## REVERSE SHOTS IN CONTEMPORARY NOIR FILMS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE LIMITS OF CONTROL, ONCE UPON A TIME IN ANATOLIA AND NIGHT MOVES\*

**JESÚS URBANO** 

### I. REFLECTIONS ON A PROBLEMATIC CONCEPT: SLOW CINEMA

One of the first theoretical debates related to slow cinema was sparked by an editorial written by Jonathan Romney for Sight and Sound in an issue that sought to sum up the films of the first decade of the 21st century. Romney pointed out that many of the decade's most important films were characterised by an austere minimalism, "a certain rarefied intensity in the artistic gaze, [...] cinema that downplays event in favour of mood, evocativeness and an intensified sense of temporality" (2010: 43-44). In the same journal two issues later, Nick James offered a harsh criticism of slow cinema in his article "Passive Aggressive". Thus began a critical debate between slow cinema's champions (Romney, Harry Tuttle) and its detractors (Nick James, Steven Shaviro) who would accuse it of being a mere rehash of earlier styles-especially by filmmakers of the 1960s, but

without either their political daring or formal audacity (2010).

If we accept the arguments put forward in Galt and Schoonover's Global Art Cinema, this debate was the product of an trend of geographical expansion that would finally usurp the Europe-Hollywood binary that had defined film history up until that time (Galt, Schoonover, 2010: 6) However, González de Canales argues that national film industries have been subsumed into the idea of transnationalism, a phenomenon observable in "the homogenising tendency characterised by the multiplex cinema and the rise of the internet and social media as a form of expansion and promotion of audiovisual media" (2015: 3). This homogenising process has given rise to "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1993: 23), deterritorialised communities whose members have a shared artistic interest. Slow cinema as a transnational movement is a very clear example of the rise of glocalisation, where notions of localisation and

#### MANY SLOW FILMS ESCHEW THE SHOT/ REVERSE SHOT ALTOGETHER OR REPEAT IT SO EMPHATICALLY THAT ITS USUAL FUNCTION IS COMPLETELY DISTORTED

globalisation converge and feed on one another (González, 2015: 3). In his prologue to Los cines por venir, Pedro Zuluaga suggests that the rigid historical dialectic between Europe and the United States gave rise to the myth of the "end of history", borrowing Fukuyama's famous assertion, and with it the definitive deflation of cinematic storytelling. But this myth is being challenged by the new historical subjects emerging from the periphery: "Is it possible to contemplate the end of time in territories and bodies that are still pure potential, whose full range of possibilities have yet to be realised?" (Zuluaga, 2021: 10). This periphery needs to be understood not only geographically but also symbolically, referring to all those subjects who have historically been pushed out of the centre of the story. The idea of the periphery can also be interpreted in industrial terms, with the digital boom that has brought about a dramatic reduction in production costs and a democratisation of the use of the technology needed to make a film.

The term "slow cinema" has provoked a number of terminological debates. The AV Festival in Newcastle titled its 2012 edition As Slow as Possible, based on a piece by John Cage, inviting filmmakers including Lav Díaz from the Philippines, James Benning from the United States, and Ben Rivers from the UK. In the academic world, the first doctoral thesis on slow cinema, written by Mike Flanagan, appeared that same year. This film movement has been labelled as subtractive cinema by Antony Fiant, neo-modernist by Rafal Syska, realism of the senses by Tiago de Luca, and contemporary contemplative cinema by Harry Tuttle. The problem of what to call the movement is important because the adjective "slow" seems

insufficient to define it clearly. Attempts at quantitative approaches, such as analysing ASLs (average shot lengths) have proven ineffective without a qualitative component. Moreover, the term has a general, abstract quality that fails to specify whether the slowness refers to minimalist editing, a lack of external or internal movement in the film, narrative minimalism, a more political or philosophical conception of time, or all of these at once (Caglayan, 2014: 9). As Horacio Muñoz points out, to "classify a cinema as slow, it should be compared or contrasted with another that is faster" (2017: 289). Schoonover and Galt differentiate "slow cinema" from faux slow, as although both styles maintain the haptic dimension that many authors identify with slow cinema, or a rhythm opposed to the imperative of narration, faux slow does not allow the experience of contemplation to dominate the film completely, as it hurries on towards some kind of change in the film in order to keep the spectator's attention (2016: 278).

