



CINEJ CINEMA JOURNAL

ISSN 2159-2411 (PRINT) ISSN 2158-8724 (ONLINE)

Exposing the world through Emmanuel Lubezki's method

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Volume 11.1 (2023) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2023.447 | <http://cinej.pitt.edu>

Abstract

This article is based on the concept of exposing the world through the lens of cinema by the cinematographer, Emmanuel Lubezki. This research claims that the cinema's camera illuminates the world through focusing and framing components. It provides the cinematic image with a cinematic presence and makes it feasible in a phenomenological sense (return to things themselves). And eventually, this leads to viewer buoyancy and immersiveness.

Keywords: cinematographic frame; Lubezki; focusing; immersion; fluid camera



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Exposing the world through Emmanuel Lubezki's method

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Introduction

Lubezki's films in his second filming legacy convey Heidegger's interpretation of the world and are characterized by anxiety that reverts to existence. This anxiety is associated in the characters' minds with a fluid camera and a searcher. By using a naturalistic approach, the cameraman made themselves less noticeable by diverting the viewer's attention away from the cinematic frame and into a bodily experience. Lubezki makes every effort to create a cinematic frame by emphasizing the use of natural phenomena, and this is what distinguishes Lubezki's style. From Heidegger's point of view, cinema that reduces image and sound to tools for transmitting narrative information, creates a world without land, constrained by the image frame and lens. However, in poetic cinema, while the story is often still told, the close relationship between narrative and image, sound, and color has disappeared. Sound and image shape our perception of important events in a narrative and their development, while many films present us with a world that was built for a specific purpose and then depicted. Poetic cinema reminds us that whether we can conquer the world or not, Heidegger is concerned with how truth emerges from historicity.

Heidegger considers *Dasein* a "being" in the world, aware of his transience, and to be able to give meaning to his experiences in the limited time he has left on this earth. This is not a guaranteed result of life, but a human achievement resulting from humans' ability to choose the world. *Dasein* is able to represent the world when only it is given a chance, a concrete opportunity, a human encounter and an opportunity to recognize their meaning. Lubezki's camera is a *Dasein* observer and never identifies with his characters; he is experiencing the world, even as he approaches the

characters who express their innermost thoughts through out-of-frame speech (voiceover). Lubezki always keeps his distance from the characters. The world can really be perceived as an image; if that is the case, then there is no illustration machine that can compare to cinema in terms of realism.

The idea of human floating and immersion in existence is a central concept in Merleau-Ponty's thought. What's more, the aesthetic experience of watching a film is the metaphysical aspect of cinema, which is referred to as the hidden layer of existence in the article "The Phenomenology of Perception." Cinema substitutes the natural state of human discernment with another perception. Accordingly the experience of "watching a film" is, in this sense, a form of movement in the spatial dimension. The spectator, like a soul free from the body, enters an imaginary and ethereal world and experiences a psychological journey. Because the spectator actually senses the separation of their "body" and "soul" while watching the film, it is less complicated to grasp intuition in cinema than in real life.

According to Merleau-Ponty theory, the body itself becomes another field or fulcrum for any object. Seeing action in conventional space involves staring at an object in order to separate it from the realm of the surrounding objects and to imagine it as a form. By staring at a separate object, that object does not establish itself for you, but instead it is you who stand. These two stages of separation and establishment are not completely different processes. Rather, they are a single, continuous action of going deeper into the object.

Each film is like a walking dream to us. Therefore, in this article, we will first examine the improvisational cinematography form of Emmanuel Lubezki, aiming to argue that man is inherently searching for meaning to continue living. The reason why this style was chosen will be explained. The observation camera will also be discussed to create a complete immersion in the cinematic experience. Their differences, however, suggest a logic connection between the two

types of filming in the world of work, namely the desire to create a naturalistic atmosphere. And afterwards, the second legacy of Lubezki's filming analysis. On that note, this study tries to confirm.

