

Beer-fly on the Wall.

Film Link: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.33158648.v1>

Film Link with Auto-Generated Subtitles: <https://youtu.be/qKkBNy1lAj4>

‘People no longer go to the church, they go to the pub.’ Charlotte’s eyes beam as she says this, though looking slightly sheepish as she does so, as if what she has said may be considered slightly ridiculous. My mother, Karen agrees; ‘I said that same thing!’. Incidentally, the patrons of this pub are singing a crude rendition of Jolene, with an open-mic-night performer standing at the front, she struggles to keep her timing over the pub’s cacophony, but she is talented, so manages admirably. I cannot help but think on this statement, about pubs and churches, and I conclude my company are correct. This is an unorthodox sort of choir, the woman at the front an unorthodox sort of pastor. Churches, most of all, are about community and hope, is that not what this is? Perhaps more booze is involved, but it is pretty much the same thing. This essay will not elaborate on the unofficial theology of pub culture of the UK – instead I wish to situate it within film, or as aptly identified by film critic Michel Ciment, the ‘cinema of slowness’,¹ often categorised through its conventions of long takes, contemplative nature, naturalistic sets and commentary on the human relationship with time and space.² This essay, like slow cinema, is reflective; namely of recent ethnographic research I conducted through a particular pub, called the Coach and Horses (on the green) and located in a small semi-rural village of Croxley

¹ Michel Ciment, *The State of Cinema*, Oral Delivery, (San Francisco International Film Festival, 2003), Blog Post by Harry, Tuttle in, *Unspoken Cinema*, 2006. <https://unspokencinema.blogspot.com/2006/10/state-of-cinema-m-ciment.html>

² Thiago, De Luca., *Slow Time, Visible Cinema: Duration, Experience, and Spectatorship*, Vol 56(1), Cinema Journal, (United States: University of Texas Press: 2016), pp 23-26.

Green. This village doubles as my home. What was missing in this research, was the innate cinematics of the location, emerging only through the practice of slow cinema that treads the line between fiction and an observational documentary. I filmed here but did not fully explore the implications of the act through specific film theory, technique and activation.³ I wish to rectify that. This essay then, will function in a meandering act in homage to the long take. We start with mediation in translation – the act of a filmmaker as a translucent translator through temporalities that are established within a filmic and a concrete case study of the Coach and Horses. Liminality becomes the new state with how films exist, how the practitioner works, and how the spectators engage. Slow cinema acts as a bridge between a natural state of real-time-and-space, while maintaining fantastical ‘essence’ at the practitioner’s whim.⁴ The author (I) will display through my own film project on how this manipulation works within the contexts established through the framing of this paper. This essay aims to illustrate not only the malleable conventions of slow cinema, but also the poignancy of what attracts us to slowness both in a tangible setting and on-the-screen. I believe in the hope of slowness. I will buy this round if you buy the next.

To begin, I wish to reference something a little left field; that being Toh EnJoe’s (a pseudonym) 2012 novella, *Harlequin Butterfly*.⁵ The story is deceptively simple, and while I would adore to elaborate on the content, only the unofficial notes from the translator – completed by David Boyd - are relevant here. To introduce the meta-

³ Lutz, Koepnick., *Introduction: Toward a Wondrous Spectator*, in *The Long Take: Art Cinema and the Wondrous*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), pp. 25.

⁴ Roland, Barthes., Phillip Lopate (ed.), Richard, Howard (trans.), *Leaving the Movie Theatre* in, *The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1995), pp. 419-421.

⁵ Toh, EnJoe., David, Boyd (trans.), *Harlequin Butterfly*, (London: Pushkin Press, 2024).

narrative of the story; this book, written under a pseudonym in original Japanese, follows the story of a fictional and elusive translator (of whom also uses a pseudonym). This text was then translated into English in 2024. Translators, or indeed mediators, as a broad concept, bleed throughout the narrative, never to be hidden or inconspicuous through the text; this book is about Boyd as much as it is about EnJoe. To quote from chapter 2; '(A)s the translation is my own, it's safe to assume that the stylistic effect often credited to the original has been all but lost here.'⁶

