

The Long Take as a Metamodernist Framework in the Age of Perpetual Distraction

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Abstract

This paper will explore the nature of the long take as a metamodernist framework by establishing the two key terms of ‘visual listening’ and ‘cinematic inclusion’ to be designed through a working model that represents the ways by which these two terms can be inclusive of defining how an audience can engage with cinema through a third key term of ‘unjectiveness’. This developed model will challenge both film philosophy and film theory to derive at a proposition that considers such perspectives to be redundant in understanding a long shot and, therefore, not applicable for coming to terms with the wider premise of making cinema. Later discussion will approach this as being inasmuch *of* cinema as it is to be *of* the film used through unjectiveness in understanding the role and impact of the long shot used to counter screen distraction and its effect on contemporary audiences that otherwise reduces the meaningfulness of durational screen experiences.

Keywords: cinematography, metamodernism, long take

INTRODUCTION

In the film *Catch 22* (dir. Nichols, 1970), cinematographer David Watkin deploys a durational sequence, otherwise known as a ‘long shot’, to present a squadron of World War Two era United States Army Air Corp B-25 Mitchel bombers preparing for take off from a Tunisian coastal airstrip for a combat mission. The establishing scene frames the formation of airplanes to then draw the attention of the film’s protagonist, Yossarian, in conversation with the base commander off camera, tracking the character down a side staircase and into a garden where he is later stabbed and the shot thus ends. While the complexity of this scene is found in part of the establishment of the choreographed agents interrelating through a detailed set of actor and vehicle blockings, the shot itself and, moreover, the condition of the shot affecting the audience establishes a premise of how the pluralism of both cinematography and editing can forge a method by which to tell stories from a visual command in much greater detail when compiled in unison through uninterrupted performances without the intervention of an editor’s cut. The significance of such a relationship, as this paper will argue, brings into question the role that both processes play out in determining a contextualisation, and from this a centralised spectatorship embodied within, and inferred by, experience. The question then remains as to how this inclusion of duration can change the way we might ought to consider our experience of what this paper terms as ‘visual listening’, that is to say, how an audience witnesses the unpacking of a film’s narrative brought about by cinematic listening referred to hereafter as the term ‘listening’, from the presence of a second term, ‘cinematic inclusion’, referred to hereafter as the term ‘inclusion’, which optically and sonically combines the nature of an intentional relationship

between the edited frame and the lens through uninterrupted performance. Consequently, this paper will consider that the purpose of the long shot can be understood in relation to the conditions of both listening and inclusion by establishing a conceptual working model to then enact a method to attest that contemporary cinema has, in recent times, become reliant on the rapid interruption of performances and, as the propensity of a capitalist-driven industrial influence, consumed by a tendency of inter-connected, fast cut montages to what Jarmusch claims to originate as ‘MTV was just starting... with its barrage of images. [...] It seemed like film-making was starting to imitate advertising.’ (Jarmusch) While there are instances in recent contributions discussed hereafter that play out the long shot as a vital part of a filmmaker's cinematic language, argued from understanding that narrative as an affordance of such communication is not to be visually contaminated by restricting a performative agency from the editor's cut, the demise of longer cuts in film have arguably created an issue for contemporary audiences to come to terms with performances as an agency-based motif and, moreover, the ways in which an audience can articulate stories on screen in the age of perpetual distraction.