In addition to the debate over the name or over what slow means and what it is being compared or contrasted with, there have also been disputes over the scope of its political dimension. Schoonover, for example, questions whether this type of cinema is politically subversive or politically decadent (2012: 68). Shaviro describes it as retrograde because of its evident inability to adapt to a contemporary hypermodernity to which it responds with self-absorbed melancholy (2010). However, it is Mark Fisher, in an effort to resurrect Derrida's notion of hauntology, who argues for the concept of productive melancholy as a politically inspired phenomenon that is incapable of letting go of a past that promised a better future (2018). This melancholy stands in opposition to what Fisher himself identifies as the only possible regime of representation: capitalist realism, which aims to impose capitalism as the only viable option and render any other political proposal unthinkable (2016: 22). Although it is purely materialist, slow cinema is a regime of representation that is

not governed by any of the mainstream conventions of capitalist realism, least of all the convention that Harun Farocki identifies as the first law of conventional cinematography: the shot/reverse shot technique. For Farocki, "the real auteurs are the ones who rise up against the shot/reverse shot" (2013: 83). A politically conceived cinema is not a cinema with political themes (2013: 71), but an approach that formally confronts this conventional syntax either through its non-use, like Godard does, exposing its absence precisely where its presence would be logical (2013: 89), or through its profound reformulation in the style of Bresson, i.e., through its intensified use (2013: 104). Thus, many slow films eschew the shot/reverse shot altogether or repeat it so emphatically that its usual function is completely distorted.

Flanagan considers what he calls durational realism to be essential to slow cinema, as it makes it possible to materialise the act of observation (2012: 213-216). This durational realism sometimes entails a temporality unconcerned with human activity, such as that of the still life shots in some of Abbas Kiarostami's films and his proposal of a cinema without spectators (Remes, 2015: 235-236), or slow cinema's relationship with environmentalism and with filming nature without human mediation (Lam, 2015: 217), an approach that Daney previously identified in Straub and Huillet's landscapes (2004: 130-133). Other authors, such as Çaglayan, highlight the importance that slow cinema assigns to existential boredom in opposition to the idea of productivity (2014: 206-207) and note its hybrid nature, blending forms associated with the documentary, fiction, genre films, video art, and museum installations-the museum in particular being a space that many slow cinema filmmakers have engaged with (2014: 25). Caglayan extends his description of slow cinema's hybrid nature to its institutional status, as a form exhibited in both mainstream and arthouse cinemas, as well as film libraries and museums, and to its national status, with its local themes

and international forms, and the important role that international co-productions and European festivals have played in its development. All these studies confirm the importance of slow cinema as an international film movement, regardless of whether or not we accept the admittedly disputable pertinence of the name given to it.

#### 2. PROPOSED ANALYSIS

In recent years, a growing number of slow films have been adopting the features of the noir genre. Referred to as minimalist noir or slow noir (a term used by Kyle Barrowman in his 2023 article on Béla Tarr), these films constitute a unique approach to the genre that has not been given much attention in scholarly research on contemporary film noir. This small but significant number of films includes The Man from London (A Londoni férfi, Béla Tarr, 2007), Lorna's Silence (Le silence de Lorna, Jean-Pierre & Luc Dardenne, 2008), Police, Adjective (Politist, adjectiv, Corneliu Porumboiu, 2009), The Limits of Control (Jim Jarmusch, 2009), Aurora (Cristi Puiu, 2010), Eastern Drift (Eurazijos aborigenas, Šarūnas Bartas, 2010), Hors Satan (Bruno Dumont, 2011), Once Upon a Time in Anatolia (Bir zamanlar Anadolu'da, Nuri Ceylan, 2011), Night Moves (Kelly Reichardt, 2013), Norte, The End of History (Norte, Hangganan ng Kasaysayan, Lav Diaz, 2013), The Woman Who Left (Ang Babaeng Humayo, Lav Diaz, 2016), An Elephant Sitting Still (Da xiang xi di er zuo, Hu Bo, 2018), and Pacifiction (Albert Serra, 2022). All these films reinvent the noir genre through the prism of slow cinema.

