a persecuted and struggling artist. It is at the



same time a story about people in despair after a natural disaster struck the country. Asked about his use of extreme long shots in *Encantos*, Diaz responds that “For that particular film, I just [wanted] to be a journalist, an observer, just try to be very objective about it. I [didn’t] want to manipulate the thing” (Diaz, 2014a). The long shots became a method of distancing himself from the space and action, saying “it’s too heavy” (Diaz, 2014a). This form of distancing resembles those methods used by Folman and Panh in their respective cinematic memory works *Waltz with Bashir* and *The Missing Picture*, which I noted in Chapter 4. Despite Diaz’s claim of intended objectivity, it is vital here to point out that objectivity is relative. Even though Diaz intends to be as objective as possible, he nevertheless frames the atrocities in a subjective way through the use of camera angle, length of shot and other aesthetic choices. In using long and extreme long shots not as a means of setting the scene, Diaz works in similar terrain as Béla Tarr. Jacques Rancière writes that Tarr, too, refrains from utilising establishing shots in the original sense (Rancière, 2013: 27). In his films as well as in Diaz’s, the long shots are “a matter of seeing what they [the characters] see, for the action is ultimately only the effect of what they perceive and feel” (Rancière, 2013: 27).

The concept of characters-as-dots in the context of a film set in nature, mentioned above, is reminiscent of the aesthetics of Chinese painting. Jianping Gao suggests that traditional Chinese landscape painting contained two distinct planes; that of the “host” and that of the “guest”. While the host was always established first on the scroll in line with its significance in the painting, the guest was merely added to it (Gao, 1996: 62). There was thus a priority of subjects apparent. T’ang Hou, art critic in the Yüan period, showed that mountains and water were generally considered hosts in every painting. Animals, figures and buildings, on the

other hand, were regarded as guests, and had to be depicted accordingly (T'ang Hou in Bush and Shih, 2012: 247). This allows us to see a clear discrepancy between the position and hence acknowledgement and praise of nature and that of Man respectively.

Eleanor Conston illuminates the position of Man in Chinese painting in her analysis of Eastern and Western landscape painting. She contends,

[In classical Western painting], Man is the crowning glory of Nature, her master ... Man and his doings are often at the center of the Western landscape, heroic or intimate ... The East gives a less exalted place to man in Nature; his importance is in proportion to his size ... Man happens to be one of Nature's many creatures, not her master. (Conston, 1942: 121)

In *Encantos*, in particular, nature is predominant in every frame, which is reminiscent of pre-Hispanic Malay belief in the importance and role of nature. It is what Chinese painters would have treated as the host in their work. In fact, in all of his films, Diaz places special emphasis on nature. He describes nature as a “great actor”, which has the power to change the direction of a film’s narrative (Carpio, 2010a). He goes further, arguing that “geography is not just a background. It’s not an artifice to the canvas. It’s a big part of it. ... It’s a big part of the life of that frame” (Diaz, 2014a). The focus on nature stems from his own upbringing in the forest in Mindanao, and the observation that nature governs people’s lives. It is for this reason that Diaz creates characters who struggle with nature, as he sees a partially destructive dynamic between people and their surroundings. In contrast, the characters in all of Diaz’s films in general, but most visibly in *Encantos*, are ‘filth’ or ‘parasites’. Dictatorial leaders such as Stalin and Hitler have used both terms repeatedly to refer to alleged enemies in society (Applebaum, 2003; Levi 1988). A similar treatment of self-declared enemies can be found in the Philippines,

particularly under Martial Law. Hamin's later exchange with his torturer in a local café illustrates the activists' treatment as inferior by oppressive forces. Being opponents of the Philippine government and its corruption and neglect of undemocratic actions in the country, Diaz's characters are persecuted, tortured and killed because their lives are not deemed worthy enough.

### **Terror and the loss of agency**

In *Melancholia*, terror was executed through psychological warfare in the woods, which forced the characters into a persistent state of uncertainty, paralysis and anxiety, and increased their death drive. In *Encantos*, Catalina, Teo and Hamin are also under attack by governmental or paramilitary forces for using their art as political commentary and for presumably inciting revolutions. As will be discussed later in this chapter, Hamin has been tortured, and possibly killed, as a result of it. In an argument between the three friends, we learn that Teo has withdrawn from producing art. He used to paint, write prose and poetry, and compose music. Even though the reasons for this decision are never fully explained, it appears plausible that he gave up art in order to save his life, being a husband and father of four children. In his extensive study on Nazi concentration camps, Eugen Kogon suggests that the arbitrary arrest of people in Nazi Germany had the side-effect of reduced opposition and resistance in the general public, as people feared a potential deportation to concentration camps (Kogon, 1947: 25-26). Foucault, too, sees torture as "a policy of terror: to make everyone aware, through the body of the criminal, the unrestrained power of the sovereign" (Foucault, 1991: 49). He describes terror through torture as a "spectacle of power" (Foucault, 1991: 58), noting a loss of agency in the tortured body. The atmosphere of fear, so it was

hoped, would obstruct a spread of opposition. We can see a similar utilisation of terror in the Philippines under Martial Law (cf. Celozza, 1997). It therefore seems likely that Teo has given up on his position as an activist artist as a result of fear for his and his family's life.

A striking factor in the films under investigation in this study is Diaz's portrayal of passive characters. They have lost agency over their lives and are there only as a "body coping with physical and mental fatigue" (Minghelli, 2013: 161); a trope Minghelli identifies in the representation of traumatised characters in post-war Italian film. This approach to the representation of characters simultaneously implies that the focus in these films is the aftermath of traumatic events, with images of the atrocities committed being absent from the screen. In the context of Holocaust films, which tend to take similar approaches, Libby Saxton speaks of "metonymic traces" (Saxton, 2008: 14), a concept which can likewise be applied to the films of Diaz and which comes to the fore in his depiction of post-trauma.

The characters' suppressed state is metaphorically represented by the choice of long to extreme long shots in which they are, as de Luca describes it with reference to van Sant's film *Gerry* (2002), mere dots. The true power is invisible and belongs to the large state apparatus of (paramilitary) organisations, whose task it is to eradicate those who, in Teo's words, "speak the truth ... [They] get kidnapped, tortured, buried alive, killed".

In my analysis of *Florentina Hubaldo* in Chapter 6, I will argue that Florentina is a character who does not act. She has little control of what happens to her. She observes, but has no power to change the course of things. This is identical to the resistance fighters in *Melancholia*. In similar ways, the characters

in *Encantos* are rather passive. In his analysis of the film *Barren Lives* (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1963), Jean-Claude Bernadet argues that the characters “inhabit a world where they don’t act, but they are acted upon...” (Bernadet in Goldman, 2006: 156). This is the case on two levels in *Encantos*. First of all, the characters are acted upon by nature. They have no influence on the power of nature. On the contrary, they are at the mercy of nature’s wrath and all they are left with after typhoon Reming ravished their habitat is hope. On a second level, Hamin is acted upon by his torturer, who reiterates time and again that “We hold your life here in the Philippines. I hold your life.” Hamin is threatened by him that if he were to write critical poetry again, he would be killed. He is only allowed to do what his persecutors allow him to, keeping him, as Avery F. Gordon notes in relation to the limbo of terrorised individuals, “in a constant state of imminent death” (Gordon, 2008: 78). Like Florentina, or the resistance fighters in *Melancholia*, Hamin is subject to his persecutors, and has no means to regain his liberties. He does not control his life. Rather, his life is controlled from the outside by overpowering forces.

### **Of memories, ghosts and princes**

In an article for the Slovenian magazine *Kino!* Diaz gives an insight into the process of filming *Encantos*.

The shoot was both harrowing and liberating for us. It was always raining. We wept, embraced whatever sorrow can give us, we can’t help it; actors were breaking down; we had had discourses of what happened but most of the time, individually, we struggled in silence trying to reconcile everything. One actor, a medium, could actually see the suffering spirits. We were shooting over buried houses, over dead bodies. We were purging our own demons. (Diaz, 2008)

The perceived presence of spirits found a direct translation into film. Three hours into the film, Hamin, Teo, Catalina and their friend Sir Claro (Dante Perez) walk through the ruins of Padang, Eastern Samar, which was the hardest hit area. As Hamin explains in a voice-over, “Thirty days after the disaster, nobody dares to visit Padang ... It seems it’s easier to forget or everybody’s afraid of remembering.” At night, the four of them stand around a campfire. The night is pitch black as the strong winds have cut the energy supply and Diaz refrains from using artificial lighting. Only the wind is audible. It feels ghostly, and eerily empty. Poignantly, Baskar describes the recorded scenery as “a desolate, featureless ground-zero landscape, infused by the ghosts of the dead” (Baskar, 2007).

As noted earlier, the landscape depicted in *Encantos* is one that remembers and I would like to return and expand on this point now. In her analysis of ‘trauma’ in the aftermath of suicide bombings, Raya Morag describes post-terror attack spaces in Israel and Palestine as “recently traumatized space(s)” (Morag, 2013: 47). Due to the sheer force of violence inflicted by bombs, which maul the victims’ bodies, suicide bombers, as well as the victims of suicide bombings, can often not be identified by their families. Morag suggests that this has led to a phenomenon in Israel where it is the place of the attack that “takes the place, on the level of identification, of the body that cannot be identified” (Morag, 2013: 48). In other words, it is the landscape that remembers and that stands in for the lives that have been lost. This is portrayed similarly in *Encantos* and in the aftermath of typhoon Reming. Many people were buried alive, some decomposed over time, some were never seen again. A lot of people were declared missing but could never be found. In this sense, the place Diaz is showing in his film – the desolate landscape covered by lahar – stands for the identification of all the corpses buried underneath it. As

victims cannot be identified, it is the landscape Diaz captures with his camera that stands in for identification with all those victims who have never been found. The landscape is transformed into a place of mourning where trauma meets memory. Padang's devastated landscape resembles that of the post-war landscape depicted in Italian cinema, which Minghelli describes as "a silent witness, a neutral and impassive chronicler of everyday survival and loss" (Minghelli, 2013: 44). It is also reminiscent of the landscape in *Trümmerfilme*, or Rubble Films, which surfaced after the end of World War Two. Using the destroyed and bombed-out ruins of cities as a backdrop for their narratives, *Trümmerfilme*, such as Roberto Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero/Germania anno zero* (1948), portray the harsh and destitute life after six years of ravaging war. Here, too, in similar ways, it is the landscape, which creates memory.

Sir Claro, presumably the medium Diaz mentioned in the quotation above, asks his friends to "Listen carefully. You will hear the wailing of all those buried underneath. Observe closely. They roam all over the place. Thirty days have elapsed since this tragedy occurred. They are still here" (Fig. 27). Sir Claro is not the only character who sees ghosts. Shortly before his death, Hamin, in apparent distress, tells Catalina: "I see them [the souls of Padang]. Some of them are still alive. I see them. Let's pray for them. Let's dig them out".

Even though Diaz had recorded footage of dead bodies in the aftermath of Reming, he decided not to include them in the film. He told Alexis Tioseco: "It's an aesthetic decision. It's already hovering all over. You can sense it, you can see it; I don't need to show dead people" (Tioseco, 2008). Seeing the recorded footage in the aftermath of the disaster, Diaz decided to censor himself, "so that I won't be

accused of being opportunistic, exploiting the situation. I selected those subtle interviews, the shots that wouldn't look exploitative" (Diaz, 2014a).

Diaz's choice of not showing death on screen follows André Bazin's notion of the un-representability of death in cinema. In his essay 'Death Every Afternoon', Bazin argues that death cannot be represented but must be experienced (Bazin, 2003: 30). A representation of death is only possible by violating its nature, which he calls obscenity. On another level, there was little need to show the dead of Padang. International media have published dozens of photographs that show the obscenity Bazin talked about in his essay. A similar output of the photographic spectacle occurred after typhoon Yolanda, when distressing images of mutilated or bloated bodies appeared in the news. Diaz did not attempt to reproduce what news media had already done. Instead, he aimed to create a feeling, an experience of death the way Bazin has imagined it.





**Figure 26** Sir Claro sees the suffering spirits.

*Death in the Land of Encantos* - Lav Diaz (2007)

Sir Claro's speculation about ghosts turns into a visual manifestation for the viewer in flashback scenes, in which Diaz merges two distinct time periods by positioning Hamin in the same frame as his dead family members, who take on what Ma identifies in Chinese cinema as a "spectral presence" (Ma, 2010: 41). They are visually present to the viewer, although they are, in fact, mere ghosts from the past. They are a product of Hamin's imagination, and continue to haunt him. This haunting is aggravated by his guilt of having left his family behind when he moved to Russia seven years earlier. We have already encountered the theme of ghosts in Chapter 4. Julian, a publisher-editor who suffers from the disappearance of his wife, is haunted by her absent presence. I would like to go into more detail at this

point about the way Diaz uses the images of ghosts for his portrayal of mourning and post-trauma.

I would like to begin by introducing the German term 'unheimlich' (uncanny), which characterises the nature of haunting (Freud, 2003). 'Heimlich' can have two meanings in German. First, it refers to something familiar, often associated with home. Second, and most appropriate in the context of Diaz's *Encantos* is the meaning of 'secretive', suggesting something unexpected and unsettling slowly creeping up on a person. This is precisely what happens to Hamin in the course of the film. He slowly loses his sanity over the course of nine hours. Further, Belén Vidal suggests that ghosts "are not simply a throwback to the past, but the trace of chronology confounded – time out of joint" (Vidal, 2012: 68). This goes hand in hand with my previous argument that Diaz's choice of canted angles concerning the framing of action represents something similarly out of joint in relation to the natural environment and to Hamin's mental state. I will refer to Bliss Cua Lim's work (2009) on ghosts later on, in which she speaks about double temporality and points to something out of joint. This is a particularly strong leitmotif in *Encantos*.

The flashback scenes in which Hamin encounters his family members occur several times throughout the film and are characterised by the use of a handheld camera. More than a fifth of the film (thirty-nine scenes) was shot in this way, a fact that distinguishes the film clearly from *Melancholia*. These shots are unmistakably linked to Hamin's past, making the handheld shots a clear signifier for Hamin's character. If a handheld shot is used, it is used in combination with or stands in for the character of Hamin, but for no other character in the film.

The use of a handheld camera is unusual for Diaz, who generally prefers static shots. Diaz explained in an interview that *Encantos* is his most personal film yet. He reveals that

all my films are really personal, because these are my works, but with *Encantos* all the characters that are speaking, all of their thoughts are emanating from my thoughts ... I think it's the most personal in that you see all the characters talking, and these are my thoughts about what's happening now. (Tioseco, 2008)

The use of subjective shots through handheld point-of-views is a means to support Diaz's intention of creating a more personal film. But even though the use and meaning of the handheld camera appears straightforward, it is rather complex as it carries two different meanings in *Encantos*. First, as indicated above, it is a means to establish a link to the past. Approximately one hour into the film, Hamin walks through the woods. A handheld camera follows him. He walks slowly towards two young children, who play at a campfire. In a dorsal shot, we see Hamin from behind. His position resembles that of a Rückenfigur, a concept often employed in the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), in which he showed characters contemplating a specific scenery (Fig. 28). The Rückenfigur is not only emblematic for Friedrich, however, but for Romantic painting in general, which, in its use of this dorsal perspective, aimed to "incorporate the viewer, and to present a specific perspective on the landscape" (Hockenhull, 2014: 17).



**Figure 27** The Rückenfigur.

*The Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* – Caspar David Friedrich (1808), and *Death in the Land of Encantos* – Lav Diaz (2007)

Without providing the audience with a traditional point-of-view shot, the viewer is asked to take a position similar to that of Hamin. We observe what he is observing, but we are deprived of seeing his face, which means that the viewer is not given visual access to Hamin's reactions to what he observes. This puts the spectator into an undesired, yet active position, as s/he has to imagine the character's facial expressions based on the context of the scene. In her analysis of temporality in Antonioni's *L'Avventura*, Matilda Mroz describes a similar approach to linking a character and his/her observed subjects or objects in the same frame, "as though combining shot/reverse-shot in one take" (Mroz, 2012: 63). This aesthetic, according to Mroz, allows for a paralleling of character and viewer: "the film creates a powerful sense of being with [the character] by both keeping [him/her] in view and creating a particular pace of observation" (Mroz, 2012: 63). More

specifically, she continues, “we partly share the duration of [the character’s] look, and are thus drawn closer to her experience of time” (Mroz, 2012: 63). Whereas in *Melancholia*, duration was primarily expressed through cinematic time, in *Encantos* it becomes visible through Diaz’s specific framing. If both shot and reverse-shot occur in one frame only, there is no spatial or temporal displacement apparent. The cut, which traditionally links shot and reverse-shot, implies a temporal displacement. Diaz, on the other hand, uses the Rückenfigur aesthetic so as to support the sensation of an on-going duration through the use of a long-take, therefore stressing duration instead of cuts, which tend to speed up the narrative progression.

Furthermore, Gilberto Perez makes the most valid point which can be applied to Hamin’s visions and the viewer’s presence, arguing that this aesthetic may generate a “sense of our sharing a personal, private experience” (Perez in Mroz, 2012: 64). Hockenhull, too, identifies the Rückenfigur, though predominantly in painting, as showing a “remote and private world of the wanderer” (Hockenhull, 2014: 45). Although derived from her studies on painting, Hockenhull’s argument is also applicable to Diaz’s portrayal of Hamin’s private world. The Rückenfigur aesthetic is used only when Hamin’s inner struggles and his guilt come to the fore, two elements of his mental descent he rarely mentions in conversations with his friends. He keeps those feelings mainly to himself. Thus the “duration” of the Rückenfigur helps the viewer to enter Hamin’s mind so as to observe his psychological breakdown.

A little later in the scene, after having observed two children playing in a backyard, Hamin turns around and walks towards a house, which is later established as his former family home. He sees his father carrying a suitcase and

leading his mother away. As his parents' spectres walk past, Hamin follows them briefly, then watches them disappear in the woods. In a voice-over, Hamin expresses his guilt: "If only I knew that moment was her last day in our lives ... I could have prevented father from taking mother away from us." As we will learn in Chapter 6, hallucinations in *Florentina* function as a means of escape for the main character. In *Encantos*, on the other hand, hallucinations are an expression of guilt and regret.