This term, of course, is defined as inclusive of the infinite distractions by which digital communication disengages its audiences from the moment as bringing into question the same kinds of distractions that fast-paced effects and editing has on an audience's ability to concentrate or, in cinematic terms, prompt oneself to be immersed in a moment through the moving subject without the additions of distractive experiences which, ultimately, impact on an audience's experience of cinema. Yet, as this paper will propose, therein accentuates a linkage between the more distractions an audience may have on their viewership then the more that the drive and demand for quicker edits in film will rise as a new ‘cinematic normal’ through expectations to match the exterior distractedness that digital medias bring within our immediate interruptive expectations of the addiction to multitasking habits through a divisional crossing of the boundaries between activities and the need to completely disregard singular viewing experiences altogether. Dunn and Konrath defined in their study ‘Dealing with Digital Distraction’ that ‘our digital lives may be making us more distracted, distanced and drained...’ (Dunn, Konrath, 2018) just as Giffrey claims that ‘we are not actually multitasking; rather we are switching rapidly between activities’ (Giffrey, 2018). From this perspective and others to be discussed, visual listening and cinematic inclusion are developed as a way to counter this mentioned intrusion on what is arguably a *disorder* of screen concentration to sustain an alternative model as a means to come to terms with the effects that distraction has on our screen viewership yet at a deeper level, contribute to a way of practice for making cinema that provides meaningful ways to counter the fast-paced cinema experience for contemporary audiences at an experiential and media consumption level.

VISUAL LISTENING

There has been much in the way of critical analysis over recent years about the work of film philosophers and, most notably, the works of, in particular, Deleuze, for example, who have considered how an audience and a film can, and do, forge a relationship between themselves and a cinematic spectatorship affected by the form of cinema. Yet, if this paper can draw any conclusions by such conversations, it is primarily a view, albeit, and arguably, being somewhat subversive in nature to the field, that such a wide contextual analysis of existing written material brings little in the understanding of new approaches towards *making* new cinema as a counter to screen distraction, represented in the modeling additives as [SD],

beyond reinterpreted consideration as opposed to - and, notwithstanding, before we extend such a conversation even further, this point is not necessarily relevant to *understanding* new cinema or to say at a greater level of interrogation, being *with* cinema or, even at its most complex condition, being *of* cinema - which draws on the parallels of attempting to understand what such philosophers or theorists were trying to say *about* cinema, at its more centralised approach what new meanings can we fashion from the works of those who have already forged new critical knowledge in their own right? While there is an argument to be said that the critical analysis of cinema is dependent on the revisiting of the works of others, this paper proposes something more radical. Instead of viewing the past as a measurement of re-intervention for the present, is there another approach to be undertaken so as to consider cinema in the age of screen distraction in a way that affords an opportunity to think about cinema itself as being detached from twentieth and twenty-first century film discourse and, more obtusely, abandon such literature altogether? The question then remains for cinema, what then?

This, though, is not to say that existing analysis has no worth for such a treatise where, in fact, and, moreover, it would be a mistake to consider such a notion. One of the most vital ways of thinking about cinema, for example, is to posit an opposition to critical film thought and, in a wider abject, without this body of existing work, to challenge the argument of inclusion would simply not function at all because there is nothing to hold oscillation with if it is to be defined as an otherness *of* a metamodernist point of view. From this perspective, I would lament that in order to contribute to the ‘what then?’ inquiry, such a question can only be properly ascertained if it is, in doing so, framed as a metamodernist question obviously in stark contrast to, say, a postmodern question, as located in the large amount of late twentieth and early twenty-first century cinema studies no more prevalent than, for example, pitting Baudrillard’s approach, even moreso than Deleuze, against the same kind of ask which arguably could not sustain the identical structural interrogation as a metamodernist construct simply because of the restraints of a singular relativist’s abjectness in the presence of the absolute insofar as the allowances that a metamodernist approach permits simply because of the disruptive nature of its meta-immersiveness state. One might argue that it stands to reason that Baudrillard would, indeed, unpack the question of ‘what then?’ with an immediacy of relativist logic inasmuch contextual structuralism as any other postmodern film philosopher or theorist’s understanding of the same problem would convey of that time from the confines of a postmodernist relativism - but in avail of the absence of a mechanism to contain oscillation, such relativist assertions would simply cease to function if its own independence was granted through a dependency of dualism in the ways that a metamodernist symbiance enhabbited a relativism that co-inhabits an absolute whilst remaining independent in its function to reflect such harmony *of* its structural dualism instead of an approach to consider *a* structural dualism.

