

#firstworldproblems: When Long Films Last Even Longer William Brown¹

The spinning wheel of death. Two seconds of film stutter by before the screen freezes. Another spinning wheel. Two more seconds of moving images and sound – just enough time to make me think that the film might imminently return to normal. It does not. The wheel spins again. After a minute or so, I reload the webpage. It does not work and I am now back at the beginning of the film, even though it still does not play. I restart my computer, I reset my Internet connection, and I unplug my wireless router then plug it in again. Still no joy. And so I shout some expletives, immediately feeling guilty because a bad Internet connection is a stupid #firstworldproblem when there are child refugees going cold at Christmas. Nonetheless, I even find myself punching the router in frustration before the Internet finally resumes and I can watch my film online.

Perhaps other viewers of online films have had similar experiences to the one described above, including the self-conscious nature of online film viewing as an expression of privilege. Although this special issue is concerned primarily with long films, my aim here is not to analyse in detail any particular film that is considered to be long. Rather, the aim of this essay is to identify the ways in which long films might be seen to constitute a challenge to the capitalist ideology that underwrites much of contemporary life. I shall do this not by identifying what makes a long film long, but by working with the very relativity of the term (it is not that all movies over, say, three hours in length are “long”). I shall argue that a film becomes “long” when it contradicts the demands of contemporary life under capitalism. I shall then explore to what extent this contradiction always holds if all films are, regardless of running time, spectacles of a sort, and thus not a challenge to, but a critical component of life under capitalism. Finally, I shall suggest that it is when films are unnecessarily longer than they should be, e.g. when the Internet is not working for online film viewing, that we understand the “fetishisation” of the machine, which, in being exposed, can function as a challenge to the ideology of business/busyness under capitalism – as well as being an indirect reminder of the non-first, or so-called “third world” that allows the first world and its “problems” to exist in the first place. In other words, the

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#firstworldproblem of a poor Internet connection, which makes a long film last even longer, bespeaks how the first world of smooth Internet connections is problematically based upon the occulted labour of the “third world.”²

What is a long film?

Anyone who has taught a film class will have experienced students complaining that a film screened in a particular week was “too long” – often accompanied by a suggestion from the students that they “got it after ten minutes.” In a culture where many people (are encouraged to) consider themselves “experts” on, or at the very least “lovers” of, movies, and in which perhaps there is a desire to sound as if one might make a good movie executive, it may come as no surprise that viewers do not accept a film for what it is, but apply their own criteria – always with impeccable taste! – regarding what it should be. In his review of *American Honey* (Andrea Arnold, UK/USA, 2016), for example, Michael Smith declares in his title that the film is “beautiful but too long,” before concluding that it is “a beautifully crafted film, and a good film, that possibly could have been a great film with the right editing” (Smith 2016). A critic no less esteemed than Roger Ebert makes a similar gesture when he complains that “*Love Actually* [Richard Curtis, UK/USA/France, 2003] is too long” (Ebert 2005, 401).

When people express their dissatisfaction with a film by suggesting that it should have been shorter, it is quite possible that their real complaint is not with the film’s duration, but with its style, which they simply do not like and thus find boring. Evidence for this conflation of length and style can be seen in how the average length of the highest grossing movies grew from under 120 minutes in the 1990s and early 2000s to over 130 minutes in the early 2010s (Acuna 2013). If it was simply the long running time of films to which people objected, then these longer movies should not have grossed so much money. Even though box office figures do not necessarily mean that audiences enjoyed the film (perhaps it is viewed for other reasons, such as the amount of “hype” generated for the film via its marketing campaign), negative reviews complaining about the length of the movie would likely have prevented a good number of people from going to watch it, thereby denting its box office performance. When people suggest that a film is too long, then, they are really saying that for them the film is boring, and perhaps also “slow.”

² The first, second, and third world distinction has been largely abandoned in academic discourse, which is why I place the term in scare quotes. Nonetheless, the term also functions as a counterpoint to the modern hashtag #firstworldproblems, which plays a key role in my argument.