The analysis described in this article involves a selection of standard-sequences from specific case studies. These sequences are analysed, exploring the form of the film (Gómez Tarín, Marzal, 2007: 44) and the materiality of the text, in order to identify implicit, symptomatic meanings, i.e., types of meaning that point to the construction of meaning in the film (Bordwell, 1995: 24-25). Standard-sequences are sequences that encapsu-

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late the film as a whole and that must meet at least three requirements: they must be clearly delimited, have a coherent internal organisation, and be representative of the film in its entirety (2007: 46). This method facilitates the analysis of the films with a focus on their syntax rather than their themes, in accordance with Farocki's conception of the true political scope of films described above. The selection and analysis of standard-sequences from significant films of the slow noir movement serves to respond to the key question of this study: What variations and innovations does this movement propose within the larger context of the noir genre?

The films selected as case studies are The Limits of Control, Once Upon a Time in Anatolia, and Night Moves. The three standard-sequences identified as paradigmatic of the films in question are clearly delimited as they contain a key narrative moment and are structurally and formally organised in an internally coherent way. In addition to being of primordial importance to the plot of the films, they also involve typical tropes of the genre and thus allow a more straightforward comparison. This article also presents these sequences in narrative rather than chronological order, as they would naturally appear in a plausible hypothetical plot structure. The first sequence selected depicts the execution of the plan in Night Moves, from the moment when the protagonists leave the camp site until they manage to blow up the dam and evade the police. The second sequence

represents a climactic moment of any noir investigation: the search for the body in Once Upon a Time in Anatolia. The third sequence selected depicts the resolution of the mystery in The Limits of Control, with the accomplishment of the mission assigned to the protagonist. These three sequences are clearly delimited blocks as each of these films has a very rigid narrative structure where each important action takes up a segment of exceptionally long duration: the sequence from Night Moves begins at 35'22" and ends at 63'55"; the sequence from Once Upon a Time in Anatolia runs from 4'12" to 55'12"; and the sequence from The Limits of Control is from 82'03" to 103'15". Due to space limitations, for each case study a detailed analysis is provided of short scenes or key shots within the general context of the sequence as a self-contained narrative section.

## 3. THE REVERSE SHOT HAS A TEMPORALITY OF ITS OWN: PARALLEL MOVEMENTS IN NIGHT MOVES

Kelly Reichardt's Night Moves tells the story of three environmental activists—Josh, a worker on an agricultural cooperative; Dena, a university student; and Harmon, a former marine) who decide to blow up a dam in Oregon. At the beginning of the film, Josh and Dena are at the screening of an environmentalist documentary. During the Q&A session after the screening, one of the audience members suggests that showing apocalyptic images could give people the impression that it is too late to do anything to stop an environmental catastrophe. Dena asks the filmmaker what she thinks they should do to tackle the environmental problem. The documentary director replies that she herself is focused on "a lot of small plans. I think that just coming together and sharing out concerns..." Before this sentence is completed, Reichardt cuts suddenly to a shot of a person dressed up as a cow advertising a milk brand in the street. In this abrupt cut, the fil-

mmaker presents a key dialectic in her film: the opposition of two temporalities: one imposed by late capitalism and its relentless industrial activity, and the other in resistance to it, proposing a lifestyle that con-

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forms to a different temporal regime. As Henry argues, "temporal structures are power structures, and paying attention to time makes these power structures visible through their temporal articulation" (2018: 486). Josh and Dena's frustrated facial expressions during the Q&A session reflect their impatience with this "slow" form of activism based on a sustainable lifestyle in small communities that seem to have no political impact outside their own boundaries. And it is this impatience that leads them to take the decision to blow up the dam, in an effort to take up arms against the accelerated temporal structure of capitalism, whose irreversible process of exploitation of nature never seems to stop. The very long standard-sequence selected for this study depicts their execution of this plan, an action that one environmentalist at the cooperative describes as "theatre". And it is precisely at this moment that Reichardt's film most clearly translates the conventions of the noir genre. However, in opposition to the constant movement that characterises the genre—and its suspense—Reichardt incorporates a space outside the action that is more descriptive than narrative, belonging to a different model that is both representative and temporal. Otherwise, Night Moves adheres to the conventions of a noir thriller: the first part depicts the preparation of the plan; the second part (the sequence chosen for analysis) presents the execution of the plan and the getaway; and the third part combines the attempt to return to normal with the emergence of paranoia, guilt, and fear of being discovered.