So, in this sense, to abandon film theory in order to understand the *making* of cinema as a construct of metamodernism pitted against screen distraction, there are two approaches to consider in that, as represented in Figure 1, we must first either eradicate such theories and ideas altogether while at the same time be inclusive *of* them which, in itself, is self defeatist whereby as to remove such ideas completely only reinforces the need to reinstate them again in order for them not to exist and so forth or, as represented in Figure 2, establish *listening*, represented by [L], through the making cinema as a catalyst for its oscillation, represented by [~], to reveal *inclusion*, represented by [i] which disbandons pre-existing screen thought yet

remains faithful to identify itself as metamodernist without the need to disrupt [L] through its duality, represented by [D] and, subsequently, its presence.

Primary Additives

M = metamodernism
mk = making
 C = cinema
 ~ = oscillation
 SD = screen distraction
 A = action

Secondary additives

ft = film theory
 L = listening [visual]
 I = [cinematic] inclusion
 D = duality
 Un = unjective
 Ex = experience

D [- film theory] ~ [+film theory] x [experience + Metamodernism] = *making* cinema

Figure 1: Representing the oscillation of removing and also instating film theory

D [listening] ~ [inclusion] x [experience + Metamodernism] + A - SD = *making* cinema

Figure 2: Representing the oscillation of visual listening and cinematic inclusion against screen distraction

With this in mind, I will consider the later to be an informate of listening to then design a working model from that which can illustrate listening as a means to induce inclusion - not so much as an after product of listening but more considered as a reactive *of* listening - as the resultant after effect where, in a twentieth century approach, the same injunction might be enabled by what film philosophy would infer to as ‘affect’ thus now abandoned for something else. This is not to say, however, that affect is rebranded by the presence of inclusion but is, rather, an entirely new condition of *making* cinema in context to countering a presence of SD in the same model. A simplification of this approach would see D (-ft ~ +ft) x M = *mkC* replace Figure 2 as the introduction of designing a model to understand making cinema. However, this, of course, being merely a container would need to have contextualisation added if the approach was to make a contribution to *mk*. In this regard, I will consider the *Catch 22* long shot scene as one such example to unpack further in discussion

If we were, say, to position making cinema as a primary result of the component D(L) x M, an interesting way to think about the takeoff scene occurs when considering the relationship of listening being derived as a condition as opposed to a cinematic process, in this case represented through D, which affords the equation to completely change the experience for making cinema to then make the scene stronger in its ability to convey a cinematic presence represented in Figure 3 and Figure 4, allowed due to the longer takes thus reducing SD from an absence of film cutting.

D [L] ~ [I] x [Ex + M] - SD = *mkC*

Figure 3: Representation of a standard listening equation

$$D [L \times Ex] \sim [I \times Ex] (+Un) \times M - SD = mkC$$

Figure 4: Representation of a contextualised equation: the take off scene in the film *Catch 22*

The point here is that by placing a contextualisation of listening and inclusion in the presence of metamodernism, the modelling of such allows the scene to be understood in a broader contextual analysis when taking into account the premise of oscillation and its implications for both listening and inclusion to allow a richer experience of metamodernism as noted in Figure 4 to that of Figure 3 by a new term relative to metamodernism thus being *unjective*, represented by the value *Un*. The place for this term is used as a new representation which, in essence, is created as an observational experience brought about by metamodernism's ability to immerse listening and inclusion without the need to infer duality to simply a mono-experiential condition for the audience as, in this regards, unjective consolidates a reversal of both the states of subjective and objective - that is to say, if a experience through film lends itself as to what we have known through twentieth century film theory as to be 'subjective' or 'objective' in a film, we are, in effect, grafting a state of juncture on the influence between the cinematic image and the audience which, arguably, brings about an issue that once such an instance occurs, the state of the film and it's experience is grounded in either one or the other which, then, holds impact on the way we might ought to come to terms with a film's agency; however, if we consider the implications of an unjective or more broadly speaking, the removal of the presence of both a subjective or objective instance - gives rise to protecting such a relationship is not grafted into a singularity that would, if doing so, make it impossible for M to exist at all if, for this occurrence, only, say, one perspective was created and thus disabling M without the function of metamodernism to regulate any oscillative values which M depends on to exist in the first place as afforded by a metamodernist trope.