Slow cinema has received a lot of critical attention of late (see, for example, Jaffe 2014; Lim 2014; De Luca and Barradas Jorge 2015), and clearly there is overlap between slow cinema and long cinema, in that many films that adopt the techniques regularly associated with slow cinema (especially long takes) will by definition also have extended running times, and thus be “long” in terms of their duration. While slow cinema and long cinema overlap, however, they are nonetheless different things. It is therefore appropriate that we should ask, what makes a long film long, above and beyond the qualities that make it slow? For even if many audiences have a hard time enjoying slow (aspects of) cinema, such that they think it too long, they can like relatively long films nonetheless (130 minutes as the average length of a box office blockbuster in the 2010s). If slow cinema is a set of stylistic techniques, we might suggest that long cinema cuts across stylistic techniques – and is perhaps more simply a question of running time. For example, special effects blockbuster *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (Peter Jackson, New Zealand/USA, 2003) has a running time of 201 minutes, while *Beiqing chengshi/A City of Sadness* (Hong Kong/Taiwan, 1989), which is the longest film by Hou Hsiao-hsien, who for Song Hwee Lim is a paradigmatic slow filmmaker, has a running time of only 157 minutes. However, if long cinema is not *de facto* associated with style (long takes, long shots, static camera, and so on), but rather has to do with running time/duration, then we might be forgiven for thinking that we still need to ask what running time a film has to have in order to be considered long.

Given that for Roger Ebert, *Love Actually* is “too long” with its running time of 129 minutes, the answer seems to be relative. Indeed, sticking to feature-length movies, one journalist goes so far as to propose that a running time of even 100 minutes is “too long” (d’Agostino 2009). However, a slight distinction might be made in order to tease out what is constant across the otherwise total relativity of what makes a long film long, and where even a five-minute short on YouTube might be “too long” for many viewers, let alone a film like *Logistics* (Erika Magnusson and Daniel Andersson, Sweden, 2012), which has a running time of 857 hours, and which I shall discuss further below.

This slight distinction is the one between “long” and “too long.” A film that is “too long” can be of any duration, even if the way in which it is *too* long might be shaped by a number of dynamic factors, including the busyness of the viewer (“I do not have time to watch this five-minute video right now”), the tastes of the viewer (“I cannot sit through a film that is over 100 minutes long”), and industrial constraints (“we want to give our viewers value for money, but we also want to be able to screen our films at least a few times a day in order to make more money”). While any film can be “too long,” my aim here is not to get rid of relativity and declare that any film

that exceeds, say, five hours in duration is a long film. Such a declaration would be arbitrary, since one might easily contend that five hours isn't long, and that films are only long when they exceed 9 hours in length. Rather, I want to work with the relative way in which any film might be considered too long in order to argue that when films are perceived as too long, what remains constant across their relative running times is that they contradict the demands of life under capitalism. That is, they present a "problem" for the capitalist first world viewer, with that problem being presence itself.

When I find a five-minute video too long, it is generally because I must do other things, especially work, in order to make money to survive under capitalism. Even when it is too long because I am late to see a friend during my leisure hours, the notion of "too long" still demonstrates the way in which time under capitalism is quantified and regulated in such a way that it is precious, or given value: I believe that my time with my friend is of greater worth to me than my time watching this film. When I find a 5-, a 100-, or a 5.220-minute film, such as *The Cure for Insomnia* (John Henry Timmis IV, USA, 1987), too long, but don't even have another place to be, I nonetheless feel that I could be spending my time doing something of greater value (to me) – existing thereby not in the present, but thinking about time in capitalist terms (thinking not about this present time, but about another time of greater perceived value, worth, use, and so on). When I get fidgety because I cannot sit through a film that is longer than 100 minutes, I similarly am thinking about time in terms of its use-value. And when industry imposes running times on films for the purposes of maximizing screenings in relation to a perceived value for money, then clearly time is being considered in terms of monetary value, i.e. is measured in capitalist terms.