- 1) Improvisational cinematography as a suitable means for giving meaning to the world.
- 2) The cameraman can create a naturalistic, bodily perception aesthetic with a complete immersion in the film viewing experience.

Literature Review

Cinematography

As Bresson puts it this way: “Cinematography: is writing with images in movement and with sound” (Bresson, 1996:5). It is an essential component of mise-en-scene. It allows the audience to feel overwhelmed and moved by the characters in the film world. Film directors and cinematographers have a close relationship in order to preserve the dramatic world of the film. Cinematographer is the architect of the director's mind map. They are responsible for creating inner harmony using the mise-en-scene, a distinctive visual style, and making technical decisions on the filming and lighting equipment. Audience perception of the film is significantly impacted by these decisions. The camera's movement helps to create a subjective world, and the cameraman tones a scene with lighting. As Clark says: “painters with light, cinematographers must determine the quality, quantity, source, direction, and hue of light in a scene.” (Clarke, 2017: 110)

The cinematographic frame is one of the structural components of the cinematic image that defines the boundary between the image and the outside world. In this sense, the image is something that

is surrounded by a frame and comes into being as a distinct entity. In fact, the existence of a border called the frame, by separating the image from other external things, gives to the cinematographic image an independent and distinct existence.

If the cinematic image is considered as a piece of art, then the cinematic image is one thing. Something that is separated from other things by its border, the cinematic frame. And the sensemaking of the film is greatly enhanced by this. Framing is the principal aspect of filmmaking, producing a sense of place through the enclosure of space. Consequently, the infinite space around it, which is a continuum of screens, cinemas, cities, etc., will become a cinematic place.

Everything in the cinematic image is within the absolute space defined by the frame, therefore all movements and changes are measured relative to the frame and the absolute space it encloses. The range is nothing but the sum of what is displayed. Thus the frame range is merely a construction of all visual components, forms, and optical variations. There are two ontological aspects to the cinematic frame and location. From one side, the objective and independent nature of the frame that contains the image, and on the other hand, the objective and non-independent nature of the frame, which is merely the extremity and constructed of all the elements that exist in the image. Lubeszki's cinematography is generally the creation of a cinematic world with a frame. To be more precise, he employs a variety of techniques to create a distinctive cinematic world within each of his films.

Cinematographer Author and cinematographer style:

Does the director have the sole influence on the film world? The truth is that the film has many participants, each of whom influences the final product. For instance, the role played by *Sven Nykvist* in developing the scenes of Bergman's works is indisputable. In cinema, there have been many cases in which the world of a film would not have been created without a competent

cinematographer. There are, however, examples in which the cameraman transcends the filmmaker and produces a distinct world. This idea is accurate for Lubezki's cinematography; Lubezki is not a film technician but “a skilled professional making a valuable contribution to the cinema – a contribution that could best be described as aesthetic” (Keating, 2010: 15-16)

When it comes to filmmaking, one should not only create images for the sake of watching pleasure, but instead present images that appeal to the viewer's heart and mind. This idea and the director's visions are implemented through cinematography (filming), so it can be said that artistic filming is at the service. Based on such a definition, is personal style discussable? That means, does it exist at all? The style is more related to the format or the way of expressing and presenting the content of the work of art. Generally speaking, content is often repetitive, but forms or expressions of content are altered or readapted.

Image is the most significant tool of a film director. Utilizing images, he presents his vision in a variety of ways. By doing so, he has to take advantage of the professional ability and individual creativity of the cinematographer. There is no doubt that the director's wishes and opinions should be considered when determining the method and form of filming, especially lighting. However, in actuality, most directors place the responsibility for this on the director of photography.

The art of cinematography is inherently in such a way that the style of the cinematographer plays an important role in the world of work, so that it can be said that the Auteur cinema - which evokes the meaning of the absolute role of the director in writing a film - when it becomes a reality, the cinematographer has the effect of participation and intellectual companionship in the creation of the world. Therefore, in most cases, it is the *DOP* who designs and executes the image

form and format of the film. Here, the aesthetics and style of the cinematographer will influence the final result.