Notwithstanding, one might further argue that unjectiveness in both consideration of the influence of a metamodernist's structural logic as found in Figure 4 prescribes a fundamental state for film to govern without the need to be quantified as an absolute singularity, as found in the moving image once it is qualified to be *of* subjectiveness or *of* objectiveness. Such a contest, once removed, gives space for a film to develop, as does *Catch 22*, from an absence of singularity, transcended through cinematography and editing to co-join both mediums in ways not necessarily understood until recent articulations of, first, a post-postmodernist deliberation understood as post-postmodernism occurring as a catalyst to think about the following neomodernism, and second, a metamodernism perspective. This, of course, arguably, makes *Catch 22* an early example of a metamodernist film, drawn from its use of dark irony previously understood only as being *of* irony, not revealing itself until recent times as, from a twenty-first century perspective, deconstructing the premise *of* unjectiveness.

One of the more critical observations in using this method is to note the absence of time, often used in film theory as a primary base and especially from a Deleuzian perspective, for understanding and also contextualising cinema. Yet if we consider making cinema to be absent of time then the entire mechanical and durational way in which we have come to understand cinema, both of the past and in the present, then demands a completely new way to approach making cinema as the counter to screen distraction. In this context, a solution would be to articulate cinema as being *of* film and making cinema to be the oscillation of

such through the governing premise of listening. Resultantly, listening becomes absent of time as there is simply no need or function for time to exist in the first place if cinema is *of* film inasmuch as film is *of* cinema argued further by saying that to have time inextricably infers a singularity which governs the structural boundaries of the temporality of cinema. Yet, in metamodernism's context of oscillation, time would need to work independently from an *untime*, thus defeating the concept *of* time in film and *not of* time in film in the first place.

To expand on this, if we ignore time in this regards and instead focus on an unjectiveness prescribed in Figure 4, effectively replacing the need for time, then listening begins to unpack its own agency running parallel to being both *of* objectiveness and subjectiveness, and in tandem, being *not of* objectiveness and *not of* subjectiveness in both cases, thus canceling out the role of time to function simply because time cannot exist in the presence of an *untime* nor in the condition of an absence of subjectiveness and objectiveness, as time is only an absolute fixture unrivaled by no other. For time not to exist, it therefore exists by not existing thus redundantly extinguishing itself from any hierarchy *of* cinema to instead being locked into being *in* cinema, a condition unrelated to metamodernism and the premise, as this paper supports, of the boundaries outside, and unrelated to being *of* unjectiveness.

So from what we have discussed thus far, the model of $D [L \times Ex] \sim [I \times Ex] (+Un) \times M - SD = mkC$ gives rise to the role of listening, and this rise then impacts on how we can better understand the takeoff scene. But in order for us to experience the scene itself, the presence of inclusion grafts a secondary model derived by oscillation to then explain how the method of listening can infuse the way we ought to think about the experiences of making cinema which derive from listening. To do this, we next must define inclusion to grasp the fundamentals of an impact on making cinema and after that, contextualise the expanding of a third condition that supports the meaningful result of inclusion's ability to connect with an audience through the performance of the long shot.

CINEMATIC INCLUSION

Now that we have established the premise of listening, an absence of time, and the importance of unjectiveness, the second component of inclusion is concerned with the impact that listening has on an audience which, for the most part, will play out an immersive perspective derived from indicators attesting the value of immersiveness in a contextual gaze surmounted with the affordances of experience impacted through duration; not measured in time but rather, through the condition of inclusion within the shot itself and the implications as discussed in a moment of immersion as *of* and *is* with 'is' taken from 'is cinema' pitted against *of*, both two distinctive opposites yet indicative of an independant autonomy from each other in order for both to exist under the presence of metamodernism and what this brings forth into the parallel discussion of inclusion. When returning to the *Catch 22* take off scene, if we have already understood that an unjectiveness within the scene transpires the nature of what we witness in the scene, what then is for the way by which we experience the scene being *of* the shot in oscillation as to defining this experience of what *is* the shot?