The standard-sequence begins with all three protagonists loading the trucks and boat with the explosives and driving towards the scene of the crime. There is no tension evident in these actions,

which Reichardt marks with a slow, deliberate pacing. When they reach Lake of the Woods, the camping ground that serves as their departure point to the dam, Reichardt combines two contrasting movements: in the shots of narrative relevance, we see the tense expressions on the faces of the protagonists and the instructions they exchange with each other, while in a series of different reverse shots, we see the routine activities of the other campers; the duration of these reverse shots gives them an importance equal to the main action, although they contain no specific detail of relevance to the story. Reichardt establishes a distance from the main characters in the story to focus on the ordinary anonymity of the people at the camp site (Image 1) or to underscore their insignificance in wide shots that capture the natural world around them (Image 2). The story is not imposed on the organic nature of the setting. For Reichardt, the first and most important process in filmmaking is the search for locations, as the American landscape is of vital significance for her, not merely as a backdrop, but as a specific physical, material form that reveals her characters (Atehortúa, 2021: 194).

When the protagonists leave the camping ground and head for the dam, the reverse shots will switch to images showing nature depleted by human plundering (Image 3). Up to this point, Reichardt has avoided any climactic tension while still maintaining a certain degree of suspense. "Rather than generating the tension, anticipation, and anxiety typically associated with the thriller genre's mood, the quietness in this film con-

tributes to a slow-burning suspense, an anxious waiting" (Henry, 2018: 492). When night falls, the protagonists get moving in order to carry out their mission, in a scene that underscores the relationship between the film's title (*Night Moves*), the genre to which it belongs (a new take on the

noir genre) and the climax of this long sequence (the protagonists spring into action). Nevertheless, Reichardt continues constantly to include mundane conversations between the characters and nocturnal shots that are barely visible apart from the protagonists' subtle movements and their reflections in the water. The filmmaker refuses to compromise on what a typical noir mise-enscène would demand.

There are only two moments of conventional suspense in this sequence: when a car breaks down near the dam and the bomb, with its timer displaying the countdown, cannot be switched off: and when Josh and Dena manage to get past a police checkpoint in the sequence's final scene. Apart from these two moments, this sequence is almost completely undramatic. The temporal structure is more pictorial than narrative, as reflected in the shots of anonymous people and of nature—depicting the stability of the community that is about to be disrupted and the natural temporality affected by the temporality of human action-that are given the same level of importance as the dramatic movement that typifies the genre. Although such movement does occur here (the film even plays with tropes of the suspense genre, such as the bomb timer, the police checkpoint, and chance as a potential cause of tragedy), it is constantly held up by Reichardt's editing and her particular style

of shots that linger after the appearance of the figures and actions they present. In this way, she discovers a reality outside the story, which, according to the filmmaker herself, appears by "stepping to one side [...] through the reduction of elements, certain details of the world that

Images 1, 2 & 3









Image 4

were unseen before start to become perceptible" (Reichardt, quoted by Atehortúa, 2021: 193). The reverse shot is like the temporality of the Other, of that which moves slowly in parallel with the temporality identified as useful, according to a conception of production optimisation that is now also used in narrative.

# 4. "YOU HAVE TO BE MORE OF AN ASTROLOGER THAN A PROSECUTOR TO DIVINE MOTIVES AND CAUSES": ONCE UPON A TIME IN ANATOLIA

Once Upon a Time in Anatolia tells the story of a murder investigation. The film is an procedural noir, depicting the investigation from the perspective of the police officer or detective. The sequence selected for analysis is the second sequence of the film, following the opening scene and title credits, dealing with the fruitless search for the body of the victim. After two attempts to find the place where the alleged murderer buried it, the search team seems to have found the place and they begin digging. The police investigations lead to a place to the side of the highway; thunder and a relentless wind serve as a soundtrack to the setting. Instead of focusing the attention on the search, Ceylan ignores the main action completely and films a mundane conversation between the doctor and a police officer with a shot/reverse shot technique showing that the doctor hardly ever returns the officer's gaze. In the middle of their conversation, Ceylan suddenly inserts a short of the wind blowing through a field of barley (Image 4). When the conversation veers into questions about humankind's evil nature and the need to carry a gun in this region, the shot moving over the barley is interspersed with two shots of the characters, their backs now to the camera. Suddenly, rather than coming from the actors'