Some directors of photography, regardless of the subject of the film and the format and form of its development, always use a fixed method and technique. And it is natural that they have gained special experience and skill in that method and technique. Almost all of these people's films look similar. Are these features considered style by others? This style has no artistic value, because instead of being rooted in taste and creativity, it relies more on their technical experiences. While some cinematographers believe that filming should serve the subject of the film, others believe that a cinematographer should only pay attention to the aesthetics of the images and strive to create stunning shots no matter what the subject of the film is. Some filmmakers are just looking for innovation and trying to come up with a brand-new language for each film. Although innovation is one of the principles of artistic creation, not all innovations are necessarily creative. In excess, especially in intermediate and independent art such as filmmaking, its impact can be detrimental.

Lubezki's recent legacy with three directors:

Lubezki gradually began working as an international cinematographer after his career in Mexican cinema and television in the late 1980s. Over the course of his career, he has won numerous awards, including three *Academy Awards* for Best Cinematography. His career can be visually categorized into two periods. His commercial films are influenced by well-known filmmakers such as *Mike Nichols*, *Tim Burton*, and the *Coen brothers*, who are attached to the body of Hollywood filmmaking and use illumination lighting and inimitable cinematic movements similar to the excellent Hollywood productions. And his independent films, which are the result of collaborations with three directors, *Terrence Malick*, *Alfonso Cuarón*, and *Alejandro González*

Iñárritu. The visual tone of Lubezki's films was the same regardless of the three directors while maintaining his aesthetic preferences.

What is most striking about Lubezki's work is the constant effort he puts into his visual expression during filming. By looking at Lubezki's pictures, one can clearly understand the image of a mentality. Together with the other elements of the film, it expresses and presents the space to the audience as it should and directly, so that the viewer has no way to accompany the film to the end. He adapts his style to the style of any director and adds things from his perceptual realm to the world of filmmaking.

Lubezki's phenomenological filmmaking style began with Malick's *The New World* and gradually grew stronger. Moving towards the characters, the camera gains a different understanding of life. Everything except the essence of life, which is connected with ontology. In *The Tree of Life* of, a man and a woman who lose their child and the camera follows their growing pain. In *Knight of Cups*, Rick, whose relationship is constantly changes. Through every loss, he experiences the journey into himself, which is the prelude to the journey into the universe.

In *Knight of Cups*, body contact between a man and woman is a romantic experience instead of a sexual act. The camera forms cognition and perception. The camera approaches the bodies and faces in the party scene and sometimes shows us distorted images of them. Like an open-mouthed woman laughing or a picture of her deformed body. This is a shift in perception in order to understand the truth of the film's narrative. The beauty of Lubezki's camera lies somewhere beyond the mundane. The cinematic aesthetics of the film is based on the bodily movement of the camera within the film world, and is an attempt to understand the non-differentiation between the outside world and the inner worlds of the characters.

Research Questions:

1. In what way does Lubezki develop a fresh perspective on cinematography?
2. How does Lubezki's visual styles differ from others?
3. Despite the stylistic and artistic imbalances between each director, how does Lubezki dominate the visual world?

Methods

This article seeks to critically analyze the films of the second filming period of Emanuel Lubezki by adopting a descriptive-analytical method. Additionally, Oscar-winning films will be included; formal elements of Emanuel Lubezki's work will also be discussed. In the following table, *Table 1*, are the movies, years, and directors of the films studied.

Discussion

Lubezki's cinematography techniques

Camera/ Improvisational cinematography:

Lubezki is always searching in his visual world, and improvisational cinematography allows him to do so. A camera without decoupage constraints and continuous rules, a fluid camera that deals only with discovery and intuition. As the camera approaches the characters, it immerses them into the world from unconventional angles, and with each character the camera goes on an inner journey.

