

# Wastrels of Time: Slow Cinema's Laboring Body, the Political Spectator, and the Queer

**Karl Schoonover**

Across a sixty-year trajectory, many art films have stubbornly confronted viewers with slowness. From the perspective of classical Hollywood, these chunks of fallow film time “overspend,” upset, or even foreclose on the continuity system’s prized narrative economy, replacing eventfulness with an unproductive episodic meandering. From Antonioni to Apichatpong, these art films also encourage us to consider how watching wasted screen time differs from wasting time in real life. In doing so, this slower kind of film proposes the possibility that cinema can capture excess as a temporality. Although not all art house fare can be labeled slow, I speculate here that valorizing slowness characterizes one crucial sociopolitical parameter of art cinema’s consumption. In the idea of a spectator who recognizes the value of slowness, I believe we can discover something of the art film’s historicity.<sup>1</sup> The slow art film anticipates a spectator not only eager to clarify the value of wasted time and uneconomical temporalities but also curious about the impact of broadening what counts as productive human labor. This fact makes any slow film pertinent to the question of queer representation, and it asks us to consider what it might mean to be productively queer.

Last year, however, *Sight and Sound* editor Nick James took aim at the contemporary art house trend toward “slow cinema.”<sup>2</sup> In a short but scathing editorial, James interrogates what he sees as a critical bias undermining the rigor of film criticism and the very basis of film aesthetics. He offers a blistering set of accusations motivated by a fear that slow films hinder our ability to appreciate Hollywood narrative, dulling our capacity for attention and diminishing our mental acumen. Unlike the noble “slow food” movement, in which aesthetic authenticity arises from patient and sustainable modes of

preparation, slow filmmaking is a “passive aggressive” crusade that lulls its viewers into complacency by asking them to dwell excessively in image and squandering “great swathes of our precious time to achieve quite fleeting and slender aesthetic and political effects.” According to James, the indulgent wastefulness of films like those by Pedro Costa or Tsai Ming-Liang makes for lazy viewers. He is making a dig here at many of the world’s most visible and institutionally positioned film critics, for whom slower is better, more profound, artier. He reflects, “I have begun to wonder if maybe some of [today’s slow films] now offer an easy life for critics and programmers. After all, the festivals themselves commission many of these productions, and such films are easy to remember and discuss in detail because details are few.” While these statements infuriated many scholars, critics, and filmmakers, there is also a productive conceptual terrain mapped by this description. James imagines a mutually beneficial equation: a conspiracy between filmmakers and critics, and a broader collaboration of the slow filmic image with its viewer. Like a counterpart to Linda Williams’s “body genre,” the slow film’s wallowing image invokes an indulgent temporality in this viewer.

Not only James but also slow cinema’s other detractors invert the classic formulation of the art cinema criticism that began with neorealism and its most vocal supporter, André Bazin.<sup>3</sup> For Bazin and many of his followers, the slower the shot and the greater the sense of unfettered, living duration, or *durée*, the greater the effort required of the spectator. This dilation of time encourages a more active and politically present viewing practice—an engagement commended for the intensity of its perception. Seeing becomes a form of labor. The critical campaign against current slow cinema denies the political potential of this Bazinian mode of spectating and calls into question whether watching slow films “is worth it.” James’s editorial thus ends with an admission that sounds like a call to arms: “I’ll be looking out for more active forms of rebellion.” For him, slow films are passive films that aggressively foreclose on any active resistance. They seem to cheat political agency and discipline, and they eschew hard work.

While James’s surety about measuring the political effects of particular techniques is as questionable as it is noble, a more subtle presumption underwriting his and other similar arguments deserves our attention. I am ultimately most interested in how a familiar accusation of political inactivity gets counterposed here to the notion of real rebellion, sidestepping or jumping over complicated questions about what kind of work constitutes political labor—much less rebellion. After all, a central lesson of Marx is that labor is something that has been mystified and whose value capitalism conceals from our view. How then are we to measure the expenditure and the quality of labor when we do not know what labor looks like? Is labor’s true value recognizable to us? Is labor exactly figurable to us at this historical juncture? At the very least, it seems that when we attempt to describe either the work of spectators or their laziness, we must take care to ask whether we might be

enacting a particular late-capitalist ideological myopia that removes certain kinds of labor from view and refigures them as apolitical.