bodies, their voices seem to be coming from the landscape, turning into inner voices. We see that the characters are not talking in the scene, yet we continue to hear them. The public prosecutor remarks: "It rains on Igdebeli. Let it rain. It's been raining for centuries. What does that change?" While these words continue a shot of the prosecutor is inserted into the scene. After this speech, the scene returns to its previous composition before the camera moved away from the landscape. The forensic expert returns to where he was in the previous shot/reverse shot series, as if what we have just seen was merely a dream. The passage of a train seems to punctuate the scene. The search has been fruitless, and everyone gets back into their cars to go somewhere else.

This strange suspension of the narration occurs once again, this time between the forensic expert and the prosecutor, who ramble on about the state of the country. Once again, in parallel with the physical search for the body, which is completely ignored, the characters, both illuminated by the lights of a car, begin talking in another series of shots and reverse shots. And again, the characters' bodies are not positioned diagonally to one another, as they usually are in shot/reverse shot series; instead, as was the case earlier, the view of the bodies is frontal. They stare wistfully into the void of nature that earlier seemed to take on a life of its own. The prosecutor suggests that sometimes when it comes to deaths, "you have to





Image 4 Image 5

be more of an astrologer than a prosecutor to divine motives and causes." This conversation, like the previous one, is suspended by a movement of the camera, which begins filming the forensic expert and then frames both characters from the other side. The real reverse shot is not the product of the characters' responses; instead, anticipated by this camera movement, the real reverse shot is a shot of trees swaying in the wind (Image 5). The landscape, the wind, the rain, and the thunder all become characters with their own points of view, non-human characters that seem to understand the causes that the prosecutor is unable to divine. This is an example of what Rosenbaum, with reference to Daney, calls "cinemeteorology" (2021): the landscape and the weather are autonomous narrators. A mere moment later, while the characters continue their investigation, an apple falls to the ground and begins rolling downstream. The camera follows it as it rolls, once again leaving the police investigation behind: "Both the visual form and the content of the film respond to the idea that resolution can emerge less through clarifications of facts and more by means of the non-discursive and poetic" (Dudai. 2019: 48). Like the end of the train's movement in the previous scene, the end of the apple's descent returns the film to the reality of the police investigation. The answers in this film noir are not provided by the plot but remain concealed within that which lies beyond the human gaze, beyond the boundaries established by the mise-en-scène. This idea is conveyed in the highly eloquent way this scene ends: a visual match-cut from the forensic expert's eyes to the headlights of a car (Image 6). The human gaze only reaches as far as that which can be illuminated.

#### **5. A BLANK SHEET: THE LIMITS OF CONTROL**

The Limits of Control is constructed entirely on the basis of the repetition of the shot/reverse shot, but it is through its intensification of the mechanism, its particular repetition of this conventional technique that it ends up distorting its normal use. As Farocki suggests with reference to the films of Bresson, this repetition is a way of reformulating its implications (2013: 104). The film tells the story of an unnamed hitman who is hired to carry out a mission that we ultimately discover is an assassination: the murder of a senior figure in the US government. To be able to carry out his task, the protagonist has to find different characters, each of whom will give him a box of matches with symbols that he will need to decipher in order to make it to the next step. All these encounters, which seem to offer nothing to advance the plot, are always filmed in the same way, with the spec-

tral appearance and disappearance of the character and a conversation presented in a shot/ reverse shot series that always begins with a kind of password: "You don't speak Spanish, right?" The protagonist's only way of getting to the next phase of his journey is to interpret the code that appears on the matchbox and identify some kind of image—in a museum, on a poster, in the street—that makes reference to the topic in which the character in question seems to be an expert: music, cinema, drugs, etc. It is a question of knowing how to learn from the other, to construct an identity from scratch—"I am nobody," says the protagonist—out of the people he meets.