With this philosophy in mind, I wish to make a link between travelling, mediation and film. A large part of *Harlequin Butterfly* are the places and people, much like traditional methods from anthropology and ethnographic documentary, and my own research project within these two frameworks, *Pub Politics*.⁷ For myself, who has spent countless hours this year being confined to the long metallic structure of the Eurostar to travel from Amsterdam to London, to Croyley Green and back again, the concept of a novella which may 'only be read', if not designed, to be read in a state of transit, is something that excites the otherwise wistful journeys.⁸ The link between the translucent mediator and slow cinema is best shown through Chantal Akerman's *News From Home*, a 1976 feature filmed around New York City in a series of wide angle long takes.⁹ Akerman, through a voice over, reads letters sent to her from her mother, who Akerman left behind in Belgium as she moved to New York a year prior. In Akerman's, and by extension, her mothers, divine status, they hold us in

⁶ Toh, EnJoe., David, Boyd (trans.), Chapter 2, *Harlequinn Butterfly*, (London: Pushkin Press, 2024), pp 27.

⁷ Maisie, Pearce., *Pub Politics*, (University of Amsterdam, figshare collection, 2026).
<https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.c.8433864>

⁸ EnJoe and Boyd., Chapter 1 in, *Harlequinn Butterfly*, pp. 9-25.

⁹ Chantal, Akerman., *News From Home*, 16mm Colour, (New York: INA, 1976).

liminality. As spectators, we are placed in the filmmaker's desired time-and-space through the separation of space and time, visual and audio.¹⁰ In the case of Akerman, between distance-and-intimacy. Michael Flanagan identifies a similar dichotomy within slow cinema as a practice; '[...] slow cinema is, at the time of writing, increasingly defined by two tendencies: that of the episodic long-shot long-take fiction film, and the depopulated anti-narrative landscape film.'¹¹ The 'landscape' in the case of *News From Home* is, of course, New York City, but also its occupants. It is an anthropological study, holding us between real time and space in the bustling streets, and an augmented reality where we read our mother's letters; a fictitious documentary, mediated by Akerman. *Pub Politics* aims to work the same way, with the mediation in liminality between fiction and documentary, space and time, intimacy and distance. It navigates between these dichotomies within the technical and poetic conventions of slow cinema and ethnography; a film about, and for, people. Akerman decides not to name anyone in the film, all is filmed observationally and in (mostly) long shots, there is a sense of loneliness, emulated through the shots themselves of a woman sat in a chair, back turned to pedestrians.¹² Or a lone man in a chair, cigarette dangling from his mouth.¹³ We are only comforted by the warmth of the spoken word; 'Dearest, we think of you a lot and hope you're doing well.'¹⁴ In temporality, we are placed somewhere between the past and present; present through the long takes, past as the letters have already been written,

¹⁰ Bertolt, Brecht., John, Willett (ed.), *The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre in Brecht on Theatre*, (London: Methuen, 1964), first published 1930, pp.37-38.

¹¹ Michael, Flanagan, *Chapter One: Key Characteristics of Slow Cinema* in, 'Slow Cinema': *Temporality and Style in Contemporary Art and Experimental Film*, (University of Exeter, 2012), pp. 31.

¹² Akerman, *News From Home*, [0:10:28- 0:11:07].

¹³ Akerman, *News From Home*, [0:20:18- 0:21:04].

¹⁴ Akerman, *News From Home*, [0:24:20- 0:24:31].

sent across the Atlantic ocean, opened and read, 'realist cinema *of time*' and across time.¹⁵ In other words, we are once again in transit, liminality, distance-intimacy and an embellished documentary. To think back to the Coach and Horses, in one instance caught on my phone video by Charlotte, I stand by my mother as an open-mic-night act (Ted, an unassuming lad who is perhaps too talented to be performing in this little venue) sang *You Are So Beautiful* by Joe Cocker at her request - admittedly, this shot did not make it into the final film, perhaps it was too personal? This is mine and my sister's lullaby growing up; time in the Coach became separate from time outside of it. I was implicated through my own connection to the song, and to my mother not dissimilarly to Akerman. Through my diversion from ethnographic filmmaker to daughter, I work with Akerman and Boyd as a mediator in an autobiography. As spectators, we feel their directing, the product deeply human in slight insecurity, 'why not cut?'¹⁶ you think as you watch someone stumble, take too long to finish a sentence (if they can even find the words at all). It is for this same reason that pub culture, and the essence of slow cinema, allow such instances to flourish. As put simply by Andre Bazin, it feeds into our 'obsession with realism';¹⁷ but connection, relief, comradeship. Maybe if the film in the pubs can breathe, so may the mediator and the unofficial actors they chose to film.