This valuation of time would apply to numerous films with longer-than-average running times. As Peter Travers is quoted as saying, "Oscar will not take any epic seriously if it's under two hours," thereby suggesting that length is often associated with prestige and awards, which in turn helps to attract audiences (see Setoodeh 2012). In short, then, issues surrounding whether or not a film is too long hinge upon the idea that "time is money," with d'Agostino suggesting as much when he bemoans how "too many directors [today] are indulging themselves *at the expense of your time*" (d'Agostino 2009, my italics).

Ebert has said that "[n]o good movie is too long. No bad movie is short enough" (Ebert 2005: 401), which similarly seems to be suggesting (in the absence of any definition of "good" or "bad") that movies are less about time as an experience of the present, and more about time-as-value. That is, rather than engaging wholeheartedly with what is before me because it is the only present that I have, I prefer instead to be transported somewhere else. In this way,

a film that is too long is also too “present,” perhaps even too real in that it does not transport me anywhere, thus making it not “worth” the “investment” of my time. People often complain that a film that they dislike constitutes “two hours of my life that I’ll never get back.” Of course, they will never get back a single instant of their life, regardless of what they are doing. Yet, the logic is that they prefer to spend that life not in the present, not making the most of even the “difficult” time of a film that is “too long,” but rather transported to the non-existent times of the fast-paced fiction movie, to a world in which the satisfaction of their desires comes first, or a first world.

If the process of finding a movie too long conveys the way in which we see/measure time in terms of use-value, and thus through the lens of a capitalist ideology, then a long film might be one that deliberately tries to disrupt that ideology. The film may be deliberately long not just in terms of using the techniques of slow cinema (a form primarily associated with non-Western filmmakers, although it also has proponents in the West), but also in terms of having an unwieldy running time with regard to the programming policies of cinemas, film festivals, and the other spaces in which films get shown. By this rationale, we might suggest that a movie that extends over five hours in running time constitutes a long film more definitely than a film that runs over three hours, since a number of films that are over three hours in duration have been commercially released, including *The Return of the King*. The important point, though, is that a long film is a film that is hard to screen under the demands of capitalism. However, it also by definition becomes a film that is hard to see, in various different ways, as I shall explore presently.

A cinema of interruptions

Psychologist Tim J. Smith has argued that owing to the limitations of the human eye, the average viewer generally only sees about 3.8 per cent of the screen at any given point in time during a movie (Smith 2013, 168). That is, we perhaps only ever see fragments of films. However, beyond this physiological limitation that prevents us from seeing the whole of films, no one can have sat through *Logistics*, which has a running time of 35 days and 17 hours, and not missed some of the film as a result of either walking out to go to the loo, to get food, or falling asleep (no human has reportedly stayed awake for much longer than 11 days, let alone the 35+ days that the film lasts; see Coren 1998). Few, even, will have sat through *Empire* (Andy Warhol, USA, 1964), which has a running time of “only” 485 minutes. These films are hard to see, then, not only because of their unprogrammable length, but also because one cannot physically sit through a screening of them without missing some of the film. The only way to watch the entirety a long film like these, is to watch it in

parts, or to have an interrupted viewing of the film (and perhaps repeated several times in order to be able to “see” all of the screen space, as per Smith’s argument).

