Viewing the Long Take in Post-World War II Films: A Cognitive Approach

A thesis presented to

the faculty of

the College of Fine Arts of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts

Hsin-Ning Chang

November 2008

© 2008 Hsin-Ning Chang. All Rights Reserved.
This thesis titled

Viewing the Long Take in Post-World War II Films: A Cognitive Approach

by

HSIN-NING CHANG

has been approved for

the School of Film

and the College of Fine Arts by

Ruth E. Bradley

Associate Professor of Film

Charles A. McWeeny

Dean, College of Fine Arts
ABSTRACT

CHANG, HSIN-NING, M.A., November 2008, Film Scholarship

Viewing the Long Take in Post-World War II Films: A Cognitive Approach (71 pp.)

Director of Thesis: Ruth E. Bradley

The goal of this thesis is to investigate the effect of long takes that appear in the films made after WWII. To demonstrate how these long takes provides the effects, this thesis employs two different approaches. The first approach synthesizes previous film studies’ descriptions about three characteristics of long takes in post-WWII films. The second approach uses the discoveries from experimental psychology to discuss how spectators’ attention functions while viewing these long takes. By comparing these two different approaches, this thesis also points out that cognitive film studies are valuable because they are able to illustrate the long-take viewing experience of spectators in general rather than only film scholars, who are the dominated voice in interpreting the effect of long takes in post-WWII films.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Ruth E. Bradley

Associate Professor of Film
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would not be accomplished without the advice from Professor Adam Knee and Professor Ruth E. Bradley. I deeply appreciate them. Thanks to Professor Alessandra Raengo and Professor Arthur Zucker for all the great suggestion they gave me. Also, Shih-shan Chen, Sho Ogawa and Chris Iacofano have been great help with clear both my thoughts and language. Thank you all.

Sincere appreciation to my parents for all their patience and support.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract ............................................................................................................................... 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments ............................................................................................................... 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: Introduction .................................................................................................. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Phenomenon of Long Takes in Post-World War II Films ........................................... 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Significant Characteristics of the Long Take .......................................................... 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems and Suggested Solutions ....................................................................................... 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: Three Qualities of Long Takes in Post-World War II Films—A Classical Approach ................................................................................................................... 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-World War II Films and the Three Characteristics ..................................................... 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedramatization .............................................................................................................. 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptual Reality ............................................................................................................ 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing Intellectual Interpretation .................................................................................. 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: Viewing Long Takes— A Cognitive Approach through Analyzing the Function of Spectators’ Attention ........................................................................................................ 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining the Levels of Understanding Processes ............................................................... 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Is Attention and Why Can It Be Used in Studying the Effects of Long Takes? . 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Function of Human Attention: Several Studies From Experimental Psychology . 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Strength of Directing Attention ................................................................................... 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary Attention ......................................................................................................... 55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attention Dwindles ........................................................................................................ 58

Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 60

Chapter Four: Conclusion ............................................................................................. 62

Works Cited .................................................................................................................. 68
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Throughout the twentieth century, modernization of that and two world wars changed how people see the world, greatly influencing styles in various types of art. This upheaval gave rise to an aesthetic movement in art. This movement also influenced film. By watching these post-WWII films, I found that the long takes, which have limited or very simple camera movement within the long duration of the take, have been used in some of these films. For instance, directors, such as Andrei Tarkovsky, Miklós Jancsó, and Michelangelo Antonioni, started including these kind of long takes in their works around the 1950s to create unique visual styles. In addition to not using any cut for a long duration, in contrast to the dominative editing style during this period of time, the compositional style also makes these long takes structurally very different from edited sequences in mainstream films. The influence of the aforementioned directors’ style is evident in the work of other subsequent directors, such as Theo Angelopoulos, Bela Tarr, and Aleksandr Sokurov. This thesis will not only demonstrate the unique style of these long takes in post-WWII films, but will also investigate the effects in terms of how viewers perceive and understand them.

Two different kinds of approaches, the classical and the cognitive, will be used respectively in the next two chapters to analyze the long takes in specific films such as Antonioni’s The Passenger (1975), Angelopolous’ Landscape in the Mist (1988) and Michael Snow’s Wavelength (1969). The classical approach in Chapter Two helps to highlight three characteristics of these long takes, which are also supported by film scholars. I am going to combine analysis of their research with my insights and then
illustrate characteristics of these long takes in the aforementioned three films. Moreover, since these long takes appear in the period of post-WWII films, I will also examine how these characteristics fit into the ideology that is influenced by WWII. The classical approach simply interprets the long takes in these three films from authoritative points of views, such as scholars and filmmakers’ opinions. These interpretations may not adequately illustrate how spectators in general¹ perceive these long takes. Therefore, in order to provide a diverse voice from authoritative opinions in the classical approach, a cognitive approach in Chapter Three will use hypotheses from experimental psychology to discuss how the spectators’ attention functions while viewing these long takes.

The conclusions that come from the two approaches do not contradict each other. On the contrary, the second approach provides further understanding of the three characteristics that are delineated by the first approach. Adding another perspective from the field of human cognition, this thesis will investigate the influences of long takes in post-WWII films.

**The Phenomenon of Long Takes in Post-World War II Films**

Before discussing the effects of long takes in post-WWII films, I first need to define what a long take is, and then further specify what kind of long takes that this thesis will discuss.

¹ The idea of “spectators in general” here replies to all kinds of spectators that film studies have categorized, such as the spectator that regularly goes to watch movies, film fans, film students, film critics and film scholars…etc. By adapting the discoveries from experimental psychology in Chapter Three, the cognitive approach is attempt to apply to all kinds of spectators because experimental psychology investigates human perception and all kinds of spectators are considered function under rules of human perception.
The long take is a term that describes a film technique. It is a term used in film studies. David Bordwell has defined a take as “one run of the camera that records a single shot” (*Film Art* 240), and he further describes a long take as a single shot that runs for an unusually long duration. To provide a statistical basis for defining how long a long take should run, in 1974, Barry Salt selected 52 films and calculated the average shot length for each film. These films were made from 1915 to 1970, including Hollywood mainstream films, European art films, and two Japanese films (13-22). According to Salt’s statistics, each of these films has an average shot length of less than 20 seconds with most of them measuring around ten seconds. If most films are primarily composed of takes that run for ten to 20 seconds, a shot that runs for a couple of minutes easily stands out from the others. As a result, we may define whether a shot is a long take or not by comparing the running duration to the average length of shots in most films. If the duration of the shot is significantly longer than the average length, then we can say that the shot is a long take.

Except for running the take with a relative long duration, I will argue that filmmakers bring new elements to long takes in post-WWII films. First of all, the long takes appear in the period of time when film had been developed for a half century. During these 50 years, various kinds of editing strategies had been used in films. Presenting a sequence for a long duration of time without any cut seems to be in opposition to the trend of editing films. In this way, when the spectator, who is used to films with edited sequences, watches a long take, the unexpected viewing experience

---

2 Bordwell also indicates that a long take is often confused with a long shot, a shot that shows a long distance between the viewpoint and the objects or characters.
makes the long takes in post-WWII films differ from the long takes that appear in earlier films.

If we assume the average length of shots is some ten to twenty seconds according to Salt’s research, we can see that shots that run longer have existed since the beginning of film history. The earliest films were single-shot films, and the only shot in these films usually runs for about one minute.³ For example, Louis Lumiere’s movie, *The Arrival of the Mail Train* (1895), which was first film shown in a public screening in film history, is a complete shot that runs for one minute. This take is obviously longer than the length of a take that contemporary spectators would expect. However, the shot can be considered as a long take only when the spectator is able to compare his or her experience of the take with his or her usual movie-watching experience. Due to the lack of reference, spectators who watched Lumiere’s film in 1895 would not have perceived this as a long take, having nothing to compare it to.

In addition to the running time of the shot, other elements have emerged to form the definition of a long take. Documentary film director and scholar David MacDougall suggests “long takes are perhaps better defined by their structural qualities than by their length” (39). He uses Brian Henderson’s examples of the long takes in F. W. Murnau’s works to show that some takes can run for a long time but may actually feel quite short to the spectator, owing to the constant reframing of the mise-en-scene. That is to say, a shot may run for a long duration in Murnau’s films, yet spectators can easily find certain highlighted actions or objects during the movement of the shot on which to focus their

³ When the motion picture camera had just been invented, the length of the first films was determined by the mechanical ability of the camera and the projector.
attention. Viewers understand the meaning of the shot by putting these actions and objects together. In this way, the effect of the shot actually would not differ much from an edited sequence composed of various shots. For example, in the last sequence of Murnau’s *The Last Laugh* (1924), after the title shows that the protagonist is the descendental of the deceased millionaire, the next shot shows the protagonist eating in a high-class restaurant. It is a long take that starts from the middle of the restaurant. Then, it moves backward to reveal other customers’ expressions towards the fortunate protagonist. During the camera’s movement, we see, table by table, the admiring expressions of the people in the restaurant. The shot continues to run and then moves to the back to a group of waiters. They step apart to reveal a sumptuous cake. Finally, the cake is moved out from the right side of the frame, and the happy protagonist is sitting at a table that is in the center of the frame. Although this sequence is completed in one take, we can deconstruct the take into a series of images: 1) the curious customers from other tables, 2) the group of waiters, 3) the cake, and 4) the protagonist. This sequence’s narrative can be understood by forming the relationship between these four segments. Moreover, during the movement of the shot, these four areas of focus are fairly clear so that virtually no spectator would understand the narrative in this shot were it presented in a different way. As a result, spectators would not misunderstand this one complete take in a different manner were the narrative elements presented in four, short, and separate shots of the four series of images. That is to say, a shot that runs for a long duration can be structurally similar to a sequence that consists of several short shots. The long takes that I
discuss in this thesis, however, have a different structure from that of the long take in *The Last Laugh*. They cannot practically be divided into short segments.

I have to clarify that the type of long takes in post-WWII films, which will be discussed in this thesis, are different from the long take in *The Last Laugh*. They do not focus on different objects or characters through the movement of the camera during the take. Rather, they usually combine with static camera, consistent pan or zoom, or long shots and therefore either direct our attention to one object, or, on the other hand, present no privileged object whatsoever. More examples of this type of long takes are: the long takes in Jancsó’s *The Red and White* (1967), the nine-minute long take in the second to last scene in Tarkovsky’s *Nostalgia* (1988), the long take of a close up on two people walking in the street in Béla Tarr’s *Werckmeister harmóniák* (2000), and the long take in an empty theatre in Tsai Ming-liang’s *Goodbye Dragon Inn* (2003).