As you can see in Figure 1, the camera corrects the frame in all frames and does not make a fixed selection. Even when approaching the subject, it moves forward or sideways to further check the position. Lubezki's improvised camera, unaffected by the characters' actions, has a unique relationship with nature and the world around it. With the scenes of Jack walking among the rocks in *Knight of Cups*, this presence in the heart takes on a different form. It's all made up of an improvised camera that sees the world. Malick tries to create natural and spontaneous moments in life so that the camera can understand them exactly. Due to the poetic nature of Malick's films, Lubezki can display his visual tone. Lubezki says: "he is somebody looking to tell stories with a pure filmic approach where the movies are not based on theatre, but are much more purely cinematographic" (Lubezki, 2011: 22).

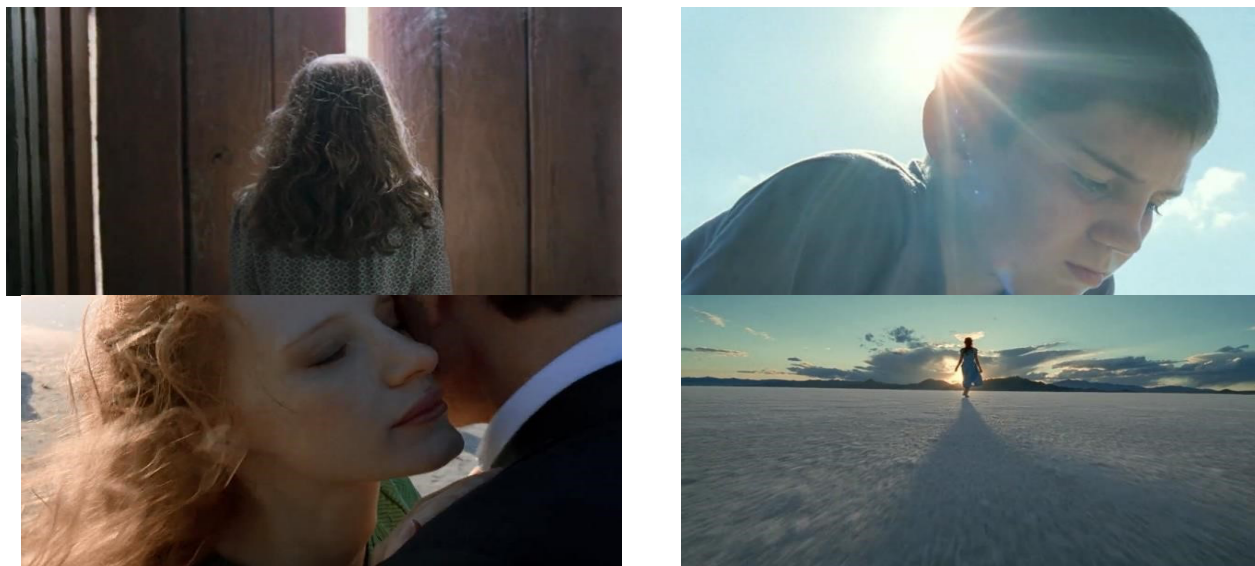


Figure 1.

Existential camera (Active improviser):

Lubezki's camera instinctively predicts the improvised movement of the actor. Visual dynamics are formed in this spontaneous coupling (actor movement - camera movement). Lubezki's camera operator Jörg Widmer said, "When actors move their hands and touch each other, you can follow the hand, and then you come back to a close-up, so if it's all in the movement it looks so natural. It's like the flow of water. It's really a very immediate way of telling a story. So, you can totally react to whatever they do" (O'Falt, 2020: 21)

At the beginning of *The Revenant*, Lubezki's camera in Figure 2 approaches *Hugh Glass*, looks around him and sees him again. Occasionally, it enters into his point of view and returns to the world. Observations like these, and sometimes movement into the actor's field of view, transform the subjective camera into an objective one. The camera physically perceives two-dimensional space and turns it into a subjective perception for the viewer. This type of fluid camera with active movements is almost expected in Malick, Iñárritu and Cuarón, but each has its particular situation according to the plot. Due to the story of the character, Malick films are very fluid and mostly on steadycams. Due to the rough nature of the situation in *The Revenant*, moving images are used with more tension to make the image closer to reality.