The spectres of Hamin's dead relatives are hallucinations, which are visual symptoms of the continuous aggravation of his mental health. Roger Luckhurst refers to ghosts as "signals of atrocities, marking sites of untold violence, a traumatic past whose traces remain to attest to a lack of testimony" (Luckhurst in Maseda, 2014: 58). Dejan Levi (2013), in his reading of 'trauma' and madness in post-Yugoslav cinema, identifies hallucinations as a common trope in cinema after the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1980s. Their findings are relevant and applicable to Diaz's films. Levi writes, "Hallucinations - a common symptom of PTSD - are thus here not only those relating to a traumatic confrontation with death or a similar experience but are instead a result of a loss of social and familial ties" (Levi, 2013: 155). He goes further, arguing that these hallucinations are "simply evidence of an imaginary which seeks to patch up this traumatic loss/discrepancy" (Levi, 2013: 157). As I will demonstrate in the next section, Hamin shows symptoms of PTSD as a result of torture. Thus, the hallucinations are part of his complex symptomology, which Diaz refers to several times in the film. In later flashback scenes, Diaz positions only Hamin and his mother in the same frame so as to emphasise the particularly strong relationship they had. Hamin never knew how she died, and he never visited her in the mental hospital his father took her to.

After he has shown initial signs of a mental breakdown and of increasing madness, Hamin encounters his mother in a flashback scene.

Yvette Bíro (2008) and Jean Ma (2010) refer to commonplace markers, such as the dissolve, which simplify a temporal orientation for the viewer. None of these markers, however, are used in *Encantos*. Diaz switches freely between past and present without indicating in which temporal layer he positions the viewer. He disorientates the viewer, a similar strategy he pursues later in *Florentina*, as we will see in Chapter 6. Locking the survivor into a cyclical narrative, PTSD disrupts a person's perceived temporality, therefore disorientates him/her because there is no longer a clear distinction between past and present (Caruth, 1996). The Rückenfigur and the lack of temporal markers for flashbacks reinforce the disorientating sensation of PTSD in regards to time. Past and present become one and indistinguishable from one another. In *Encantos*, Diaz reinforces this through visuals, whereas in *Melancholia* it was the narrative element of immersion therapy, which alluded to it.

In a long shot, the mother is seen sitting almost lifeless on a wooden bench in front of a tree in the home's backyard. Rather than observing a family member as seen earlier (Fig. 28), this time Hamin commences an interaction. He walks into the frame, sits down, and then lays his head onto his mother's lap (Fig. 29). It is an image of a broken man, who has missed and is still missing the love of a mother, who was mentally and physically absent during his childhood as a result of what the films' characters consider as schizophrenia-paranoia.

That the ghostly images of Hamin's family occur in the family's backyard is, according to Lisa Kröger and Melanie R. Anderson's (2013) analysis of ghosts in literature and film telling. They contend that "ghost sightings frequently occur in

the betwixt spaces of the home: doorways, windows, even stairwells” (Kröger and Anderson, 2013: ix). Kröger and Anderson imply that ghosts are primarily seen within the confined walls of houses. ‘Home’ is thus clearly defined as the house of a character’s birth and upbringing. Yet, the concept of home can be broadened. It is unusual for Diaz to set his films indoors, with the notable exception of *Melancholia*, as we have seen in Chapter 4. While all of his films are tied to the concept of home – for instance, the ramshackle house in *Florentina* – the majority of scenes are set outdoors, sometimes in a home’s immediate surroundings, as is the case in his new film *From What Is Before* (2014). Confining aspects of home to an indoor space, however, neglects other important spaces that can be considered home. Given that Hamin attaches great importance and memories to the family’s backyard, it is vital to see the area around the family house as home in a similar sense. Seen from this perspective, the sighting of Hamin’s mother as a ghost in the garden comes as little surprise and echoes traditional ghost stories.

Scenes in which Hamin interacts with his long-dead family members follow what Bliss Cua Lim describes as a “double temporal logic” (Cua Lim, 2009: 8) or a “cinematic meanwhile” (Cua Lim, 2009: 169). They contain two coexisting tempi. First, there is the present, which is indicated by the presence of Hamin in the frame. Adjoined to this, there is, in Lim’s words, “a spectral time of haunting and return, one in which the dead are alive and the past [is] fully preserved” (Cua Lim, 2009: 169). These temporal layers overlap in scenes such as the one described above. The visible coexistence of time periods suggests a relation between them, and an inevitable influence of one on the other. In the case of Hamin, the mental absence of his mother had a substantial impact on his emotional state. He continues to suffer from the effects of past events, more specifically of his parents’



deaths and his sister's suicide. As will be discussed later, Hamin has built up a strong feeling of guilt in relation to the past, which acts as a burden in his present life.

In agreement with Cua Lim, Belén Vidal contends that “[t]he ghost challenges the idea of linear time... it does not belong properly to any space-time frame but poses a threshold between frames” (Vidal, 2012: 68). Vidal's argument chimes with Cua Lim's suggestion that ghosts follow a double temporal logic, because it is impossible to assign a single temporality to them. Rather, they merge past and present. Vidal's and Cua Lim's argument about time devoid of linearity and logic is a symptom of post-trauma in its destruction of linear time and an individual's time perception as a result of shock.



**Figure 28 Hamin interacts with the ghost of his mother.**

*Death in the Land of Encantos* - Lav Diaz (2007)

The flashback scenes are set in the family's backyard, just outside the family home. They are what Harper and Rayner describe as "conduits to memories" (Harper and Rayner, 2010: 19). The backyard is not "of the moment" (Harper and Rayner, 2010: 18), but is instead atemporal in that its representation contains elements of both past and present, or actual condition and remembered feelings. The backyard is only connected to Hamin's past as a young boy, and is therefore a signifier for painful memories of loss. It is here that the aforementioned notion of the backyard as an extension of home becomes apparent again, but also of growing up as a traumatic period in his life, locking Hamin into a persistent confusion of present and past.

Having established a link between the use of a handheld camera and Hamin's traumatic childhood, I would like to explore another meaning of Diaz's handheld camera now. In several scenes, it conveys the idea of a quest, more specifically of a character looking for something or someone. Two hours into the film, we are in a city that is later revealed to be Zagreb, Croatia. It is night, and we are positioned behind a pile of bin bags cornered against a wall. The handheld camera seems to imitate Hamin's point-of-view. The camera pans to the right so as to capture the passing of a tram before it pans left again in order to focus on people waiting at a tram stop. The positioning and the movement of the camera evoke the sensation of us waiting for something. Initially, it is unclear whom we are waiting or what we are looking for. The camera is slightly erratic and thus gives the viewer a sense of agitation. In a voice over, Hamin explains his motif: "Like a rat, I was searching for you." In a subsequent handheld night shot, we observe a group of people in the streets of Zagreb. Hamin continues: "Like a rat, I was trailing and watching you." His lover, Svita, whom he got to know during his

stay in Russia but who left him after the death of their son, is never identified in the group. The camera keeps a distance and, in so doing, renders Svita a mere ghost. In contrast to the visual depiction of Hamin's family members, Svita is no more than a sensation for Hamin and the viewer.

As Bliss Cua Lim argues in her book *Translating Time* (2009) ghosts "[collapse] departure and return, presence and absence, seen and unseen, death and survival" (Cua Lim, 2009: 152). Ghosts therefore represent a fine line between absence and presence. More specifically, ghosts are, as Avery F. Gordon suggests, "primarily a symptom of what is missing. It gives notice not only to itself but also to what it represents. What it represents is usually a loss, sometimes of life, sometimes of a path not taken" (Gordon, 2008: 63-64).

Indeed, as indicated earlier, ghosts in Hamin's hallucination are an indicator of loss; the loss of his mother, his father, and his sister. It is striking that it is predominantly Hamin's mother who appears as a ghost in his imagination. Even though he also suffers from his sister's death due to suicide, she does not appear as a ghost in the film and neither does his father. The appearance of the ghosts of his mother and his lover indicate that Hamin considers the loss of these two women in his life as particularly grave. On top of this, the mental decline of Hamin's mother parallels that of Hamin's downfall.

In order to go into a bit more detail about the theme of ghosts, I would like to refer to Tom Gunning's term "phantasmatic" at this point, which he describes as "images that oscillate between visibility and invisibility, presence and absence, materiality and immateriality" (Gunning, 2007: 99). Gunning's argument complements Lim's suggestion on the way ghosts challenge the traditional perception of the seen and the unseen. All characters Hamin encounters in scenes

that had been shot with a handheld camera belong to the realm of the phantasmatic. They are phantoms, which, as Gunning observes, “[occupy] the ontologically ambiguous state of ‘haunting’ – enduring and troubling in its uncanny claim on our awareness and sense of presence yet also unfamiliar and difficult to integrate into everyday space and time” (Gunning, 2007: 100).

Gunning’s argument connects with the aspect of melancholy I analysed in detail in Chapter 4. It is not only haunting that takes place here; it is also mourning and the feeling of melancholy for the loss of Hamin’s loved ones. Agamben proposes, “covering its objects with the funereal trappings of mourning, melancholy confers upon it the phantasmagorical reality of what is lost” (Agamben in Vidal, 2012: 98). There is thus a link between the images of haunting, the images of ghosts and Hamin’s felt melancholy.

Referring to Jean-Claude Schmitt’s argument, Gunning proposes that “traditionally, hauntings are the result of an inability to forget, due to an incomplete process of memorialization” (Gunning, 2007: 117). This echoes the development of flashbacks through which a survivor relives certain elements of a traumatic event as a result of delayed information processing in the brain (Caruth, 1995, 1996; Turim, 2001; Walker, 2001). In this case, however, I would like to stress the first part of the argument, namely that “hauntings are the result of an inability to forget”. Hamin continues to feel guilty for having left his family behind. Especially his mother’s traumatic disappearance and her descent into schizophrenia-paranoia weighs heavily on his shoulders. He cannot forget how his father had tried to save his mother, for instance by sacrificing a pig and pouring its blood onto the heap in the backyard that Hamin’s mother used to sit next to. Nor can he forget the actual image of how his mother had spent her time sitting next to

the heap in the backyard, which she understood as the presence of what is throughout the film referred to as “the prince”. These images continue to haunt Hamin. They are part of a cycle of traumatic memories from his childhood. Shortly before he dies, he tells Teo that he went to Russia because he was “trying to run away from so many ghosts”; the ghosts of his family. He left because he did not want to lose his sanity as his mother had done, nor did he want to commit suicide the way his sister did. As he cannot forget past events, they return to him in images, or phantasms. Poignantly, Olaf Moller describes Diaz’s *Encantos* as “an assortment of the living dead wandering a landscape filled with the grief-stricken” (Moller in Falgui, 2008), referring not only to the landscape of the dead shown in Diaz’s extreme long shots of the ravished surroundings, but also to Hamin who increasingly transforms into a living dead himself.

In his detailed analysis of the films of Tsai Ming-liang, Song Hwee Lim (2014) refers to the aspects of mourning and haunting in Tsai’s work. He proposes that “it is the haunting by the dead of the living, with an indefinite deadline stretched out in time, eventually ending, perhaps, only with the death of the mourners” (Lim, 2014: 105). Lim establishes here a link between long duration and haunting. He suggests that haunting is a long-term process that often finds its end only in death. This is precisely how Diaz illustrates the issue. As indicated earlier, Hamin is unable to accept and get over the loss of his loved ones. The haunting can thus only end with the death of Hamin.

*Encantos* is an assemblage of ghosts, which haunt the fictional characters. They are either ghosts of the past, or ghosts of the present, stemming from the aftermath of typhoon Reming’s destruction. Interestingly, Diaz adds another ghostly figure, which is repeatedly referred to as “the prince”. Contrary to the

ghost figures of Hamin's family members, the prince is visually absent and exclusively referred to in voice-overs and interviews. The prince is regarded as the incitement of Hamin's mother's drift into insanity. It thus appears plausible that the prince symbolises the devil, or the Prince of Darkness. We encounter the exact same approach in Béla Tarr's *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000), in which an unnamed and invisible prince is said to incite violence in small Hungarian villages.

In a scene that resembles one of the many interview scenes Diaz has inserted into his film, an elderly woman, presumably Hamin's grandmother, explains that "Carmen [Hamin's mother] was still young when the prince of the black dwarfs started to like her.<sup>26</sup> She was being guarded and closely observed since then." She further reveals that the dwarfs arranged the snatching of her soul, and that Carmen had been a prisoner in the prince's house ever since.

Rather than depicting the devil directly, the prince finds a symbolic expression through the image of the Pongapong flower, which had begun to grow in the family's backyard. The Pongapong flower is also called the Corpse Flower, because of its foul smell when it withers (Kew Royal Botanic Society, no date). The specific use of this flower – as a mysterious plant that only grows every four years and as a foul-smelling plant that establishes a direct link to death – is a comment on the mental development of Hamin's mother, who took the flower as a sign of the prince's presence.

In several successive scenes, she is seen offering food to the plant / prince (Fig. 30). In all of these scenes a low angle camera imitates the position of the

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<sup>26</sup> The film's context and content does not provide clues as to the origin of the black dwarfs. It may, perhaps, be worth mentioning a possible link to astronomy. Black dwarfs are cooled down white dwarfs, which are invisible in the galaxy as they lack heat and therefore light. This phenomenon covers both absence and presence in space, just as the black dwarfs and the prince are absent and yet present in Diaz's *Encantos*.

flower. In medium long shots, we see Carmen sitting next to the flower and offering it a basket of food. As time passes, and the withering process of the flower commences, Carmen lies next to the flower, and loses her joy. It was indicated earlier through a voice-over that the appearance of the Pongapong flower caused joy in Carmen. Yet, the withering, therefore the death of the flower, is a metaphor for her growing mental distress. It is after this episode that she is taken to a mental hospital, and is never seen again. She disappeared in the eyes of the young Hamin.



**Figure 29** Hamin's mother considers the growth of the Pongapong flower as a symbol of the prince.

*Death in the Land of Encantos* - Lav Diaz (2007)

## **Tortured souls**

In a scene towards the end of the film, Hamin, seemingly on edge, sits at a table with Catalina. He keeps looking out of the window as though expecting something or someone. Anxious and close to tears, he says “They’re following me. For days, they’re ‘casing’ my house. They sent me a letter stating that my time has come ... They followed me here. They’re spying on me. They’re going to kill me.” Catalina, though concerned, is unsure about the roots of Hamin’s paranoia, as is Sir Claro in an earlier and similar scene, in which Hamin approaches him in what is left of Claro’s house (Fig. 31). Hamin appears restless and anxious. He grabs Sir Claro by the arm, hides behind the only wall of the house which the lahar has not swallowed and begs him “Please help me. People are following me. They’re watching me. They’re following me. They don’t like what I do. They’re behind me. They will kill me.” Sir Claro suspects the onslaught of schizophrenia-paranoia in Hamin, akin to what happened to Hamin’s mother. Yet, in these two scenes, Hamin shows characteristic symptoms of post-trauma. As many victim-survivors, he “often scan[s] the surrounding world anxiously for signs of danger, breaking into explosive rages and reacting with a start to ordinary sights and sounds” (Erikson, 1995: 184), while showing increased numbness, depression and helplessness in other scenes. He repeatedly looks out for the people, who Hamin says follow him. Yet they are only a product of his imagination. The scene ends with Hamin running away in fear of being captured by an invisible power.





**Figure 30 Hamin asks Sir Claro to help him escape his persecutors.**

*Death in the Land of Encantos - Lav Diaz (2007)*

The visual absence of the persecutors is conflicting. Neither Sir Claro nor Catalina seem to believe in Hamin's fears. They cannot *see* the persecutors who follow Hamin's every step. It is for this reason that Sir Claro, in particular, ascribes Hamin's behaviour to madness as a result of schizophrenia-paranoia, the mental illness of his mother. Schizophrenia-paranoia is often characterised by delusions and hallucinations, with the individual expecting people in the surrounding to kill him/her (Ruiz, 1982: 315). The delusions thus come with a high degree of anxiety and paranoia. Given the symptomatic of PTSD, with its focus on anxiety and fear of death, Diaz creates a complex narrative here, in which he leaves it to the viewer to decide what s/he thinks Hamin suffers from in reality. What he does, however, is

inserting scenes, which give viewers a clue as to whether Hamin's symptomatic is the result of PTSD, following physical and psychological torture, or of schizophrenia-paranoia. I want to note one example at this point.

Hamin's severe anxiety and hallucinations are preceded by a twenty-minute long take of Hamin meeting his torturer in a local café.<sup>27</sup> He is told that "they" – an unnamed and unspecified group of people - were holding his life. Sam Raphael explains that "specific [paramilitary] groups often warn potential targets of the presence of paramilitaries and the likelihood of being attacked if some identified behaviour does not change" (Raphael, 2010: 168), which appears to be the case here. Another significant element of the torturer's threat is his repeated attempt to draw attention to his power over Hamin, which is identified in Ojeda's analysis of psychological torture as the 'omnipotence' of the torturer. The torturer's omnipotence is a crucial element of psychological torture, which aims to drain the victim's hope for escape (Ojeda, 2008: 5). Having broken the body of Hamin through physical torture, his persecutors now aim to break Hamin's mind. This pursuit is part of the concentrationary system. Paul Marcus contends that "the psychological and physical breaking down and punishment of the prisoner was the main goal" in the concentration camps (Marcus, 1999: 4). The attack of external forces on the characters' psyches is a common characteristic of Diaz's films, and runs through all three films in focus here. I will return to it in greater detail in the next chapter.

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<sup>27</sup> Mario Villani, an Argentinian physicist who was disappeared under the junta in the 1970s, was released after spending several years in secret detention centres. When he was released, his freedom continued to be restricted by his torturers. He had to call in weekly, and, interesting in the context of *Encantos*, he had to meet his torturers at local cafés after he was released. For a full account of Villani's experience in Argentina's detention centres, please see further Feitlowitz, M. (1998). *A lexicon of terror - Argentina and the legacies of torture*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Only after having met his torturer in a café, Hamin tells his friends anxiously about the people he believes are following him. He has kept silent over the torture he endured; a common characteristic of survivor's behaviour. Anne Rutherford claims that silence is an often-desired way "to protect the listener; to tell can feel like smearing the listener with faeces, and this is where disgust comes into play – a sense of taboo, of defilement" (Rutherford, 2013: 82). If he speaks almost openly about his stay in Russia, including the traumatic events he has been through, such as burying his stillborn son, Hamin mentions neither his internment nor his torture in conversations with his friends. Considering the gravity of state terror against (artist) activists, it appears also possible that Hamin aims to protect his friends, not only as listeners but also as fellow artists, as his liberty is possibly dependent on his not making his endurances public.

Due to Hamin's chosen silence in front of his friends and Diaz's visual signifiers throughout the film, the viewer has unique access to a part of Hamin's history, which no other character of the story has. While in the film itself, the debate is open whether Hamin died of schizophrenia-paranoia, or whether he committed suicide or had even been murdered, the viewer is able to judge according to the exclusive material Diaz has supplied him/her with.