**Three Significant Characteristics of the Long Take**

Three tendencies will be discussed in this thesis to characterize long takes in some selected post-WWII films. The first of these tendencies is dedramatization. This characteristic refers to a sense of avoiding emotional climax by providing ambiguous points of view that meant not to give a logical, cause-effect series of images. The second one is perceptual reality. This characteristic refers to the idea that watching the images in a long take is more mechanically similar to how people perceive the world in daily lives, as opposed to watching a series of edited images (Bazin 55). The third characteristic is that the long takes in certain post-WWII films usually demand an intellectual interpretation based on the cinematic style of the shot, rather than on the content. Each of
these three characteristics reflects the influences of WWII to the filmmaking, such as presenting an obscure rather than clarified meaning, attempting to capture a sense of reality from the post-WWII world and reflecting a self-explanatory introspection in the ontology of film techniques.

**Problems and Suggested Solutions**

After discussing the three characteristics, I will further examine the methodology of approaching these three specific characteristics. There are two major resources that I used in understanding the effects of long takes in post-WWII films. First, I take film scholars’ interview of directors as a reference to find out directors’ intention in using a long take. Second, film scholars’ analyses about their own viewing experiences in watching the long takes in certain post-WWII films provide me with a strong foundation for illustrating the three characteristics. In scholarly reviews, scholars point out the significance of these long takes through their own knowledge about the usage of film techniques in the context of film history. By exploring and re-organizing these resources, I will argue that we have only learned the perspectives from the authority figures, such as film scholars and filmmakers, in discussing the effect of the long takes. However, the point of view from regular spectators' is still missing.

What is a regular spectator’s understanding process when he or she is watching the long takes in these films? Indeed, filmmakers’ opinions and film scholars’ arguments are solid and crucial for us to understand the effect of long takes. However, alternative

---

4 Regular spectators can be understood as movie goers who do not necessarily respond to the films they watched as a context that needs to be analyzed in historical or academic perspective. Therefore, when film scholars only interpret the long takes in historical or academic point of view, they disregard how regular spectators respond to these long takes.
research, which explores a regular audience’s perception, will create a more comprehensive understanding that will be useful to form a more thorough study in viewing long takes in these films.

Utilizing a cognitive approach to understand films was first introduced in the 1980s. By focusing on studying the spectator’s perception, some film scholars, such as David Bordwell, Edward Branigan, Murray Smith, and Gregory Currie have adapted elements of cognitive science into their studies. These scholars believe that the cognitive approach is more advantageous than previous approaches in film studies for two major reasons. The first, the cognitive approach provides a scientific basis for film studies. The cognitive approach is able to justify itself with references to empirical evidence that has been generated by its studies. Carl Plantinga said, “At the broadest level, cognitive theorists are committed to clarity of exposition and argument and to the relevance of empirical evidence and the standards of science (where appropriate)” (20). Cognitive film theorists also suggest that any film phenomenon is also experienced in the real world and in our real lives (Allen 175). Since we generally accept that scientific methodology is one of the most reliable ways to understand the world, it is a methodology capable of providing a reliable approach for understanding film. Second, although the cognitive approach was not historically the first method of study used to illustrate spectators’ viewing experiences, it is the first method that attempts to depict films through the eyes of the regular spectator. In other words, the ability to understand the processes spectators undergo in order to create meaning from a film, by describing films through their own perspectives, is the second advantage of cognitive approaches.
In Chapter Three, I will first use Per Persson’s theory about the levels of understanding to point out that the cognitive approach investigates a more basic conceptual level compared to the high level where film scholars conceptually interpret a film. Then, I will argue that investigating the basic conceptual level is valuable because the cognitive mechanism of this level is shared by spectators in general.

Watching any kind of film image usually involves controlling and maintaining attention. In this chapter, I will discuss how the special format of long takes in certain post-WWII films causes the spectator to approach their strategies of attentional control while watching these long takes. Therefore, the aim of Chapter Three is to analyze how spectators direct their attention when they watch long takes. This analysis helps to illustrate spectators’ viewing experience, and to reflect the effect of long takes through spectators’ perspective.

To discuss audience’s perception to long takes, both the visual images and the audio soundtrack are important in terms of how these long takes affect the audience. However, this thesis will specifically focus on discussing the visual aspect of these films. This is not to suggest that the audio track has less effect on the audience’s perception or that the cognitive approach cannot be applied to the audio perception. With the concern that the audio track is equally important to the image in these long takes, in this footnote, I am going to briefly point out how audio tracks presented in these long takes could cause different viewing experiences.

The examples of long takes that are mentioned in this thesis have used mostly diegetic sound. The seven-minute long take that is examined in The Passenger is synchronized with ambient sound, such as the sound from the cars, footsteps and the dusty space. There are only 20 seconds of non-diegetic music accompanying the take, and the music is soft and seems to become a part of the ambience, so it is hard to tell if the music comes from the an object within the scene or is an additional non-diegetic composition on the soundtrack. The train-station long take in Landscape in the Mist also consists of all diegetic sound, and most of the sound is from the environment of the train station. Similar sound design is used in the long takes that have been mentioned earlier, such as the long takes in Nostalgia, Werckmeister harmóniák and Goodbye, Dragon Inn. On one hand, with pure ambient sound the soundtrack is fairly abstract in terms of the sound comes from multiple objects that are on the screen. Moreover, it is difficult to define whether these sounds are helpful for telling the story or creating an atmosphere to emotionalize the scene or neither. On the other hand, the ambient sound realistically portrays the period of time during the take. Among all the examples, the long takes in Wavelength are exceptions. From the ninth minute of the film, the audio track starts playing loud, non-diegetic noise for the rest of the film. The film contains no evident storyline, and the noise might make it even more difficult for the spectator to stay and watch in the theater.
Although cognitive film theorists challenge the methods of theorizing phenomena in the classical approach, they are not completely against the arguments that mainstream film scholars have made. Instead, they add descriptions of human cognitive function to film studies in order to justify the arguments that have been made. As a result, in addition to investigating the effects of long takes in post-WWII films, this thesis aims to show how a cognitive study of spectator attention can help us form a solid description of the effects.

The audio tracks in the long takes that are discussed in this thesis basically agree with the three characteristics that we will discussed in Chapter Two. The long duration of ambient sound does not enhance the drama, and it presents sounds that are close to the reality of the space. In the case of Wavelength, the disturbing noisy sound is asking for intellectual interpretation in order to rationalize its presentation. The abstract ambience and the disturbing noise can also be discussed as a significant element in term of how they can affect spectators’ attention in watching these long takes. Nevertheless, to discuss the audience’ perception in both audio and video aspects would be too complicated for this thesis in this stage. As a result, I have decided to only discuss the elements of visual perception in this thesis.
CHAPTER TWO: THREE QUALITIES OF LONG TAKES IN POST-WORLD WAR II FILMS—A CLASSICAL APPROACH

Introduction

Long takes that appear in different eras of film history present different qualities. This thesis focuses on analyzing long takes in post-WWII films by using two different approaches. This chapter will go through the first approach, the classical approach. Based on previous film studies, this approach takes evidences from existing scholarly literature to suggest three special characteristics of these long takes. Then, I will analyze the classical approach that is the methodology most generally represented in scholarly literature of classical film studies. As a result, the goal of this chapter is not only to describe the characteristics of long takes in post-WWII films, but also to closely examine how previous film studies have analyzed and interpreted these long takes.

The first characteristic is dedramatization, which David Bordwell identifies as a tradition that “emerged in European cinema after the end of the Second World War” (*The Last Modernist* 13). This characteristic refers to a way of presenting images that avoids clear narrative and is based on providing ambiguous points of view. Such a style provides an illogical, anti-cause-effect series of images and construct sequences without clear storylines, so it is considered deviant from classical and mainstream structures of narration. When film scholars discuss this effect of long takes in these post-WWII films, they usually identify it by comparing and contrasting the differences between these long takes and the classical style of editing.
The second characteristic is the capability of long takes to represent perceptual reality. Watching the images of a long take is more like how people perceive the world than is watching a series of edited images (Bazin 26). Especially, since long takes in post-WWII films offer no clear development of the narrative during their long duration, the spectator needs to actively observe the elements of the shot. This effort of observation is also similar to how people perceive events from their real lives. When some film scholars identify and discuss this characteristic, they do so considering various spectators’ viewing experiences to draw their conclusions. These conclusions are drawn in large part on both the scholars’ interpretation, and an analysis of the filmmaker’s intentions. However, I found that these interpretations and analyses are based on a kind of intellectual privilege, and do not consider the viewing experiences of what we might identify as ordinary viewers – or “normal” spectators positioned outside of the “insider” privileges of film scholarship and filmmaker intentions.

The third characteristic of long takes is that watching a long take requires intellectual focus from the spectator. In certain instances, when the long take presents minimal variation in its composition, film scholars seek an interpretation of the take in terms of its conceptual format, rather than meaning based on narrative content. As a result, to analyze these long takes, film scholars place more emphasis on interpreting conceptual format, generating these interpretations from their own fruitful knowledge of film and media rather than viewing them merely from a narrative basis.

---

6 As described in the introduction, by connecting the focus of mise-en-scene smoothly within one take, a long take can be structurally similar to an edited sequence. For example, the last sequence in Murnau’s The Last Laugh is a long take, yet by keep moving focus from one figure to another, the composition of the frame keep changing and thus the narration is developed within the take. Long takes in post-WWII films are different from this kind of long take in terms of their lack of frequent change in their compositions.
Post-World War II Films and the Three Characteristics

Since I found that the kind of long take appears especially in certain post-WWII films, another focus of this chapter is how these three characteristics relate to the influence of WWII. As with the beginning of any aesthetic movement, the phenomena of post-WWII film can be identified with regards to how these films embody significant styles that are distinguishable from the films before the war. Prior to the war influence on filmmaking, through the development of editing strategies such as D. W. Griffith’s non-linear editing and Sergei Eisenstein’s theories of montage, edited sequences became one of the basic formal strategies which filmmakers use to structure a film. Yet, long takes in post-WWII films, by combining with such film techniques as the long shot, static shot, or tracking shot, have provided viewing experiences for the audience that are very different from classical, highly edited sequences. Without adopting classical editing strategies or Eisenstein’s montage, directors such as Andre Tarkovsky started using long takes to limit the frequency of cutting shots. “My own method of conveying experience to the audience is quite different…Eisenstein makes thought into a despot: it leaves no ‘air.’ Nothing of that unspoken elusiveness which is perhaps the most captivating quality of all art…,” Tarkovsky stated (in Halligan par 1). Experimentation, that established a differentiation from classical film, is one of the movements in film that appeared after WWII. Additionally, this “unspoken elusiveness” is another important quality. We will discuss more about this quality in the following paragraph.