The film blogs exploded with replies to James's attack.<sup>4</sup> Many of these retorts regrettably invoked connoisseurship and stylistic innovation. These defenses overvalued a staid economy of artistic merit (virtuosity, mastery) rather than opening up the conceptual and theoretical questions of labor, value, and productivity at the core of much contemporary slow cinema—questions probed in films such as *Le quattro volte/The Four Times* (Michelangelo Frammartino, IT/DE/CH, 2010), *Unser täglich Brot/Our Daily Bread* (Nikolaus Geyrhalt, DE/AT, 2005), *Hei yan quan/I Don't Want to Sleep Alone* (Tsai, MY/CN/TW/FR/AT, 2006); and *Wendy and Lucy* (Kelly Reichardt, US, 2008). In this slow cinema debate, in which critics are accused of not working hard enough and bloggers defend contemplative film consumption, part of what is at issue is who gets to describe the work of the spectator.<sup>5</sup> Who can speak for the viewer and transform him or her into an abstract agent? In other words, who is authorized to quantify, substantiate, or measure the labor of reception? Who can attest to the productive political capacities of film watching? Would that be *Sight and Sound*, academic film theorists, bloggers, or the *New York Times*, with its recent pining for the slowness of *Jeanne Dielman* (Chantal Akerman, BE/FR, 1975)?<sup>6</sup>

Although viewers could be asked to express their will and/or to describe the quality of their own labor, apprehending that data is not my pursuit here. I do not wish to make empirical claims about reception; rather, my intention is to supply a few observations about the contested critical terrain of substantiating the labor of viewing. I am taking this broader approach because I believe that these debates reveal a resurgent interest in deciding whether or not watching is a valuable form of labor, a valid or measurable means of expending effort. Debates over whether a film spectator is actively or passively engaged have characterized a century's worth of conversations about the cinema and film aesthetics. Today, however, these persistent debates get restaged around the opposition of time wasted versus time labored. If time is the way that the art film makes the question of labor visible in the image, then exactly what does nonproductivity look like? Where does it fester? Can it accrue value, and can this value be measured?

Of course, the slow cinema debates make visible a set of assumptions that lurk under the polarities of art film versus mainstream cinema—assumptions too pervasive and important to fully account for here. Instead, I offer some preliminary explorations of this recent debate's metacritical logic, probing not only how it reifies and organizes film history but also how it reflects and refracts the history of ideas concerning the cinematic image. Instead of simply retrieving the political potentiality of slowness, inactivity, or "passive aggression," my aim is to begin unpacking the politics of value that these debates have brought to the surface. From this perspective, I quickly reprise the constitution of art cinema as a category and consider how labor gets discussed

in debates around the actors in and spectators of one crucial inspiration for today's slow cinema: neorealist filmmaking and particularly the work of Vittorio De Sica. When considered alongside this moment from its prehistory, the slow film is not, I argue, simply in a pointless headlock with Hollywood's temporal economy.<sup>7</sup> 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. This, too, is the register of the actively political.

### *Two Bodies of Slowness*

For critics, the questionably productive but nevertheless importantly alternative temporality of slow cinema gets manifested in two bodies: the body on the art film's screen and the body of its spectator. Is there a coordination of these bodies as in Williams's "body genres" where the affective eruptions of a particular genre's spectator parallel the onscreen affective excesses associated with that genre? Does the onscreen body ameliorate or exploit the offscreen body's uncertainties? As we begin to answer these two seemingly descriptive questions, we cannot help but confront the implicit political fault line of an aesthetic debate. This fault line can be posed as the question of whether the art film promotes a particular kind of viewing practice in order to sooth anxieties about the value of our own labor and that of others, or to aggravate those anxieties to generate a different account of the very idea of productivity. More simply put, is slow cinema politically decadent or politically subversive?

To begin answering the question of how critical discourses about cinema (past and present) have intertwined labor and temporality, let us turn to the first body, the onscreen body, and examine how the art film has been understood to use the body as a means of making slowness visible in the cinematic image. In doing so, we can expand Steve Neale's canonical assertion that "art cinema has always been concerned with the inscription of representations of the body that differ from those predominating in Hollywood."<sup>8</sup> Deleuze finds just such a new kind of onscreen body—the art house deviant—facilitating a new postwar mode of cinematic temporality. Describing the shift from the movement-image to the time-image, he writes, "a new race of characters was stirring, a kind of mutant: they saw rather than acted, they were seers."<sup>9</sup> We might also characterize these stirring mutants that populate the aggressively slow art film as "wastrels"—an odd label that designates both people who waste too easily and those vagabonds who society treats as waste and who, like refuse, are thrown to the side of road. The art film's attempt to make empty or nonproductive time visible through the presence of these onscreen bodies reverberates with a late twentieth-century anxiety about how to quantify human labor and the more general concern about the value of human life in late modernity.<sup>10</sup> For Deleuze, early examples of these figures

populate the films of Rossellini, Antonioni, and Fellini. With them onscreen, the priorities of the image now shift: “time, ‘a little time in the pure state’ ... rises up to the surface of the screen. ... The body is no longer exactly what moves; neither subject of movement or the instrument of action, it becomes rather the developer of time, it shows time through its tiredness and waitings.”<sup>11</sup>