Figure 2.

Fluid camera

Visible fluid camera in decoupage service for ultimate immersion

Alfonso Cuarón is interested in longtake filming. His films try hard to instill reality, and documentaries were inspired by *Gillo Pontecorvo's The Battle of Algiers* (1967). This is a longtake style that, as *Bazin* once argued of the neorealist filmmakers, confronts the aesthetic limitation of a contemporary normative editing system (Bordwell, 2008:16-28). In fact, Cuarón's and Lubezki's overarching longtake style is quite idiosyncratic. (Ibid.) Lighting and the occasional use of a hand-held camera create the kind of naturalistic aesthetic that Bazan mentioned in neorealist films.



Figure 3: Children of Men

Figure 3: To make the human *Children of Men* world more believable, Cuarón needs an observer camera that occasionally moves away from or sometimes approaches the characters. Lubezki's camera is the only testifier and unaffected view of space and time in the film. Thompson put it this

way: “Cuáron describes the camera as "not trying to make a judgment or a commentary, that everything there would be just the commentary itself” (Thompson, 2018) Immersion is a kind of seeing in accordance with human experience without interruption, which leads to the illusion of reality; cut generally informs the viewer of the film. In Cuarón films, this immersion takes place using a fluid and visible camera.

In Figure 4, in the film *Children of Men*, Cuarón and Lubezki used a 4-minute long-take documentary filming, which was filmed using an electronic device mounted on top of the car, which allowed them to move the camera anywhere in the car. Including what is happening inside and outside the car.



Figure 4: Children of Men and the car

Invisible fluid camera with hidden cut technique

The stories of Iñárritu's films are human mosaics spread across narrative lines, Various Narratives and Films with several heroes. This type of narration has been prevalent since the early years of cinema. The characters in his films are not safe from human harm. Iñárritu's film world "is one where almost no one can escape the wrath of life unharmed" (Ruimy, 2016: 3). Therefore, cinematography must be invisible and tell stories from close range. Lubezki won two Oscars for Iñárritu films; Lubezki's power in seamless filming in the mazes of Broadway theatre and the use of natural light is commendable.



Figure 5: Birdman

In Figure 5, the camera focuses on Reagan for most of the film, using a hidden cut to match the filming rhythm so that the camera captures Reagan's homogeneous interior space. Iñárritu wanted the film to look like it was unfolding in real-time (Salisbury, 2016) Lubezki said: "Alejandro likes the camera to look slightly accidental, as if you have maybe missed something, or you arrive slightly late – it gives the audience a feeling of the suddenness of events." (British

Cinematographer, 2017:11) Lubezki also adds: “We experimented with that in Birdman a bit. We call it the elastic shot. Where you go from objective to subjective and back to objective. It’s a way to get the audience immersed in the world and we did a bunch of those in the movie.” (Tangcay, 2016)

Lighting/Naturalistic lighting

Excessive use of natural light creates a great deal of fear for cameramen. Uncontrolled light and reflections of light from different places and objects disturb the cinematic image. But Lubezki makes good use of this feature in creating the search world of his films, and he makes extensive use of natural and minimal light to make his search camera invisible.



Figure 6.

In Figure 6, he uses a lot of natural light. The characters are placed in front of the window to reflect the blue color. The skylight appears on the grass and in the interior of rooms. All these colors create the original qualities of natural light. It is used as the main light without any fillers. It creates a high contrast in the actor's face to show the uncertainty and the shaky psychological atmosphere of the character, a kind of anxiety in character.