The Limits of Control has a puzzle noir narrative, as the whole plotline is articulated around these encounters with informers who provide clues that need to be interpreted. In a conventional noir film of this kind, all these clues generally culminate in a final climax where the conclusions are explained and the case is closed. This is precisely what happens in the standard-sequence chosen for analysis: the final encounter between the hitman and his target, the latter protected inside an impenetrable fortress monitored by multiple cameras and armed guards. The sequence begins with the hitman travelling by car to the desert location where the target is hiding. During this journey, Jarmusch focuses on a shot on a bridge that seems to suggest an imaginary portal between realms (Image 7), the idea of a crossing that will be realised in the protagonist's subsequent "magical" journey. At this climactic moment, as in the other two cases studied, the filmmaker opts to abandon the suspense typical of the genre, which would involve showing the protagonist working out how to break into the target's office, and places him there directly after a cut. The bewil-









Images 7, 8, 9 & 10

dered target wonders, as does the viewer, how the hitman has managed to get past his security (Images 8 and 9). As a cinematographic mechanism, the shot/reverse shot technique always splits the scene into two halves (Farocki, 2013: 293), thereby accentuating an idea of separation while at the same time always assuring continuity: "It allows very different images to be linked together in succession" (2013: 83). For Jarmusch, this mechanism of continuity in rupture, a force for dialogue and at the same time a clear marker of the space of the Other, opens up the possibility of an encounter at the intersection between the two where identity is ultimately blurred. What matters is found not in each differentiated shot but in that intersection. in the imaginary liminal space that it creates. "My films are about the little things that happen between people [...]. I'm interested in what happens in the middle" (1996, quoted by Viejo, 2001: 61). In all the dialogues between the unnamed protagonist and the other characters, there is a learning experience that involves merging with the other, diluting the individual space of the shots. It is this fluidity that ultimately allows the protagonist to cross the intermediate space between two shots that separated the space in a radical way at the beginning of the sequence. And to complete the task, one last clue is needed: a blank sheet of paper that will lead the protagonist to contemplate Antoni Tápies's abstract painting Large Sheet (Image 10): what remains in the end is a blank space, a reflection of the protagonist's undefined identity, noir (black) turned into its opposite, positing the total deconstruction of any possible category.

## 6. DISRUPTIONS OF A GENRE: FROM SUSPENSE TO SUSPENSION

In his book on the historical variations on the Western, Fran Benavente argues that there are two types of limit-aesthetics, so called because they subvert the genre as a normalised system of representation. The first makes use of exagge-

ration: hyper-overcoming, surpassing the boundaries or exasperation. The second uses the suppression of a specific feature, i.e., a schismatic hypo-transgression that will give rise to radical catastrophes as a result of the elimination (2017: 19). Clearly, slow noir engages with this second limit-aesthetic; it is anti-genre genre cinema, a "curious negative designation that is usually a sign of interesting disruptions in the discourse of the genre" (2017: 315). It does so first by eliminating suspense entirely. The delay in Night Moves, the digressions in Once Upon a Time in Anatolia, and the repetition in *The Limits of Control* all force the spectator to give up on any expectations related to the plotline, provoking what Jakob Boer calls a contemplative viewing mode, as the spectator ceases to follow the story and begins perceiving the film as artefact, so that it switches from being "film-as-fiction to film-as-film" (2016: 13). Norman Holland uses the term "puzzling films" (quoted by Bordwell, 2008: 154) to describe those films where the plot ceases to be important and the spectator begins exploring the materiality of the film itself. The narrative suspension that typifies modern cinema aims to dissolve any expectations associated with classical genres (Fillol, 2016: 46). In the specific case of noir, suspense is the key element that allows viewers to interpret the clues in order to anticipate the conclusion or to be surprised if they misinterpret them. In these slow noir films, suspense is definitively replaced, with the desire to obtain a tense resolution to the story being substituted by a narrative and formal suspension that eliminates the tension altogether. The key question is no longer who did it or why, but why is the film the way that it is. The spectator is transformed into a detective, not of the story but of the film-as-act, and the questions now are about why the director made a particular aesthetic decision, why a shot is so long, or why an unrelated shot has been inserted-in short, questions about the film itself and not about the plot or the logic of the narrative development.