Lalitha Gopalan has argued that popular Indian cinema is a “cinema of interruptions” as a result of the “constellation of interruptions” that define its production and reception, from censorship interrupting the would-be sexual relationships of numerous films’ lovers, to song and dance sequences interrupting the films’ narrative, to intervals interrupting the relationship between films and their viewers (Gopalan 2002). Given that many Indian films have a running time of over three hours, it perhaps makes sense that they feature intervals when screened at the cinema (and often on DVD, especially when the film is spread over more than one disc). For in some senses these are long films that viewers may not want or be able to watch in one sitting – even if the cinema that Gopalan discusses is clearly a commercial cinema (and thus not “long” in the anti-commercial sense that I have presented above). Nonetheless, we can borrow the concept of interruption from Gopalan for several purposes. First, it suggests the distinction between first and third world conceptions of time: the first world is “busy” and not present, but elsewhere and elsewhen, while the so-called third world is defined by interruptions that make the present palpable (it is not atypical to find Western audiences uncomfortable with the duration of Bollywood films). Second, and more simply, the interruption not only prolongs the time required to watch an already quite long film, but it also prolongs our engagement with the film as a whole.

Faced with a film that lasts the best part of a waking day or more, I might not bother if I knew that there was no interval. Or, I might only watch a fragment, knowing that I do not have the time or the will to sit through the whole film. Knowing, however, that I can watch the film in fragments might well persuade me to watch it. This can be achieved in several ways. For example, the film can be split up into separate parts, as happened with Miguel Gomes’ *As Mil e Uma Noites/Arabian Nights* (Portugal/France/Germany/Switzerland, 2015), which in many places became three separate films to make its 381-minute running time more palatable. Equally, one might add intervals at a cinema screening. Although these were discontinued in North America after the release of *Gandhi* (Richard Attenborough, UK/India/USA, 1982), they continue to happen in various countries, including India, for various reasons (see Hartlaub 2003). For example, I attended a screening of *The Shallows* (Jaume Collet-Serra, USA, 2016) at the Cinemas NOS complex in the NorteShopping Centre in Porto in August 2016 – and there was an interval in which viewers were encouraged to buy refreshments, even though the film has a running time of “only” 86 minutes. Meanwhile, Quentin Tarantino inserted as a directorial decision an

“intermission” space into *The Hateful Eight* (USA, 2015), which has a running time of 187 minutes. Furthermore, one might watch the film at home or “on the go” using various devices, including smartphones, DVD and Blu-Ray players. Such films regularly come with ready-made interruptions, like when MUBI split Jacques Rivette’s *Out 1: Noli Me Tangere* (France, 1971) into several episodes when streaming it in the UK during the early summer of 2016. Or, one might create one’s own interruptions by pausing the film for a brief period or even several days. However, while these interruptions might help viewers to see long films in their entirety, in some senses the interruptions demonstrate the commercial nature of the films and/or how they are complicit with the use-value attributed to time under contemporary capitalism.

Perhaps the commercial dimension of interruptions – be they programmed or chosen – is made most clear by looking at the cinema interval once again. While the interval might provide some welcome respite for the viewer of a long film, it is also – as per the screening of *The Shallows* described above – be designed as a moment in which viewers can and are encouraged to buy various snacks and drinks, i.e. spend more money at the cinema. This is revealed by the animated short, *Let’s All Go the Lobby* (Dave Fleischer, USA, 1953), which used to play in movie theatres and which advertised various refreshments on offer (“the popcorn can’t be beat”). That is, the interval functions not as an opportunity to leave the cinema, but as a means of ensuring that one comes back to continue watching the spectacle. One might argue that breaking long films down into readily-consumable chunks serves a similar purpose as it also compromises their unwieldy nature. Perhaps this also is made clear by the way in which the consumption of long films in chunks/with interruptions becomes practically indistinguishable from viewing “quality television” series that also might last between 10 and 100 hours. If *Les Vampires* (Louis Feuillade, France, 1915) was split into 10 episodes lasting between 15 and 60 minutes, and only rarely screened in its 399-minute entirety, then how is this necessarily so different from watching *Breaking Bad* (Vince Gilligan, USA, 2008-2013), which is a 3,038-minute film split into 62 x 49-minute episodes? In this sense, the long film does not so much critique commercialism as support it, with the role of the interruption being to make sure that you continue to watch the film or show. In this way, the subversive potential of long cinema becomes contained because its very length is fragmented, even if many viewers of “quality TV” shows indulge in marathon “binge-watching” sessions that can last many hours.