The film ends with a fifteen-minute static long-take of Hamin lying on the floor in an empty room, or 'safe house', as these torture rooms have been frequently called in the Philippines (Scarry, 1985: 40). His hands and feet are constrained, and he breathes heavily. After four minutes of little movement in the frame, a man enters the room with a book in his hands. It is an unnamed piece written by Hamin, for which he was arrested and detained. In a low angle shot, we see the man spitting on Hamin before reading an extract of the book. After that he

rips several pages out of the book, grabs Hamin by the legs and shoves him across the room while singing the national anthem. He briefly strangles Hamin whom he brings to the verge of suffocation, and then leaves.

The detailed torture procedures used to silence Hamin are not shown on-screen. They are generally as absent as the group of people behind his persecution. Yet, they are spoken of in the scene mentioned above, in which Hamin encounters his torturer in a coffeehouse in what is supposedly Manila (Fig. 32).



**Figure 31 Hamin meets his torturer in a café.**

*Death in the Land of Encantos* - Lav Diaz (2007)

Prior to this threatening meeting, Hamin had visited the mental institution his mother was taken to when he was still a young boy, and had enquired about her cause of death. He also visited the place where his sister Teresa committed suicide.

In a local coffeehouse, Hamin seeks peace after these two difficult encounters. In a medium shot, we see him read a book while drinking a coffee. The framing is unusually tight for Diaz's films, but resembles scenes set in indoor spaces in *Melancholia*. The tight framing suggests tension for Hamin himself, and tension between him and his counterpart. After a six minute long static shot of Hamin reading a book, a man, who will be revealed as Hamin's torturer at the end of the film, walks towards him and joins Hamin at his table. In the next seventeen minutes that follow, the two men engage in a tense exchange of words, which I want to quote in detail.

Man: You can't hide from us. I'm watching you closely. We are watching those who are like you. We cannot be lax.

Hamin: I know that this meeting is not a coincidence. You wait for me and you know the place frequented by me.

Man: How's your brain? ... I hold your record from Russia. You were institutionalised there. You went nuts just like your mother. ... We hold your life here in the Philippines. I hold your life. We'll finish all of you.

Hamin: Won't you people ever have pity on our country? The people you kill are those who do good things for the country, people who truly love this country.

Man: Let me see your hand, does it still hurt?

Hamin: Yes, it still hurts. I hope you also experience the pain you inflicted on me when you crushed my fingers. I hope you feel the pain I felt when you electrocuted my penis. I wish you feel the pain of having a tube jammed up your ass. I hope someone would also force you to eat their shit. I wish you experience the same agony when you injected acid into my brain.

According to Diaz, Hamin's testimony is based on real experiences of an activist in the country (Diaz, 2014a). For his prose and poetry, which are critical of the government, Hamin underwent torture in forms of beatings, physical injuries, electrocution and rape. Torture is shown as "an organized ritual for the marking of

victims and the expression of the power that punishes” (Foucault, 1991: 34), as Foucault suggests in his work on the birth of the prison. Hamin has retained physical and psychological markers of torture that continue to serve as reminder of his punishment. The pain he suffered during the torture is on-going, and links two temporal layers, pointing again to Hamin’s inability to distinguish past and present. Physical pain as a result of torture is described as bodily memory, locking the victim into a persistent re-living, or rather *re-experiencing* of the torture endured. As previously mentioned in relation to ghosts as blurring the line between past and present, so it is the bodily memory that has a similar effect.

The torturer’s claim that he would ‘finish all of you’ generates a definite threat of life for Hamin. He knows that he will be murdered, even though he remains a free man. In this way, Hamin is subject to a metaphorical mock execution, which Elaine Scarry studied in parts of her book *The Body in Pain* (1985). Of interest here is that Scarry refers to a term used in the Philippines in lieu of mock execution; “the process of dying” (Scarry, 1985: 31). This new term brings psychological torture to the fore and places emphasis on the slow deterioration of the victims’ mental states, which the viewer can see in the character of Hamin. Hamin lives a life of conflicts, heightening his confusion in regards to temporal and spatial orientation. As pointed out, while being a free man, he is imprisoned through a psychological act of torture. The process of dying is also significant in relation to contemporary representations of torture in film which *Encantos*, in its focus on the long-term after-effects of torture, challenges. Contemporary works on torture focus on immediate effects on victims, immediate physical pain, for instance, rather than explore the physical and mental consequences that often surface long after torture has taken place (Chaudhuri,

2014: 28). Again, the focus in these films, as in popular trauma films, is not on duration, but on speed and immediacy, which Diaz counters in his nine-hour portrayal of Hamin's slow mental breakdown.

Hamin is confronted with continuous death threats, which points to a characteristic of the concentrationary, mentioned previously in my introductory chapter. Primo Levi writes about the concentrationary that its "primary purpose [was] shattering the adversaries' capacity to resist" (Levi, 1988: 24). As can be detected from the above scene, however, it is not only the concentrationary with the concentration camp as its locus which aims for breaking the resistance and defence of the 'enemy'. Rather, it is a symptom of a larger system of terror, executed here by the persistent following of Hamin by his torturer. Having endured physical and psychological torture over a period of years, Hamin is no longer able to resist. While the torture has not broken his spirit, it has broken his ability to resist, in particular because he knows that death is upon him regardless of what he does. Hamin is therefore no different from the resistance fighters in *Melancholia*, who are aware of their fate and the imminent execution of it.

It is hence the torturer who rules over Hamin's agency. It is no longer Hamin who has full control and therefore freedom over his life. As Scarry contends, "torture systematically prevents the prisoner from being the agent of anything..." (Scarry, 1985: 47). Rather, he is obliged to follow his torturer's demands in order to survive. The loss of agency thus turns Hamin into a passive figure in his own life, which bears striking similarities to reports of the behaviour of concentration camp inmates. Paul Marcus argues that "in the camps, it was precisely the inmate's agency that was continually attacked; the inmate's options and field of action were greatly restricted, contributing to his established sense of

self-efficacy” (Marcus, 1999: 91). He goes on, “the so-called ‘Muselmann’ (the ‘walking dead’) characterized by apathy, passivity and extreme personality deterioration is perhaps the best example of an inmate’s total loss of agency” (Marcus, 1999: 91). While I do not propose that Hamin is a ‘Muselmann’ in the original sense, as this is a victim-survivor personality specific to the Nazi concentration camps, he nevertheless bears similarities with typical Muselmann behaviour. In particular, the torture itself and the torturer’s subsequent omnipresence render Hamin passive. This loss of agency triggers a deterioration of his mental health, which leads, in this specific case, to paranoia, confusion, anxiety, and an almost complete withdrawal from the social surrounding. At the end of the film, he is no more than a ‘walking dead’.

As practiced in *Florentina*, to be explored in detail in Chapter 6, Diaz refrains from visually depicting atrocities. In the case of *Encantos*, he uses the means of dialogue for the transmission of violence. Diaz therefore positions the viewer as a listener.<sup>28</sup> This particular positioning of the viewer will be one of my key arguments in the next chapter. In highlighting sound and conveying information mainly through dialogues, Diaz differs from other slow-film directors, such as Tarr, Lisandro Alonso and Tsai Ming-liang. *Encantos* precedes *Florentina*’s production and I suggest that Diaz experimented with the use of sound in *Encantos* and later perfected it in *Florentina* for his metaphorical depiction of colonial oppression. Compared to *Florentina*, *Encantos* is heavy in dialogue. There is a similar focus on dialogue in the first two parts of *Melancholia. Norte*, too, contains

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<sup>28</sup> This is in complete contrast to the viewer’s position in Tarr’s films, for instance. In an interview on the DVD of his 2007 film *The Man from London*, Tarr explained that his film would transmit what he intended to say without sound and dialogue. Tarr places emphasis on the language of visuals rather than the language of sound. This is, however, only the case in the second-period of his filmmaking, and is especially visible in *The Man from London* (2007) and *The Turin Horse* (2011).



lengthy, often philosophical conversations between characters. While traumatic events in *Encantos* are partly transmitted through the use of canted camera angles, as I have explored earlier in this chapter, the focus remains on speech. Traumatic events are largely revealed in dialogue, as is the case in the scene when Hamin meets his torturer, or when Hamin tells his friends that he had to bury his stillborn son in Zagreb.

In her study of the experience of torture in Palestinian political prisoners, Raija-Leena Punamäki (1988) establishes a link between torture and the symptoms of post-traumatic stress. She refers to anxiety, hyper-alertness as well as to flashbacks and nightmares (Punamäki, 1988: 83). In addition, she gives a detailed account of symptoms that have occurred in torture victims, all of which are applicable to the changing behaviour and mental processes of Hamin; paralysing and strong fear, increased nervousness and restlessness, withdrawal and avoiding association with people, sexual dysfunction, confusion and disturbance of memory, and difficulties in concentration and attention (Punamäki, 1988: 92). The film's characters, including Hamin himself, link his behavioural change and his withdrawal to the recent loss of his lover, his devastation over the destruction in Padang, and his growing schizophrenia-paranoia, which, he had been warned by a Russian psychiatrist, would eventually kill him. There is, however, a subtle pointer to an even more serious cause of Hamin's symptoms: in the scene mentioned earlier, Hamin refers to a process, in which his torturer(s) allegedly injected acid into his brain.

I would like to draw attention to a project called MKUltra at this point, which was conceived by the CIA in the 1950s and 1960s and which was partly aimed at actively modifying human behaviour through the use of chemical

substances such as LSD.<sup>29</sup> In some cases, these experiments have been conducted on people without their consent. Researchers involved with MKUltra have elaborated on their aims in a document from 1955. Amongst others, their aim was to discover “substances which will promote illogical thinking and impulsiveness to the point where the recipient would be discredited in public” (Select Committee on Intelligence, 1977: 123). Considering this avenue of the MKUltra research, it appears rather curious that Hamin speaks about having had acid injected into his brain and a simultaneous increase in his apparent schizophrenia-paranoia.

My diversion to the mind-control programme of the CIA presents only a small piece in a broader spectrum of global efforts against communist subversion. According to R. Matthew Gildner’s historical overview of psychological torture, the CIA “disseminated psychological torture techniques to foreign internal security forces as part of a broader containment initiative aimed at fortifying Third World governments against local communist subversion” (Gildner, 2008: 24). It is interesting that Gildner points to a “foreign police training programme” in countries, such as the Philippines. Initiated by the US Defence Department, the programmes were designed to train local forces in physical and psychological torture (Gildner, 2008: 29). Given these circumstances it is plausible that Philippine extra-judicial forces have applied similar CIA torture techniques in the past, including parts of the mind-control programme, or a similar programme, mentioned above.

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<sup>29</sup> Admiral Stansfield Turner stated this in a joint hearing before the Select Committee on Intelligence in 1977. For more detailed information about this project, please see further the full report of this joint hearing, available at [http://www.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/national/13inmate\\_ProjectMKULTRA.pdf](http://www.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/national/13inmate_ProjectMKULTRA.pdf) (Retrieved 25 May, 2014)

The end of *Encantos* is a succession of speculations around Hamin's death, expressed mainly by Teo and Catalina, which range from suicide to murder. Furthermore, Hamin shows a strong death drive and asks Teo to kill him so as to save him from more pain. What is not articulated, however, aside from possible suicide or murder by governmental forces, is the possibility that his torturer(s) triggered an onslaught of mental illnesses through the injection of acid into his brain so as to avoid being suspected of having killed Hamin as a result of his critical stance towards the government. It is known and documented that paramilitary groups guilty of killing leftist activists are trained to make murders look as though another government-critical group had committed them.<sup>30</sup>

Diaz claimed that the injection of acid into prisoners' brains was "a normal thing. It's a common practice of the military against activists, and suspected communists of the country. They [the military] do it" (Diaz, 2014a). Even though the accuracy of Diaz's statement cannot be verified, it is an intriguing addition to the reading of *Encantos'* focus on military torture and its mind-control programme, and fuels speculation around Hamin's death.

After a lengthy ordeal of paranoia and distress, Hamin, as his dead family members, turns into a ghost. More poignantly, Hamin disappears. Speaking specifically about the *desaparecido* in Argentina under military rule in the 1970s, Philippe Sollers argues that the consistent fear of being kidnapped, tortured and disappeared or killed, as is, in effect, the case with Hamin, keeps society and the individual in a permanent state of suspense: "Fear, agony, guilt, anxiety, trouble,

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<sup>30</sup> For more information, please see further Human Rights Watch (2011). *"No Justice Adds to the Pain" - Killings, Disappearances, and Impunity in the Philippines*. New York: Human Rights Watch. Also of interest is Alfred McCoy's book chapter on the CIA's mind control programme, cf. McCoy, A. W. (2008). Legacy of a Dark Decade: CIA Mind Control, Classified Behavioral Research, and the Origins of Modern Medical Ethics. In A. E. Ojeda (Ed.), *The trauma of psychological torture* (pp. 40-69). Connecticut, London: Praeger.

pervasive malaise: the living become virtually disappeared, potential specters ... It is a question of *slow poisoning, a delayed psychic bomb*" (Sollers in Gordon, 2008: 124, emphasis added).

Hamin, virtually disappeared, spends the last hours of his life at the place of his former studio and is not seen by anyone until he is found with his throat slashed. In a high angle shot, we witness his growing paranoia day and night. In a landscape of emptiness and destruction, he imagines people approaching him. He mutters incomprehensible phrases: "Some visitors are coming. Leave first. I said...leave! I'll write. I better write. Where's my pen? You said you're going to clean the studio. Where is...Amalia?" In the following scene, a handheld camera shows him at night, his back leaning against a boulder. He appears to find refuge in his imagination of his former lover, Amalia, and tells her about his relationship to Svita, the Croatian woman who left him after the birth of their stillborn son. This episode of explicit paranoia and mental decline is the last time the viewer sees him. In a later scene, he is found by another resident of Padang, his shirt covered in blood and his throat slashed.

### **The dirty war in film**

Diaz uses extra-judicial killing and torture as a backdrop for the development of Hamin. A year after the release of his film, he explains that

the scene in the end [when Hamin is tortured] is very specific about the extra-judicial killings, but it encompasses everything about the problems of our culture, of our country ... It's still happening today in our country, a lot of people are getting abducted; especially the activists, and there's no answer. (Tioseco, 2008)

In addition to the scene of alleged torture, Diaz inserts real news about the death of Rodolfo 'Ompong' Alvarado, a political activist in the region of Bicol. On the

morning of New Year 2007, when Teo visits Catalina to tell her about Hamin's death, Catalina reads out a newspaper article, which details the assassination of Alvarado, "the 122<sup>nd</sup> member of Country First and the 818<sup>th</sup> victim of political killings since President Macapagal-Arroyo assumed office."<sup>31</sup> It is the first time Diaz uses factual material, referring to names and political groups in his films. As an artist himself, he thus takes a definite stance against the persecution of artists and political activists in his own country. More poignantly, Alvarado was a good friend of Diaz's, and he included this newspaper article as an homage to him. He explains, "That guy was a good friend of mine. He was shot by the military because he's the head of the Bayan group, a leftist group in the area. ...Just because he was suspected of being a communist, they killed him. When they shot him, he was holding his baby" (Diaz, 2014a). In the same interview, Diaz revealed that he lost many more friends to extra-judicial killings (Diaz, 2014a).

Torture and extra-judicial killings had become rife under the dictatorship of president Ferdinand Marcos from 1965 to 1986, and have since then been a prime characteristic of the post-Marcos regime in the Philippines. Amnesty International speak of "widespread and systematic torture by the security forces" as well as of people "disappearing and becoming victims of apparent extrajudicial [sic] killings" (Amnesty International, 1988: 3-4).<sup>32</sup> In a publication twenty years later, Human Rights Watch report that "extrajudicial [sic] executions have been on the rise [since 2001]" and that "nearly all of these victims are *not* members of armed

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<sup>31</sup> Country First, or Bayan Muna, was founded in 1999 and is a leftist, government-critical party in the Philippines.

<sup>32</sup> Extra-judicial killings are those that take place outside judicial frameworks and go largely unpunished (Amnesty International, 1988: 1).

groups, but are members of legal groups who are very critical of the Government” (Human Rights Watch, 2007: 24-25, emphasis added).

In March 2014, the New Straits Times reported that “Amnesty International criticised the Philippine government Wednesday for allegedly failing to crack down on torture committed by the security forces against detained persons” (New Straits Times, 2014). The article also refers to recent observations by Human Rights Watch, which considers the ongoing prominence of extra-judicial killings and attacks on journalists. There is thus an abundance of material on persistent and on-going violation against human rights.

Diaz used Marcos’ Martial Law (1972-1981), which marked the beginning of extra-judicial killings, as a backdrop for one of his films before. His eleven hour long opus *Evolution of a Filipino Family* (2004) follows a poor farming family through the years of upheaval in the early 1970s to 1987, one year after the ousting of President Marcos. Kadyo, a young man who dreams of finding gold in the local mines, is arrested for supposedly having murdered three soldiers. He is sent to prison, but manages a successful escape attempt until the authorities catch up with him, drag him on a leash and parade him through unnamed village. Later, released from prison, he is expected to “kill a very important person”. Poignantly, this important person is Filipino filmmaker Lino Brocka, who has raised awareness for the oppression of artists in the Philippines when he attended international film festivals. While in *Encantos*, Diaz has used a fictional character for the representation of the persecution of artists, in his earlier film *Evolution* he uses the image of a real artist, whose films have been highly acclaimed and shown internationally. At the same time, however, Brocka stirred controversy at home with his statements about artistic freedom in his country.

## Conclusion

Diaz's *Encantos* explores the themes of memory, post-trauma and history through the eyes of one individual, a practice he continues in *Florentina*. *Encantos* shares similarities with the other films under analysis in this thesis, but it stands out for its blurring the line between fact and fiction and its visual approach to the representation of post-trauma.

Expanding on elements noted in Chapter 4, Diaz uses aesthetics of the concentrationary in *Encantos* in order to depict the specific suffering of his characters under state terror. In order to achieve this, he combines the aesthetics of slowness – long-takes, little character movement, and static camera – and the narrative theme of torture and persecution. *Encantos* is the beginning of Diaz's play with sounds, transmitting significant factors of Hamin's trauma through dialogue. Visually, the utilisation of canted angles and handheld camera shots, neither of which he had used before or after the release of *Encantos*, with the single exception of *From What Is Before*, indicate a slow deterioration of Hamin's mental health as a result of torture and his persistent persecution. Using a post-disaster landscape, which *remembers*, as a location for his film, Diaz repeatedly alludes to the presence of ghosts throughout the film, inserting a complex structure of time into the narrative, which aligns with a survivor's time perception in PTSD. He stresses the theme of memory and the inability to forget by confronting Hamin with hallucinations of his dead loved ones and his interaction with them.