Among the most important experiences for human beings in the modernist world are the two world wars. The author of The Language of Modernism, Randy Malamud,
suggests that experiences of war are difficult to describe using only language. He says that WWI and WWII “generated a vast range of stories that embodied more than the language could contain: the list of modernist works influenced by the war is monumental” (8). The sense that language cannot clearly express the experience of life reflects the inadequacy of language (6-10). In this way, Malamud perfectly explains the “unspoken elusiveness” that Tarkovsky tries to portray in his films with long takes.

Moreover, for Malamud, using unclear language to reflect the chaos of the urban modernization that had been destroyed during the war shows that language used in many post-WWII literatures is self-explanatory about the fundamental philosophical idea of the delusion of modern society, which is: we live in a ruined world, and how are we to do that? (12). He cites Gertrude Stein’s words:

As in Stein’s essay, modernism is filled with description of itself—guidepost and helpful hints for making sense of the text, that are scattered throughout the text. These guides may be bluntly overarching, explaining the entire philosophical sensibility of the period as a justification for the writer’s controversial literature, as in the first sentences of Lawrence’s Lady Chatterley’s Lover: “Ours is essentially a tragic age, so we refuse to take it tragically. The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins, we start to build up new little habits, to have new little hopes. It is rather hard scramble over the obstacles” (1). Lawrence’s opening nicely creates the context not only for this novel, but for a good deal of modern literature as well (13).

This quote has conveyed two ideas. First, using a sentence in the novel to represent the idea of modern literature shows how the work is self-explanatory. Moreover, with the awareness that the rules have been destroyed, there is an effort of experimenting in a new way. Although Malamud comments mostly on literature, various modernist artworks also reflect this quality.
Dedramatization

Dedramatization, the opposite of dramatization, is an effect that occurs when a film prevents the spectator from experiencing a series of cause-effect sequences in the narrative. This is illustrated when a film presents its narrative in an ambiguous way. As mentioned, overturning the literal narrative style in classical literature was one of the artists’ motivations that reflect the impact of WWII. When readers, who are used to following a clear narration in mainstream literature, read ambiguous writing for the first time, they usually find that it is very difficult to thoroughly comprehend the work (Malamud 7). Filmmakers have also practiced such a characteristic. In Bordwell’s analysis, goals for mainstream narrative style usually include making the audience naturally follow a clear narration and leading them up to the story’s climax by dramatizing a pertinent causal chain (Film Style 208). Comparing the differences between mainstream and non-mainstream films in terms of narrative style shows that non-mainstream films sometimes abandon the clear, causal relationship between shots and confuse the audience by interrupting the development of the narration. The story does not seem to make sense, and the motivation of the protagonist is hard to be defined. Thus, the characteristic of dedramatization simply refers to the concept of subverting clear narrative style as well as presenting a sense of ambiguity.

Michelangelo Antonioni is identified as a filmmaker whose films embody the characteristics discussed above. Glen Norton adapts these characteristics from Randy Malamud to illustrate the qualities that reflect the influence of WWII in Antonioni’s works. One of the qualities Malamud states is that artists believe that literal and clear
language could no longer present the world after WWII. Norton points out Antonioni’s visual language “making the narration incomplete” (par 7). This reflects the quality of unclear presentation that Malamud cites to identify post-WWII works. Norton says, “There is certainly a difficulty in understanding any particular Antonioni text, in that he defines within them a cinematic language all his own, a language that lies only within the bounds of the text. The difficulty in interpreting the text formally becomes a significant part of the content of Antonioni's films as well, for it is exactly this problem of communication that he endeavours to address” (par 4). The difficulty of reading the text comes from the incompleteness of the overall narrative, created by both the lack of cohesive communication in the dialogue and the incompleteness at the visual level of the film.

Norton further suggests that the final long take in The Passenger is a perfect example that supports the description of “making narration incomplete.” Viewing the long take in the final sequence of The Passenger is an example of an unsatisfying experience for spectators who desire resolution from the tension at the end of the film. At the end of the film, characters who seem to have interests in conflict with Locke’s previous gunrunning business finally find Locke staying in a hotel room. This final long shot is one seven-minute-long that starts from the interior of this same hotel room. Following the previous shot with Locke lying on the bed looking out of the window, the long take begins. Facing the outside of the window, the camera, that is first positioned in the room, gradually dollies towards the window. After passing the window frame, the camera slowly pans and makes a one-hundred-eighty degree turn, revealing the hotel
where Locke is staying. For five minutes, Luciano Tovoli, the cinematographer of *The Passenger*, never motivates the camera to follow any characters for the purpose of emphasizing narrative details. During the pan, Tovoli makes the camera wander in the plaza. He reveals an old man sitting on the other side of the plaza, a girl jogging by, a little boy throwing a stone onto the old man, a car driving in, two black men getting out of the car — and we also see the female protagonist walking in and out of the frame. As Norton points out, while the camera slowly rotates, every figure in the frame is given equal emphasis. Based on this, he describes that the shot presents an “‘objective’ fashion,” with which figures, characters, or events in the film that are considered important in the narrative context are not more additively delineated than the ones that previously do not appear much or are less important. Therefore, he argues that the narration of this shot is incomplete, because the use of the long take does not clarify any of the action within such a long duration.

Norton’s explanation of the long take in *The Passenger* in terms of its incomplete narrative comprises a comparison of the difference narrative styles characterized by long takes (in post-WWII films) and classical decoupage, (which is usually used in mainstream films). Norton is aware that regular sequences in films usually follow the figures and the events of the narrative in a characteristic manner that applies to the whole film. That is to say, he analyzes the long take within his knowledge of the dominant style of presenting film narration.

More than making the narrative incomplete, film scholars also find that a long take could distract the viewer from focusing on the narrative. The operation of the camera
becomes visible in the unconventional seven-minute shot in *The Passenger*. When Sam Rohdie analyzes the shot, he suggests that the camera gives a subjective point of view, which is the camera itself. He says, “While watching the cars, The Girl, the dog, the old men, it [the camera] also watches itself watching them, observing not only their movement, but its movement, not only what is outside it, but what fascinates it, what it imagines and turn into images” (150). In other words, when spectators watch the take, they sometimes are able to put the narrative aside and realize what they are seeing is through the movement of the camera. Rohdie further uses the example of the long take to illustrate how Antonioni builds the narrative of the film differently (from classical cinematic narrative) by using such an unconventional camera movement:

Not once in *The Passenger* is the camera ‘in’ the fiction: it never adopts the ‘classical’ technique of moving in and out between subjective-character views, nor views outside characters, but which, nevertheless, remain dominating views overseeing the narrative. As a result, the spectator is neither bound to the fiction by being caught in an identity with a character view, nor by being bound in an identity with a narrational view. The freedom of the camera from the necessity to determine, to control and possess the narrative, its freedom simply to look, ‘objectively’, doubles over for the spectator, equally free, positioned in a place of objectivity and non-necessity (150).

As Rohdie says, spectators have the freedom to look. With a shot that embodies cinematographic style more than the narrative content, Antonioni provides no focus on the images that will help the spectator understand the story. Instead, he counts on his special cinematographic style to unsatisfy spectators’ desires to interpret or to dramatize the story. In the case of the final take in *The Passenger*, the long duration of the take embodies a cinematographic style that makes it noticeable for the spectator. It also leaves the spectator with great freedom to observe a continuous space. Awareness of the
cinematographic style and the freedom to observe are two ways to take the spectator away from simply following the narrative while she or he is watching the film, and to become an active participant in constructing meanings.

In response to Norton’s analysis, when Rohdie discusses the presentation of the long take in *The Passenger*, he is aware that long takes cause different effects compared to shot usage in classical film technique. From the citation above, we can see that when Rohdie explains that the spectator has more freedom to view the long take, he specifies how the spectator will not maintain identity with the characters or the narrative point of view. That is to say, with classical film technique, the spectator usually identifies with these two elements that are important for the fictional narrative.

In conclusion, film scholars acknowledge that the classical decoupage of mainstream films usually leads spectators to set up hypotheses beforehand in terms of the causal relationship of shots. It is easier for spectators to clearly understand the connection between characters and locations, and to construct relative events from these connections. In this way, spectators are capable of following the development of the story through a reasonable understanding in the story events. Thus, film scholars are able to suggest that editing in many post-WWII films, however, does not necessarily enhance the narration. Their analyses of the long take in *The Passenger* specifically point out how this long take is able to create exceptional viewing moments that stand out from the experience of watching the narrative context of the film.
Perceptual Reality

Andre Bazin, in his famous article, “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,” points out that a long take has more ability to represent reality than an edited sequence. Therefore, I will describe that the second characteristic that film scholars have suggested about the effect of long takes is a heightened sense of perceptual reality. Perceptual reality refers to an attempt to portray a sense of reality, a cinematic style that imitates the way people look at the world in their real lives. Since a long take presents a continuum of space and time, it is mechanically similar to how people observe their surroundings. When a real event happens, the observer cannot simply capture an individual image that is an element of the event, as if in an edited sequence. Rather, one has to actively scan through the environment in order to find relevant details. After comprehending the causal relationship between these details, one can then interpret what has happened. During the scanning of the environment, the observer will see not only these details, but will also see things that exist in the same space where the event takes place.

Bazin’s argument is based on a belief that the ability to show reality is an important aesthetic quality of cinema. He challenged Eisenstein’s montage style as well as the invisible editing style in classical American movies. In “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,” he asserts that both Soviet Montage and invisible montage reflect filmmakers’ faith in film images. Invisible montage, although it is not as expressive as Soviet Montage, allows the content of film images to dominate the way the spectator interprets the sequence. In other words, both the use of montage and invisible editing prevent the spectator from understanding the film outside of the narrative content. Bazin
said, “Through the contents of the image and the resources of montage, the cinema has at its disposal a whole arsenal of means whereby to impose its interpretation of an event on the spectator” (61). That is to say, for Bazin, films made by either style of montage depict reality through images, rather than reveal it. Therefore, he strongly defends long-take and composition-in-depth styles in cinematography, because he believes that these two photographic styles are more faithful to reality than filmic images.