An example which comes to mind is located in the way that editors have played out visual language on screen from examining and taking into consideration what an audience might feel when experiencing a particular part of a movie. In contemporary cinema, for example, an

audience may take on a spatial sensation of emotional stimulus from a lingering shot - and on this point, *Werckmeister Harmonies* (dir. Tarr, 2000), *Blade Runner 2049* (dir. Villeneuve, 2017) and even *Strange Colours* (dir. Lodkina) are both excellent examples of just how immersive a director can push such manifestations in a film to derive at a point of fixture, surmountable to enabling an audience to connect with a film on a subjective level while at the same time affording to be unsubjective through the resultant immersiveness - to that of a state induced to unjectiveness *of* a film and *of* an audience's film experience. As listening prescribed oscillation as the catalyst for making cinema, then so too does inclusion but for very different reasons as shown in Figure 5. If one was to think about inclusion based on the listening formula, the role and intent of inclusion is to follow on from what was created through the establishment of listening and take these agents to probe how such a condition can then effect the experience of an audience as derived by inclusion to then, at last, move forward to base the new knowledge of what the condition of inclusion can generate from listening, prompting the viewer to consider a method to come to terms with their experience of unjectiveness being *of* cinema inasmuch as cinema itself can be experienced as being *of* film. If, for example, the additives of I and L are swapped in placement held by duality and presided by oscillation then we can start to see how inclusion manifests a different kind of role in the model whereby duality in this context is concerned primarily with inclusion and how oscillation then delegates listening to a second condition where the first has an impact on the second and so forth; that is to say, that duality first impacts on inclusion to then oscillate with listening, giving a different kind of result for an unjectiveness in relation to the take off scene as represented in Figure 6.

$$D [I] \sim [L] \times [Ex + M] - SD + A = mkC$$

Figure 5: Representation of a standard inclusion equation

$$D [I \times Ex] \sim [L \times Ex] (+Un) \times M + A - SD = mkC$$

Figure 6: Representation of a contextualised equation: the take off scene in the film *Catch 22*

Returning to *Werckmeister Harmonies*, Tarr uses exactly that of an inclusion-esque informant where the immersiveness in his work comes across as a meditative collage, perhaps not as intense as the bleakness of the same stylistic shots as found in Tarr's later film *The Turin Horse* (dir. Tarr, 2016), but nonetheless prevalent to engage with his audience with a sense that the oscillatory qualities firmly derived in the duality of the inclusion-driven experience certainly makes for the kind of cinema which comes from his attention to uninterrupted performances posited to boundary a necessitated and lingering agency in the long shots prescribed as making cinema as opposed to the generic relativism afforded by, say, what a postmodern reading, or even an early post-postmodernism reading of the film would be when addressing the same kinds of concern played out through the audience's experience of the same movie.

I draw attention to this point because it comes to mind that Tarrs 'refusal of the imperative of the narrative order in favor of the extensive quality of images' (Benedyk & Ribeiro, 2019) presents itself as an unjective state quite at odds with mainstream cinema's fallacy of

entertainment-based doctrines that ultimately fuel the disorder of screen distractions by and from the objectifying of time through dismissively and, moreover, actively seeking to propel such a disorder by presenting too much sensorial information on screen to cause a break in concentration from an over-use of cutting, sound design and visual effects. If the *Werckmeister Harmonies* can give us any indication of the extent of such disruptions then one only has to look at the populous mass consumption of media-based entertainment and the kinds of films that especially digital consumption brings to understand the importance of Tarr's films insofar as the role that inclusion unifies an already un-unified space not necessarily defined by its cinematic form as much as it measures the agency of deliberateness in a slow media brought about by Tarr's images in context from the execution of frequented long shots which prompt an audience to become immersed in the scene and of the moment instead of bouncing from one cut to the next from a constant state of reactive unattentiveness.