*Encantos* is Diaz's most personal film, and he takes an explicit stand against recurring extra-judicial killings in the Philippines. Rather than merely alluding to processes of torture and persecution, Diaz puts them on screen and leaves little

room for negotiation between what is and what is not happening. With *Encantos*, he joins the ranks of well-known directors such as Lino Brocka and Mike de Leon in using cinema to speak out against repression, persecution, torture and extra-judicial killings.

In the next chapter, I will expand on several aspects that I have noted in the previous two chapters. First of all, *Melancholia* and *Encantos* contain characteristics of Diaz's concentrationary system, in which an individual is reduced to bare life and subsequently increases his/her death drive. Diaz continues his approach and perfects it in his portrait of Florentina, a young woman who is used as a means of money making for his father while forced into permanent submission. The most evident difference between the two films I have investigated already and *Florentina* is the latter's focus on sound, positioning the viewer most clearly as a listener. Aspects of *Melancholia's* emphasis on long duration and *Encantos's* visual aesthetics of post-trauma, combined with their reference to non-linear time in their use of ghosts, come together in Diaz's six-hour film *Florentina*.



## 6. Individual and collective trauma - *Florentina Hubaldo, CTE* (2012)

But the war goes on; and we will  
have to bind up for years to come  
the many, sometimes  
ineffaceable, wounds that the  
colonialist onslaught has inflicted  
in our people.  
(Fanon, 1963: 200)

### Introduction

A young woman sits in a chair, her nose bleeding and her left cheek swollen. She experiences difficulties to retain her posture while keeping a cool cloth to her head (Fig. 33). Looking directly at the viewer and, in so doing, “enlisting the viewer as confidant and psychoanalyst” (De Bruyn, 2014: 13), she mutters: “My head hurts. My head never stops hurting. It never stops. I do not remember a lot of things. I have forgotten so many things. I sleep a lot. I am always in bed. I am always sleepy. My head hurts. I do not remember a lot of things.”



Figure 32 Florentina speaks of her ordeal at the end of the film.

*Florentina Hubaldo, CTE* - Lav Diaz (2012)

The young woman repeats herself over and over again. She speaks about having been beaten by her father, about having been chained to her bed, strangled, kicked in the stomach, and about having been sold to men. After a twenty-minute static long-take, the young Florentina loses her strength and her consciousness. The film cuts and ends with a black screen.

*Florentina Hubaldo, CTE* is Lav Diaz's twelfth feature film, and with a six-hour run-time, it is the shortest film under investigation here. It premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam on 29 January 2012, and had its UK premier at the Edinburgh International Film Festival in June of the same year. Diaz's film is a metaphorical treatment of chronic trauma which has been caused by centuries of colonialism and by years of dictatorship under president Ferdinand Marcos. In contrast to *Melancholia*, which transmits post-trauma through paralysing duration, and *Encantos* in which Diaz conveys a sensation of post-trauma through

the way he frames the events, *Florentina* stands out in the director's oeuvre as stressing the auditory aspects of post-trauma. In addition, he represents post-trauma through the use of repetition in the present narrative, a slowness evoked by long-takes and the overall film length. This combination of aesthetics – duration, framing and sound - evokes most clearly a sensation of the concentrationary universe, as I have pointed to in the previous two chapters and which I will explore further in the following analysis.

In this chapter, I analyse the aesthetics of post-trauma utilised in Diaz's film. In particular, I will focus on the representation of fragmented memories in relation to Florentina's attempt to narrate the story of her self, "*a performance of memory*" as Annette Kuhn describes the event of recounting traumatic events (Kuhn, 2010: 298, emphasis original). Florentina is positioned in a cyclical narrative as a result of a traumatic event, which locks her into past events and into struggles of remembering even small things such as her mother's name. The theme of paralysis or stagnation, which we encountered in Chapter 4 for the first time, comes to the fore here. The film is in parts an accumulation of repetitive elements, which function as an illustration of Florentina's mental deterioration and paralysis. Feeding into this is a discussion of slowness in the form of long-takes and the overall film length. The particular length of the film allows Diaz to explore the slow onslaught of post-trauma and Florentina's physical torment caused by CTE. Just as post-trauma surfaces slowly, often weeks and months, sometimes even years after the traumatic event, CTE is a condition that develops slowly over years, often without being recognised as such. Diaz's combination of long-takes, which are often up to fifteen minutes long, and their smooth blending into the overall film length aid an evocation of the slow progression of both mental and

physical trauma.

In the second part of this chapter, I shift my focus to the absence of on-screen violence and Diaz's juxtaposition of sound and silence, and thereby introduce a new component of his post-trauma cinema. Rather than showing the repeated rapes Florentina is forced to endure, Diaz conveys the atrocity through sound and positions the viewer consequently as a listener. This stands in contrast to contemporary trauma films, which tend to position the viewer as eye-witness. Positioning the viewer as a listener rather than as a direct eyewitness to the events, Diaz translates a major concern in trauma studies into his work: "All trauma narratives, be they told in life, in a drama or in a novel, *require a listener*" (Heller, 2007: 110, emphasis added). Yet, he also unmistakably expands on the notion of film as a predominantly visual medium. In her study of the representation of on-screen violence, Alison Young convincingly argues that "*seeing* is only one dimension of the spectator's relationship to the image: just as important are hearing, feeling, remembering" (Young, 2010: 11, original emphasis). So far in this thesis, we have looked mostly at the visual aesthetics of Diaz's Trauma Cinema and in so doing, followed the idea that film is primarily a visual medium. However, sound plays a major role in *Florentina*, which calls for a closer analysis of it. In *Florentina*, Diaz generates an atmosphere of rupture and shock by juxtaposing scenes of severe noise with scenes of absolute silence, deafening the viewer and making him/her helpless by removing all reference points with regards to time and space. These shock moments are, as will be explored later, a representation of post-trauma, and an attempt by Diaz to represent the "terrifying silence" in the barrios in his country (Diaz, 2014a).

Following on from this, this chapter seeks to analyse the ways in which the

portrayal of rape in *Florentina* acts as a metaphor for the repeated oppression of the Philippines at the hands of its colonisers. Diaz's film uses an individual story of suffering to portray the suffering of a nation; the rape of the nation under Spanish and American rule, a metaphor for the complete subordination and exploitation of the natives at the hand of the colonisers.<sup>33</sup> Although all characters in the films used for this study lose their agency in the wake of oppression, the theme of forced submission is clearest in *Florentina Hubaldo*.

### **The chronic trauma of colonialism**

Like Diaz's previous films, *Florentina Hubaldo* contains two narrative strands, which run parallel until they merge and complement each other. Even though he gives each strand equal on-screen space and time in the first two to three hours of the film, Diaz begins to intercut the two strands halfway through the film and then develops both alongside each other.

The film begins with the narrative of Florentina (Hazel Orencio), who lives with her father, a "monster" as she describes him early on in the film, and her grandfather in a ramshackle house in Bicol. Her father drinks heavily and behaves

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<sup>33</sup> Diaz's depiction of the rape of a woman could be considered problematic in that it may underline and reinforce a metaphor that has often been used in discussion of the feminised 'motherland' being raped by colonial oppressors in postcolonial discourse (cf. Loomba, 1998). The director could therefore be accused of using this film in order to pursue a certain politics of gender. However, this point needs to be handled with caution for three main reasons. First of all, as indicated in my introduction, Diaz is not the sole author of his films. Rather, they are the product of close collaboration between him and his cast and crew. Assigning a specific form of politics to the director alone is therefore debatable. In addition, it is worth considering the local situation. Philippine society is considered as "matricharchal ... with dominant and versatile women" (Reese, 2012: 159), which opposes Western patriarchal societies. Furthermore, Diaz uses the rape of a woman not only as a metaphor for colonial oppression. In *Florentina*, the director depicts the widespread sexual violence against women in Philippine society, as noted on page 233. As late as 1997, the Philippine legal system considered rape a crime, but the vast majority of cases, especially when they happen between family members, remain unreported. Instead of reinforcing specific images of gender, Diaz represents the present situation regarding gender politics and sexual violence in Philippine society.

violently towards her and her grandfather.<sup>34</sup> Money is scarce not only because of widespread poverty. The father loses all his money in cockfights, and sells goats in order to fund his addiction. Crucial for the narrative, he also sells his daughter to men in the local area in order to make a living. At the beginning of the film, a man offers 3000 pesos for two goats and 500 pesos for Florentina, a mere sixth of the value of the goats, which shows the degrading value ascribed to her as a woman. This part of the film is, according to Diaz, based on experience of a friend of his, who moved from Manila to the rural areas after he had earned enough money to settle somewhere else. As a result of poverty, poor farmers wanted to sell their daughters to him for fifty pesos in order to be able to afford two kilos of rice, so that the family can eat. Diaz said, “when he told me the story, I said, Oh my God. I have to tell this story, so it became Florentina Hubaldo.” (Diaz, 2014a)

I have mentioned elsewhere that forty per cent of the Philippine’s population live on less than \$2 a week (Aldaba, 2009). A man can buy Florentina for approximately \$11, a sum he would have to work for for more than a month on average. This indicates a relation and a dependency between rich and poor in the film, a theme Diaz picks up time and again, most explicitly in his film *Norte, The End of History* (2013). Duncan Wheeler concludes in his analysis of the representation of domestic violence in Spanish cinema that violence is “the almost inevitable result of extreme poverty and social marginalization” (Wheeler, 2012: 45). Given the background of poverty in the Philippines, Wheeler’s reading of domestic violence as a result of poverty can also be applied to Diaz’s *Florentina*. The young woman is repeatedly subjected to physical and sexual violence at the hands of her father and the men she is sold to. She is chained to bed in order to

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<sup>34</sup> Florentina’s on-screen grandfather is Hazel Orencio’s grandfather in real life.

prevent her from escaping the treacherous conditions. The film reveals her suffering, her attempts to escape as well as her mental breakdown.

Alongside this narrative strand, Diaz tells the story of Manoling (Noel Domingo) and Juan (Willy Fernandez), two young men who visit Manoling's brother, Hector (Joel Ferrer), in order to dig for a treasure Manoling's grandfather claimed would be hidden in Hector's acres. Around two-thirds into the film, Hector is revealed to be a key character in the narrative. In an extended monologue, he discloses that he is looking after a young woman called Loleng (Kristine Kintana), who is Florentina's daughter. According to him, Florentina sought refuge in the city after having managed to escape from her torture, and was eventually taken up by Hector. When she died, he raised Loleng as though she was his own daughter. Her health deteriorating, Loleng suffers from an unnamed lung condition, said to be an aftereffect of Florentina's maltreatment during her pregnancy.

As I will explore in more detail later in this chapter, *Florentina* stands in as a metaphor for collective trauma and suffering of the Philippine nation after centuries of colonialism, which were followed by decades of dictatorship under president Ferdinand Marcos, who put the entire country under Martial Law in September 1972. Diaz explained, the film "mirrors the long, long suffering of the Malay Filipino, from issues of colonialism to fascism" (Diaz, 2014a). In this way, *Florentina Hubaldo* is what Kim Kyung Hyum has termed a post-traumatic film, "a film that explore[s] a violent public history through personal memories that evoke trauma and pain" (Hyum, 2002: 99).

Given existing scholarship of Trauma Cinema, the film differs from contemporary trauma films, but also of the films in focus in this study, in one distinct area. Raya Morag argues that "recent humanities-based trauma studies

from Caruth to Walker have repeatedly focused on analysing the single traumatic event (rather than chronic trauma)...” (Morag, 2008: 122). Indeed, as Maureen Turim suggests in her contribution to *Screen’s* special issue, “trauma is not necessarily a single event, but a series of events that affects the imaginary and the symbolic” (Turim, 2001: 206). Milena Bubenechik, in her study on colonial trauma, asserts that “the European or Western conception of trauma focuses traditionally on a single shocking and personally upsetting event which causes a psychopathology referred to as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the victims” (Bubenechik, 2013: 4). However, as she goes on to say, “Colonialism encompasses a series of trauma for indigenous populations” (Bubenechik, 2013: 4), which resonates with Morag’s appeal to pursue a closer analysis of chronic trauma.

With *Florentina*, Diaz expands on the treatment of single traumatic events in his previous films and thereby challenges the approach of existing scholarly work on single traumatic events in film, dealing with the chronic trauma of colonisation, which, rather than being one event, had been on-going for four centuries, and which encompassed a succession of several different traumatic events. In focusing on chronic trauma, Diaz’s six-hour film differs starkly from the other two films examined here. It is of little surprise, then, that the director names this film as his most accomplished work at the time (Diaz, 2014a).

### **Repetitive trauma and the slow impact**

Throughout the film, Florentina makes several attempts at telling her story (Fig 34). The viewer gets access to her fragmented memories in the temporal order she remembers them. On top of this, her first attempt is not all-encompassing. Rather,



she discloses more of her life in the course of the film whenever memories resurface. It is worth quoting Florentina's first monologue at length as it contains several points important to this chapter.

My name is Florentina Hubaldo. I came from Antipolo. But when I was almost ten years old, we transferred here to Bicol. Around that time, in unexplainable circumstances, my mother died. My mother and father always fight. Father hits mother. He locks up mother. He ties her up ... My name is Florentina Hubaldo. I came from Antipolo. But when I was ten years old we moved to Legazpi, Albay ... I can't remember mother's face. I have already forgotten. Her hair is long. Father threw out all photos of her ... my head hurts ... there was so much blood, there was so much blood. I gave birth to a child. But the child was dead. The child had a crushed head. Miss Simang twisted her neck. Father always brings me to Miss Simang. She always kills the child in my stomach. She gives me a lot of pills. And boiled leaves.

In this uninterrupted, thirteen minute long-take, Florentina shows signs of memory loss, which foreshadow Florentina's death. As Dori Laub suggests in the context of Holocaust survivors, and I will return to this in more detail later in this chapter, it was imperative for survivors to tell their stories in order to survive. Florentina, however, cannot tell her whole story due to the loss of her memory. The telling of her story, and therefore her survival, is out of reach.

Rather than speaking fluently and in coherent sentences, Florentina tells her story in fragmented and seemingly unrelated paragraphs. This narrative element is not unusual for a film on memory. As Jeffrey Skoller argues in his analysis of the treatment of history in avant-garde films, "we ... hear the return of the traumatic event as a phenomenon of the present with all the gaps from what is forgotten, ill remembered, or so painful that it cannot be put into words" (Skoller, 2005: xliv). Florentina sits on a rock amidst trees and bushes, letting the goats she looks after graze the green. She shifts freely between talking about her mother's

death and brief recollections of children at school (“I’ll start school tomorrow”). Her jumbled narrative brings to the fore Kuhn’s characterisation of a memory text as “a montage of vignettes, anecdotes, fragments, ‘snapshots’ and flashes ... [which] often appear to have been plucked at random from a paradigm of memories and assembled in a mode of narration in which causality is not” (Kuhn, 2010: 299). Florentina’s monologue does not follow a linear temporality and defies classical causality, leaving gaps for the viewer to fill in.

Her monologue sounds rehearsed and learned by heart with little emotion attached to it. Dirk de Bruyn explains that “overpowering narratives [of trauma]... are narrated with a lack of affect” (De Bruyn, 2014: 80), thereby suggesting a reason for Florentina’s almost neutral body language. In between fragments of memories, she looks up to the sky, her eyes closed from time to time as though trying to visualise her memories. Nonetheless, there is a sense of her pain evident in her narration, and at times it seems as though she no longer wants to remember or talk about the traumatic events mentioned above. As Rutherford suggests, talking about a traumatic event can potentially re-traumatise the victim-survivor. By recalling the events, survivor-victims take on a degree of proximity, which is not always desired. What we can detect in Florentina’s behaviour while reciting her narrative of the self is her difficulty of facing this proximity; “as speech comes closer to the core of the trauma, anxiety increases exponentially in the face of the threat of reviving the original presentness” (Rutherford, 2013: 82). The trauma’s proximity, triggered by her monologue, causes anxiety in Florentina and increases her difficulties of telling her story.



**Figure 33 Florentina tells her story in a thirteen-minute uninterrupted long-take.**

*Florentina Hubaldo, CTE (2012), Lav Diaz*

She repeats the beginning of her story several times, suspending a clear narrative progression. Each time, her story becomes more incomplete. Whereas she was initially sure about the time her mother died, in her fourth cycle of repetition, Florentina merely utters “My mother died. I don’t know when.” The memory loss becomes even more evident at the end of the scene, when she begins her story with “My name is...” without completing the sentence. She no longer remembers her name. Indeed, on several occasions in the film, she asks both her grandfather and her own daughter what her name is and where she comes from. Once she hears her name, she begins to repeat her cyclic narrative in fragmented parts until her memory fails again. Florentina’s seemingly obsessive acts of remembering are a symptom of the interacting processes of memory and forgetting. Anne Whitehead writes, “in the face of mounting amnesia, there is an urgent need to consciously establish meaningful connections with the past” (Whitehead, 2004:

82). The more Florentina's memory fails, the more she therefore attempts to remember, locking herself into a never-ending cycle of repetition. As I will argue later in more detail, this obsessive repetition of specific events in Florentina's life appears as a desperate attempt to remain alive, as a loss of memory would mean a loss of the self and therefore a potential loss of life.

I would like to point to the specifics of Florentina's memory at this point. Using Pierre Janet's distinction between traumatic and narrative memory, Whitehead argues that "narrative memory is ... a social act, taking into account the listener or audience. Traumatic memory, on the contrary, has no social component; it is not addressed to anybody and it does not respond to anyone" (Whitehead, 2004: 141). Even though controversial, Janet suggested that traumatic memory needed to be converted into narrative memory so as to relieve the survivor from repeated flashbacks (Whitehead, 2004: 142). It appears as though Florentina's monologue is an attempt at undertaking this conversion. Yet it makes for an interesting case in that it is unclear whether the memory is still traumatic or already narrative, to use Janet's distinction. Narrative memory demands the address of a listener, and even though Diaz positions the viewer as such later on in the film, it is unclear whether this is the viewer's role here. Florentina merely recalls past events without specifically addressing us, though she does so more directly at the end of the film, as is shown in Fig 33 through her frontal position towards the camera. Rather, she seems to undertake the recalling of traumatic events on her own. In fact, Diaz uses supportive aesthetics in this scene, which aid the representation of Florentina's traumatic memory. Based on research undertaken by van der Kolk and van der Hart (1995), Maseda refers to traumatic memory as "a solitary, private phenomenon" (Maseda, 2014: 51). This

aspect of traumatic memory is visually supported by Florentina's solitary position in the frame. She is alone in the woods, with only two goats grazing the grass around her. She talks to herself and does not address anyone in particular. Diaz's use of a medium long shot links Florentina to the emptiness around her. She is positioned at the right hand side of the frame, therefore marginalised and set off from the surrounding.