Furthermore, if long cinema is in part designed to critique what Guy Debord terms “the society of the spectacle,” in which we are reduced to consumer-spectators, then the (necessary) reduction of the long film into consumable fragments also undermines this cri-

tique, not least because what was unwatchable has been rendered watchable, and thus simply another spectacle to be commercialized and consumed. In some senses, then, to watch the long film in its entirety defeats what I am arguing is its purpose.

Now, I should clarify the above suggestion that long films are designed to be unwatchable, since it runs the risk of sounding nonsensical. All films, including long ones, are designed to appeal to at least certain audiences in certain ways, and thus in some senses are designed to be watched. Indeed, I find *Out 1* and the long films of Lav Diaz compelling; they are, for me and for numerous others, thoroughly watchable. But through their long duration, they purposefully test the limits of the watchable – something also often achieved through their “slow” cinematic style, which stands in stark contrast to the much more consumer-friendly commercial style of mainstream cinema (fast editing, loud noises, bright colours, much camera movement and motion on screen, stories that more often than not are designed to be followed with ease, even if the stories are themselves quite complex). Indeed, many of the longest films ever made involve exposés of the inner workings of capital, including *Logistics*, which traces the journey of an electronic gadget from Sweden, where it is bought, through Europe, where it was imported, and back to China, where it was manufactured. Alternatively, a good number of very long films use found footage to deconstruct the role that cinema plays in the society of the spectacle, including, for example, *The Clock* (Christian Marclay, UK, 2010), which is a 24-hour compilation of scenes from films featuring clocks that tell the time from midnight to midnight – inviting viewers to reflect on their experience of time, especially when watching films.

Nonetheless, the ability to interrupt long films, especially when viewing them at home, subverts the challenge to watchability-under-capitalism that they otherwise offer – even if this ability to interrupt the films also makes it more likely for us to view them in the first place, thereby enabling us to discuss and write about them in essays like this one. A central issue here is about control, and specifically the ability to control the time of the film, or to choose one’s own “interruptions.” However, viewing long films online, even when split into manageable chunks, often involves moments when the control of time is lost as the viewing is interrupted as a result of a poor Internet connection. During such moments, the experience of the film is prolonged in an undesirable, uncontrolled way. These moments – when long films last even longer – once again help to subvert the commercial drive of the society of the spectacle and its insistent quantification of time as money, the notion that time cannot be “wasted” except on one’s own terms, or the business of busyness.

The spinning wheel

The running time of Lav Diaz's *Melancholia* (Philippines, 2008) is 447 minutes. This is, alas, "too long" for most people to watch in a single sitting – especially if one is unable to make it to Paris or London (as discussed in May Adadol Ingawanji's contribution to this dossier) to see it at one of its rare theatrical or gallery-based screenings. Among the few places that one might (legally) see it, then, is online, where MUBI, for example, showed the film in late 2016 as a part of their Diaz season. However, even if one blocked off 447 minutes in a single day in order to watch *Melancholia*, chances are that one would not be able to see the film in a single sitting – at least in the UK. For, as per the experience described at the outset of this essay, it is common when watching a film online for it to take longer than its supposed running time as a result of problems with one's Internet connection.

Reading Chuck Tryon's description of what he terms the "digital delivery" of movies, one might be mistaken for thinking that nothing ever goes wrong when watching films online (see Tryon 2013). And yet it is a common experience for a streaming movie completely to freeze, setting in motion the restarting and cursing described above. The phenomenon was even the subject of a cinema advert run for confectionary company M&Ms in British cinemas in 2014: one M&M stays at home trying to watch a film online, but becomes so frustrated that he goes to join his M&M friend in the cinema, thereby reaffirming the power of the cinema over the Internet.