Both Neale and Deleuze invoke Italian neorealist films as they describe modern cinema and identify the body as a site of the art film’s characteristic expectancy and influential temporal distention. Neorealism, however, is a famously slippery designator, describing a variety of film practices and styles. For the sake of argument, let us take a closer look at the consummate neorealist body—that particular physicality imaged by the canonical figures now burdened by history with describing what constitutes neorealism. For director Vittorio De Sica, his collaborator Cesare Zavattini, and their most vocal supporter André Bazin, potency resides in using nonprofessionals in key roles. The merits of this approach appear particularly visible in those amateurs whose life experience weighs heavily on their bodies. The ideal neorealist body, then, is one that performs without performing. This figure exemplifies what we might call an “unbelabored labor” to describe how comportment and physicality bespeak a character’s history and his or her present actuality more than any acting technique. These amateurs were often chosen for a defining physical characteristic—an automatic quirk or ingrained bearing that was taken to index their personal histories, national pain, and the aftereffects of a global war on the human community.<sup>12</sup> Bazin describes the casting process of *Bicycle Thieves* (De Sica, IT, 1948) as a search for the “purity of countenance and bearing that the common people have.” Explaining how neorealism accrues its value through the performances of amateur bodies, Bazin’s rhetoric plays with the collapsing of several profilmic, diegetic, narrative, filmic, performing (laboring), and just existing bodies.

Bazin believed that the narrative of *Bicycle Thieves* found its form in the distinctive strides of its main actors: a particular gait, a certain wandering. He writes: “Before choosing this particular child, De Sica did not ask him to perform, just to walk. He wanted to play off the striding gait of the man against the short trotting steps of the child, the harmony of this discord being for him of capital importance for the understanding of the film as a whole.” The dawdling of a boy’s body serves to enliven the story, but it is also exemplary and constitutive of the meandering of the narrative itself. Therefore, the dawdle characterizes the shape of one of the twentieth century’s most famous revisions to narrative structure.<sup>13</sup>

For Bazin, the purest moments of this film occur when its narration seems to free itself from the dictates of a script and the limits of artificial mise-en-scene. Those pure moments appear most readily in the “natural” action of bodies, which in turn lend the screen image its unique presence, its immediacy, and allow it to emanate a palpable sense of duration. The tics and other

specificities of bodies in *Bicycle Thieves* appear to determine the shape of the narrative for Bazin, just as Chaplin's physical antics mold plot structure and not the reverse.

Walks are not the only exemplary physicalities given full reign by neorealism. The climax of Bazin's reading of *Umberto D.* (Vittorio De Sica, IT, 1952) centers on a small and otherwise inconsequential action of a secondary character going through her morning routine: a young woman sits grinding coffee with a hand crank and nudges the kitchen door closed with the tip of her foot. The importance of this film and its revision to the terms of narrative fiction emerges from the camera's heightened attention to a quotidian microevent, asking us to "[concentrate] on her toes feeling the surface of the door" as much as on the story.<sup>14</sup> In this, one of neorealism's most famous events of uneventfulness, the body functions onscreen to amplify and expand the aesthetic registers of a slower spectating, demanding a different kind of labor from the offscreen spectating body. For Bazin, realism's "meticulous and perceptive ... choice of authentic and significant detail" is one of the truest uses of cinema because it highlights the medium's capacity to seize time in chunks. When describing this foregrounding of cinema's access to duration, Bazin invokes (or is it realism's provocation?) a corollary perceptual acuity on the part of the spectator, a careful look that mirrors the camera's lingering. Filmic realism offers the spectator a different temporal relationship to perception, "glimpsing the fleeting presence" of things and meanings missed by ordinary seeing.<sup>15</sup>

According to Bazin, this *durée* is visibly palpable with amateurs when compared to more professionalized and obviously narrative kinds of film bodies. Neorealism asks us to recognize certain bodies as evidence of the performer's status as an amateur. De Sica, Zavattini, and Bazin assume that this distinction registers on the viewer. The nonprofessionalism of certain performances must be detectable, visibly obvious to the spectator through a comparison to other types of acting—often within the same film. We might say then that the question of labor haunts any contemplation of these films.<sup>16</sup>

If slowness enlists special bodies onscreen, it also demands a special kind of viewing, a wastrel of a different space. This is our second body: the body offscreen. Through the lens of a classicist, art films are for people who can afford to spend and overspend time. They often frustrate the categories of consumption that Hollywood recognizes.<sup>17</sup> A more generous perspective might understand the art film as encouraging its spectator to acclimate him- or herself to slow time and remain open to its potentialities. The restlessness or contemplation induced by art cinema's characteristic fallow time draws attention to the activity of watching and ennobles a forbearing but unbedazzled spectatorship.