Returning to the above-mentioned monologue, there are several traumatic events Florentina refers to. First, she lost her mother at the age of ten, seemingly at the hands of her husband, who has beaten her to death. Florentina herself is beaten by her father. He bashes her head against walls, and sells her to men in the area. The repeated rapes resulted in pregnancies in the past. Due to maltreatment during her pregnancy at the hand of her father, Florentina once gave birth to a child whose head was crushed. Since then, her father has taken her to a woman for questionable methods of abortion.

Diaz has described this chain of traumatic events as a "repeated bashing of the head against a wall" (Diaz, 2012b), a form of physical violence that characterised treatment of Philippine prisoners in the decades under Marcos, especially after Martial Law had been declared. In her study on the infliction of pain and torture, Elaine Scarry writes, "former prisoners in the Philippines report having had their heads repeatedly banged into the wall" (Scarry, 1985: 40). This precise treatment is characteristic of the concentrationary system and becomes most visible in *Florentina*, as compared to the other two films under investigation. Wolfgang Sofsky argues, "before their [the prisoners'] deaths, persons were destroyed gradually, step by step. ... Many died not as a result of direct physical violence, but because of systematic infliction of misery" (Sofsky, 1997: 25). Diaz's

*Florentina* makes a particularly strong case in this respect, as the film is an accumulation of “miseries” inflicted on the main character. Moreover, Florentina is denied death for economical reasons. As concentration camp or even Soviet Gulag prisoners were deemed to be more useful when they could work, so too is Florentina’s treatment at the hand of her father a crude way to reach a sufficient degree of subordination of Florentina without compromising her ability to “work”, and therefore earn money she and her father need to survive, but which mainly her father needs in order to gamble in cock fights. Michel Foucault poignantly claims that “the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body *and* a subjected body” (Foucault, 1991: 26, emphasis added), combining the two essential forces that Diaz demonstrates in the treatment of Florentina: her productive body as a means to earn money, and her subjected body as a requirement to force her into work.

As a result of her treatment, Florentina loses her dignity, which Tzvetan Todorov describes in his study of morality in concentration camps as “the capacity of the individual to remain a subject with a will” (Todorov, 2000: 16). Florentina’s brutal treatment degrades her to such an extent that she has no will herself anymore. She is, as already pointed out, a mere means of money-making. The degradation of Florentina is, according to Brison’s study and her own experience of human-inflicted trauma, common. In the process of subjecting a person to violence, the tormentor aims to shatter the victim’s individuality in order to achieve maximum submission (Brison, 2002: 40). Just as Hamin lost his agency as a result of continuous persecution by extra-judicial forces, Florentina is no longer the agent of her life. Indeed, Elaine Hilberman suggests, rape for the subjected individual means a “loss of autonomy and control” (Hilberman in Wolbert Burgess

and Lytle Holmstrom, 1985: 49).

An additional factor that aggravates Florentina's suffering is that she has no opportunity to overcome one traumatic event. Consequently, the chain of events elongates and eventually acts destructive to her mind. This is, in parts, expressed by amnesia, which becomes gradually more evident throughout Florentina's lengthy monologues and which I have already pointed to earlier.

Agustin Sotto (1995), writing primarily on popular post-war Philippine cinema, provides conclusive comments significant to Diaz's film. Referring in particular to films such as Gerardo de Leon's *Isumpa Mo Giliw* (1947) and Teodorico C. Santos' *May Umaga Pang Darating* (1954), Sotto writes that,

amnesia became a popular theme of mainstream filmmakers in the postwar [sic] era. Philippine cinema was suddenly deluged with examples of memory blackouts or reversals of identity ... owing to the high incidence of emotional trauma especially during the bombing of Manila. (Sotto, 1995: 13)

Sotto's reading of classic Filipino films suggests that Diaz's focus on amnesia is not new, but rather a continuation of elements that had already been present in Philippine cinema, some films of which aimed at working through the country's traumatic history. Diaz, however, does not depict contemporary history such as World War II through the use of amnesia, but instead goes further back in history and picks up themes of colonialism, which he had not done before; in *Melancholia* he focuses on contemporary resistance fighting and disappearances, and in *Encantos* he stresses extra-judicial killings and persecution.

The film's extensive length and Diaz's long takes, particularly prominent in scenes in which Florentina recites her narrative of the self, underline specific aspects of post-trauma which are worth unpacking in more detail at this point.

First, I want to focus on the physical trauma that has been inflicted on Florentina. Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE), is a degenerative disease of the brain, whose onslaught is slow and often remains undiagnosed. CTE is first and foremost associated with sports such as boxing in which an individual's head is directly exposed to severe damage (Saulle and Greenwald, 2012: 1). The disease develops slowly over years, often over decades, and has therefore no immediate impact on the individual (Saulle and Greenwald, 2012: 3). Akin to this development, there is a slow deterioration of Florentina's state evident throughout the film's six hours; amnesia, hallucinations, headaches as well as difficulties of forming sentences. The length of the film thus supports the slow breakdown of her brain functions, whose main symptom is memory loss. Gaps in her lengthy monologues, which become more and more repetitive with time, foreshadow this increased amnesia.

Memory loss as a narrative device functions on two levels. Diaz pointed out in the Q&A that followed the screening of his film at EIFF in 2012 that it would be essential for Filipinos and Filipinas to remember.<sup>35</sup> An explanation for this emphasis on commemoration can be found in a statement by Milan Kundera, who argues that a "nation which loses awareness of its past gradually loses its self" (Kundera in Tofighian, 2008: 84). It is thus not only Florentina who could lose her self. Her country, too, is deprived of its identity if it does not remember its past. Diaz's film serves as a reminder for Kundera's concern about the effects of amnesia on countries and societies. In response to Kundera's statement, Diaz claims, "it's a very honest statement. If you forget the past, you can't really move forward. You're in denial. Everything becomes pseudo. Everything becomes fake. ... How can you

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<sup>35</sup> In his film *Heremias Book I* (2006), Diaz includes a debate on the fading of memory with regards to atrocities committed by the Japanese Imperial Army during WW II. The characters argue that time cannot only trigger amnesia, but it can also alter memory.



call yourself a nation if you don't know how to confront the past?" (Diaz, 2014a). *Florentina*, as well as Diaz's other films, especially those under investigation in this thesis, function therefore as cinematic defences against the loss of memory, the loss of the past and thus the loss of the country's self as a nation.

In his analysis of Chang Sn-u's *A Petal/Ggotip* (1996), Kim Kyung Hyum (2002) focuses on the depiction of a young teenage girl, who lost her mother in the Gwangju massacre in May 1980, and her relationship to a man, whom she mistakes as her brother and who continuously beats and rapes her.<sup>36</sup> Her selective mutism appears to be lifted only when she stands at the grave of her real brother. Like *Florentina*, her memory is repeatedly failing her. Hyum suggests that "her failure to regain her memory reflects the contested historiography of Kwangju" (Hyum, 2002: 106). The Philippines have a similarly contested history with regard to violence committed under colonial authorities. Diaz suggests in an interview that there is a discrepancy between scholarly historical accounts and first-hand experiences of those who suffered at the hands of the oppressors (Diaz, 2014a). The female characters' partial silence in both *A Petal* and *Florentina* and their inability to fully remember the past act as a sign of contestation in regards to official accounts of the countries' histories.

Kundera's and Hyum's arguments as well as Diaz's own statements at Edinburgh, mentioned previously, concern the effects of collective amnesia as a result of trauma for a country as a whole. On top of the collective suffering, however, the suffering of the individual needs to be considered. This allows for the opportunity to study the macro and the micro cosmos of oppression and the

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<sup>36</sup> The Gwangju massacre was the result of an uprising in the South Korean city of Gwangju, in which mainly students demanded more democracy and were fired upon by government forces.

resulting post-trauma, thereby generating a more detailed image of the possible psychological consequences of oppression.

For Florentina, the ability to remember is a chance of survival. Brison writes, “Locke famously identified the self with a set of continuous memories, a kind of ongoing narrative of one’s past that is extended with each new experience” (Brison, 2002: 49). She asserts that a traumatic event disrupts the on-going narrative and the individual is consequently locked in a narrative loop. The inability to escape this loop, I argue, could mean, by extension, the annihilation of the individual. This can be prevented from happening by the repeated telling of one’s story, which is illustrated in *Florentina*. Brison argues that “by constructing and telling a narrative of the trauma endured ... the survivor begins not only to integrate the traumatic episode into a life with a before and an after, but also to gain control over the occurrence of intrusive memories” (Brison, 2002: 57). Moreover, escaping the cyclical loop and returning to a linear narrative allows the survivor “to feel a greater sense of integration [into their lives] and personhood” (Marcus, 1999: 89). Marcus suggests here a link between survival and the telling of one’s story because an individual cannot exist without social integration and without a sense of personhood, in other words, without a sense of the self. Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas add that the process of telling one’s story can potentially release the survivor from the compulsion to repeatedly relive the trauma (Guerin and Hallas, 2007: 8). However, as Le Roy, Stalpaert and Verdoodt (2011) stress, “Even though narrative has the therapeutic value of warding off the compulsive repetition of a trauma, it does not lead to its total redemption or to the full restoration of the subject’s past as an autonomous, un-affected unity” (Le Roy, Stalpaert and Verdoodt in Levi, 2013: 144). Thus, although narrating a traumatic

event can initiate a survival of the victim, it may not erase the traumatic event from the victim's memory.

The repeated telling of a trauma narrative derives from the cyclic nature of the individual's narrative the trauma has caused. As Cathy Caruth suggests, "catastrophic events seem to repeat themselves for those who have passed through them" (Caruth, 1996: 1). She points to two main aspects in regards to the repetitive narrative of trauma survivors. First, "the survival of trauma is ... the endless *inherent necessity* of repetition, which ultimately may lead to destruction", as I have argued above, and "the history of the traumatized individual is nothing other than the determined repetition of the events of destruction" (Caruth, 1996: 62-63, emphasis original). Caruth's use of the word "determined" is interesting here, because it is not entirely clear whether or not the traumatised individual is forced or forces itself in parts to repeat the traumatic narrative.

She further refers to arguments by neurobiologists who claim that the repeated return to traumatic events can potentially threaten the chemical structure of the brain, which can "ultimately lead to deterioration" (Caruth, 1996: 62-63). This deterioration is visible in Florentina's repetitive monologues, which reveal her failing memory. But it is also visible in the repeated hallucinations, which I will look at in more detail later on. Diaz uses Florentina's repetitive monologues as a narrative device and suspends narrative progression in order to transmit her sense of post-trauma and her being trapped in a repetitive cycle of past events.

Furthermore, in addition to incorporating the traumatic event into one's narrative, which supports the act of remembering, it is simultaneously a part of survival because forgetting can cause a cessation, thus the death, of the self. In all

of his films, Diaz places emphasis on commemoration. Especially in connection to the Philippine's colonial and dictatorial history, this has a striking parallel to Dori Laub's assertion about Holocaust survivors. He claims that victims "did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive" (Laub, 1995: 63). In a similar tone, Dow Marmur writes about her encounter with concentration camp survivors: "I do not remember them talking of much else; they told of their experiences again and again; it was necessary for their existence, their survival. They recalled death and suffering in order to be able to live" (Marmur, 1990: 52). This telling of a story, however, needs a listener, and with *Florentina*, Diaz positions the viewer as such.

### **Post-traumatic sound**

In her analysis of sound in *Oxhide I* and *Oxhide II*, Lovatt argues that it be vital to shift the attention from visuals to sound in the study of Slow Cinema, because the combination of image and sound creates the immersive experience which is often at the core of slow films (Lovatt, forthcoming: no pagination). I would like to respond to Lovatt's call for a shift in focus at this point. Having primarily looked at the aspect of circularity and the aesthetics of mise-en-scène of *Florentina* in the first half of this chapter, I would like to expand on the reading of this film by analyzing Diaz's use of sound in his representation of post-trauma.

E. Ann Kaplan (2001) identifies four positions the viewer of trauma films can embody, which are dependent on aesthetics and genre. The first two types range from the depiction of trauma "as a discrete past event, locatable, representable and curable" to a film as being traumatising for the viewer because s/he is presented with terrifying images (Kaplan, 2001: 204). The third category

she proposes is that of the spectator as a voyeur, in the case of television news of catastrophic events. Lastly, Kaplan's fourth category is significant in the context of *Florentina*; the spectator becomes a witness. As May Adadol Ingawanij suggests, "this quality [of Diaz's films] endows the experience of watching his films with the weight of bearing witness to social suffering and ... to endurance" (Ingawanij, 2012: 14).

I argue, however, that the viewer is not framed as an eyewitness the way s/he is positioned in *Melancholia* and its shocking display of skulls and bones – a category that would become difficult to sustain in the case of Diaz's *Florentina*. S/he is first and foremost a listener. To witness is necessarily linked to visual stimuli. When we witness something happening, we *see* something. Yet, in *Florentina*, as I will discuss in greater detail later in this chapter, the spectator does not see the atrocities that are committed. This deprivation of visual stimuli addresses the viewer's other senses, and, in this specific case, renders him or her a listener rather than a witness.

As has been pointed out, Brison argues that a traumatised individual must reconstruct a narrative of the self in order to survive. This can be done by forming a narrative about traumatic events, as Florentina does in the film. Yet, Brison also contends that a reconstruction of the self is only possible if there is an audience "able and willing to hear [the individual] and to understand [his or her] words as [he or she] intends them" (Brison, 2002: 51). Florentina's survival, and by extension potentially that of the Philippine nation, is thus dependent on the viewer's engagement with her story.

In this part of the chapter, I want to look closely at the way Diaz employs visual absence and sound in order to evoke a sense of post-trauma, and thereby

introduce another main component of Diaz's post-trauma cinema. As indicated above, absence in the context of trauma can have a wide-ranging meaning. First, the self can be absent from the narrative (through disembodiment), and second, the narrative and the self can cease to exist as a result of trauma if we consider the chemical destruction in the survivor's brain, as highlighted by Caruth (Caruth 1996: 62-63). Diaz juxtaposes on- and off-screen action as well as sound and silence throughout the film so as to highlight the annihilation of the self and its senses as a cause of trauma.

Perhaps the most striking absence displayed in the film is that of Florentina herself. The viewer is barred from visual access to the repeated sexual violence Florentina has to endure. This is decisively different from Diaz's other films, such as *Century of Birthing* (2011) in which he aims to recreate a realistic representation of the rape of a young and devoted female member of a religious cult. The action is framed in a medium shot, and there is a clear link between the cries and screams of the young woman and the image of her being raped (Fig 35). Sound and image thus merge in order to represent the action as unambiguous. In Diaz's 2013 film *Norte*, rape is depicted less visually. The action is mainly conveyed through sound, with the rape itself happening partially on- and off-screen, as the viewer looks through an open door as violent actions occur in the far background. Yet the actual rape itself occurs behind a wall, leaving the viewer to experience the event primarily through sound. The accumulation towards the event is also visible on screen, so that the actual action is unambiguous. Asked about the absence of on-screen violence in *Norte* and his decision to depict the rape that occurs between Fabian and his sister without graphic images, Diaz responds by explaining the ethics of his filmmaking:

I wanted it to be there but it shouldn't be seen, only a fraction of it. I wanted the audiences' senses to work on it, because you know that it is happening. ... I don't cut, I don't manipulate you and fake it. The actors must really be ready. The crew also needs to be ready. And the audience must be ready. I'm trying to approximate the truth of what is happening, from the sound to the physicality. It is a very hard thing to do, but I have to do it. It is very hard for the actors because they are not faking it. ... I don't want the action to be graphic. I want the audiences to work on it because they are smart, and the poetic absences will be there for them. (Furtado, 2014)



**Figure 34** A young woman is raped. Image and sound create a coherent and unmistakable meaning.

*Century of Birthing* - Lav Diaz (2011)

In *Florentina Hubaldo*, on the other hand, Diaz depicts Florentina's torture through the use of sound only. An hour into the film, two men wait for the arrival of Florentina's father. When he arrives, one of the young men gives him money and disappears. Instead of following the young man, the camera remains focused on Florentina's father and the second young man (Fig 36). The off-screen sound of rattling chains and a woman's screams and cries suggest that Florentina is being raped, supposedly by the man who has disappeared from our vision.



**Figure 35 Off-screen rape I.**

*Florentina Hubaldo, CTE - Lav Diaz (2012)*

We remain with the two men for a minute or two, exposed to the horrific sound of a woman being raped, until the alleged rapist leaves. A cut brings us to another outdoor corner of the house where Florentina's grandfather sits on a rock. A medium long shot captures his reactions and emotions during the off-screen rape of his granddaughter (Fig 37). As the camera moves closer to the sound source – the rape occurs just behind a makeshift wall made of wood – the proximity of sound has altered. The viewer is still denied visual access to the scene, but he or she is positioned audibly closer to the action. The proximity not only increases the sound's volume, it is also a means to translate the particularly close relationship between Florentina and her grandfather onto screen.





**Figure 36 Off-screen rape II.**

*Florentina Hubaldo, CTE - Lav Diaz (2012)*

In these two successive scenes, Diaz plays with the viewer's points of identification. The acoustic atmosphere is the same in both scenes. Yet, the reaction of the on-screen listeners to it differs. The distance of the camera to the listeners suggests a relative emotional distance of the men to the audible violence. The first scene, shown in a medium long shot, is a demonstration of ignorance and neglect towards the young woman, who is a mere object to be used for the sake of men's pleasure. The second scene, on the other hand, is one of suffering. The camera is spatially positioned closer to Florentina's grandfather in order to capture his emotional reactions. Throughout the film, Florentina shows an enduring love to her grandfather, who has repeatedly attempted to free her from her father's maltreatment. Yet her father's threat that he would kill her grandfather if she were to escape again ("I'll chop you into pieces."), makes her endure the horror. A striking example of this is a scene, in which Florentina's

father beats up her grandfather as he suspects him of freeing her from her chains. Crying over the treatment of her grandfather, she apologises and promises that she will not try to escape again. This is an illustration of the persistent and altering terror, which her father exposes her to. It also demonstrates another significant factor in the context of survival. It appears as though Florentina is trying to stay alive for her grandfather. In his in-depth study of survival in extreme situations, Todorov proposes that “There are things we can do for others that we are incapable of doing solely for ourselves, and so concern for others can keep us from giving up” (Todorov, 2000: 17).

There are several aspects to note in regards to Diaz’s treatment of on-screen violence in this film. First of all, by refusing direct representation of the occurring rape, Diaz avoids positioning the viewer as a voyeur, and therefore the danger of “rendering women as spectacle” (Maseda, 2014: 54). Any cinematic representation of rape poses ethical questions which must be addressed. Maseda claims that “the display of women’s bodies being desecrated could contribute to the objectification of women that might satisfy voyeuristic impulses” (Maseda, 2014: 53). Chaudhuri adds that cinematic representations of rape often serve to reinforce stereotypical conventions (Chaudhuri, 2014: 77). This is precisely the danger Diaz counters by choosing to position rape off-screen, thereby minimising voyeuristic (visual) impulses.