For example, Bazin used the famous shot when Nanook is hunting the seal in Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922) to explain how the running time of the take shows the true relationship between Nanook and the seal. He described that the seal-hunting take presents the “actual waiting period” (62). When spectators watch the shot, they spend the same amount of time watching as Nanook does on waiting. Such experience is not only crucial for understanding the effort that Nanook undertakes to fight with the seal, but also allows the spectator to sense that the hunting is real. In summary, for Bazin, by presenting a continuous space and time, and meanwhile providing freedom for the spectator to observe through the real duration of the event, a long take can be used to build a viewing experience that is closer to the experience of reality.

Comparing how Norton and Rohdie address the effect of the long takes in the context of its speciality in the techniques of mainstream films, Bazin straightforwardly discusses the viewing experience of a long take. Nevertheless, the goal of Bazin’s argument is to show how the long take enhances the aesthetic value of film media, rather than analyzing the viewing experience. When Bazin points out how the seal-hunting take in *Nanook* represents the actual waiting period, he does not explain and does not have to
explain why the long take has that effect. The hypothesis seems to come from a self-
analysis derived from a common sensible reaction to the take. More importantly, the
hypothesis is used to support Bazin’s main argument, which is that the long take creates a
real moment. As a result, although Bazin touches the issue about spectatorship and the
long take, his interest is not in discussing the viewing experience. The discussion is
mostly about how a long take is valuable for expressing the aesthetics of film media.

Some filmmakers demonstrate similar concepts as Bazin when they use long takes
in order to represent reality. Influenced by Tarkovsky and Antonioni, Theo Angelopoulos
has considered how long takes emphasize the natural space and time in the frame. He
says, “Working with long takes was not a logical decision. I have always thought it was a
natural choice. A need to incorporate natural time and space, as unity of space and time.
A need for the so-called ‘dead time’ between action and the expectation of action, which
is usually eliminated by the editor’s scissors, to function musically, like pauses” (par13).
In this way, Angelopoulos utilizes the natural space and time of the long take to present
an event that is on-going. When the spectator watches these long takes, they observe the
action in a unified environment. The way that they observe seems closer to how people
perceive real life.

In his 1988 film, Landscape in the Mist, Angelopoulos uses many long takes. The
film is about two children taking a trip from Greece to look for their father in Germany.
Voula (Tania Palaiologou), the sister, and Alexandre (Michalis Zeke), the younger
brother, board a train to Germany with no tickets. Expelled by the train conductor, they
wander in several places, such as the train station, their uncle’s factory and the police
station. The two children later meet Oreste (Stratos Tzortzoglou), a young man who plays an important part in their journey.

Through the continuum of time and space in the long takes in this film, Angelopoulos invites spectators to observe the action of two children through their movements in various environments. For instance, in the second shot, before the film title appears, Voula and Alexandre walk through the hallway of the train station. They stay in the entrance to the platform while a train arrives, then they step forward, hand-in-hand to the platform. People start getting on the train, but the children do not follow them. Soon, the doors of the train close. Alexandre says, “I dreamed about him last night. He seemed bigger than the other times.” Voula holds her brother’s hand and they run to the now-closed door. The train starts moving and Voula and Alexandre watch it departs, staying on the empty platform by themselves. This sequence is shot in one two-minute long take. The camera tracks the children from the hallway to the entrance and gradually pushes close to them when they are on the platform. *Landscape in the Mist* is full of this kind of long take with Voula and Alexandre lingering in strange places. It includes the train station, their uncle’s factory, a police station, the train, a construction site, a highway and an empty city at night… etc. These long takes justify what Angelopoulos states about the concept of using long takes. Because of the long duration and the unifying space of these takes, the spectator not only sees the action of the two children, but also has the ability to observe and anticipate their reactions in the environment where they do not belong.

Another example of the long takes in *Landscape in the Mist* is when a giant stone hand is drawn up from the water by a helicopter. While viewing this shot, the spectator
spends almost three minutes watching the helicopter fly away and disappear at the far edge of the sky. The experience of watching this long take not only fits in Bazin’s description of how the take represents the actual waiting time while watching Nanook hunting the seal, but also reflects Angelopoulos’ intention of presenting “dead time” amongst the actions of Voula, Alexandre and Oreste. The length of the event in the film is exactly the length of time that the spectator spends viewing the event. On the other hand, the spectator observes the three main characters watching the helicopter and expects their next move. Since spending continuous time observing one event and expecting the development of the event both match real-life experience, the depiction of the event by a long take matches the way how people perceive the real world.

From the previous section, we can see that the filmmaker’s intention is another resource to inform how previous film studies analyzes the long take. When Angelopoulos states that his intention of using long takes is to reserve the “dead time” that is eliminated by editing, we are strongly supported when we interpret the take by following his statement. In this way, the method of understanding the long take is not just an analysis of the take, but an examination on whether the take justifies the filmmaker’s intention.

**Focusing Intellectual Interpretation**

From how film scholars analyze long takes, I will suggest that the third characteristic of a long take in post-WWII films is its ability to present meaning that not only from what is contained in the shot, but also through its viewer’s intellectual interpretation. This characteristic is especially visible when the long take is extreme. That is, the long take runs for an extremely long time and has just a little change in the mise-
en-scene. Long takes used in avant-garde films are good examples. For instance, Andy Warhol’s *Sleep* is a seven-hour film that shoots a man’s one-night sleep period. Attempting to extract meaning from the content of such a long take becomes an experience of going nowhere. This kind of long take radically breaks the viewer’s expectation for the development of the narrative. The spectator may be aware that expecting something to happen is superfluous (Helfert par 12). In this way, to justify the meaning of the take, the viewer is forced to interpret it from other perspectives of the take rather than from the perspective of the content. After the spectator is familiar with the narrative style of mainstream movies, reading the meaning outside of its narrative content would be a challenged.

Michael Snow’s *Wavelength* consists of a single long take starting in an empty room. The shot slowly zooms toward the wall at the other end of the room, a process which takes 45 minutes. It eventually arrives at a photograph attached to the wall between two windows. The close-up of the photograph shows the wavy surface of an ocean. During the take, Snow keeps playing with color filters on the lens. He also uses superimposition to overlap images during the take. Moreover, the take starts with diegetic environment sound but later adds low non-diegetic buzzing on the soundtrack. During the take, there are several technical effects (filter and superimposition) used to change the look of the images. Also, people walk in and out the empty room. However, before the final close-up of the photograph, for 45 minutes, the spectator is challenged to see details of the people or the room. What the spectator has seen in the beginning of the film is what they can see in the whole film. As Michael Snow describes it: the beginning of the
film is the end of the film (in Wees 157). This suggests that there is almost no narrative
developed through this 45-minute take in terms of the content of the film images.

For film scholars, such as C. Wees, viewing *Wavelength* allows the viewer to
perceive the spatial changes that the camera produces. He first describes the development
of imagery in *Wavelength*: “The viewing time of the film is expressed as a center-to-
peripheries expansion in space. With the passage of time, every minuscule change in the
lens’s focal length marks another expansion of the center toward the borders of the
frame” (157). Wees has also pointed out that the space becomes more and more flat as
the zoom gets closer and closer to the photograph. He explains, “The deep space of the
room has become steadily shallower, until the flatness of the photograph and the flatness
of the screen seem to be one and the same” (157). At this point, however, the flatness
transforms when the shot frames nothing but the photograph. “Then the flatness
evaporates, the viewer perceive the depth again,” Wees discovers (157-160). By
analyzing the spectator’s viewing experience, Wees recognizes the mechanical
manipulation of the camera, and then is able to interpret the concept used to structure the
film. From the previous paragraph, we can see that the way Wees describes the long take
is a self-analysis of his own viewing experience—plus he combines his observation with
his knowledge about film mechanism.

In an article about a festival that honors Michael Snow as a multi-media artist,
Cleo Cacoulidis points out, “Watching the films of Michael Snow requires a fair degree
of intellectual focus, not to mention patience” (par 1). Unlike the classical type of film,
which usually creates a flow of time by editing or by having activities through a mobile
mise-en-scene, the long take in *Wavelength* produces a closed time, which means: Running for seven minutes, or 20, or 40 minutes does not mean much for the look of the take (filmic time—the time that is presented with film images) because the variation of the content is limited. However, it is meaningful in terms of the duration in which the spectator experiences the take (real time). When the real time the spectator requires to understand the film’s development is identical to the filmic time, the spectator becomes easily conscious of his/her position of watching the screen in the real world. But the flow of the real time and the static filmic time cannot move together. In order to keep engaged with the film, the spectator must restrict his/ her consciousness from real time and make an effort to follow the filmic time. One way to keep focusing on the limited content of film images in such a long filmic time is to interpret the take with other aspects than the development of the content.

Reviewing the previous discussion about three characteristics, we can see that there are two basic methods used by film scholars in approaching these characteristics. First, film scholars can use the way directors explain their intention in composing long takes in their works to illustrate the effect of long takes. For example, Tarkovsky, Angelopoulos and Snow have commented on their intentions in using long takes, and their opinions are addressed when scholars analyze these long takes. Second, film scholars can discuss the effects of long takes by applying their self-analysis, from their own experience of viewing long takes, to all audiences when they illustrate the effects of long takes. For example, when Rohdie analyzes the experience of watching the seven-minute long take in *The Passenger* and when Wees describes the process of viewing
Wavelength, they actually project their own viewing experience onto the general audience.

These two methods were often used in discussing the effect of a specific filmic device in previous film studies. Yet, both methods come from authorized voices. The first method emphasizes the author’s interpretation of the film. The understanding of the long take comes either directly from the filmmaker or indirectly from film scholars who justify their point by using the filmmakers’ opinions. The second method is built upon the film scholar’s personal interpretation, although the second method has been projected onto the viewing experience of regular spectators. However, such experience cannot totally apply to spectators in general. After all, film scholars have been trained to view films in various perspectives, such as from technical and aesthetic points of view. That is to say, only filmmakers’ and film scholars’ understandings are applied when the effect of long takes is studied in the previous methods of film studies. In this way, the previous studies regarding the long take do not take into consideration the experience of regular spectators. Therefore, this thesis asks: Can we approach the effect of long takes through the pure viewing experience of spectators in general? If we can, how can we do so? These questions will be discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER THREE: VIEWING LONG TAKES— A COGNITIVE APPROACH
THROUGH ANALYZING THE FUNCTION OF SPECTATORS’ ATTENTION

Introduction

In addition to understanding the effects of the long take through filmmakers’ and film scholars’ literature, these effects can also be analyzed in terms of a process of how spectators psychologically recognize the long take. Investigation of the cognitive process is different from scholarly literature that usually interprets the meaning of the long take. It is step-by-step research starting from when the spectator’s eyes and ears perceptually receive stimuli from the screen. After the 1980s, some film scholars began to study this territory, called cognitive film studies. Cognitive film studies focuses on analyzing spectators’ reaction to movies by utilizing the rules of human perception found in cognitive science. Cognitive film scholars (who support the use of cognitive science in analyzing films) point out that studying the spectator’s perceptual reaction to a film is not suggesting that the reaction represents what the film is. Instead, cognitive film studies should be a “piecemeal” setup for the whole structure of film studies (Carroll 381). That is to say, cognitive film scholars believe a film can be analyzed in various perspectives. No one particular film theory can be used to define the meaning of the film, including cognitive film theory. Being a part of film studies, cognitive film studies operates from a scientific base and therefore is able to provide empirical data for other perspectives of film studies (Peterson 127).