I commonly meet an old friend of mine at the Coach. His name is Paul Jeffries, but my mother came up with the acronym of PJ, and since that is what I call him too; he will not mind if you do the same. We met the first time in the pub when I was six

¹⁵ Andre, Bazin., Hugh, Gray (trans)., *A Note on Umberto D* in, *What is Cinema? Volume II*, (California: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 76. *Italic emphasis added by me.*

¹⁶ Andre, Bazin in Flanagan., pp. 65.

¹⁷ Bazin., *The Ontology of the Photographic Image* in, *What is Cinema? Volume II*, pp. 12.

and understandably did not have much in common with him being forty-five years my senior. We met again when I was fifteen, and realised we have the same taste in music, literature, philosophy and humour. Since he is one of my best friends and the Coach is our location of choice. I managed, over the iPhone voice memo feature, to capture his anecdote on the first time he ordered in a pub (The Black Horse in Chorleywood) in 1973 when he was fifteen. He went with his girlfriend at the time, Joanne, her friend and PJ's friend Ross, of whom he remains friends. Ross stated he would do all the talking: 'Excuse me, landlord! We would like your finest Cornish Bitter,' he exclaims, rubbing his hands together. Allegedly, the landlord raised an eyebrow over his Sunday newspaper at the youngsters, scanned the empty establishment, shrugged and poured them the eccentric request. Ross enthuses; 'Ah, that's the ticket! I've been waiting so long for that.' Anecdotes like these are pub culture, as well as the retelling of them to a keen audience. My friend shares numerous anecdotes and waits for me to match them. He always insists on sharing a bottle of wine and topping up my glass. I think deeply in these moments of this act of swapping, sharing and rekindling. What is it about this village pub, with its recent housing developments and local dramaturgy, that ignites our conversation? And what of the desire to capture this in a slow film in a translation? to highlight Jean Epstein on his idea of *Photogénie* within Leo Charney's book *Empty Moments: Cinema, Modernity, and Drift*; 'the moment of contact with the film lens elicits from people and objects a "soul" that we would not otherwise perceive'.¹⁸ In identifying a soul of all of those in front of the apparatus of a camera, the people who occupy a space,

¹⁸ Leo, Charney., *Six: The End of Pleasure* in, *Empty Moments: Cinema, Modernity, and Drift*, (London: Duke University Press, 1998) pp. 153

(say a pub?) become just as alive as the space itself. Slow cinema then acts as a conduit for allowing the space, the people, time itself to breathe in its reality. Though, in the case of *Pub Politics*, there is an added element of my own position as mediator – both in front of the camera and behind it. Akerman opted for only her voice to be heard, but her physical presence is absent. Her role, as stated, is translucent, she creates her identity through her takes and choices of enquiry.¹⁹ Boyd does the same, perhaps justifying his translation for the sentiment from our protagonist in *Harlequin Butterfly*; ‘instinct’ – or the soul?²⁰ I, however, choose in moments to stand in front of the camera in a tactic (though this word feels manipulative) to put the patrons at ease in a true ethnographic method. Though, the effect still leads to Bazin’s realist cinema, despite not being directly about slow cinema as a movement. These characters I have mentioned: Charlotte, my mother Karen, PJ, are not actors, nor are any patrons of the Coach. All events are spontaneous in front of the camera and improvised behind it.²¹ No directing happens, all shots are chosen because the composition might be nice and no one would be annoyed if I stood here for the duration of a take. *Pub Politics* becomes fundamentally abstract in the attempt to capture unique moments in time never to be repeated. This abstraction perhaps adds another layer to Bazin’s proposal, not only does the ontology of cinema include who is in front of the camera, but the relationship they have to the camera itself, and the woman behind it. As expressed within the footnotes of *What Is Cinema? Volume I*; sometimes one may become

¹⁹ Ilona, Hongisto., *The Primacy of Feeling in, Soul of the Documentary: Framing, Expression, Ethics*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), pp. 125.