Second, in his focus on transmitting the violence which Florentina endures through the use of sound rather than through visuals, Diaz prevents the viewer from escaping the scenery of atrocity. Juliette Volcler correctly points out that “the ear is a vulnerable target: you can’t close it, you can’t choose what it hears” (Volcler, 2013: 1). Susan Sontag, too, writes that “we do not have doors on our

ears” (Sontag, 2003: 105). Sontag makes reference here to the power of sound as something the viewer has difficulties escaping. It is this characteristic that Diaz exploits in *Florentina*. Just as his protagonist is unable to escape the repeated sexual violence, so the viewer is trapped in that s/he cannot shut him/herself off what is happening. On the contrary, the viewer is forced to listen. This is yet another striking example of Diaz’s attempt to create a similarly terrorising situation for the viewer as he does for the protagonist.

Pierre Schaeffer coined the term “acousmatic sound”, with which he described “a situation wherein one hears the sound without seeing its cause” (Chion, 1994: 32). The rape of Florentina acts as such an acousmètre. More specifically, it is, what Chion calls, an already visualised acousmètre (Chion, 1999: 21); the viewer is familiar with the character of Florentina, and has already seen her before Diaz uses off-screen sounds of her rape. By exposing the viewer only to the sound of the rape scenes without showing the characters involved, Diaz creates a more stressful situation for him or her as he plays on the viewer’s uncertainty and imagination. The presence of a voice blended with the invisibility of the voice’s source creates a particularly tense atmosphere. As Chion determines, “Sound [suggests] the forbidden sight in a much more frightening way than if viewers were to see the spectacle with their own eyes” (Chion, 1999: 22). In her study of the representation of ‘trauma’ in Israeli cinema, Raya Morag makes a similar remark, arguing that “sound symbolizes the unapproachable essence of the traumatic event, and is thus more commensurate to the event than the visual image could ever be” (Morag, 2013: 76). It is thus possible to conclude that by highlighting sound over image with the effect of a more tense and frightening situation for the viewer, Diaz attempts to surround the viewer with situations that

are similarly difficult to endure in relation to Florentina's ordeal; a strategy we have come across in Chapter 4, in which I argued that Diaz's use of duration aims to transmit to the viewer the fighters' terrorising situation of waiting for their certain death on the island. This is particularly significant because the rape scenes are void of ambient background sounds. The emphasis is instead on the auditory depiction of rape so as to deprive the viewer of possible escapes with the help of ambient and peaceful sounds.

The denial of visual access to the scene underlines the large scale and the universality of the event, which Diaz intends to represent. In *Century of Birthing*, mentioned earlier, rape is attached to a specific character. A young virgin and member of a fundamentalist cult is raped by a photographer who wants to "free" her from her obsession with the cult's proclaimed God. Rather than serving as a metaphor, rape is here used as a catalyst for character development and narrative progression. The young woman loses her sanity after she is expelled from the cult and realises that she is pregnant. This opposes the treatment of rape in *Florentina* in which Diaz intends to recount the colonial legacy of the Philippine people via the metaphorical use of rape. Visual access to the scene would enable viewer identification with Florentina as a character, which would in turn restrict identification with the unseen, that is, with a larger group of women, people and societies, not only in the Philippines but around the world.

### **Sonic rupture**

If Diaz highlights sound in these specific scenes, he places emphasis on images in others, in which sound is entirely absent. These scenes have two main functions. Chion suggests that sound guides the viewer's vision (Chion, 1994: 7). He claims,

“When the sound is removed our beholding of the image is more interrogative, as it is for silent cinema. We explore its spatial dimension more easily and spontaneously; we tend to look more actively to the image to tell us what is going on” (Chion, 1994: 132). Chion’s arguments infer that sound can support a preferred reading by the director. In using absolute silence, Diaz distances himself from the scene, and allows the viewer to read a specific scene in his or her way. I have noted the director’s method of distancing himself from imposing a particular meaning on the images in Chapter 5 in the context of *Encantos*, and its aesthetic distancing through extreme long-takes, and we can detect a similar strategy in *Florentina*.

Furthermore, the absence of sound can ascribe a greater significance to the viewer as listener. In his analysis of the functions of silence in John Cage’s compositions, Douglas Kahn (1997) refers to Cage’s famous *4’33”* (1952), an entirely silent piece. Kahn suggests that the silence is not only the result of the absence of sound, but also due to the specific silencing of the performer. The silence asks the audience “to be obedient listeners” (Kahn, 1997: 560). The question of whether *Florentina* is silenced by Diaz is an interesting one, and it is not entirely clear. Nevertheless, Diaz’s use of absolute silence can indeed ask the audience to keep listening in anticipation of audible signs to appear. Yet, crucially, as the viewer acts mainly as listener, as mentioned earlier, the absence of sound deprives the audience of the main sensory information, and renders him or her as disorientated and helpless as *Florentina*.

Diaz makes use of sensory deprivation such as absolute silence throughout the film, which renders *Florentina* a unique example of his approach to transmitting post-trauma to the viewer. While it appears common to associate

deprivation with an absence of something, it is, according to the study of Volcler, a more varied method, affected by “neutralizing the senses [through absolute silence] or ... by bombarding them” (Volcler, 2013: 66). As I will demonstrate throughout the following section, Diaz switches between these two modes of sensory deprivation throughout the film, and therefore creates a feeling of traumatic rupture and shock for the viewer.

I want to begin with a study of the use of absolute silence, which is prevalent in scenes that link Florentina and the Giants, as is the case in a scene towards the end of the film in which Florentina dances with one of the Giants near her home. The Giants are gigantic paper-mâché dolls, which are the main attraction during the Higantes Festival, an annual celebration on 23 November in Angono, Rizal, near Manila, which has its roots in times of Spanish colonisation (Fig 38).



**Figure 37 Higantes Festival, Rizal.**

*Florentina Hubaldo, CTE - Lav Diaz (2012)*

Florentina's imagining or remembering the Giants marks a past event. Angono is close to Antipolo where Florentina was born (as recounted in her monologue). It is, however, remote from Bicol to where she has moved with her parents and her grandfather. This indicates that all scenes that show interactions between the Giants and Florentina are dreams or hallucinations. It is telling that Florentina confides to her grandfather at the beginning of the film that the Giants have returned and that she sees them in her dreams. It is worth noting here that her grandfather denies the existence of the Giants, questioning Florentina's escape measures and neglecting the progression of the physical brain trauma, which leads to her hallucinations.

Despite this, however, Florentina appears to find refuge in the Giants, because "[trauma]", Hinderk M. Emrich writes, "destroys the normal coherence, the rules of parallelism, after which a person is rendered helpless and requires saving, i.e. salvation – concreteness within one's surrounding" (Emrich, 2014: 182). At the end of the film, she recounts that she is always with the Giants, especially in her dreams. She adds that they keep returning and that they often dance together. In interview, Diaz explains his decision of including the Gigantes parade: "I integrated it [the Giants] with the idea of finding a God to save you, finding somebody to redeem you from all this torture" (Diaz, 2014a). This is significant in that hallucinations take on a role that differs from those in *Melancholia* (terror/mourning) and *Encantos* (trauma/guilt). Florentina's hallucination, on the other hand, works on a trauma-saviour axis. Triggered by the physical trauma of CTE, her hallucinations become a point of refuge for her, allowing her temporary escape from reality.

In addition to being part of dream images, the Giants are seemingly also

part of hallucinations, which arise from her mental decline. In several scenes, as exemplified in Figure 39, Florentina interrupts her actions because she appears to see something. Just as we could detect a ‘regard cinéma’ in Fig 33, Fig 39 is another example of Diaz’s use of this specific shot, in which a character looks directly at the camera. In *Florentina*, Diaz returns to this shot time and again, thereby “[destabilising] the boundaries between on-screen and off-screen space, representation and reality, image and viewer” (Saxton, 2008: 108), while simultaneously “implicating us inescapably in the production of meaning” (Saxton, 2008: 109). In its direct address to the audience, the ‘regard cinéma’ destroys cinema’s fourth wall and demands the viewer to take responsibility for what s/he sees.

Diaz does not make use of eye-line matches in this scene. In other words, he refrains from showing what exactly Florentina sees. Nonetheless, her position and behaviour allow for speculation.



**Figure 38** A scene of absolute silence; Florentina holds her hands out for an invisible object or subject.

*Florentina Hubaldo, CTE - Lav Diaz (2012)*



Scenes such as those shown in Figure 39 are often altered with images of the Gigantes parade. Handheld shots show children looking up to the Giants and trying to grab their huge hands. It is a game, because the Giants' sleeves are empty so that the arms move freely as they dance around. This creates a challenging game for children, who attempt to catch a Giant's hand. Florentina, too, looks up to something or someone. Her gaze resembles that of the daughter in Tarr's *The Turin Horse*, who sits motionless at the window and whose "longing gaze ... ends in emptiness" (Hetzenauer, 2013: 63). She holds out her hands as though she tries to grab something. Her facial expression is one of happiness. She repeatedly dances around just as the Giants themselves do. Her behaviour – though evidently trance-like – is that of a child's at the Gigantes parade. Her trance-like movements are reminiscent of a rape victim portrayed in Lu Chuan's depiction of the Rape of Nanking in his film *City of Life and Death* (2009). In one scene, a woman, after having been subjected to repeated rapes by Japanese soldiers, moves and behaves inconclusively until she is shot. She appears to hallucinate and has lost her sanity. The physical and mental traumata have been destructive to her brain since the beginning of the mass rape. Her trance-like movements, resembling strongly those of Florentina, are an indication for her growing insanity and for her cessation of life and self.

Discussing the significance of sound in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, Stefan Smith concludes that the absence of sound, which he further refines as the presence of minimal sounds, creates an "unsettling, otherworldly feel" (Smith, 2007: 46). In addition to that, silence acts here as an auditory illustration of "the weight of the trauma's effect" (Maseda, 2014: 54). Indeed, in *Florentina*, the sudden switch from sound to absolute silence disorients the viewer as sound

functions as temporalisation and as unification of images (Chion, 1994: 13-14, 47). In Chion's words, "Synchronous sound (of voices, footsteps, or ambient sound) would henceforth entail the precise and irreversible registering of time, time that is numbered, weighed, and divided" (Chion, 2009: 263). Silence thus disrupts temporality, as is the case in trauma, which equally disrupts temporality and a linear narrative of the self thereby causing the self to move within a temporal loop.

Damian Sutton suggests that the absence of sound, which would infer temporality to an image, changes the meaning of time. It is "simply duration: as long or as short an impression of being as it needs to be" (Sutton, 2009: 33-34). Time in the form of long duration reinforces the scene as an example of Florentina's trance-like state, which is not governed by temporal markers. Silence slows down time because it is sound which is perceived quicker than the image as the former travels through time and the latter through space (Hezekiah, 2010: 25). The absence of sound evades therefore the temporal structure induced in the image, and the viewer is left with a slower reading of it. Furthermore, absolute silence also underlines the universality of the image mentioned earlier, stressing that the events shown are not connected to a specific time.

Confronted with a disrupted temporality, linearity and unity, the viewer is left in a position similar to that of the on-screen character. Florentina appears disoriented and in a trance-like state. She is abandoned and has no means of protection. Similarly, there are no reference points for the viewer. Accordingly, Chion contends that "every instance of silence is disarming" (Chion, 2009: 148) for the viewer. Chion refers specifically to our hearing here, but it also refers to the absence of reference points for the viewer, who becomes disoriented as a result of it. In similar ways, Andrea Truppin (1992) suggests that the use of off-screen and

at times ambiguous sounds generates an environment of uncertainty for the viewer, with which he or she has to struggle. She suggests that “These efforts by the audience represent internal struggles akin to those experienced by the films’ characters” (Truppin, 1992: 235). This resonates with Diaz’s attempt to make the viewer struggle. He clarifies in an interview, “I want them [the audience] to struggle also” (Carpio, 2010a), making explicit his intention to use specific aesthetics in order to create an unnerving and burdensome atmosphere for the viewer so as to make him/her sense the situation his characters are in.

Chion’s argument intimates that silence disorientates the viewer, which we can link at this point to terror and psychological torture Diaz positions his character and his viewer in. In his treatise *The Survivor* (1976), Terrence Des Pres argues that “silence ... is a consequence of terror, of a dissolution of self and world that, once known, can never be fully dispelled” (Des Pres, 1976: 36). Terror therefore silences, temporarily or permanently, the victim. We have come across this phenomenon in Chapter 4 and its study of the resistance fighters’ oppressive silence in the face of certain death. Diaz’s use of absolute silence in the context of Florentina’s post-trauma can be read as a consequence of the event she goes through. This sensory disorientation as a result of the absence of sound is also mentioned in Almerindo E. Ojeda’s description of psychological torture (Ojeda, 2008: xiii). It is therefore evident that Diaz continues to pursue a psychologically stressful aesthetic for the viewer so as to mirror his protagonist’s ordeal; a practice I have described in my analyses of *Encantos* and *Melancholia*, but which is most visible in the latter.

In an interview, Diaz gives an insight as to why absolute silence plays such a significant role in his film. Aside from Chan’s suggestion that silence “will make

[everything] louder, and more disturbing” (Chan, 2007), Diaz explains:

I realised that silence for traumatised people is not really silence. It’s more traumatic. There is this echoing thing. ... Total silence is terrifying. ... You cannot explain that kind of noise. It’s evil. Terrible, really. I’m trying to construct this feeling. Cut the noise and there is just movement, and there is actually a strange noise from within. ... maybe the banging of the heartbeat, or the pulse. It’s terrible. Horrifying. (Diaz, 2014a)

Diaz alters scenes of absolute silence and scenes of sound three times in the film. Two of these alterations have a direct connection to the Higantes festival, which acts as a narrative counterpoint to the traumatising life Florentina endures. A spectacle in particular for children, the parade of the paper-maché dolls and people accompanying them with brass instruments creates a sense of what I call acoustic stress. The volume of sound appears not only higher in contrast to the absolute silence that preceded it. It is also much higher than the sound volume throughout the rest of the film.<sup>37</sup> The sound of the parade, on the other hand, appears artificially, and deliberately, heightened for the purpose of rupture.<sup>38</sup> They function as shock moments, and as attacks on our auditory senses through sensory deprivation. Similar to repeated attacks on Florentina’s body and mind, the viewer is once more forced to endure a similar ordeal, being confronted with repeated incursions of his or her sensitivities. Confusing for the viewer, acoustic stress occurs mainly in alleged scenes of joy, which is indicated by the children, who repeatedly try to grab the hands of the massive dolls in order to walk alongside them.

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<sup>37</sup> In some cases, it even needs a manual increase of volume with the remote control in order to hear ambient sounds.

<sup>38</sup> A closer study of the film in Final Cut Pro Studio, which allowed me to study the sound more closely as it registers the sound waves recorded in each scene, reveals that Diaz has indeed cut the sound entirely in scenes of absolute silence. There is no indication of his having turned down the volume. The sound was evidently cut. Likewise, in scenes of what I call “acoustic stress” the volume bar moves straight into the red region, which indicates that the sound is much louder than normally accepted.

In contrast, scenes of absolute silence often succeed scenes of acoustic stress. Half an hour into the film, Florentina takes care of the goats in the family's backyard. She puts the goats into a small shed, and then turns around to face the viewer. Her eyes seem to follow something, and a cut discloses that she is imagining two Giants in front of her garden. There is a discrepancy between image and sound as the latter contains children's voices and the sound of instruments. They are, however, absent from the image. This scene is followed by absolute silence; a close up of a hand, which tries to grab a Giant's hand. Contrary to expectations the soundtrack has raised, it is not a child's hand we see in this medium close-up. Rather, it is Florentina's hand. In a handheld shot, we see Florentina's hand attempting several times to hold one of the Giants' hands, but she fails repeatedly. Her failure is juxtaposed with a scene of intense noise of heavy rain pouring down on her, a metaphor for psychological disintegration, which we encountered in the character of Julian in *Melancholia*. The use of acoustic stress not only wakes Florentina from her dream or her hallucination, it is also a reminder for the viewer that scenes of absolute silence do not belong to the realm of the real. Drenched by heavy rain, Florentina stands in the woods and she stares into nothingness.

### **Death time and time terror**

The juxtaposition of absolute silence and acoustic stress bears resemblances of the concentrationary universe, which I introduced in Chapter 1. As noted earlier, the concentrationary system aimed at prisoners' slow death as a result of a persistent infliction of miseries. We can see a similar portrayal of the treatment of Florentina at the hand of her father and the men she is sold to. Diaz's play with sound is

emblematic for what I call 'time terror', and I would like to go into a bit more detail at this point before I continue with a reading of the film with regards to Florentina's split of personality.

Analysing the concentration camp system, Wolfgang Sofsky speaks of the presence of an "endless duration that was constantly interrupted by sudden attacks and incursions. In this world of terror, a single day was longer than a week" (Sofsky, 1997: 24). If Sofsky notes here a shattered time-consciousness for the camp inmates, Viktor E. Frankl speaks of "deformed time": "a small time unit, a day, for example, filled with hourly tortures and fatigue, appeared endless" (Frankl, 2004: 57). Time begins to stretch, a characteristic similar to that of a traumatic event, which survivors often describe as a slow-motion effect (Arstila, 2012).

Sofsky returns repeatedly to the fact that the most pressing aim in concentration camps was not to kill the prisoners immediately. The routine was a persistent infliction of miseries, a long chain of traumatic events. Sofsky argues that this pursuit of gradual destruction of the human being "allowed death time" (Sofsky, 1997: 25). For the purpose of my research, I consider Sofsky's foray as a self-contained term, because it makes for an intriguing factor in the analysis of slow films. These films have often been discussed in the context of *temps mort*, or dead time (Flanagan, 2008; Kovács, 2013; Çağlayan, 2014). At the end of an action, the camera often remains focused on an empty frame before the director cuts to a new scene. More than any other slow-film director, however, Diaz employs what I call death time more than dead time in his films. In doing so, he highlights the use and effects of terror on society. In this respect, another argument of Sofsky is of importance here. He writes that "the temporal law of terror combines cyclical

recurrence with endless duration and suddenness or abruptness” (Sofsky, 1997: 74). As in post-trauma, the concentrationary shares the characteristics of circularity and abruptness. The combination of slowness and the shock of speed is illustrative of what Sofsky’s calls “camp time”. He writes, “absolute power [in the camps] is not subject to time. Rather, it manipulates time by expansion and acceleration, sudden incursions and attacks, and *the torment of duration*” (Sofsky, 1997: 81, emphasis added).