Art cinema exploits its spectator's boredom, becoming as much a cinema of expectancies as one of attractions. It turns boredom into a kind of special work, one in which empty onscreen time is repurposed, renovated,

rehabilitated.<sup>18</sup> Borrowing again from Williams, we might say that as the art film increases its demand on the spectator's labor, it reduces the expectations for its performer's labor. The boringness of art films exposes that genre's insistent disarticulation of the body onscreen from the body offscreen: a belabored spectator mirrors in reverse the nonbelabored body of the character onscreen. A complex set of dependencies proceed from this formula: screen time's open or indeterminate quality triggers a different mode of spectatorial labor that appears enabled by the very determinate quality of the "unbelabored labor" of nonprofessional actors.

### *Seeing Labor Differently*

The morning routine of the young Maria Pia Casilio in *Umberto D.* is a very different type of labor than that of Lucy and Ethel wrapping candies in the classic episode of *I Love Lucy* (CBS, US, 1951–1957), although both sequences appeared on screens in 1952.<sup>19</sup> Bazin's description of neorealist bodies as relative entities (always defined by their distinction from other bodies) also introduces the possibility that cinema might remake and rework the picture of labor given us by earlier films. The history of the moving image might in this sense be recast as a series of recognitions of divergent types of laboring bodies in which the flatness of Julianne Moore's performance in *Safe* (Todd Haynes, US/UK, 1995) makes impossible the self-improvement promised in Lifetime's made-for-TV movies of the 1980s/1990s. Also recognized by this new history might be how the refusals of Mbissine Thérèse Diop, who plays Diouana in *Le Noire de ...* (Ousmane Sembene, FR/SN, 1966), revoke the orchestration of sentimental attachments supplied by Danielle Darrieux's performance as the Comtesse in *Madame de ...* (Max Ophuls, FR/IT, 1953). Such comparisons identify a common register across a group of films that complicates the traditional historicist privileging of progress as a means of marking social change.

One contemporary slow film seems to make these comparisons *within* its diegesis, or more accurately, among its various diegetic registers: Jia Zhang Ke's *Er shi si cheng ji/24-City* (CN/HK/JP, 2008). This film suggests in its form how the eclipse of industrial production based on human labor might be made visible in the image itself. The film beautifully strains to document cinematically the problem of nonproductivity. It lingers on the overwhelming scale of emptied factories, the distended barrenness of a crowded city after the departure of large-scale industry, and the dystopic nostalgia of retired workers. Testimony is appropriated as an element of *mise-en-scène*. In other words, Jia stages his testimony, blurring the lines between the use of the image as a means of narrating a fiction and as a means of culling documentary evidence. In the midst of this rich visual and aural accounting, Joan Chen appears in the film playing a woman, Xiao Hu, who is often mistaken for the movie star Joan Chen. Although other actors in the film, such as Liping Lü, will be

recognizable to many Chinese moviegoing audiences as film actors, Chen's performance manages to hover in the film's ambiguous generic terrain that mixes documentary, reenactment, and fiction.<sup>20</sup>

Viewers of Jia's films have come to expect diegetic instabilities to disrupt the narrative of his films at their midpoints. Just as we are settling into the conceits, temporalities, and semantic use-value of his film *Still Life* (CN/HK, 2006), for example, a spaceship hovers on the horizon. The breaches in his films are often not just out of the ordinary. They echo the wildly overdetermined images in his films that sometimes irritate and interrupt an otherwise realist narration: these are those almost stagy and over-the-top images, such as the ancient planter walking in front of the postmodern cityscape at the beginning of *The World* (CN/JP/FR, 2004). In *24-City*, however, Chen's own remarkable performance, and its reworking of what it means to labor as an actor, elevates the stakes of the film's diegetic intrusions. The duplicitous authenticity of Chen's star body feels like an intrusion of extratextual hybridity into what has been a realist diegesis. Chen's performance relishes the tensions between persona, self, and look-alike.