²⁰ Enjoe and Boyd., Chapter 2., *Harlequin Butterfly*, pp. 28.

²¹ Margaret, Iversen., *Introduction: The Aesthetics of Chance in Chance*, (London: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2010), pp.12.

frustrated at seeing performative moments when one knows they are being watched, especially through the leering gaze of a camera.²² In slow cinema, anthropology, ethnography and poetry, we wait for authenticity; pubs are an agreeable place to wait, wouldn't you say?

To close with some thoughts about *Pub Politics* as a film (rather than a theoretical paper), I wish to look at the artefact in response to the ideas discussed. In terms of the structure, that being the film associated with this paper, I lean into the abstraction of slow cinema showcased through Akerman's *News From Home* (and others).²³ The film is peppered with long takes, emphasised landscape, but also odd cuts – interruptions. Are you paying attention?²⁴ The film opens with a dialogue recorded between my mother and me, caught accidentally when I was attempting to get room-tone. She tells me I must eat something (which I rarely do when carried away with filming). I used this audio despite managing to get a clean room tone as a direct nod to Akerman's *News From Home*; my mother too influences my work and her presence at the Coach is unmistakable. My father is the first shot for the same reasons. The camera shakes and struggles to find focus, perhaps another filmmaker would cast these shots aside due to their imperfections, but not here; the translation of the pub must be felt through the tangibility of the process of filmmaking itself. There is a slight montage – sorry Bazin – to get an essence of the space of the pub, overlapping conversation, bar tenders and bar flies; all the sound is diegetic. A

²² Andre, Bazin., Hugh, Gray (trans.)., *Theater and Cinema-Part Two* in, *What is Cinema? Volume I*, (California: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 101.

²³ Maisie, Pearce., *Pub Politics - Final Film*, (University of Amsterdam, figshare, media, 2026).
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²⁴ Jakob, Boer., 3a, *Attention, Please!* In, *Reframing Slow Cinema: On the Spectatorial Pleasures of Passivity*, (Groningen: University of Groningen, 2025), pp. 169-171. <https://research.rug.nl/en/publications/sensing-slowness-a-phenomenology-of-slow-cinema-spectatorship/>

clearer voice takes over as PJ talks, recounting his time as an underage drinker in the pubs: 'we felt privileged to be there'; 'that's the way!' Erik, a fellow patron, agrees. The underage attendees are shown, music slowly creeps in. My mother chimes in with a recent instance where my sister got ID'd at the Coach despite her daughter by her side – the drama of it all! As PJ talks, the staff set up for an open mic night, a beer rests on a table as an accessory to the guitar. The music starts, showcasing the pubs offered entertainment for the night, colour enters the frames, changing from a muted warmth to the vibrancy of the blue and purple LEDs. The takes become longer, but the musicians are interrupted; as is the attention of the spectators watching. The camera loses focus in the smoking area as I have a conversation with a stranger in the space off-screen. The drunken (despite his insistence that he is not) man exists within the film, but also as a figment of the pub due to his absence from the frame.²⁵ You can hear his disembodied voice only and know of his existence through my gaze to the right, he functions in liminality. Meanwhile, my father and Smiffy discuss the dangers of AI – I will let you sit with the irony. I end the conversation with the man and adjust the focus to my smoking companions; the conversation shifts to this very project 'for part of my thing'. The music starts once again, a traditional videographer's montage plays, one in which spectators might be more accustomed to. The tone is homemovie-esque. Patrons, musicians and staff play in front of the camera, or shall I say play with me as I film them. The tone is slightly comical, it is an antithesis of what slow cinema is, its unserious, cheesy and admittedly charming. These shots were the throwaways; the ones I thought were too

²⁵ Noël, Burch., *Nana, or the Two Kinds of Space* in, *Theory of Film Practice*, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1973), First published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* 189, April 1967, pp. 17-21.

silly to be included in *Pub Politics*. I realise now to not include them in this sort of montage would be doing the charm of the pub a disservice. The takes once again slow down as the film ends. We are left with the singer who is allowed to finish his song and receive his applause in slowness. I would have applauded him too, but my hands were full.

With love to the patrons of the Coach and Horses (on the green).

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