In principle, Sofsky’s “camp time” and the kind of temporality Diaz creates in his films, especially in *Florentina*, are an example of what I call ‘time terror’: seemingly endless long takes in which little happens juxtaposed with sudden scenes that invoke shock. Time terror is, I suggest, different from suspense that is often discussed in regards to the thriller genre. The decisive characteristic of suspense is that the viewer does not know what happens next. There is thus room for surprise. In slow films, including those of Diaz, on the other hand, what happens to the characters is often already known, so that it is not a question of what but of when it happens (Totaro, 2002). More than in any other film, Diaz uses sonic rupture in *Florentina* in order to transmit the feeling of time terror to the viewer. The persistent alteration between acoustic stress and absolute silence reinforces the concept of the concentrationary: a disorientation of the victim through the continuous shift in temporality, initiated by endless duration and moments of shock.

### **Personality split and the loss of childhood**

Analysing the aesthetics of the New Iranian Cinema, Shohini Chaudhuri and Howard Finn argue that the post-war locations used in Italian neo-realist films

have created a new type of film character: a character who “tends to see rather than act” (Chaudhuri and Finn, 1994: 169). This goes back to Deleuze’s notion that cinema in the era of what he termed the time-image is “a cinema of the seer and no longer of the agent” (Deleuze, 2005: 2). This implies that the character is passive rather than active, and echoes previous arguments on aspects of character agency in Chapter 4 and 5. This is also visible in Diaz’s film on chronic trauma. Florentina, for instance, has little control of her situation. When she wants to gain control of her plight, for example through escape attempts, she is subjected to violence at the hand of her father, which pushes her into a passive position. A character as a mere observer is thus an indication of his or her incapacity to control what he or she is subjected to. It is also an indication of a loss of agency. Particularly in the context of trauma, the aspect of observation has a significant meaning. It implies a sense of disembodiment for the character, who observes situations with distance and detachment so as to minimise the impact of the traumatic events. This is a common means in trauma survivors, especially in rape victims. Van der Kolk describes this dissociation as “a split between an ‘observing self’ and the ‘experiencing self’” (Van der Kolk in de Bruyn, 2014: 94). The split of the self allows the survivor to detach him/herself from the experience. Elie A. Cohen, for instance, survivor of Auschwitz concentration camp, describes a similar phenomenon in his study of the psychology of concentration camp prisoners. He calls this process of disembodiment “acute depersonalization” (Cohen, 1988: 116). Quoting R. Le Coultre for a deeper insight into the issue, Cohen adds that acute depersonalization is characterised by “an estrangement from one’s ego, an estrangement from one’s own body, and an estrangement from the surrounding world” (Cohen, 1988: 116). This becomes more evident in the description of Bruno



Bettelheim, also a survivor of Dachau and Buchenwald concentration camps. Bettelheim speaks about “a split in his person into one *who observes and one to whom things happen*” (Bettelheim in Cohen, 1988: 117, emphasis added). Here, Bettelheim makes explicit reference to the idea of traumatic events as triggering a disembodiment in the victim-survivor. Paul Marcus describes this form of detachment as “occurring in the initial period of collapse” (Marcus, 1999: 96). Marcus’ assertion suggests that Florentina’s estrangement from her body is a sign of her continuing mental collapse, and her psychological breakdown.

Returning to the juxtaposition of sound and silence in relation to Florentina and the Giants, the sudden rupture in the soundtrack that follows scenes of acoustic stress not only acts as a literal loss of sound. It refers simultaneously to a much deeper and more symbolic loss: Florentina’s loss of childhood, which is implied in the alteration of scenes of joyous children and Florentina’s lonely and trance-like walks at night through the streets of an unnamed city. It is also underlined in scenes in which we see Florentina’s hand failing at grabbing a Giant’s hand. This symbolises more than the child’s game I briefly discussed earlier. Before she loses consciousness at the end of the film, Florentina reveals that “The Giants keep on returning. I asked for their help. I hope they come back. Those Giants. I hope they come back. Because they will help me. They will help me.” It is suggested that being able to hold a Giant’s hand, as all the children do, would generate a feeling of security for Florentina. It would provide relief from suffering and a sense of hope.

The juxtaposition of sound and silence is less abrupt towards the end of the film. Diaz gradually reduces the acoustic stress, and instead alternates silent scenes with those that contain peaceful ambient sound. This is the case, for

instance, after Florentina escapes from her father's house and seeks a hiding place in the woods. These scenes are intercut with silent images of dancing Giants. Rather than employing yet more rupture, Diaz shifts between silence and ambient sounds of birds and wind in the trees. His technique of minimising aesthetic rupture foreshadows Florentina's gradual loss of sensorial reception, which is a symptom of her failing brain functions.

As can be detected from my analysis above, silence in Diaz's film appears to be an indicator for Florentina's loss of childhood. Yet, in fact, he alters the meaning of silence throughout the film. The absence of sound can function as a metaphor for the *loss* of childhood and innocence, yet in other scenes silence implies the reverse.

After Florentina discloses some of the horrors inflicted upon her, for the first time in the film, a straight cut brings us to the woods, in which a small girl, supposedly Florentina, jumps around as though playing. Indeed, later in the film she recalls that "we [the Giants and Florentina] are always playing. We play hide and seek in the forest. We run around the rocks. We frolic under the stars. We dance." Her child's play in the forest amidst absolute silence underlines aspects of peace and innocence. The forest thus plays an essential role in the creation of a feeling of innocence and peace. But as practised in *Melancholia*, analysed in Chapter 4, Diaz's portrait of the forest is, in fact, twofold.

In her analysis of *The Child in Film*, Karen Lury (2012) makes reference to Jack Zipes' work on fairytales, who describes the function of forests as such: "The forest is always large, immense, great and mysterious. No one ever gains power over the forest, but the forest possesses the power to change lives and alters destinies" (Zipes in Lury, 2010: 125). The forest as a place of refuge is a repeated

motif in *Florentina Hubaldo*. It is established as such at the beginning of the film, when Florentina flees from the hands of a man, who wants to buy sex from her. She escapes into the forest and waits for her grandfather. Later in the film, when she makes an attempt to run away from her father, she hides in the forest again. She tries to find a hiding place behind bushes and trees, and is then seen crouched at the right hand side of the frame. A little later, she lays on a rock as though resting (Fig 40). These scenes are accompanied by peaceful ambient sounds, which emphasise Florentina's feeling of safety.



**Figure 39 Florentina seeks shelter in the forest.**

*Florentina Hubaldo, CTE - Lav Diaz (2012)*

Nevertheless, the forest is only a place of assumed safety, as Florentina's bright dress, which marks her out distinctively, indicates. Florentina is caught by her father, dragged home on a leash, and chained to her bed. She also discloses that "Mother and I always hide in the forest. We crawl on the ground ... but father saw us, and caught up on mother. He tied up mother." Hence, on the one hand, the

forest is an idyllic place of peace for Florentina, in which she repeatedly seeks refuge and seemingly plays with the Giants, who give her a sense of joy and childish innocence. On the other hand, the forest fails to protect Florentina and causes her, her mother and her grandfather harm. Her mother is beaten to death following her escape to the forest. Her grandfather, too, is beaten. Thus, the forest is merely a fairy tale escape, which, in reality, aggravates Florentina's suffering.

### **Rape trauma as metaphor**

Florentina's repeated rapes are primarily a result of poverty, as Diaz himself explained. Read in this way, Florentina is treated in a similar way women had been during centuries of slavery, which Gayl Jones depicts in her novel *Corregidora* (1975). Elizabeth Goldberg refers to Jones' description of female genitalia as a "gold piece" (Goldberg, 2007: 136), which establishes an unmistakable link between forced prostitution under slavery and the connected profit that had been generated with it. In Diaz's film, too, Florentina is no more than an economic object, maltreated but kept alive for the sake of generating an income for her father. Yet, this is only one way of reading the film, and Diaz has incorporated a historical pointer in *Florentina*.

Dominique Russell states that "the reasons [for on-screen rape] are multiple: rape serves as a metaphor, symbol, plot device, for character transformation, catalyst or narrative resolution" (Russell, 2010: 4). In Diaz's *Florentina*, I suggest, the repeated rapes and the resulting physical and mental traumas function primarily as a metaphor for Philippine colonial history.

Ann Wolbert Burgess and Lynda Lytle Holmstrom argue that "the contemporary view of rape sees it as an act of violence expressing power,

aggression, conquest, degradation, anger, hatred, and contempt” (Wolbert Burgess and Lytle Holmstrom, 1985: 49). The same terms appear in Loomba’s contextualisation of colonialism. She asserts that colonialism “can be defined as the conquest and control of other people’s lands and goods” (Loomba, 1998: 2). Even though she is linking it first and foremost to territory and goods, this applies equally to colonised subjects, the native, or the deviant “other”. Referring to arguments by Robin May Schott, Maseda further points out that “during wartime, rape, historically, has been one of the tools used to undermine the enemy, demoralizing them by showing that they are incapable of protecting their families (Maseda, 2014: 5). Further, she suggests that rape functions as a means of degradation, humiliation and torture of the enemy (Maseda, 2014: 5). Connecting the execution of power, aggression and conquest, on the one hand, and the loss of autonomy and control on the other, a similarity between rape and colonialism becomes apparent. Indeed, the term ‘rape’ has been used metaphorically in the past for descriptions of particularly brutal conquests and occupations before and during World War Two. The Rape of Nanking and The Rape of Austria are only two examples.<sup>39</sup>

As indicated in the introduction to this thesis, the Philippines have had a long history of colonialism, beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the conquest by the Spanish Empire. Over the course of four hundred years, the country had been colonised and the people oppressed by Spanish (1521-1898), British (1762-1764), American (1898-1946) and Japanese (1941-1945) troops until they gained

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<sup>39</sup> The Rape of Nanking has, in fact, a double-edged meaning. When the Japanese Imperial Army occupied the then capital of China, Nanking, in 1937, it was not only the city that was raided. Chinese women had been raped regularly in exchange for coal and food during the cold winter months (cf. Chang, 1997). The Rape of Austria refers to the annexation of Austria to Germany in 1938 (cf. Brook-Shepherd, 1963).

independence in 1946. Local culture had been widely suppressed (Zaide, 1956) or even completely destroyed (Tofighian, 2006). People had been exploited through forced labour (Benitez, 1954), while their rights, such as freedom of speech, had been greatly reduced (Zaide, 1956). In this ever-changing environment, people had to comply with the colonisers' implementation of law and order, and those who rejected the foreign authorities were tortured or executed (Zaide, 1956). Similarities of this procedure can be found in Diaz's film. Florentina is repeatedly subjected to the power and exploitation of men. The abuse she endures calls her position in society into question, as she is rendered inferior to her perpetrators. Her freedom is taken away, at times literally with the help of chains. When she speaks up or tries to escape, she is punished with severe violence.

In her last, painstakingly long monologue, Florentina reveals more details of her ordeal: "He [my father] was very cruel. He's always drunk. He beats me up. He slams my head to the wall. Hard. He pushes me. He always hits me. Slaps me." She reveals an accumulation of traumatic stressors that Diaz has taken from his country's colonial history. Like the child actors in Spanish films such as *Spirit of the Beehive/El espíritu de la colmena* (Victor Erice, 1973) analysed in Lury's book, then, Florentina acts "as a metonym for wider suffering" (Lury, 2010: 107), her body symbolising "the conquered land" (Loomba, 1998: 152), which had been a common view during the colonial period (Loomba, 1998: 152). In Korean cinema, too, as Kim Kyung Hyum argues, "one of the dominant tendencies ... is to provide allegories of the nation through the figurations of tragic women" (Hyum, 2002: 105). This emphasis on the portrayal of female suffering acts against what Maseda has called "grand narratives of war and victories" which depict the often heroic struggle of men, but which "[fail] to acknowledge the effects of those events on

women and children's lives" (Maseda, 2014: 50). In putting a woman at the centre of his work, Diaz challenges male-driven war and trauma films and illuminates the suffering of women that is most often depicted in popular war and trauma films as a passive endurance of trauma. This means that women are often cast in the role of the soldier's wife, whose peaceful life is challenged when her husband returns from war unable to adapt to normal life.

*Florentina Hubaldo* is Diaz's most explicit treatment of post-trauma yet. The film can be considered a comment on the maltreatment of Philippine citizens throughout colonial history. In this way, Diaz joins the ranks of filmmakers such as Pier Paolo Pasolini and Jean-Luc Godard, who, as Russell suggests, have used rape in their films in order "to comment on political power" (Russell, 2010: 5). Instead of commenting exclusively on abuses that occurred at the hands of colonisers, however, the exploitation of *Florentina* is double-edged and suggests an additional, less foregrounded perpetrator.

In her study of the effects of colonialism in several different areas of the world, Loomba refers to a curious effect of colonialism, which can be seen in the film. She argues that white European colonisers disempowered native men because native women were regarded as desiring white colonisers. Native men thus became "more tyrannical at home. They seized upon the home and the woman as emblems of their culture and nationality" (Loomba, 1998: 168). Contrary to other Philippine film, such as *Three Godless Years*, mentioned in Chapter 3, which centres around the rape of a female protagonist by foreign soldiers, it is the native man, the father, in *Florentina*, who acts out the oppression, power and aggression towards her. The film thus offers and explores multiple layers of effects of colonisation and its traumatic legacy. Its metaphorical take on

rape suggests tyranny initiated by colonisers and natives alike.

## **Conclusion**

The rape of Florentina serves as a metaphor for the rape of the Philippines, which occurred throughout four centuries of colonialism. It adds a new dimension to Diaz's post-trauma cinema; that of sound. Florentina's repeated attempts at remembering and at expressing the atrocities committed lock Florentina in a narrative loop that has been caused by the succession of traumatic events and her mind's incapability of processing the events. The particular length of Diaz's work supports the idea of a slow onslaught of traumatic after-effects in the wake of an individual's attempt to survive. Although his alternation of sound and silence, and the play with off-screen and on-screen sound and image and the connected points of identification for the viewer are unique to this film, the thematic exploration of rape in the context of colonialism is not a new endeavour in Philippine cinema. Rather, directors such as Raya Martin and Mario O'Hara have contributed to a body of works, which is dedicated to cinematic depictions of colonial execution of power and of native resistance. Violence tends to be alluded to through the use of off-screen sound or through suggestive dialogues, but it is not shown on screen. The colonisers, too, have only scarce off-screen appearances. The emphasis is on their invisible, yet felt presence.

*Florentina* is the most expressive form of Diaz's "aesthetic of absence", in which he transmits scenes of violence exclusively through sound. The juxtaposition of sound and absolute silence is a specific aspect of post-trauma he wanted to convey in order to demonstrate the terrifying alterations in an individual's perception in the aftermath of a traumatic event. As mentioned



throughout this chapter, the viewer cannot act as a witness as the camera denies him or her access to the event. The repeated off-screen sounds of rape render the viewer a listener; not only to Florentina's monologues, but also to the traumatic events she endures. According to Guerin and Hallas, "the listener assumes responsibility to perpetuate the imperative to bear witness to the historical trauma for the sake of collective memory" (Guerin and Hallas, 2007: 11). This suggests that Diaz positions the viewer in such a way as to support remembering and counter forgetting in an attempt to retain the self of the nation. *Florentina* is a film which, as Elm, Köhne and Kabalek argue in relation to cinema in general, "makes the spectator forget the forgetting" (Elm, Köhne and Kabalek, 2014: 11).

Florentina's repeated attempts to tell the story of her traumatised self is a unique element in Diaz's filmmaking and has so far not re-surfaced. He stresses the importance of a narrative for the survival of the individual and his country's society. A recurring factor, however, is that of the forest as a trap rather than as a place for refuge. In Chapter 4, I described how Diaz's depiction of the forest challenges that of the enchanted forest in fairy tales, which enables positive transformation of the characters. Diaz portrays the forest as a dangerous trap, which lures his characters in in the hope of safety and refuge, but which aggravates their suffering despite their hopes. Focusing on memory lapses, persistent narrative loops, auditory distortions and the gradual disintegration of Florentina, the film is a sharp representation of the director's development of his aesthetics of post-trauma.

## 7. Conclusion: Diaz's (slow) post-trauma cinema

If representing the government's suppression and persecution in film and fiction is intended to commemorate and to remember, what is gained beyond 'knowing' what happened? (Lin, 2007: 8)

Time and again, Diaz picks up themes of power and aggression, and the absence of autonomy for the individual. In several interviews, as well as in the Q&A after the screening of the film at the Edinburgh International Film Festival in 2012, Diaz stated that his filmmaking was a way of dealing with the history of his country (Ramani, 2007; Guarneri, 2013; Kenji, 2013). His films explore the themes of colonialism and dictatorship, and their traumatic effects on contemporary Philippine society.

My investigation of Diaz's films suggests that films on (post-)trauma are not only a means to commemorate and remember. More important in the context of Diaz is the suggestion that film may be a therapeutic means of working through trauma. What is gained is therefore not only knowledge about what happened; rather, it is an attempt to escape the cyclical loop of events the victim-survivor is forced to endure. In this way, film is a personal work that aims less at teaching and entertaining an audience, and is instead an intimate portrait of personal and individual pain that seeks release through the means of film. Diaz's repeated return to similar themes of trauma represents "a compulsion to repeat" (Hodgkins, 2009: 50), a major characteristic of post-trauma, and with that he is merely one of several directors, whose films are intimate but cyclical portraits. Cambodian director Rithy Panh, whose work equally beckons a thorough investigation in the light of the Khmer Rouge genocide in the 1970s, and his films *The Missing Picture*,

*S-21 – The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2003) and *Duch, Master of the Forges of Hell* (2011) is the most outstanding example in this context. Rithy's filmography is as extensive as Diaz's, yet there are decisive difference between the two directors which would allow for an in-depth analysis of how the two directors differ in their approach to (post-) trauma. Even though some of his films, as we have seen in Chapter 5, are situated between fact and fiction, Diaz tends to tell stories of (post-) trauma through fiction while at the same time referring to particular dates and names, which have their roots in real life. His documentary about the death of film critic Alexis Tioseco, *An investigation into a night we won't forget* (2009), is perhaps the clearest diversion of his usual approach.

Rithy approaches the traumatic events in Cambodia in a different way. His films are situated more directly in the realm of documentary. He speaks to survivors and perpetrators, so that his films have a testimonial nature to them, which is the case only in Diaz's *Florentina Hubaldo, CTE*, analysed in Chapter 6. Nevertheless, across his large body of work it is apparent that Rithy, too, obsessively returns to the traumatic history of his country, and the trauma he has personally endured. He is a filmmaker whose repeated narrative focus on the Khmer Rouge genocide is symptomatic for a post-traumatic paralytic state re-enacted on screen.