IN THE SPECIFIC CASE OF NOIR, SUSPENSE IS THE KEY ELEMENT THAT ALLOWS VIEWERS TO INTERPRET THE CLUES IN ORDER TO ANTICIPATE THE CONCLUSION OR TO BE SURPRISED IF THEY MISINTERPRET THEM. BUT IN THESE SLOW NOIR FILMS, SUSPENSE IS DEFINITIVELY REPLACED, WITH THE DESIRE TO OBTAIN A TENSE RESOLUTION TO THE STORY BEING SUBSTITUTED BY A NARRATIVE AND FORMAL SUSPENSION THAT ELIMINATES THE TENSION ALTOGETHER

The second disruption to the genre involves another type of suspension: temporal suspension. Boer describes the experience of slowness in cinema as the combination of three types of stillness: stillness-of-the-image, stillness-in-the-image, and stillness-between-the-images (2016: 5-10). Stillness-of-the-image refers to the absence of external movements, a filmmaking style comprised of still and static shots. Stillness-in-the image exists when the action depicted is minimal or insignificant, but it is the temporal treatment of the action that turns it into a dramatic event. Finally. stillness-between-the-images is a narrative structuring that does not connect the elements of the film together naturally, revealing it to be a series of sequences operating as autonomous intervals, units of duration where time no longer derives from movement (2016: 11). Kelly Reichardt herself defined her first film, River of Grass (1994), as "a road movie without a road" (quoted by Atehortúa, 2021: 199); the film's genre is declared, yet that genre is deprived of the possibility of movement. Deleuze argues that in modern cinema the cut no longer forms part of the image, as the end to what is leaving or as an anticipation of what is to appear; instead, it is an interstice with its own inherent value (1985: 265). This idea is expressed very graphically in the sequence analysed here from

The Limits of Control, where the fleeting moment of the cut becomes an imagined space that the characters move across. The film cut thus ceases to be continuity or transition (movement), to become instead an irrational or incommensurable entity (time). Schoonover suggests that the debate over temporality in slow cinema "may be about the question of queerness or what it means to live queerly. Queerness often looks a lot like wasted time, wasted lives, wasted productivity" (2012: 73). Queerness effectively proposes a new temporality in opposition to the (re)productive temporality of capitalism, advocating de-identification and fluid, uncategorised identities, and rejecting narratives with closed or self-contained denouements while defending freer narratives that challenge the dominant models of which genre cinema is a primordial example.

#### 7. CONCLUSIONS

While all three films analysed in this article contain camera movements and frequent editing cuts, the combination of the repeated portrayal of insignificant actions and the interruption of natural continuity in the organisation of their shots offers a temporal experience that no longer relies on movement. The shots in Night Moves are not arranged to create a unified movement; rather, each cut very precisely interrupts the progress of the action. In Once Upon a Time in Anatolia, the shots of nature appear as sudden imponderables, unexpected shifts towards a natural order that has its own movement and its own temporality. And in The Limits of Control, the excessive use of the shot/ reverse shot technique, which usually controls the pacing of a film, ends up transforming the technique itself into a circumlocution. In this way, these films challenge the concept of the match cut, the assurance of continuity and of a progressive relationship between shots, suspending time and dissipating the suspense that characterises the genre. The slow everyday activity of the farming

community in *Night Moves* and the emphasis on reverse shots of the environment that serve to undermine or question the action, the non-anthropocentric temporality of *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* and its multiple narrative digressions, and the repetition in *The Limits of Control* of the same sequential structure and blank-slate depiction of its protagonist are all examples of a new aesthetic and narrative approach in contemporary film noir.

This approach, associated with slow cinema, advocates a temporality opposed to narrative utility and continuity as an ideal of progress, proposing a treatment of the genre that indiscriminately embraces or eschews its conventions: the three different dramatic situations in the sequences analysed are all tropes of the genre—the execution of the criminal plan, the police search, and the accomplishment of the hitman's mission—that are all undermined and stripped of tension. These films prioritise stillness over action, the unmeasurable temporality of nature over the imperative temporality of humankind, the negation of identity over the rigid category, and none of them offer satisfying conclusions or explicit closed meanings. They all thus represent an aesthetic and narrative approach that resists or challenges normativity, which is revealed to be a form of political filmmaking. ■

#### **NOTES**

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# COUNTERSHOTS OF CONTEMPORARY NOIR: ANALYSING THE LIMITS OF CONTROL, ONCE UPON A TIME IN ANATOLIA AND NIGHT MOVES