There are numerous reasons as to why the Internet might not work well enough for one to watch a movie without facing the dreaded spinning wheel or equivalent. However, in the UK a major reason for the general slowness of Internet provision is as a result of Internet service providers failing to replace copper cables that run from street-level cabinets into the home, with the fibre optic cables that otherwise provide the infrastructure for UK Internet provision. This means that even if data flow rapidly along fibre optic cables outside of the home, they hit a bottleneck when they try to enter into the home, since the copper cables are "limited to 80 megabits per second (Mbps), compared with 1,000Mbps or more available in all-fibre networks" (see Garside 2012). In other words, many UK homes will, by definition, find it hard to stream movies, especially ones that are higher definition and thus require data to flow more rapidly.

Frustrating though the experience of a slow Internet connection is, it nonetheless is instructive in several ways. This is not simply a case of trying to put a positive gloss on what is generally considered to be a (first world) problem, making of the experience something like a surrealist viewing experiment (akin to André

Breton putting his hands over his eyes during film viewings, perhaps the spinning wheel, like a glitch, can be used productively). Rather, the moment when a poor Internet connection interrupts online film viewing, thereby making long films even longer, demonstrates the mediated nature of our relationship with time, or how time under capitalism is measured not by presence but by media themselves. In other words, the loss of the control of time demonstrates how we are not really in control of time at all, but rather have our time controlled by the media, such that the real and present time of the interruption is intolerable to us. As we shall see, the illusory belief that I control time – made clear as an illusion when the uncontrollable interruption takes place – requires the fetishisation of the machine in order to exist in the first place.

The film stops working and I get annoyed, cursing the Internet service provider, my computer, and the website that is hosting the film. In attacking the apparatus, be it verbally or physically, I demonstrate that I do not really understand where the images are coming from or how they arrive in front of me (my words certainly will not improve the Internet service provided). In addressing the computer/Internet/website as if it were a person (I talk to it), I make clear how in general I consider the apparatus to be a fetish, or what Achille Mbembe describes as “an object that demands to be made sacred; it demands power and seeks to maintain a close, intimate relationship with those who carry it” (Mbembe 2001, 111). My powerlessness before the computer, and perhaps before cinema as a whole, reveals the way in which power is otherwise conferred on to it (“it demands power”). This power is given because the computer, like cinema, comes to be an apparatus that helps us to understand the world, which becomes our measure of the world, and which we consult mentally or physically when we do not understand the world.

This fetishisation process is demonstrated by the way in which we think of movies when faced with an overwhelming situation that is otherwise real (as per the numerous reports that witnesses of the attack on the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September, 2001 felt that it was just like a movie; see Schaffer 2001). It can also be seen by the way in which we consult our pocket computers and smartphones whenever faced with too much reality, or what I am here terming “the present.”

This is how media become the measure of time: faced with the present, with presence, I imagine elsewhere or another time, and I go there mentally by thinking about media, or I go there physically by directly consulting my media machine/apparatus. In both cases, I avoid the present for the other times of the media.

The irony, as far as this essay is concerned, is that the long film aims in part to use media against themselves: faced with an

unendurable film, I am confronted not just with the fantasy presence of the medium's content – images from another time and place – but with the presence of the medium itself. When reduced to easily consumed chunks, like when watching sections of a film like *Melancholia* on MUBI, this aim is somewhat undermined. However, when a poor Internet connection then causes that easier-to-consume chunk to expand uncontrollably and to last longer than its running time, I am once again faced with the presence of the medium and the way in which the media otherwise help me to avoid presence and to seek the mediated and measured time of capital. Time is money, and since time is money, I better be entertained during my time, just to help me to forget that this is “costing” me. In this way, the medium is like a fetish “made sacred,” and we have with it an “intimate relationship” in charge of which we believe ourselves, and yet which we find offensive when it eludes our control.