When we look closely at this film's temporal engorgement, we find it unable to avoid the awkward problem that human labor presents for a culture aspiring to a postindustrial future. The question of the value of human life in a postindustrial future is found in the collapse of these various bodies into the image of Joan Chen. That is why this portion of the film is so crucial. It describes the film's discomfort with ordinary cinema's instrumentalization of bodies. David Bordwell suggests that we feel an art film's deviant loosening of Hollywood's linear temporality through its drifting characters who lack clear motivation. This aimless drifting figure first finds shape in the neorealist bodies mentioned above. However, this drifter goes on to shape the quintessential performers of art house auteurs: Antonioni's Monica Vitti, Fassbinder's Hanna Shygulla, Pasolini's Franco Citti, and Tsia-Ming Liang's Kang-sheng Lee. These are figures whose affective vacancy exemplifies the odd temporal dilation of the art film. These figures are the opposite of how Jia collaborates with Chen in *24-City*.

At first, the star body of Chen infuses the image with a kind of movie-magic charge that the rest of the film—and its meditations on waste and refuse—has avoided. We are hit by a sudden rush of excitement: this is what mainstream cinema tells us movies are supposed to feel like. This magic does not last long. No sooner do we cathect onto the star aura of Chen than we feel this body slipping back into the mundane register of postindustrial detritus. Chen does not appear to labor much at being the character who labors at being Joan Chen. As the mortal body of Xiao Hu reabsorbs the star body of Chen (paradoxically via Chen's masterful performance of ordinariness), the film returns to the brutal question of how to measure the consequences of human labor.



### *Wastrel Time and Queer Living*

In considering the functionality of narratively inconsequential time in relationship to the specificity of art films, we are asking about the political potential of that slowness. Barthes found those films that encourage distended spectatorial temporality to be replete with political potential. He writes the following in his tribute to Antonioni: “To look longer than expected ... disturbs established orders of every kind, to the extent that normally the time of the look is controlled by society; hence the scandalous nature of certain photographs and certain films, not the most indecent or the most combative, but just the most ‘posed.’”<sup>21</sup> For Barthes, Antonioni’s slowness was a dissident protraction of the gaze, undermining narrative’s hegemony. Do slow cinema’s scandalous disruptions constitute a politically subversive practice? Or are they evidence of a reactionary bourgeois culture taking hold and driving Bataille’s potlatch underground? According to John Frow, Thorstein Veblen identifies the leisure class as a group invested in activities that take time but do not “conduce directly to the furtherance of human life.” Frow paraphrases: “At the core of aristocratic labor is a ‘non-productive consumption of time,’ and the deliberate and ostentatious *wasting* of time.”<sup>22</sup>

This description immediately calls to mind Andy Warhol and, in a different way, John Waters, both of whose cinemas, even more directly than De Sica’s, refuse to depict bodies as laboring productively. Their films are populated with obstinately unproductive counterproductive bodies. The body becomes a site to resist labor, refusing to appear belabored, or spoofing the very notion of production and reproduction. But if such physicalities provide these films the means by which to distend time, do they actually trouble modernity’s definition of labor as well-timed bodies? In dilating time, do these physicalities subvert or simply reify the inextricability of timed bodies and the value of labor?

In different ways, the films of Warhol and Waters refute any critical practice which tries to make the aesthetic accountable to “more significant” meanings, content, or narrative truths. When we begin dicker over the use-value of the excessive image, these films seem to warn, we are suddenly taking a referendum on queerness, questioning the validity of queer lives. In the broadest sense, then, the debates over 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. Queers luxuriate while others work. Queers seem always to have time to waste. In fact, when an innocent soul finds himself with too much time on his hands, the threat of too much time often gets coded as a vulnerability to homosexuality (as is clear in the flea market sequence of *Bicycle Thieves*). One can imagine a queer reading of the ur-text of slow cinema *Umberto D.* that argues not for the latent homosexuality of its characters, but that exposes the film’s project—finding an

aesthetic means by which to faithfully account for the temporalities of less-eventful living—as a queer venture.

If we now return to the current slow cinema debates, we find that each side enacts a masculinist reaction to aberrant temporality that we should not let go unquestioned. On the one hand, slow cinema's detractors display an irritable impatience with fallowed time, which they equate with refuse, useless activity, unproductive labor, and the overly aesthetic.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, its supporters deploy a compensatory rhetoric that attempts to rescue it from aesthetic decadence. As with the erudite connoisseur's encounter with the excesses of the feminine, they suggest slowness is an otherness to be recognized and mined for its profundity, beauty, or meditative qualities. A key figure like Bordwell embodies both of these impulses: compellingly describing the systematicity of classical Hollywood narrative as economical, unified, and coherent, while at the same time embracing art films for their deviations from classicism as evidence of authorial or artistic expression.