As Lubezki stated: “I didn't use any lights. It's funny, because sometimes I talk to other cinematographers and they say, ‘Oh my God, Terry doesn't let you use lights,’ but it's not that he doesn't let me — I don't want to use them. On *Tree of Life* we really tried to do combinations of scenes with light and scenes without, and when you add movie lights they don't have the complexity of natural light. You're putting one light that has one tone and one color through some diffusion, and it doesn't have the complexity of natural light coming in through the window from a blue sky and clouds bouncing green off the grass. Some would call that kind of light imperfect, but it's more accurate to call it more complex. That complexity of natural light and the way it hits the face is amazing. When you start to go that way it's hard to go back and light [things artificially]. The less you use artificial light, the more you want to avoid it, because the scenes feel weak or weird or fake. Often we would be inside a house and it would be cloudy and we would know that we'd probably have to rewrite the scene and shoot it outside or come back another day, but that would be better than the option of lighting the scene and not liking it.” (The ASC, 2013)

In Figure 7, he makes extensive use of *Magic Light*. Using sunlight as the main source of light is a logical choice. He had carefully prepared a planned schedule of the exact light position of each scene in *The Revenant*, and with the natural dimming, he set the record for the external

scenes. In fact, he had already designed the right light for the scene according to the natural light. He even minimizes the use of artificial light indoors to create a real sense of life.

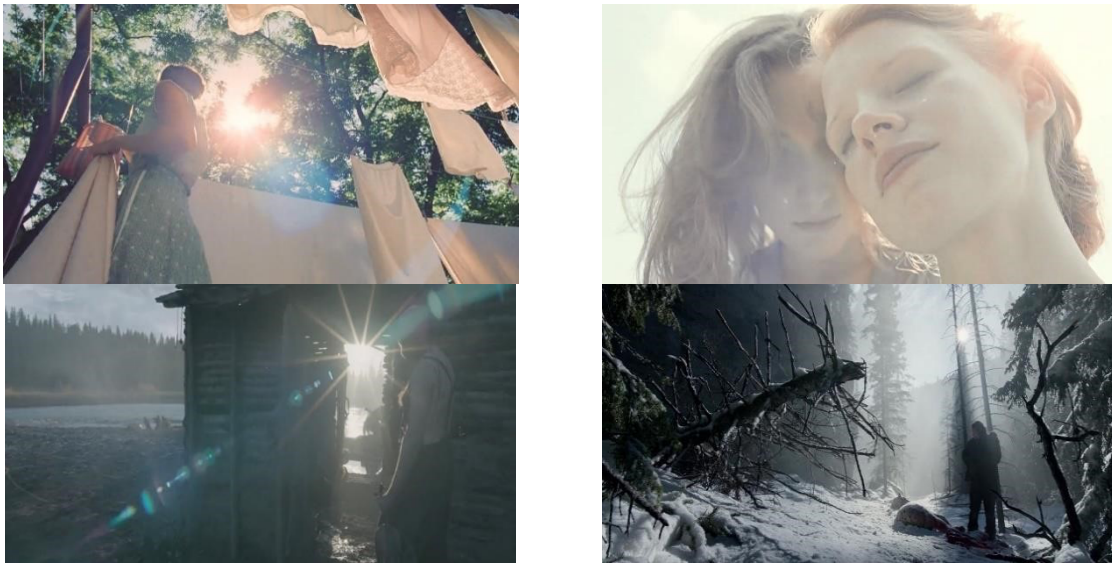


Figure 7 The Revenant

In Figure 8 In *Birdman*, many scenes are internal, so as to avoid losing the actor's sensory continuity, the film was designed as a longtake. Lubezki had already installed all the stage lights. The theater lights in the background aren't very effective at illuminating the stage, but they do create a lighting space. According to Lubezki: "I wanted the movie to look as naturalistic as possible. We did not use movie lights. It's all light bulbs. All the lights that you see in the set are the lights that are lighting the scene. These cameras allow us to do that because the dynamic range of the camera was able to capture the light bulb and the face of the actor without clipping. There is one scene where we used probably a 20K. It was outside a window in the stage to create the impression of daylight, but all the other lights are just lamps and practicals." (Lubezki, 2016)

Lubezki cinematography toolbox

Lubezki's images are somewhat like an odyssey in the characters' mental world. He uses high-depth cameras to capture such images. In his older work, he's shot on film cameras such as the Arri cam LT or the Arri 235, which he favours for their more compact ergonomics.