In the preceding chapter, we discussed what characteristics of long takes used in post-WWII films are found in previous scholarly literature. That chapter also points out
what methods have been used to analyze or justify these characteristics. Chapter Three provides analyses for the same long takes using a different approach, the cognitive approach. As we discussed above, the cognitive approach utilizes discoveries in cognitive science to analyze the spectator’s viewing experience. In analyzing the spectator’s reaction to these long takes, results of psychological experiments concerning visual attention are especially useful. Yet, as Carroll describes cognitive film studies as a “piecemeal” setup to the whole film studies, this chapter does not suggest that the cognitive approach is the only way to portray the effect that the long take delivers.

Moreover, the conclusions in this chapter do not contradict the interpretations about the long takes demonstrated in Chapter Two. Rather, all the later discussions are set up as empirical data for achieving a more complete understanding of long takes in post-WWII films.

**Defining the Levels of Understanding Processes**

Before we start analyzing the effects of long takes using the spectator’s attentional function, I am going to divide the understanding processes by using Per Persson’s description of the psychological model for spectator reception in order to point out that the approach provides a significant perspective for understanding the effect of the long take in post-WWII films. In this way, I am able to say that since the analysis of human attention functions while watching a long take fits into one of the understanding levels, this analysis is valuable for understanding the effect of the long take.

Persson divides the model into six levels. At the lowest level, level 0, spectators receive pure perceptual input from the images or sounds of a film. The process of
perception at this level happens before the spectator consciously recognizes objects, spatial relations and how the sound is related to the image. In level 1, the meanings have begun to be picked up and constructed during the processes of perception. By constructing the data collected at the previous level, the spectator is able to roughly recognize the appearance of the object. For example, when the image shows a man in a black suit, the spectator can recognize the man, the color of the suit, as well as the relationship between them, such as the suit is black and the man is wearing it. Moreover, at level 1, the spectator starts recognizing the spatial relationship between objects in the frame. If there were a sequence shown of a cat jumping onto a man’s lap, the viewer would recognize that the spatial relation between the cat and the man was changing during the action. In this way, the spectator may also construct the depth of the space and therefore view the image on the screen as presenting a three-dimensional space (Persson 28). We can understand that the appearance recognized by the viewer as a visual stimulus that has caught the viewer’s attention. Therefore, the attentional function of the long take can be described from this level of the understanding process.

Understanding a meaning deeper and with more complexity than that of level 1, at level 2, the spectator recognizes the specific identity of the objects by noticing their social references. “X is a nerd,” “that is Dracula,” and “X is a hero” are the examples that Persson uses to explain what statements of properties a viewer would understand at level 2. An important development at this level is the meaning of different properties from two objects starting to link with each other. At level 1, a viewer picks up simple properties, such as color and shape. Yet, at level 2, he or she comprehends several properties from a
sustained concept, such as assigning “nerd,” “Dracula,” or “hero,” to a certain object. In this way, understanding of the relationship between space and objects becomes far more complex than level 1. “The straightforward level 1 spatial relationships between objects explicitly within the frame are now complemented by meanings relating to objects in offscreen space…, she or he may assume that objects and space continue outside the frame, although it is not explicitly visible at the moment” (Persson 29-30). In addition to putting the substances, which the viewer has received, into categories, the viewer must use information that already exists in his or her mind to understand the objects.

Matching the sustained knowledge and the visual objects that the viewer has recognized at the level 1 drives the viewer to focus attention. Objects that are meaningful to the viewer become targets on which the viewer will direct attention. Later in this chapter, I will use experimental results to illustrate how attention usually attempts to be carried by objects that are meaningful to the spectators.

Through the upper three levels, 3 to 5, the understanding processes gradually progress from knowing the referential meaning of objects to the situation of events. Finally, the viewer comes not only to understand the literal meaning but also to interpret and speculate upon the extended meaning. That is to say, the understanding processes at these three levels are all top-down. The spectator adds meaning to complete visual information in his or her brain. Interaction with the visual inputs no longer happens in these three levels. At the highest level, level 5, Persson describes understanding as going beyond the comprehension of the film (33). Interpreting the political message and evaluating the theme of the film happens at this level. Therefore, film scholars and
experienced spectators are better able to achieve this level of understanding than are regular spectators.

Dividing the levels of understanding provides a solution for the problem we discussed at the end of the preceding chapter. That is, is it enough to demonstrate the effect of the type of long takes only through filmmakers’ and film scholars’ opinions? Film scholars are aware of the unique style of a shot when they interpret it. Such awareness involves knowledge about film techniques, so it can only happen at the highest level of understanding processes. As mentioned in Chapter Two, for instance, the description of dedramatization is built on knowledge of the dominant editing techniques used for narration. In addition, discussing the characteristic of the perceptual reality of long takes, Bazin emphasizes how long takes are more powerful for representing reality than montage. The discussion is also built on knowledge about two opposite styles of editing strategies. In Chapter Two, effects of both Antonioni and Angelopoulos’ long takes are illustrated through knowledge about historical aspects of style of shot. The interpretation I have used for discussing it happened at the highest level of the understanding processes. Moreover, when Wees discusses the long take in *Wavelength*, he analyzes the relationship between the camera and spectators. He is aware of the existence of the camera and analyzes the concept behind the whole take. Such a complete interpretation of the whole 40-minute film that Wees suggests can only be generated at the highest level of the understanding process.

To suggest the importance of all the levels of the understanding process, Persson states, “Psychologically speaking, meanings produced at level 4 or 5 are not more
sophisticated than level 1” (43). In the case of studying certain long takes that present characteristics reflected post-WWII world, I differ with Persson. Meanings produced at level 4 or 5, when a spectator views the long take, are the most intriguing understanding of the take. Nevertheless, high levels of understanding do not exist by themselves; they correspond to the accumulated information that is produced by lower levels. Therefore, the question that I try to raise in this thesis is: Is it enough to analyze films only in level 5? If it is not enough, studies of films have to be also addressed on the other levels.

**What Is Attention and Why Can It Be Used in Studying the Effects of Long Takes?**

Since I attempt to illustrate the effects in certain long takes using how viewer’s attention would react to these long takes, I must clarify what attention from the sustained experiment of psychology is and why it is useful for the demonstration. “Attention” is a word people use in their daily lives. Everyone knows what it means, yet psychologists point out that there is no absolute definition of the word (Style 1). Studies show that “paying attention” involves several aspects of human cognition, which not only include top-down processes of tracking and controlling where one consciously captures the goal, but also bottom-up processes of receiving unexpected perceptive inputs.

The top-down process refers to attention functioning by order from the brain. The bottom-up process usually happens when an unexpected object captures one’s attention. By following the images seen before a shot appears a spectator learns the important objects in the film. The images of these objects become targets for the spectator to track. Since the spectator must know what he or she is looking for in order to further search for
the target on the screen, tracking the targets is a top-down process. There are also bottom-up processes that happen while viewing film, when there are intense visual stimuli from the screen, such as a bright light or a movement of an object combined with a loud sound effect. These visual stimuli do not necessarily project meaning to the spectator when they catch the spectator’s attention. Therefore, in this case, the viewer’s attention is directed by pure bottom-up processes. In addition, a spectator sitting in a theatre, experiences many distractions, such as talking in the audience members, or a sudden a flash of light when people open the door of the screening room. These distractions may draw the spectator’s eyes and pay attention to things unrelated to the movie.

The function of spectators’ attention is a cognitive process that crosses between level 1 and level 2 of understanding hierarchies. As we discussed previously, a spectator has started to recognize meaningful objects at level 2. Such an understanding involves a top-down cognitive process. When a spectator is tracking the objects to which attention will be paid, he or she must recognize the objects first. That is to say, the spectator has to collect the basic properties of the objects, such as the shape and the color, in order to pick up the objects while watching the whole image. The understanding, therefore, is a top-down process that uses the information constructed from the brain to lead the eyes to track the objects. The level 1 understanding process happens when a spectator is distracted by an unexpected stimulus. He or she just categorizes the physical substances of an object in order to further locate the space of the object and later recognize what the object is. In conclusion, attention is a human cognitive process that functions at levels 1 and 2 as defined by Persson. These two understanding levels are disregarded in previous
studies of long takes. Cognitive film scholars believe that empirical investigation of the understanding processes from the lower levels can be important resources for further understanding the effect of certain film techniques. In the same way, studying how a spectator directs his or her attention while watching long takes in post-WWII films may help us better understand how these long takes present these characteristics.

**The Function of Human Attention: Several Studies From Experimental Psychology**

With these hypotheses discovered in contemporary experiments about human attention, we are able to investigate level 1 of the understanding processes while watching the long take in post-WWII films. Utilizing these hypotheses, the later section is going to analyze the viewer’s attentional reaction toward the long takes, and further test the unique effects of these long takes as a cognitive aspect. Steven Yantis, professor of psychology at John Hopkins University, who specializes in studying attention, states that human attentional control can be divided into two kinds: goal-directed and stimulus-driven (73). In our daily life, things we consciously know that we are perceptually searching for usually catch our attention easier than things we do not know. For example, at a cocktail party, one can find a friend in a group of people without checking all the faces. In this case, goal-directed attentional control is used to help find the friend. Knowledge about the context is involved this type of attentional control. Moreover, things with bright colors, big sizes and movement, etc. usually catch attention easier than things with dark colors, a small size and no movement. A flashing yellow traffic signal, for example, easily catches people’s attention.
In his article, “Goal-Directed and Stimulus-Driven Determinants of Attentional Control,” Yantis uses four domains of visual selection to explain how these two ways of attentional control operate (75-93).