Gendered and sexed binaries maintain a firm (if implicit) grip here, one that begs for a limp-wristed intervention. While my observations here are preliminary, my motivation for unpacking the discourses of slow cinema is to reveal a stultifying logic of utility in current debates around cinematic aesthetics that dangerously confines our sense of what and who can be represented and for how long. Queer theorist and literary scholar Lee Edelman argues that at their very core ordinary, everyday notions of temporality—including linear narrative, teleology, reproduction, progress, history, and so forth—constrict what can be political. "Queer" names anything that works against or is left unrealized under that temporal regime. He writes, "the queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form."<sup>24</sup> Edelman uses "reproductive futurism" to describe the logic that compels us "to submit to the framing of political debate—and, indeed, of the political field—as defined by the terms of ... reproductive futurism: terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside of the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations."<sup>25</sup> Through a close consideration of the discursive history of slow cinema, we may be able to address larger questions, exposing how notions of utility conspire against queer temporality, how "reproductive futurism" demands that queer forms of exertion and labor go unseen, and how alternate forms of living may remain unfigurable in mainstream cinematic language.

To think we can answer the question of slow cinema's value without such a careful consideration is to decide prematurely that we know what labor looks like and to predetermine what counts as productive. Since the value of human being is at stake here, it might be crucial to delay such judgments until we develop a more rigorous—even queerer—materialism of slowness.

In the interim, and like the imposing stench of a trash heap, wasted time betrays the truths of a well-measured world.

*Karl Schoonover is the author of Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema (University of Minnesota Press, 2012). He is also the coeditor of Global Art Cinema: New Histories and Theories (Oxford University Press, 2010).*

## Notes

I am grateful for the readings of earlier drafts of this essay provided by the anonymous reader, Jennifer Fay, Lloyd Pratt, Rosalind Galt, and Elena Gorfinkel.

1. Matthew Flanagan provides an excellent account of the slow film's characteristics and suggests a series of effects that the slow image has on its spectator in "Towards an Aesthetic of Slow in Contemporary Cinema," *16:9*, no. 29 (November 2008), [www.16-9.dk/2008-11/side11\\_inenglish.htm](http://www.16-9.dk/2008-11/side11_inenglish.htm) (accessed October 22, 2011). Dudley Andrew offers a different but relevant take on the temporality of contemporary art films in his formulation of "décalage" in "Time Zones and Jetlag: The Flows and Phases of World Cinema," in *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, ed. Natasa Durovicová and Kathleen Newman (New York: Routledge, 2010), 59–89. For a broader discussion of the art film's historicity, see the "The Impurity of Art Cinema," in *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
2. Nick James, "Passive Aggressive," *Sight and Sound* 2, no. 4 (April 2010): 5.
3. For examples of additional skepticism toward slow cinema, see Steven Shaviro, "Slow Cinema vs. Fast Films," *The Pinocchio Theory* blog, posted May 12, 2010, [www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=891](http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=891) (accessed October 22, 2011); and Dan Kois, "Eating Your Cultural Vegetables," *New York Times Magazine*, April 29, 2011, [www.nytimes.com/2011/05/01/magazine/mag-01Riff-t.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/01/magazine/mag-01Riff-t.html?_r=1) (accessed October 22, 2011).
4. For a representative retort to James see Harry Tuttle, "Slow Films, Easy Life (*Sight & Sound*)," *Unspoken Cinema* blog, posted May 12, 2010, <http://unspokencinema.blogspot.com/2010/05/slow-films-easy-life-sight.html> (accessed October 22, 2011). For interesting summaries of the debates and additional commentary, see Dan Fox, "Slow, Fast, and Inbetween," *Frieze* blog, posted May 23, 2010, [http://blog.frieze.com/slow\\_fast\\_and\\_inbetween/](http://blog.frieze.com/slow_fast_and_inbetween/) (accessed October 22, 2011); Andrew O'Hehir, "In Praise of Boredom, at the Movies and in Life," *Salon.com* (October 7, 2011 [www.salon.com/ent/movies/andrew\\_ohehir/2011/06/07/in\\_praise\\_of\\_boredom](http://www.salon.com/ent/movies/andrew_ohehir/2011/06/07/in_praise_of_boredom) (accessed October 22, 2011)); Danny Leigh, "The View: Is It OK to Be a Film Philistine?" *Guardian Film Blog*, posted May 21, 2010, [www.guardian.co.uk/film/filmblog/2010/may/21/film-philistine](http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/filmblog/2010/may/21/film-philistine) (accessed October 22, 2011); and Vadim Rizov, "Slow Cinema Backlash," *Independent Eye* blog, posted May 12, 2010, [www.ifc.com/blogs/indie-eye/2010/05/slow-cinema-backlash.php](http://www.ifc.com/blogs/indie-eye/2010/05/slow-cinema-backlash.php) (accessed October 22, 2011). Adrian Martin provides a uniquely rich response to James in "Slow Defence," *Filmkrant* 323 (July/August 2010), [www.filmkrant.nl/world\\_wide\\_angle/7218](http://www.filmkrant.nl/world_wide_angle/7218) (accessed October 22, 2011).
5. Also lurking here is the tense uncertainty of film journalism's future: the institutionally ensconced voice (*Sight and Sound* is the official publication of the British