One of the key instances on this point is what can inclusion offer for the long shot by way of strategies that can reduce screen distraction? By using the word 'can' in relation to our previous discussion on 'of', this implies an invitation for the audience to experience immersion as indicated in the formula of Figure 6 not necessarily an interpretive assumption of *can* as *is* taken in an empirical sense but moreso, in a metamodernist sense which must uphold in this regard that for *of* to exist in the equation there must also be an *is* working independently as the opposite yet still open to the presence of *is* from an oscillatory requirement to *not* exist in the presence of *of* in order for *is* to exit and then, equally, not exist in the same space. Thus, the presence of inclusion would not be able to exist at all in a reductive sense otherwise the entire proposed structure of both would then be divorced from metamodernism entirely - said in that metamodernism can only exist by its framework and also, not existing, at the same time. So, in this case, inclusion's interpretative basis to use *of* and *is* in tandem, yet not in tandem independently would then simply interpret the two perspectives as post-postmodernist or even, and perhaps more likely to be gained as postmodernist; a sudden death for our expanding model.

Returning to the *Catch 22* scene and with *of* and *is* in mind, the last remaining additive not yet discussed is action represented by [A]. This is by far the most visually descriptive of all of the additives used thus far primarily because the action and also inaction of the scene can determine if an audience will hold their attention to a long shot, inviting the entire formula to work as a centralist 'glue' which holds all other mechanical and temporal additives together. A comparative analysis would be to examine a side by side version of the take off shot in three ways as represented in Figure 7 and 8. The first being with and without sound, the second being with and without the airplanes and the third, with and without the characters who linger in the final moments of the shot as the squadron takes off and exits screen right.

In the case of the first comparison of sound and no sound, its obvious effect would be to have action hold an audience's attention simply out of the contrast variants between the sound design of the roaring plane engines and the syncing image of the airplanes making each sound. In the absence of sound, though, the action of the shot would be deferred to only the images themselves which, of course, greatly diminishes the power of action understood that sound itself can still keep action moving throughout a sequence in, arguably, ways that images cannot, or at the very least, not in the same assumption. Leading into the images themselves, if the airplanes were removed from each shot and instead have sound design playing over the top of the amended montage, a different kind of action would thus unfold,

creating a versioned screen immersion from its absence of what we know *should* be in the shot, especially if collective screen memories are to play a part in our experience of the witnessing shot but has ultimately been removed from view.