First, if we understand paying attention as selecting visual input, the range of the space and the length of time limits the visual selection (75). This is to say, one can only direct his or her attention to one location at a time. At the same time, a visual stimulus in the space around the location may also re-direct his or her attention. Items near the location more efficiently become visible compared to items elsewhere (76). The duration for watching the image also influences whether the attentional selection from location functions as a deliberately controlled cognition or a mechanical acceptance of the visual onset. In the case of watching a movie, attention functions in the same way. For instance, a viewer can only focus his or her attention on one part of the screen at a time. If the viewer focuses on the foreground where the main character is located, he or she is more likely to notice the items in the foreground than in the background. In addition, depending on how long the take runs, the viewer either has the ability to control the focus, or be forced to accept the most visible visual input.

Second, the location to which one pays attention is directed by particular objects. Reasonable strategies lead the viewer to search for targets. Psychologists design various experiments to find out what kinds of strategies a viewer may follow to select the target. Through these experiments, psychologists have found that attention could be often successfully guided by simple features, for example: red or horizontal. When the viewer is asked to look at these simple features, he or she will pick up related targets, such as red
letters or horizontal bars (Wright in Yantis 78). Attention can also be guided by conjoined features, for example: red with horizontal (Hubel and Wiesel in Yantis 78-79). Furthermore, asking an observer to select features with conjoined features could lead to extended results. For instance, asking the observer to look for a red O could guide him or her to locate attention on a red target among Os, or an O among red items (Egeth, Virzi and Garbart in Yantis 79). In the case of watching films, the development of the narrative can guide the spectator to focus on the characters or objects that are meaningful to the narrative.

In the discussion in the Chapter Two, when film scholars find a long take is different from a classically edited sequence, they characterize one of the qualities of the long take as dedramatizing the narration. Understanding goal-directed determinants of attentional control helps to explain that the images in a classically edited sequence give the spectator clearer goals for directing attention in each shot than does the type of long takes we discuss in this thesis. In a later section, there is a practical comparison between the spectator’s attentional control in watching shots in the edited sequence in Written on the Wind (1958) and the long take in The Passenger. Yantis’ discoveries about goal-directed attentional control provide a factual base for us to analyze how the spectator may direct his or her attention differently while viewing these two styles of film technique.

Watching images in movies is much more complex than viewing simple or conjunction features in psychological experiments. Nevertheless, the basic method of selection is similar. For example, the figure of the main character in a film can be understood as an object with complex conjoined features. The audience is easily guided
to follow the narrative and select the main characters and important figures in every image.

In addition to the function of attentional selection, psychologists also investigate how attention is maintained when an observer attempts to keep his or her focus on the target. Examples of psychological experiments have shown that the duration an observer dwells on the visual target is not significantly longer than the duration during which the observer selects the target (Egeth and Yantis 286-292). That is to say, human attention can hardly remain on one item after selecting the visual item. Yet, if the target is complicated, the observer will need more time for the selective processes. In this case, attention would dwell on a complicated target for a longer time than on a simple one. In Harber and Nathanson’s experiment, they presented a word with letters spelling one after the other in the same location, and then recorded the time that the viewer would attend these letters. They used words that varied from four letters to eight. The result showed that the viewer took a relatively longer time to report the words with eight letters than with four letters. The experiment proves that when a viewer selects a complicated target, attention dwells on the target longer than when a simple one is selected. Although the experiments reflect the fact that human attention is re-directed fairly frequently, we should note that visual stimuli in real life are not as pure as the stimuli in experiments, nor is watching a film as simple as watching the visual targets in experiments. In real life we seems to be able to maintain our attention on a single item, such as the flame of a fire, or the leaf floating in the wind, etc.
David LaBerge, the author of *Attentional Processing: The Brain's Art of Mindfulness*, introduces studies regarding how humans maintain attention, he says, “In consideration of the apparent lack of experimental research directed to the maintenance manifestation of attention, the brief treatment of maintenance attention here will be more impressionistic and theoretical…”(91). In addition, William James believes that maintaining one’s attention is a process of mental action that can be understood as the function of one’s “will” (in LaBrege 94). LaBerge further suggests that the maintenance manifestation of attention is similar to mental activities, such as regarding, observing, considering and entertaining. Although there are few psychological experiments for examining how a viewer can keep his or her attention continuously in real life, through James and LaBerge’s analyses, we can understand that attentional maintenance needs to function with sophisticated thoughts.

In the case of watching a movie, the spectator usually attempts to keep his or her attention on the screen. In the same way, in viewing long takes, the spectator has the motivation to maintain attention on the screen. However, lacking strong targets in the frame for a long duration causes difficulties for the spectator to do so. Speaking of focusing attention on the screen is not to say the spectator can pay his or her attention on the full screen at the same time, but rather moves the attention from one target to another from time to time. As long as the attention stays on the screen, we can say that the spectator maintains his or her attention on the take. Therefore, there will be two degrees of attentional maintenance in the later discussion. First, even though there is no target strong enough for the spectator to continuously focus on for a long duration, the spectator
can still keep his or her attention on the screen by moving his or her attention to various spots on the screen. In this way, the spectator actively searches for new targets on the screen and voluntarily maintains attention on the long take. Second, in some extreme long takes, such as the one in *Wavelength*, the visual information of the long take is too simple and the time of the take is too long. Therefore, the spectator can hardly even keep his or her attention on the screen.

In the next section, I will practically utilize the discoveries about visual attention in psychology to examine how spectators react to the long takes in post-WWII films as we discussed in the previous chapter.

**The Strength of Directing Attention**

Based on the psychologists’ description of attentional control, in this section, I am going to analyze why some long takes present effects that differ from classical edited sequences in terms of the spectator’s attentional function. The first difference is that an edited sequence can direct the spectator’s attention better than a long take from certain post-WWII films can.

The compositional strategy of shots in a classical edited sequence usually includes locating key objects, such as famous actors, important characters, and items related to the development of the narrative, in the most visible area of the frame. As the targets in the experiments that Yantis describes, these important figures can also be seen as visual targets for the spectator. Therefore, there is a strong tendency for the spectator to immediately focus on these objects. In addition, since the length of each shot in the edited sequence is usually not long, each shot is able to limit the spectator to simply focusing on
the important characters or objects. As a result, there is a strongly suggested direction for the spectator’s attention when the spectator is watching shots in an edited sequence.

When we look at the long takes in post-WWII films, they seem to show less control in directing the spectator’s attention. As we defined earlier in Chapter One, long takes in these post-WWII films do not have focal actions or objects during the movement of the shot and therefore cannot practically be divided into short segments that show the causal-effect of the relationship between the key objects. In this case, these long takes either compose the same figure(s) in the frame through the whole take, as in *Landscape in the Mist* and *Wavelength*, or put no emphasis on any figure important for the narration, such as in *The Passenger*. When the take keeps focus on the same figure(s), according to Harber and Nathanson’s experiment, the long duration of the take may provide a longer time than while the spectator focuses their attention on the figure(s) (if the figure is not complicated, which is usually the case in the type of long takes we discuss here). Since the spectators are not strongly directed to focus on the main figures in the frame, they are free to scan through the frame, thus having the opportunity to attach meaning to any object in it. When no main figure is emphasized, the shot naturally gives no direction for the spectators. For example, the final long take in *The Passenger* has no particular object for the spectator to focus on in the shot for the first four minutes. Viewing this kind of long take, the spectator has freedom to focus attention on any of the objects in the frame. As a result, this kind of long take provides less strength in directing spectators’ attention than does an edited sequence.
Yantis states that the range of space and the length of time will limit a viewer’s visual selection. Moreover, his research also shows that if there is a direction, the viewer will tend to select the target by following that direction. When we watch a narrative film, the development of the narrative can be understood as direction, and characters or objects that relate to the narrative can be understood as targets. As mentioned, in a classically edited sequence, these main figures usually appear in the most visible locations in the shot, such as the foreground or the centre of the frame. In this way, the spectator can easily select them with his or her attention. In order to compare the analysis of the long take in *The Passenger* later in this thesis by using results from psychological experiments previously described, I will first analyze a classically edited sequence in Douglas Sirk’s *Written on the Wind* (1956) by using the same method.

**Example: The Sequence in *Written on the Wind***

*Written on the Wind* tells the story of forbidden love between Mitch (Rock Hudson) and Lucy (Lauren Bacall), who is the wife of Mitch’s friend, Kyle Hadley (Robert Stack). In the movie, there is a scene in which Mitch carries Kyle, who is very drunk, back home; then Jasper Hadley, the father of Kyle, starts expressing his disappointment about how he had unsuccessfully raised his children. The police car that brings home another child of Jasper, Marylee Hadley (Dorothy Malone), and her casual boyfriend justifies the failure of old Hadley. Jasper later threatens the boyfriend with a gun hidden in the drawer. Mitch stops him by taking the gun and asking the boyfriend to leave. From the window upstairs Marylee watches him go; she lights a cigarette, turns on her stereo, and starts dancing. The sequence starts right after this scene.
Following the narrative previously, Jasper, Mitch, Marylee Hadley and Lucy are important characters, and the gun is the key object\(^7\). Therefore, these characters and the object can be seen as targets which the narrative guides the spectator to pay attention to. The sequence begins with a close-up of Jasper’s face. The camera first moves with him by keeping him in the centre of the frame and stops moving when Mitch appears in the frame. The camera begins to follow Mitch and then moves down to focus on the gun in his hand. The shot stays on a close-up of the gun until Mitch puts it in a drawer. The subsequent shots are intercut between a glimpse of Marylee dancing in her room in her red gauzy pajamas and old Hadley stumbling upstairs. After a close-up of old Hadley’s hand holding the handrail of the stairs, three continuous shots capture how Jasper Hadley falls down the stairs. Then, there is a shot of Mitch’s legs as he runs towards old Hadley. The following shot shows Lucy coming out from her room, scared by what has happened. As we can see, each shot in this sequence has either the characters or the gun positioned in the salient part of the frame. In addition, every shot shows the character or the object for a short length of time, so the spectator can hardly move attention from these important figures to others that are not closely related to the main narration.

Moreover, the crosscut between Marylee dancing in her room and old Hadley stumbling upstairs shows that shots in this sequence not only have the main targets but also present these targets in the most salient way. In this crosscut sequence, the target is either Marylee or old Hadley. The first shot shows Marylee walking out from the curtain

\(^7\) The gun is considered as the key object because it was appeared in the opening sequence when Mitch Hadley fired the gun to someone that we are not able to know through the sequence. Since the opening sequence creates a veiled question, the gun is an important clue for the spectator to unveil the question.
with her red pajamas. The red pajamas present her as the most salient visual target in the frame. Then, a long shot shows Jasper walking up the stairs from the side of the stair. The background wall and the side of the stair are all white, so, Jasper who dressed in brown is also the most salient object. The next couple of shots cross cut between Marylee and Jasper in a middle-shot distance. Either character fills more than one-fourth of the frame, and usually appears near the center area of the frame. As a result, they easily catch the viewer’s attention. The following close-up of old Hadley’s hand also presents a clear focal object. Then, three extremely short takes when old Hadley falls provide his body as the most visible object in the frames. When there is a salient object in every shot the meaning of which the spectator can reference within the context, the spectator will easily select the object when watching the shot. A series of this kind of shot functions as a series of directions for the spectator to follow.