- Film Institute) versus the peripheral voice, the professional versus the amateur, the paid versus the unpaid.
6. See Manohla Dargis's contribution to the discussion in "In Defense of the Slow and the Boring," *New York Times*, June 2, 2011, AR10; A. O. Scott's contribution to this discussion is less approving.
  7. Although I am not arguing that all art cinema directly or unself-consciously inherits neorealism's interests, I do want to suggest that the question of what counts as political filmmaking and viewing practices in our current moment derives from a long legacy of thinking about cinema as a political medium. This is a legacy that seems increasingly important to young filmmakers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. For more on this issue, see *Global Art Cinema* and my *Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).
  8. Steve Neale, "Art Cinema as Institution," *Screen* 22, no. 1 (1981): 11–39.
  9. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 2:xi.
  10. In her influential account of midcentury French consumer culture, Kristin Ross demonstrates how comparative temporalities of wasteful versus efficient time reflect a larger sociopolitical landscape of accumulation, overproduction, and neocolonialization. Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), particularly 159 and 168.
  11. Deleuze, *Cinema*, 2:xi.
  12. Thus, the ideal neorealist body imagined by certain critics stands at the intersection of two temporalities of labor: (1) a *present* labor that requires no effort, demanding only that bodies go through the motions rather than commanding a performance that requires the display of intention, skill, and virtuosity; and (2) a *past* labor that has left indelible physical markers. (Therefore, in his film *Harvest 3000 Years* [ET, 1976], Haile Gerima borrows from neorealist approaches to bodies: a life of difficult farming is inscribed—historiographically even—in the scars of overworked feet, and perpetual famines can be read in gaunt legs.) For more on neorealism's body, see my *Brutal Vision*.
  13. André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967–1971), 2:56; 52. Of course, *Bicycle Thieves* thematizes the question of labor in a variety of ways throughout the film. The collective efforts to recover the protagonist's bicycle meet with no success. Furthermore, the question of a unionized workforce seems fraught with implicit anxiety. The film's most substantial encounter with organized labor represents actual union activity as a kind of lame social club. In a basement, the union is rehearsing what seems to be an amateur variety show. Frustrations rise as the lead singer of a song and dance number appears unable to sing the words "the people" on the right key. He must repeat "the people" over and over again, as the director tries to echo it back to him in the right key. With each repetition, further dissonance ensues. This scene holds little narrative import except as a parable about the ineffectiveness of labor and suggests that unions only further alienate people from work—union leaders cannot even get their members to articulate the most essential elements of labor.
  14. Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History, or the Wind in the Trees* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 53. André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* 2:82.
  15. Quoted in Dudley Andrew, *André Bazin* (New York: Oxford University Press), 80. Keathley, Mary Ann Doane, and Elena Gorfinkel recognize a similar kind