This need for capitalist control is also suggested by the way in which one feels “ripped off” by someone (the website, the Internet service provider, the computer manufacturer) when the apparatus does not run perfectly or smoothly. Through its failure we feel the presence of the apparatus/medium and we understand how our time is mediated more generally. Put differently, it is when the machine does not obey our desires that we realise how much we obey it. We fetishise the machine, since it helps us to understand, or better to avoid, the reality of presence; and yet when the machine really shows something like a will of its own (in refusing to do what we want it to do), we immediately hate it and become violent towards it in thought and word, if not in action. Perhaps this anthropomorphisation of the machine reveals the mechanisation of people that is also a measure of capitalism.

Therefore, although we might hate it, the failure of the machine/apparatus/cinema confronts us with our own busyness, with how our lives have succumbed to the first world, capitalist ideology of business, and with how time is measured through media as business – with entertainment being perhaps the most serious aspect of the capitalist world of business, as suggested by our outrage when the apparatus does not entertain us. This frustration, in which we feel not the subservience but the otherness of the apparatus, is perhaps a more radical challenge than that of the long film running smoothly, even if the latter generally also aims to confront us with a sense of the present as mediated, as well as a critique of the workings of capital, as per *Logistics*. The smooth running of the apparatus during the running of the long film still involves the subservience of the apparatus, which really is our fetishistic subservience to the apparatus of spectacle, and to capital more generally. When the apparatus fails, is unruly and uncontrollable, paradoxically this fetishisation is revealed.

In some senses, then, the failure of the apparatus reminds us not of its subservience to us, but of our subservience to it; it involves a feeling of humiliation on our part for the very reason that our hubristic sense of domination over the apparatus has been exposed as sham. We do not dominate the apparatus. Rather, we are slaves to the capitalist quantification/evaluation of time as money (“business”), and we know it. This awareness of our subservience has been exposed rather than quietly ignored through the use of media, which we use precisely to avoid having to recognise our subservient condition. It is because of the shame involved in this exposure of our subservience that we immediately try to confess the very first world nature of the problem of our annoyance at the Internet not functioning properly. In confessing that it is a “first world problem,” we clearly demonstrate that we are invested in – and are happy to perpetuate – a world that has been divided into at least three parts, such that the first and the third world are not conjoined, interdependent, or what I might, after Karen Barad (2007), term entangled. Instead, they are separate and hierarchical, so much so that we make up a ghostly “second world” that acts as a buffer between the first and third worlds, rather than having them rub up against each other, reminding each other of their existence. This confession of the “first world problem” in turn bespeaks our shame that we know that our first world is dependent upon – and that we who inhabit this first world are therefore subservient to – that third world and not the other way around. This confession comes as we simultaneously deny (by saying that the third world is not our world, and that our world is split in three rather than one) and forget (by ignoring the third world and preferring to look at our media machines) its truth.

When the computer answers back, it is as if we hear the voices of those in the third world who mined the copper, silicon, and various other raw materials from which the machine was made, not to mention those working in the factories assembling the machine’s circuit boards. When the computer fails, when it answers back, it is also the third world answering back – reminding us in the so-called first world that we have constructed a world split precisely into three (“first world problems”) and of how we use our media in order not to face up to, or to be presented with that reality, but to escape from it. It reminds us of our wish to live not in this time of exploitation, but in another time of fantasy and fiction. If long films like *Logistics* try to expose these processes through their unendurable running times, then when long films last even longer as a result of a poor Internet connection, we are reminded of the possibility of a similar “crash” taking place should those in the third world like the computer also decide to rebel, to disobey. In our treatment of the machine as human (we shout at it), we are reminded of our treatment of humans as machines (to disobey is intolerable and must be quashed), of our sacrifice of humans to the machine, or apparatus, of

capitalism (third world lives should not make problems for those in the first world). May our sense of first world guilt and shame lead us no longer to favour the machine over our fellow humans, but our fellow humans over the machine. May it lead us no longer to split the world into three, but to see the world as one. In this way, perhaps #firstworldproblems can lead to the realisation that we are #oneworld.

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