Yantis also suggests how goal-directed attention could be extended by not only focusing on the goal but also on the objects around or related to the goal. For example, in the beginning of the sequence in *Written on the Wind*, there is a shot which uses continuous camera movement to switch the main object on the shot from Jasper Hadley to Mitch and finally to a gun. The shot happens when Jasper Hadley leaves his study room. It first follows him, and then when he walks by Mitch, the shot gradually comes to focus on Mitch. Finally, the shot pushes close to the gun in Mitch’s hand. In this continuous shot, three objects that are salient: Jasper, Mitch and the gun. Jasper and Mitch are two important characters in the film, and the gun is presented as a key item from the beginning of the film. More than directing the spectator’s attention by simply
Putting these three objects in a visible location, the movement of the camera smoothly leads attention from Jasper to Mitch and finally to the gun. The description of attention in Yantis’ article, which suggests that the attention is readily re-directed to the peripheral area of the location of attention, helps to explain the strength of leading the spectator’s attention in this shot. The spectator’s attention is first located on Jasper because he is the only one in the frame to which the spectator has recognized in terms of Jasper’s character in the story. Yet, when Jasper walks by Mitch, Mitch is not only another important character, but also the object that is nearest to Jasper. Therefore, the spectator can easily re-direct attention from Jasper to Mitch. The same operation happens when attention is switched from Mitch to the gun. When the camera gradually moves to center on the gun, the gun is not only understood to be an important to the narration, but it also is an object held by Mitch; they spatially connect, so the spectator easily transfers attention from Mitch to the gun.

Compared to the edited sequence discussed above, the final long take in *The Passenger* puts no emphasis on the main figures in the frame. Also, because of the long duration of each frame in the long take, the spectator has enough time to shift attention among objects that are not necessarily related to the previous narration of the film.

**Example: The Long Take in *The Passenger***

By combining the long take and the long shot, the final take in *The Passenger* is able to present no clear goal for the spectator’s attention. For example, in a segment of the final long take, for almost 20 seconds, a dolly shot looks through the bars of the window and vaguely shows an old man sitting on the other side of a plaza, a dog walking
around and then a boy in a red shirt runs across the frame with a sudden stop in the center of the frame. Later the figures that are meaningful to the narrative, such as the female protagonist, just move in from the edge of the frame. Because of using the long shot, all three objects—the old man, the dog and the boy—take little space in the frame. That is to say, none of them has any advantage in attracting the viewer’s attention. Moreover, since none of the three objects has appeared before nor seem to have any explicit place in the development of the narration, they are not considered visual targets for the spectator. Nevertheless, although the spectator is not guided to pay attention to these objects, with the time duration of the take presenting them, the spectator has freedom to not only focus on one of them, but also to re-direct attention among the three. Therefore, in this segment of the long take, because there is no dominant figure as in the sequence in *Written on the Wind*, but enough time to scan through the frame, the spectator is able to actively focus his or her attention on anything.

The long take may also show several informational targets in one frame, yet because it presents an integral space and time, the take cannot guarantee the spectator would move his or her attention from one item to another. Also, there is no way of knowing which item the spectator would select first and which one last. As a result, although the narrative is developed through the long take, the development is not as certain as in an edited sequence. During the segment of the long take in *The Passenger*, for instance, when the first group of people who attempt to assassinate Locke arrive and Locke does not know that they have found him, the dolly shot slowly pushes towards the window and finally goes through it. The shot simply moves forward and shows nothing
but the area of the plaza. The segment starts with a white car driving into the frame, two men get out, and they talk to each other, one man keeps looking at the window. He later walks out of the frame from the bottom-right corner of the window, where the female protagonist walked into the frame earlier. Another man drives the car out of the frame and then walks back into the frame. He walks near the window, takes a look inside and suddenly turns back. At the same time when the two men are active in the bottom of the frame, the female protagonist is lingering in the upper part. Later, one of the men turns around, sees the female protagonist, and then he tries to talk to her. They move to the right side of the frame. Consistently pushing forward, the shot does not follow their movement. Finishing the conversation, this segment ends with the man walking out of the frame through the bottom-right corner.

When the spectator watches this part of the long take, although there are targets for his or attention, these targets appear in various parts of the frame simultaneously. No two spectators will definitely re-direct their attention from one to the others in the same order. Also, according to Yantis, one can only focus attention on one thing at a time, so no two spectators necessarily see the same movement from two targets. In this situation, each spectator may construct the development of the sequence through different resources.

The previous comparison between the edited sequence in *Written on the Wind* and the long take in *The Passenger* supports the idea that long takes are able to dedramatize the narrative. In the first segment of the long take in *The Passenger*, without clear and meaningful items, the spectator can put his or her attention on objects that not are
necessarily related to the narrative. Moreover, the analysis of *The Passenger* shows how the long take disallows the spectator from focusing his or her attention on key items in a scheduled order. Every spectator may move attention among various items in one frame according to his or her own volition. Since key items and the order of looking at these items decides the casual relationships among the items and the casual relationships are essential for constructing the narrative, without a definite order, different spectators can develop the narrative of the take differently.

**Voluntary Attention**

For most spectators, going to a theatre or renting a video tape gives them reasons to volunteer their attention. Bruce D. Hutchinson points out that a spectator has to fight off distractions in order to attend a film (1). Therefore, the edited design of a film is usually set for keeping spectators’ attention. Long takes in post-WWII films, however, sometimes take a risk in not providing images that can strongly hold the spectators’ attention. This can be seen in various types of long takes in terms of how they present salient targets for spectators to focus on.

The first type is the long take that provides no clear target. As mentioned in the last section, the final long take in *The Passenger* provides almost no clear objects at first. In this way, the spectator cannot be confident about what he or she should attend to in order to understand the film. Second, some long takes do provide a clear target in the frame, yet when the shot focuses on one target for a long duration, it is hard for a spectator to keep his or her attention on the target. For instance, in the train station shot of *Landscape in the Mist*, the shot tracks Alexander and Voula walking through the station.
for two minutes. The two characters are salient goals for the spectator’s attention. However, as the studies show, human attention does not dwell on one item for long. The two characters gradually lose the strength of attracting spectators’ attention. Third, although some long takes provide a visual goal in the frame, during the duration, using visual depth of image, the goal may change its attention-attracting strength by moving from background to foreground or vice versa. In the long take in *Landscape in the Mist*, when a helicopter hoists up a giant hand, the helicopter and its cargo strongly capture attention in the beginning. However, the helicopter flies away to the background and gradually becomes a small spot in the frame. In this case, even though the giant hand captured attention at first, it gradually loses that attention. One reason is that the spectator cannot maintain his or her attention on one item for a long time. Another important reason is the decreasing size of the target that occupies the screen. There are many reasons for the spectator to be distracted while watching the long take. Nevertheless, because of the intention of going to watch a film, spectators may make an effort to find targets or track goals.

When no targets are shown one-by-one to direct the spectator’s attention in a shot, the spectator willing to volunteer his or her attention actively scans through the space in the frame. Also, when the shot runs for a long duration, the spectator has more opportunities to look into details of the space. For instance, in the train-station shot of *Landscape in the Mist*, because of the duration of the take, a spectator can dwell upon a continuous space from the hallway to the platform. Although two main characters are strong perceptual goals that attract the spectator’s attention with the lack of any new
action but walking from them, they are not strong enough to continuously keep the
spectator’s attention. Because, as studies show, human attention is re-directed frequently,
the visual image of the train station is rich enough to distract attention from the
characters. In this way, even though the spectator may not expect to observe the
environment surrounding Alexander and Voula, he or she cannot avoid being aware of
visual information from it.

In the section on the second characteristic of long takes in post-WWII films,
perceptual reality, we suggest that watching some long takes, such as the train-station
example from *Landscape in the Mist*, is similar to how we visually react to the real world.
In our real lives, we constantly filter most of the information from our surroundings and
simply focus on the target we expect. Yet, the target will not be visually put in front of us
by itself. It always blends into the environment around it. With enough time in a long
take, the viewer is allowed to scan through the space. Such a visual perception is more
similar to active observation then passive reception. Active observation is usually what
happens when a person visually reacts to the external world. Since observation needs the
effort of scanning the surroundings and moving attention to the target, an observer needs
to volunteer his or her attention to do so. Nevertheless, suggesting that the spectator has
volunteered his or her attention while watching the long take is not sufficient to claim
that the long take presents the quality of perceptual reality. Rather, voluntary attention is
helpful for supporting the characteristic of perceptual reality from the perspective of basic
human cognitive processes.
Attention Dwindles

As mentioned, LaBerge believes that the viewer is able to maintain attention because he or she develops thoughts while regarding, observing, considering or being entertained by what he or she is watching. The final long take in *The Passenger*, and the train-station long take and the giant-hand long take in *Landscape in the Mist* indeed provide developing moving images that allow the spectator to generate thoughts with these four inner activities. For instance, he or she can observe the movement of characters in the plaza in the final long take in *The Passenger*. Considering the reason why two children appear in a train station by themselves at night also helps the spectator to keep focus. Moreover, the spectator might think about the contrast between the giant hand as a part of renaissance sculpture and the background landscape of Thessaloniki as a modernist city. Finally, the beautiful composition of this shot also presents a spectacular scene of the city of Thessaloniki and thus is able to entertain the spectator. As a result, with these four inner activities, although a spectator attends to these long takes in ways different from watching a classically edited sequence, he or she is able to voluntarily maintain attention on the shot.