- of attention to the body in their descriptions of the cinephile. Hoberman and Sconce describe a corresponding tendency in audiences for “bad” films invested in a certain realism emerging from the inadvertent details of the performer’s body that pierces through the fictions of shoddy, low-budget, or subindustrial productions. Keathley, *Cinephilia and History*; Mary Ann Doane, “The Object of Theory,” in *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema*, ed. Ivone Margulies (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 84; Elena Gorfinkel, “Cult Film or Cinephilia by Any Other Name,” *Cineaste* 34, no. 1 (2008): 33–38; J. Hoberman, “Bad Movies,” in *American Movie Critics*, ed. Phillip Lopate (New York: The Library of America, 2006): 517–528; Jeffrey Sconce, “‘Trashing’ the Academy: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style,” *Screen* 36, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 371–393.
16. The spectrality of labor complicates the legacy of these films. In fact, the nature of the actual kinds of labor necessary for neorealist filmmaking has at times been something of a controversy. An “approar [*sic*]” broke out in a 1961 symposium on film labor politics organized by the magazine *Film Culture* when several panelists argued that Rossellini’s films could not have been made without “scab labor.” Rossellini officially respected the union policies, but according to comments made by Jonas Mekas, his films could be made only because the unions had a less-powerful hold over productions at the time. Their lenient stance toward nonunion workers meant that they often sanctioned productions with as few as four union members working on the film. James Degangi (former president of Local 161) then accused Rossellini of actively encouraging non-union labor and sees his cinema as one dependent upon scabs. “Film Unions and the Low-Budget Independent Film Production—An Exploratory Discussion, with Gideon Bachmann, Shirley Clarke, James Degangi, Adolfas Mekas, Jonas Mekas, Lew Clyde Stoumen, Willard Van Dyke,” *Film Culture* 22–23 (Summer 1961): 139. More recently, Toby Miller describes how “runaway productions” often get out of using unionized labor and his work exposes the need for more research to be done on the shifting status of labor in various modes of production. “Runaway productions” and coproductions are modes of production central to the formation of the category of art cinema and would be extremely interesting places to start such a study. Toby Miller, *Global Hollywood* (London: British Film Institute, 2001).
  17. Increasing art house audiences are understood by historians as an odd mixture of different affinities, conflicting class identifications, and divergent tastes. Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Joan Hawkins, *Cutting Edge: Art Horror and the Horrific Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); and Mark Betz, “Art, Exploitation, Underground,” in *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste*, ed. Mark Jancovich et al. (Manchester, UK: University of Manchester Press, 2003), 202–222.
  18. For more on boredom as a critical practice, see Siegfried Kracauer’s essays “Cult of Distraction” and “Boredom” in *The Mass Ornament: Wiemer Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 323–328, 331–334. See also Patrice Petro’s essay on the importance of boredom to the Frankfurt School’s notion of aesthetics, “After Shock: Between Boredom and History” in *Aftershocks of the New: Feminism and Film History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002). Chris Fujiwara offers a rich and careful consideration of the issues of boredom and the exploitation of the film spectator in “Boredom, Spasmo, and

- the Italian System,” in *Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style, and Politics*, ed. Jeffrey Sconce (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 240–258.
19. The *I Love Lucy* episode containing this famous sequence puts forward a parable of how males and females live life differently, and in doing so explores the relationship of these two genders to work, time, and consumption. As Fred explains to Ricky at the start of the episode: “There are two kinds of people, earners and spenders. Or as they are more popularly known, husbands and wives.” Later in the episode, the harshness of the chocolate factory’s production supervisor is represented by her gender trouble: a butchness that is underscored for the viewer by Lucy mistakenly using the wrong pronoun when referring to the supervisor. “Job Switching” (Episode 39), *I Love Lucy*, CBS, first aired September 15, 1952.
  20. Kevin B. Lee’s description of the film’s Chinese reception demonstrates the centrality of performance labor to the question of the film’s realism: “For all of Jia’s playful provocations with representation, some Chinese audiences found the blending of documentary and fiction distracting from the film’s impact. As one blogger wrote: ‘The documentary style requires the stars to perform with a mask. Truth is concealed rather than revealed. The professional actors can never escape from being recognized, and their stardom becomes a vital disadvantage in performing their roles.’ On the other hand, another blogger maintained that foreign audiences, unable to discern the actors from the real subjects, would be better able to appreciate the fundamental truth of the film’s characters.” The legibility of the body as a laboring star or performing laborer seems to make the bloggers uneasy and anxious about the larger stakes of the film. Kevin B. Lee, “24 City,” *Cineaste* 34, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 44.
  21. Roland Barthes, “Dear Antonioni ...” reprinted in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *L’avventura*, BFI Film Classics (London: British Film Institute, 1997), 67–68.
  22. John Frow, “Invidious Distinction: Waste, Difference, and Classy Stuff,” in *Culture and Waste: The Creation and Destruction of Value*, ed. Gay Hawkins and Stephen Muecke (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 27.
  23. Kois admits his boredom with slow films and questions the sincerity of their audiences’ appreciation. He prefers narratively fast films over art films, whose slowness he likens to “eating your cultural vegetables.” His tone throughout the essay carries a kind of folksy, commonsense attitude that equates to something like “real men don’t eat broccoli.”
  24. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Series Q (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 4.
  25. *Ibid.*, 2.

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