There has been a surge of trauma films directly related to the war and the soldiers' suffering from their experience once they return home after America's War on Terror in Afghanistan and Iraq. Diaz's post-trauma films show a different war, a war *with* and *of* terror. His films portray characters that are not active in the making of post-trauma, they are instead on the other side of oppressive forces, with post-trauma forced upon them. His films are not a representation of post-

trauma as a result of what a character did or saw. The films depict post-trauma as a result of what a character has been subjected to. It is a trauma of the passive victim. Judith Herman contends that “[trauma] is an affliction of the powerless. At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force ... Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary system of care that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning” (Herman in Yosef, 2011: 139). This lack of power, which Herman highlights, is particularly evident in the works of Lav Diaz, who makes an intervention here in popular Trauma Cinema. All of his protagonists are powerless in the face of what is happening to them. Especially Florentina Hubaldo, analysed in Chapter 6, is an example of the lack of control a traumatic event triggers.

Diaz’s films about the effects of post-trauma on the individual and on society challenge current notions of Trauma Cinema and its scholarship. Although he engages with themes similar to those addressed in popular Trauma Cinema, such as the seeping of the past into the present, thereby creating a temporal disorientation for the survivor, visual and auditory distortions as a result of severe anxiety, or the need to tell in order to gain control of intrusive memories, Diaz uses an aesthetic of long duration and absence for the representation of post-trauma. He therefore answers Michael S. Roth’s “demand [for] new aesthetic forms” (Roth, 2012: 93), which Roth called for after a succession of traumatic events throughout the twentieth century. As I hope to have shown in my work, Diaz reworks the existing form of Trauma Cinema, applying it to his culture and his own traumatic experiences. His form of post-trauma cinema, as I have called it, focuses on trauma as condition rather than as an event. Through the means of duration in particular, but also through a specific use of *mise-en-scène* and sound, Diaz’s post-trauma

cinema comprises symptomatic characteristics which are largely neglected in contemporary Trauma Cinema and which only the director's specific aesthetics can give rise to: trauma's latency period and its slow onslaught, the gradual loss of agency for the traumatised individual, a prolonged struggle with anxiety, social withdrawal and paranoia, and a persistent fear of death.

Diaz's approach to the representation of post-trauma differs in many ways from contemporary Trauma Cinema, because of a complex engagement with time as well as an insertion of his own personal experience into his films. Kundera considers slowness and memory as dependent on one another. In his novel *Slowness* (1995), he writes

there is a secret bond between slowness and memory, speed and forgetting. ... In existential mathematics, that experience takes the form of two basic equations: the degree of slowness is directly proportional to the intensity of memory; the degree of speed is directly proportional to the intensity of forgetting. (Kundera, 1995: 34-35)

Lutz Koepnick, writing on slowness in contemporary art, notes a similar reference to memory and slowness. In the 1910s and 1920s - the high time of Futurism, which advocated speed - slowness was regarded as a "stagnant present" (Koepnick, 2014: 22). Nevertheless, as Koepnick argues, slowness "aims at expanding the space of the present ... to experience this present as a complex relay station of competing memories and anticipations, of stories-to-be-remembered and stories-not-yet-told" (Koepnick, 2014: 36). It is therefore slowness, or, I would suggest, long duration, which is linked to a study of the past and its memories, and this is precisely where Diaz's cinema positions itself.

What is evident throughout the films under investigation is that Diaz stresses the aspect of terror that comes with trauma; terror through expected

death, through anxiety, and terror through intrusive memories. This form of terror, which is caused by trauma, is transmitted aesthetically via the use of slow time, or 'death time' as I called it in Chapter 6. I have argued that Slow Cinema's *temps mort*, or 'dead time', takes on the notion of death time in Diaz's films, indicating the perpetual terror his characters are exposed to. Terror creates uncertainty, anxiety and paranoia, visible in all films under analysis here, and strips the characters of their natural perception of time. Time is no longer healing already inflicted wounds, but is deepening them instead. Duration becomes an expression of power, which restricts victims in their ability to overcome a traumatic event. The exceptional length of Diaz's films supports his in-depth exploration of both the slow onslaught and the slow but gradual development of post-trauma in the individual. This is particularly visible in his six-hour film *Florentina Hubaldo, CTE*, which portrays a young woman's struggle with both mental and physical trauma (CTE). These traumas create a complex notion of the metaphor of conquest and oppression throughout Spanish and American colonialism, but also of Marcos' dictatorship that followed it. Paul Virilio once suggested that occupation is never only aimed at the body or the territory of the occupied, but also at his/her mind (Virilio, 2012: 14). In *Florentina*, Diaz shows the combined effect of oppression and violence on body and mind.

The extended duration with which Diaz portrays the suffering of his characters is reminiscent of the perception and uses of time in the concentrationary universe, which David Rousset describes in his book of the same name. The concentrationary uses duration rather than instantaneity in order to inflict the most severe punishment on its victims, rendering death a preferable outcome for victims. In their study of Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog/Nuit et*

*Brouillard* (1955), which could not be more different from Diaz's films, Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman reach conclusions which are applicable to Diaz's films in one significant aspect, namely that directors of concentrationary cinema create a form of cinema which "connects the living to the dead, past to present, here to there ... a cinema of haunting, 'in-betweens' and warnings..." (Pollock and Silverman, 2011: 2). Diaz's repeated return to themes of haunting serves as an example here. Furthermore, it suggests that his merging of past and present is indicative of concentrationary cinema.

What became evident throughout this thesis was the portrayal of characters who barely cling to life, and who suffer as a result of external forces. Death looms over them, but instead of granting them this relief, Diaz traces their sufferings over long periods of time. He describes this as being characteristic of "the state of the Filipino. We're almost dead. We cling to life. Politically, we're almost dead. Economically, we're almost dead. It's a metaphor for everything that we are" (Diaz, 2014a). Diaz's characters have lost agency over their lives. Trauma's force leads to the victim's loss of agency (Lloyd, 2000: 214), rendering him/her a mere passive spectator of life. This has a particular resonance with the concentrationary universe, whose aim it was to trigger a psychological disintegration in victims and thereby suppressing the victim's agency. The victim as a passive spectator is common in the films under analysis. I argued in Chapter 5 that Hamin's agency is suppressed by his torturer's persistent death threats and intimidations. Hamin's awareness of his consistent observation by extra-governmental forces gives him little room to navigate, if at all, between death threats as a consequence of certain behaviour of his. If he took over agency and began to write poetry again he would die. In Chapter 4, I argued similarly. Yet, the

context is different in that those left behind by the desaparecidos live in a state of paralysis, fear and terror, being aware that they, too, could be abducted for actions that are critical of the government. This persistent awareness locks survivors into a passive state in which an external force sets the boundaries which they must not cross. In Chapter 6, I addressed Florentina's loss of agency, her being reduced to 'a mere thing', a characteristic of the concentrationary system (Pollock and Silverman, 2014: 17). The brutal treatment at the hand of her father positions her in a submissive state with little physical and mental strength to take agency of her fate. The main characters in Diaz's films call descriptions and images of the Muselmann into mind; the result of total disintegration and a break of agency.

Slowness, duration and (post-) trauma come together in the history of the Philippines, which Diaz deals with in his films. On the one hand, the long duration in his films is a remnant of the Malay culture that became almost extinct with the arrival of Spanish colonisers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. On the other, using Malay aesthetics, Diaz uses film for a portrayal of the Philippines' brutal past. The cinematic slowness is a demonstration of what Sutton (2009), Deleuze (2005) and Hezekiah (2010) identified as a particularly crucial element in cinematic works on memory, namely duration. There is a strong reliance on traditional myths visible in Diaz's films, which he infuses his films with and which he merges with his depiction of the traumatic history of his country. In combining what he calls Malay aesthetics and traditions with contemporary history, Diaz stands out in the canon of slow-film directors, and is only matched by Thai director Apichatpong Weerasethakul, whose films similarly refer to ghosts and spirits based on Thai myths. Diaz, too, makes reference to this, but he uses ghosts in a different context, suggesting that the visibility of ghosts are partly connected to hallucinations as a



result of deteriorating mental health. Ghosts are, in fact, a common denominator in Diaz's films. Their presence renders time spatial. Time no longer progresses in a linear fashion from past to future. Rather, time becomes a complex structure of past, present and future, all of which collide in the aftermath of a traumatic event, overlapping and seeping into one another, thereby revoking time's singular linearity.

In all films under analysis here, Diaz attempts to position the viewer in similar situations his main characters have to endure through specific aesthetic choices. In *Florentina*, it is the sudden switches between sound and silence, evoking a sense of terror which the viewer cannot escape. In *Melancholia*, it is the last part of the film that aims most strongly at positioning the viewer in conditions of uncertainty, unbearable anxiety and fear. The lengthy close-up study of three resistance fighters in the woods, who are surrounded by the Philippine military, uses time, or duration and waiting, as a particular aesthetic for an evocation of terror. In their aligning character and viewer in similarly terrorising situations, Diaz's films are what Ian Johnston identified in the context of Tarr's films as "a cinematic tour de force" (Johnston, 2009).

In her edited collection on trauma and memory, Cathy Caruth makes an interesting point that is striking in the context of Diaz's cinema. She claims that "the traumatized ... [carry] an impossible history within them, or *they become themselves the symptom of history that they cannot entirely possess*" (Caruth, 1995: 5, emphasis added). Caruth describes what is at the forefront in the films under investigation in the thesis. The traumatised characters in Diaz's films stand for the long traumatic history of the Philippines. While Diaz created individual stories of suffering, as he did with *Florentina Hubaldo*, his characters always carry symptoms

of a much broader suffering. As Kai Erikson contends, “Trauma ... has a social dimension” (Erikson, 1995: 185). In his analysis of collective trauma represented in Michael Haneke’s *Caché* (2005), Thomas Weber equally suggests, “If we talk about the representation of collective trauma, we have to see that in films, it is mostly shown as an individual trauma” (Weber, 2014: 32-33). It therefore seems to be a common force in cinematic representations of ‘trauma’ to utilise the individual as a stand-in for societies as a whole.

The goal of this thesis has been to show how Lav Diaz stands out in the area of Slow Cinema but more importantly how he challenges current notions of Trauma Cinema. The previous analyses aimed at demonstrating the way Diaz uses duration, mise-en-scène, both what is present and absent, and sound as the main elements of the portrayal of post-trauma cinema. It also incorporates the idea of the filmmaker’s creation of Malay aesthetics, which considered time as spatial, not only to reawaken his culture’s past. It is at the same time a decisive element in his investigation of the Filipino post-trauma psyche.

It was my aim to read Diaz’s films through the prisms of both form and content. This broadens the area of current Slow Cinema scholarship in that very little has so far been done in this direction. The present work is the first comprehensive analysis of Diaz’s films as representative of Slow Cinema and Trauma Cinema alike. This can only be the beginning, and I hope to encourage more in-depth readings of slow films which bridge form and content, looking in particular at the directors’ respective backgrounds. This is important in that several slow films are set in or are directed and produced in countries stricken by poverty and traumatic histories, often deriving from the peoples’ fight for independence from Western colonisers. If their use of slow cinematic time is an

attempt to reclaim their pre-colonial culture, the stories those directors tell are simultaneously a window into a post- and neo-colonial present, which is absent from common public discourse.

But just as I advocated for merging Trauma Cinema studies and Slow Cinema studies, I suggest that it would be enriching to look beyond Film Studies in order to position these film works in the broader context of (post-) trauma in art. In his analysis of the representation of the Rwandan genocide in 1994 in film, literature and theatre, Alexandre Dauge-Roth (2010) contends that cultural expectations tend to govern the aesthetics of artwork on (post-) trauma (21-22). This can lead primarily to the silencing of the survivors, but also to standardised works of testimony which have a certain accepted structure and length. Dauge-Roth seems to suggest that in order to retain the complexity of traumatic experiences with their political, historical and social contexts, it is necessary to move beyond cultural expectations and allow for personal memories to surface in the way they do in each individual and in the time it takes for the individual to remember, and Diaz's and Claude Lanzman's lengthy investigation of traumatic histories are an example of the defiance of cultural expectations.

In 2000, six years after the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda, the Belgian collective Groupov staged the over five-hour long theatre play *Rwanda 94. An Attempt at Symbolic Reperation of the Dead, for Use by the Living*. With its extraordinary length and approach to aspects of testimony and witnessing, *Rwanda 94* upsets cultural expectations. The play's beginning is reminiscent of Diaz's *Florentina Hubaldo* in which Florentina speaks about her ordeal in a thirteen minute long-take. *Rwanda 94* equally uses duration in order to give trauma survivors the opportunity to remember in their own time. Yolande

Mukagasana, a survivor of the Tutsi genocide, describes in a forty-minute long scene what she has endured. The mise-en-scène is scarce; only a single chair is positioned on stage, thereby allowing the audience to focus entirely on Mukagasana's testimony. *Rwanda 94* is one example of where future research can begin, bridging Film Studies and Performance Studies in order to achieve a broader insight into the representation of (post-) trauma in art which does not comply with cultural norms and which, in rejecting those norms, allow survivors to tell their stories of endurance and survival in a way that appears most appropriate to them. In the light of these survivor- rather than audience-centred works, an investigation into the ways in which artists facilitate the process of remembering and healing by defying cultural expectations presents an intriguing research avenue which has so far been absent from scholarly discourse but for which my thesis, in parts, presents the beginning.

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## Filmography

- A City of Sadness* (1989) Directed by Hou Hsiao-hsien.
- An investigation into the night that won't forget* (2010), Directed by Lav Diaz.
- A Petal* (1996) Directed by Chang Sun-Woo.
- A short film about the Indio Nacional* (2005) Directed by Raya Martin.
- Barren Lives* (1963) Directed by Nelson Pereira dos Santos.
- Batang West Side* (2001) Directed by Lav Diaz.
- Birth* (2004) Directed by Jonathan Glazer.
- Caché* (2005) Directed by Michael Haneke.
- Century of Birthing* (2011) Directed by Lav Diaz.
- City of Life and Death* (2009) Directed by Lu Chuan.
- Crude Oil* (2008) Directed by Wang Bing.
- Damnation* (1988) Directed by Béla Tarr.
- Death in the Land of Encantos* (2007) Directed by Lav Diaz.
- Duch, Master of the Forges of Hell* (2011) Directed by Rithy Panh.
- Eat* (1964) Directed by Andy Warhol.
- Evolution of a Filipino Family* (2004) Directed by Lav Diaz.
- Florentina Hubaldo, CTE* (2012) Directed by Lav Diaz.
- Fogo* (2012) Directed by Yulene Olaizola.
- From What is Before* (2014) Directed by Lav Diaz.
- Germany Year Zero* (1948) Directed by Roberto Rossellini.
- Gerry* (2002) Directed by Gus van Sant.
- Goodbye Dragon Inn* (2003) Directed by Tsai Ming-liang.
- Grandchildren (Identity and Memory)* (2004) Directed by Benjamin Ávila.
- Heremias Book I – The legend of the lizard princess* (2005) Directed by Lav Diaz.
- Hesus, The Revolutionary* (2002) Directed by Lav Diaz.
- Homeland* (2011 - ) Directed by Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa.
- I don't want to sleep alone* (2006) Directed by Tsai Ming-liang.
- Imburnal* (2008) Directed by Anthony Sanchez.
- Independencia* (2009) Directed by Raya Martin.
- Isumpa Mo Giliw* (1947) Directed by Gérardo de Leon.
- Japon* (2002) Directed by Carlos Reygadas.

*JFK* (1991) Directed by Oliver Stone.

*Journey to the West* (2014) Directed by Tsai Ming-liang.

*L'Avventura* (1960) Directed by Michelangelo Antonioni.

*Leave it for tomorrow, for night has fallen* (2013) Directed by Jet Leyco.

*Manila by night* (1980) Directed by Ishamel Bernal.

*Manila, in the claws of the light* (1975) Directed by Lino Brocka.

*May Umaga Pang Darating* (1954) Directed by Teodorico C. Santos.

*Melancholia* (2008) Directed by Lav Diaz.

*Mirror* (1975) Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky.

*Mother and Son* (1997) Directed by Alexandr Sokurov.

*Night and Fog* (1955) Directed by Alain Resnais.

*Noli me tangere* (1961) Directed by Gérardo de Leon.

*Norte, the end of history* (2013) Directed by Lav Diaz.

*Nostalgia de la luz* (2010) Directed by Patricio Guzmán.

*Oxhide I* (2005) Directed by Jiayin Liu.

*Oxhide II* (2009) Directed by Jiayin Liu.

*Perfumed Nightmare* (1977) Directed by Kidlat Tahimik.

*Revolutions happen like refrains in a song* (1987) Directed by Nick Deocampo.

*Rome, Open City* (1945) Directed by Roberto Rossellini.

*S-21 – The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2003) Directed by Rithy Panh.

*Sátántangó* (1994) Directed by Béla Tarr.

*Saving Private Ryan* (1998) Directed by Steven Spielberg.

*Serafin Gironimo* (1998) Directed by Lav Diaz.

*Shoah* (1985) Directed by Claude Lanzmann.

*Sister Stella L* (1984) Directed by Mike de Leon.

*Sleep* (1964) Directed by Andy Warhol.

*Spirit of the Beehive* (1973) Directed by Victor Erice.

*Spoils of war* (2000) Directed by David Blaustein.

*Stalker* (1979) Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky.

*The Hole* (1998) Directed by Tsai Ming-liang.

*The Hurt Locker* (2008) Directed by Kathryn Biegelow.

*The Interpreter* (2005) Directed by Sydney Pollack.

*The Man from London* (2007) Directed by Béla Tarr.

*The Mark of Cain* (2007) Directed by Mark Munden.  
*The Missing Picture* (2013) Directed by Rithy Panh.  
*The Red and the White* (1967) Directed by Miklós Jancsó.  
*The secret life of words* (2005) Directed by Isabelle Coixet.  
*The travelling players* (1975) Directed by Theodoros Angelopoulos.  
*Three godless years* (1976) Directed by Mario O'Hara.  
*Three Monkeys* (2008) Directed by Nuri Bilge Ceylan.  
*Three sisters* (2012) Directed by Wang Bing.  
*Two Years at Sea* (2011) Directed by Ben Rivers.  
*Uncle Boonmee who can recall his past lives* (2010) Directed by Apichatpong Weerasethakul.  
*Walker* (2012) Directed by Tsai Ming-liang.  
*Waltz with Bashir* (2008) Directed by Ari Folman.  
*Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000) Directed by Béla Tarr.  
*West of the tracks* (2003) Directed by Wang Bing.