#### Abstract

This paper studies the innovation of noir codes in three slow movies: The Limits of Control (Jarmusch, 2009), Bir zamanlar Anadolu'da (Nuri Ceylan, 2011) and Night Moves (Kelly Reichardt, 2013). To that end, the concept of slow cinema and its significance as an international film movement are contextualized and discussed. Subsequently, in order to explore different variations on the tropes of films noir a sequence from each film is analyzed. These variations are a result of a unique use of space, new temporality, and suspended narratives, in contrast to other contemporary films that aimed at renovations of both subjects and archetypes. This study argues that challenging normative narrative –that is, defending stillness over action and excess, uselessness over usefulness, subduing human time to the time of nature, and rejecting a pre-established identity – is also a way of making films politically.

#### Key words

Slow Cinema; Film Noir; Shot/ Countershot; Film Space; New Temporality; Narrative Suspension.

#### Author

Jesús Urbano Reyes (Granada, 1993) is predoctoral researcher in the Department of Theories and Analysis of Communication at Universidad Complutense de Madrid and Specialist in Film History and Aesthetics from University of Valladolid. His research focus on Film Analysis and Theory, History of Cinema, Autofiction and Authorship in Contemporary Cinema. He is the author of several papers published both in scientific journals, "Un efecto óptico (2020): ¿Existe la ficción todavía?" in Miguel Hernández Communication Journal, and monographic books, "La autoficción europea tardomoderna (1975-1989)" in Los caminos de la memoria en el cine y el audiovisual contemporáneos (Comunicación Social Ediciones, 2022). He has recently published the two volumes Conversaciones sobre cine. Del hogar a la intemperie (Confluencias, 2023). Contacto: jesusurb@ucm.es

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#### CONTRAPLANOS DEL NOIR CONTEMPORÁNEO: ANÁLISIS DE LOS LÍMITES DEL CONTROL, ÉRASE UNA VEZ EN ANATOLIA Y NIGHT MOVES

#### Resumen

El presente artículo estudia las alteraciones de las convenciones del noir en tres propuestas próximas al slow cinema: Los límites del control (The Limits of Control, Jarmusch, 2009), Érase una vez en Anatolia (Bir zamanlar Anadolu'da, Nuri Ceylan, 2011) y Night Moves (Kelly Reichardt, 2013). Para ello, se contextualiza y se discute el concepto de slow cinema y su alcance como movimiento cinematográfico internacional. Posteriormente, se propone analizar una secuencia-tipo de cada película objeto de estudio para destacar sus variaciones respecto a situaciones cliché del género noir. Variaciones resultado del tratamiento particular del espacio, la prolongación de la temporalidad o la suspensión del interés narrativo, en contra de otras propuestas contemporáneas más tendentes a la renovación temática o a la reescritura de arquetipos. Ofrecer resistencia a una narrativa normativa —defendiendo la pasividad frente al precepto de la acción o el excedente y lo inservible ante lo considerado útil, sometiendo el tiempo humano al tiempo de la naturaleza o rechazando identidades preestablecidas— es también una forma de hacer políticamente cine.

#### Palabras clave

Slow Cinema; Cine negro; Plano/contraplano; Espacio fílmico; Nueva temporalidad; Suspensión narrativa.

#### Autor

Jesús Urbano Reyes (Granada, 1993) es investigador predoctoral en el departamento de Teorías y Análisis de la Comunicación en la Universidad Complutense de Madrid y Especialista en Historia y Estética de la Cinematografía por la Universidad de Valladolid. Sus líneas de investigación se centran en Teoría y Análisis Fílmico, Historia del Cine, Autoficción y Autoría en el Cine Contemporáneo. Es autor de diversos textos publicados tanto en revistas científicas, "Un efecto óptico (2020): ¿Existe la ficción todavía?" en Miguel Hernández Communication Journal, como en libros monográficos, "La autoficción europea tardomoderna (1975-1989)" en Los caminos de la memoria en el cine y el audiovisual contemporáneos (Comunicación Social Ediciones, 2022). Ha publicado recientemente los dos volúmenes Conversaciones sobre cine. Del hogar a la intemperie (Confluencias, 2023). Contacto: jesusurb@ucm.es

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