However, when the duration of long takes has been pushed much further in some experimental films, it is almost impossible for anyone to maintain attention through the whole take. As described in the previous chapter, the one lone take in Snow’s *Wavelength* has limited changes during a fairly long duration. The whole film looks like runs with one shot for forty minutes long. Such a long duration of time has already suggests that maintaining attention will be very difficult. After the first six minutes, when people come
in and out the room in the frame, a ten-minute section of the shot slightly zooms in
towards the windows. The color and the brightness of the film keeps being changed
during this ten minutes. There is almost no obvious compositional difference through
these ten minutes. The spectator sees windows of an open room from beginning to the
end of the take. At the sixteenth minute, a man stumbles into the room and lies down on
the floor. The movement of the figure of this man refreshes the stillness of the take.
Observing the man re-directs the attention of the spectator. However, subsequently, the
shot keeps zooming in, and then excludes the figure of the man from the frame. In the
next twelve minutes, there is another section of the take that shows the pictures with
various colors and brightness, and includes no compositional changes from the objects in
the shot. There are three sections of the long take repeating these similar qualities. The
last one happens after the twenty-ninth minute and lasts until the ending of the film. The
content of the images in this long take has provided changes in images to give the
spectator fresh visual material every couple minutes. However, even though the spectator
wants to find a focus on the new visual composition, and even though there are some
objects that direct the spectator’s attention, there is nothing that allows the spectator to
develop further observation. In this way, the maintenance of attention becomes almost
impossible while watching the long take of Wavelength.

The entrapment experience that we discussed in the previous chapter is generated
from exhausted viewing experiences. Since the images of the long take in Wavelength
provide a difficult condition for the spectator to maintain attention, the viewing
experience precedes against a smooth process of visual perception. Yet, as mentioned,
watching movies is an activity where the spectator is willing to pay his or her attention to the screen. Therefore, the spectator must struggle to maintain attention while watching the take. As a result, struggling to keep attention is one of the perspectives that helps us to understand why the viewing experience of watching the long take in *Wavelength* is exhausting.

**Conclusion**

A cognitive approach, like psychoanalysis or cultural analysis, is simply another film-analysis method. Yet, because the method is based on scientific results from psychological experiments, one of the advantages of the cognitive approach is the capability of connecting conceptual studies with empirical studies. The studies of attention help us to analyze long takes in terms of how basic human cognition functions while watching the take. The goal-directed tendency of visual attention makes the spectator to have different attentional control between watching a classically edited sequence and long takes in these three post-WWII films. Shots in a classically edited sequence smoothly direct the spectator’s attention from one object to another. The three long take discussed above, however, exerts little control in directing the spectator’s attention. Moreover, because of the deficiency of directing the spectator’s attention, the spectator must volunteer his or her attention to not only focus on the main object but also surrounding objects. Such an activity of volunteering becomes a way for the spectator to receive unexpected visual inputs from the frame. Therefore, the spectator is able to sense the surrounding space of the main objects in the frame, rather than only focus on the main objects. Finally, when a spectator attempts to maintain his or her attention on an
extremely long take, he or she has to keep regarding, observing, considering or being entertained by the content of the long take. If the spectator cannot successfully develop his or her thoughts, his or her attention would easily dwindle. Forcing oneself to keep attending the long take, the spectator may exhaust him/herself from viewing the long take.
CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

After a century of development, film is no longer a novelty for audiences. There are now basic film techniques that have been repeatedly used in films. From previous film-viewing experiences, the spectator becomes used to images utilizing these film techniques and learns how to understand the meaning of each image from familiar visual layouts. In other words, spectators usually can depend on their previous film-viewing experience to feel confident in understanding the meaning of the image. However, the long takes that are discussed in this thesis alter the familiar comfort zone for the spectator. These long takes emerged in films made after WWII, a conflict whose brought the doubt about the vision of modern society because the destruction in many modern cities. People start to aware that a controllable and understandable world could be a delusion. One reaction to the concept of new chaotic world was a break down of sustained structures and a portrayal of an ambiguous reality, as reflected in many films. Long takes, as a unique film technique, became a useful strategy for representing this new post-WWII society.

The long take is not a new film technique. Nor does it definitively embody the idea of modernism. Nevertheless, when some long takes are combined with a long shot, a static camera, or a non-narrative motivated camera movement, they present moving images open to various interpretations by spectators—but provide no absolute way of understanding or interpreting them. At the same time, an extremely long take may disturb the spectator by not giving clear direction as to what the image is trying to convey over a fairly long duration of time. The long takes in Wavelength, The Passenger and Landscape
in the Mist are examples. Despite that these three movies were made over two decades (1967, 1975 and 1988, respectively), they all reflect various influences of WWII from various perspectives.

Wavelength radically destroys classical narrative structure, which had been in existence for half a century. The Passenger deals with ambiguous self-identity. Landscape in the Mist portrays characters wandering through an environment undergoing the process of modernization. Thus, the subjects of all three films resonate with the ambiguous that is caused by the delusion of modernization after WWII.

In addition to illustrating how some long takes present the characteristics that reflect the influence of WWII, this thesis also compares two research approaches used for analyzing these characteristics. The first approach discussed in Chapter Two is the classical one. This is the dominant approach in demonstrating characteristics of long takes. In reviewing the classical approach, I found it is based on conceptual discussions led by authority figures, such as filmmakers and film scholars. In discussing how some long takes embody modernism, previous studies interpret the effect of long takes with heavy reliance on an acquired knowledge about film and film techniques. For example, they interpret the effect of the long take from either the director’s perspective or the spectator’s reaction through a self-analysis, with the film scholar positioned as the spectator.

Another approach, discussed in Chapter Three, is the cognitive approach. This contemporary method of study adapts experimental results from cognitive science as a tool for understanding a film through the spectator’s cognitive reaction. Analyses from
cognitive approaches are based on empirical evidence collected by visual experiments designed under strict rules for methods of psychological experiments. The conclusions from these experiments are meant to apply to people in general. In studying the effect of long takes in post-WWII films, Chapter Three adapts experimental results about the function of human attention to investigate spectators’ cognitive reaction to the long take. The attentional function coordinates the many cognitive activities involved in watching the moving images of films. Most importantly, the attentional function works is active in everyone’s perceptual cognition – film scholar and regular spectator alike.

In this way, the cognitive approach has the advantage of bringing into classical film studies a method from natural science for analyzing spectatorship. When Carl Plantinga defines cognitive film theory, he says: “At the broadest level, cognitive theorists are committed to clarity of exposition and argument and to the relevance of empirical evidence and the standards of science (where appropriate)” (20). Watching film is simply one of the activities that occur in real life. Plantinga further explains, “Most cognitivists, including Bordwell and [George] Currie, tend to favor naturalistic explanations of filmic phenomena that assume that we make sense of films in many of the same ways we make sense of the real world” (22). Furthermore, scientific conclusions are grounded in experimental results based on empirical evidence that occurs in real life. Therefore, the scientific method is a reasonable tool for understanding the activity of film viewing.

Cognitive approaches have shared a philosophical foundation with cognitive science. They both use the term cognitivism to address their shared knowledge bases.
Thus, Bordwell points out, cognitivism is constructivism. In this way, the cognitive approach in film studies is considered to be based on constructivism as well.

Constructivists use the concept of schema to imagine the mechanical function of human cognition. Matti Kamppinen, in *Consciousness, Cognitive Schemata, and Relativism*, shows that when mental representations, such as “perceptions, beliefs, desires or actions” (144), generate links to each other, they create a system of representations. In terms of the schemata in perceptual cognition, Ulric Neisser states “a schema is that portion of the entire perceptual cycle which is internal to the perceiver, modifiable by experience, and somehow specific to what is being perceived” (54). In this definition, Neisser points out that only a portion of internal activity applies when the schemata digest the perceptual information. Another portion of perceptual reception happens in the “sensory surfaces and is changed by that information” (54). Many cognitive film scholars adapt concepts from constructivism in order to build up the philosophical base of cognitive approaches. For example, Neisser’s statement includes the concept that the activity of perceptual cognition combines both the “bottom-up” and “top-down” processes. Persson, then, uses this concept to build up his theory about the hierarchies of understanding processes while watching films.

However, constructivism has been questioned. Richard Allen asserts that cognitive film theory is problematic because it is based on constructivism. He argues that suggesting there are different paths of cognition, bottom-up and top-down, is problematic because constructivists fail to explain the connection between them. Clarifying this connection is important because sensations, such as hearing, seeing, and feeling, cannot
be reduced to ‘insufficiently human-like objects’ (183)⁸. The bottom-up cognitive process through the physiological mechanism is based on an insufficiently human-like object. For example, when one feels pain, although physiologists have shown that there are electrical activities in our nervous system under the skin, the feeling of pain cannot be reduced to the reaction of the nervous system. In this way, Allen also believes that cognitive film theory is problematic because it is based on constructivism. The experience of watching films cannot be reduced to spectators’ perceptive processes.

Therefore, the question fundamental to this thesis is: Does the cognitive approach in Chapter Three reduce the viewing experience of long takes to human attentional function? I would say, no, because, this thesis was not trying to suggest that this is the only evidence for analyzing the effect of long takes in post-WWII films. Cognitive film scholars clearly declare that a cognitive approach simply offers an alternative way of discovering the film viewing experience. Furthermore, using a cognitive attentional function to investigate the effect of long takes is not attempting to revise what has been suggested as the effect of long takes from previous film studies. Rather, the cognitive approach in this thesis tries to be coherent with the previous assumptions about these long takes by adding perspectives from general spectators.

Despite overcoming doubts about the philosophical basis of the cognitive approach, some film scholars have already gained fruitful results from practicing this methodology. In 1999, Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith collected articles about how films can be illustrated through spectators’ emotional reaction. The assumptions about

---

⁸ Allen quotes the term from Anthony Kenny, when Kenny questions the ideology of constructivism with the homunculus fallacy.
human emotion in these articles are based on hypotheses from contemporary psychology. In 2003, Per Persson uses studies from anthropology to analyze the effect of a close-up. A study in anthropology points out that body and personal space between one and the other affect how human beings emotionally reacts to each other. This analysis explains why a close-up can create either intimacy between the spectator and the character or a threat from the character to the spectator. Moreover, in 2005, Tim J. Smith published his Ph.D. thesis that investigates continuity editing by using empirical evidence from research about human attention.

Following the same method Persson and Smith used for analyzing one particular film technique, by using cognitive approach, this thesis describes how long takes in post-WWII films affect viewers in their perception level, especially in the level that practices attentional function. This thesis adapts the experimental results from psychological studies to investigate the experience of watching long takes of certain post-WWII films, such as *The Passenger*, *Landscape in the Mist* and *Wavelength*. The analyses show that the effect of these long takes is different from classical edited sequence in terms of the spectator’s attention, on one hand, is released from being strongly directed while watching a classical edited sequence, on the other hand, the spectator needs to effort on keeping his/her attention on the take.
WORKS CITED


Salt, Barry. "Statistical Style Analysis of Motion Picture


Wees, William C. "Balancing Eye and Mind: Michael Snow." Light Moving in Time:
   Studies in the Visual Aesthetics of Avant-Garde Film. Berkeley, Los Angles,

Yantis, Steven. "Goal-Directed and Stumulus-Driven Determinants of Attentional