Figure 7: Still from the take off scene in *Catch 22*

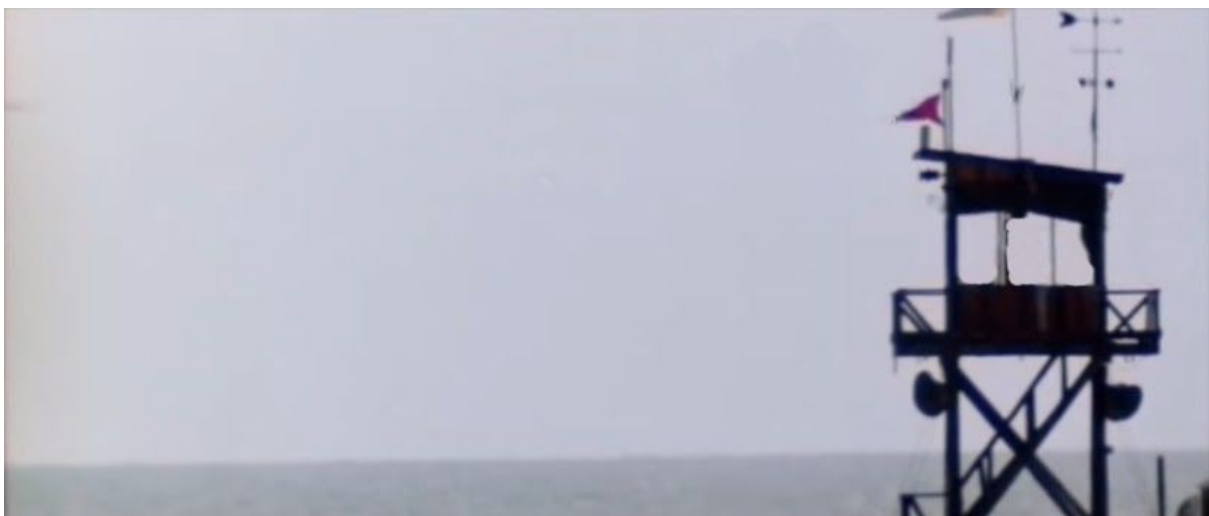


Figure 8: Planes and characters removed from the take off scene in *Catch 22*

This absence of airplanes, sound design and characters opens up an interesting space for inclusion. For this scenario of the scene to work, it needs to oscillate between collective memory of the audience ‘filling in’ the missing components which in turn, creates immersiveness from the perspective of *of* while on the other hand, if an audience was not familiar with the take off scene and, instead, viewed this scene without the context and memory of the original version, then the inclusion aspects of the shot would behave quite differently to its other by the presence of *is* understood as the empirical opposite of the relativistic *of*, thus changing the way that not only the shot can experience a sense of immersiveness within the contextualisation of making cinema but moreover, how such

contextualisation plays an important part in determining the immersiveness of making cinema as a counter to screen distraction.

From this example, we can see that if an audience's attention is to be held during a long shot, and placed into the sub-context of minimising distraction, what we know as a foundation of modern cinema is that if we hear and see repeated contrast values between sound and image then screen distraction reduces but if this contrast is reduced then screen distraction obviously increases and so forth.



Figure 9: Still from the water well scene of *The Turin Horse*



Figure 10: Character removed from the water well scene of *The Turin Horse*

The same can be said of Figure 9 depicting a still from the water well scene long shot in *The Turin Horse*, when the character is removed to instead reveal an absence in the landscape, as located in Figure 10, which devoids the scene from deliberate action except to say the movement of the camera tracking forward, the natural weather effects on the landscape, and the accompanying sound design.

CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated an alternative theoretical model to understand long shots through a metamodernist perspective as a way to create structural affordances of a more intrinsic approach in thinking about making cinema. While the two key terms of listening and inclusion create their own possibilities in explaining such a premise, the contribution that this method enables to the field offers a dynamic and scalable perspective to both the coming to terms with a long shot in a contemporary context and also as a method to counter screen distraction by and large deposited from collective expectations from modern audiences. In doing so, listening and inclusion offer a new proposal to better understand the role of the long shot in contemporary cinema by excluding the governance of established film philosophy and film theory, namely, the concept of time in cinema, to focus more on the need to maintain an oscillation between subjective, objective and unjective, duality and singularity, action, and meta-immersiveness.

By disrupting access from film philosophy and film theory, this approach offers a new way to consider making cinema as a method of new knowledge to inform embryonic viewpoints by practitioners and audiences at an immersive level. Despite the limitations of screen distraction and the accelerated levels of fast-paced editing cuts as located in twenty-first century contributions, this application of listening and inclusion through cinema introduces a better way to regard long shots as an integral component of contemporary practice and a vantage point for developing new approaches of making cinema in the future.

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IMAGES

Figure 7. Still from *Catch 22* (1970), Paramount Pictures, USA

Figure 8. Modified still from *Catch 22* (1970), Paramount Pictures, USA

Figure 9. Still from *The Turin Horse* (2011), The Cinema Guild, USA

Figure 10. Modified still from *The Turin Horse* (2011), The Cinema Guild, USA