He also likes to shoot Arri, having used the Alexa Mini, XT and the Alexa 65 for large format work. He described working on the Alexa 65 while shooting *The Revenant*. “The images had the immersive and experiential qualities we had imagined at the very start. Not a representation of the story, but reality – as if you are there, looking through a clean window. As Lubezki puts it: “I don't think we could have done this movie a year or two years ago. The *ALEXA* camera and the *ALEXA M* especially, allowed me to do handheld for so long. The fact that you can record media for so many minutes and also that the video system gets an image that is so clear for the director... It allowed us to do the movie. Otherwise, I think it would have been probably close to impossible.”

(Lubezki, 2016)



Figure 8.

In Figure 9, Using a wide-angle lens and stylized close-up images, Lubezki creates a particularly emotional connection between the subject and the world. The use of these close-up shots with wide-angle lenses helps to isolate the characters in a way that induces a sense of loss of characters in the environment. The use of a wide-angle lens allows more natural vision to be captured Lubezki said, “We wanted the audience to feel the sheer cold, to see the breath of the actors on the lens, and experience the powerful emotions in the story” (British Cinematographer, 2017:5)



Figure 9: The Revenant

In figure 10, Lubezki's use of wide-angle lenses for close-ups also creates a claustrophobic feeling for the audience, a feeling of frustration. Lubezki said, “We wanted the audience to feel the sheer cold, to see the breath of the actors on the lens, and experience the powerful emotions in the story” (British Cinematographer, 2017:5)



Figure 10: Birdman

Conclusion

Emanuel Lubezki's main style is the immersion of the viewer in the world of film. To achieve this style, he sometimes uses images with maximum resolution in detail and sometimes creates images with a documentary base. Sometimes a mise-en-scène is arranged for the camera to replicate real-life experiences so that what we see matches the human eye.

It is a fluid camera with a documentary narrative to turn it into a cinematic naturalistic image, an image that strongly creates a sense of being in everyone's life. In fact, improvised filming is a kind of cycle of objectivity to the character's mentality to create a harmonious organism. The camera moves and oscillates in a fluid state in each view, and it is reasonably expected that each view should belong,

This is where the duality of mind and object is formed, But the cinematic aesthetic of the film is based on the body movement of the camera to understand the outside world and the world inside the characters. The characters are constantly involved in existential anxiety. Anxiety that goes back

to existence. Because they see death in front of them, Lubezki's camera in these films is constantly working to show this Anxiety, Anxiety that has spread to camera movements and created a restless camera. The search for perplexed subjects in a fragmented and fragmented narrative raises the existential idea that the world exists only through the lens of the human eye. Cinema has an area where one can find a unique and separate view of the world around, Phenomena that man cannot perceive with the naked eye. Lubezki's camera always reminds us of the disappearance of man in the modern world and its modern civilization. It is an object that has now become a subject to help increase human knowledge. but Lubezki was able to prevent disruption in the film by creating inner harmony using his unique cinematographic techniques. The most accurate definition of Lubezki is that his images look invisible and natural.

A unique approach was taken to the second tradition of Emmanuel Lubezki's cinematography in this study. Furthermore, the various camera modes depict him representing a cinematic frame in a naturalistic perspective.

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Movie	Year	Director
<i>Children of Men</i>	2007	Alfonso Cuarón
<i>The Tree of Life</i>	2012	Terrence Malick
<i>Birdman</i>	2015	Alejandro González Iñárritu
<i>Knight of cups</i>	2015	Terrence Malick
<i>The Revenant</i>	2016	Alejandro González Iñárritu

Table 1. Movie Title, Year, and Director