

Kan-Anek Rachatasakul: Problematics of the Long take in film: From film to digital age

In introducing his final thesis, Kan-Anek Rachatasakul presents historical definitions of the long take: for example, a definition by Brian Henderson (1976) - "A single piece of unedited film, which may or may not constitute an entire sequence" and another by Mark Le Fanu in his essay from 1997: - "In general, I think it is important in the definition of the long take to go to the spirit of the thing, not the letter ... it is not so much the actual length of the take that is crucial (as though it were measured by a stop-watch) but the fact that ... [it] is geared towards contemplative engagement"

Kan-Anek Rachatasakul himself does not either oppose nor endorse those theories through comments. It is also a pity that opinions by other authors are not brought up, as would be expected. He only notes those above and also divides the long take into two groups: long takes and mobile long takes. The first is formed by a static camera, and so is similar to a master shot, when the camera doesn't move, and the second one, which is the subject of this theoretical work, is about working with the camera in movement.

Kan-Anek Rachatasakul's thesis has two basic chapters: Background and Problematics of Longtake.

The chapter on Background containing a history of the development of the longtake is in my opinion a bit too "nutshell." Kan-Anek Rachatasakul refers here only briefly to work by F. W. Murnau and Andrei Tarkovskij, and omits many significant works of European production, which in the past had inspired high budgets Hollywood productions. I mean, for example, work by Federico Fellini or Béla Tarr and many others. He also does not take notice of the fact that the Long take is not only determined by the length of a shot, or by technological difficulties, but also by content. In this respect, Kan-Anek Rachatasakul is neglected many significant factors in his presentation on historic development. It seems that the main purpose of Kan-Anek Rachatasakul's work is only to explore long take in light of the transition to digital media and therefore, he deals with the history of long take and its dramaturgical nature or use in achieving dramatic effect only very marginally. He only really goes into some depth with the films of Alfred Hitchcock and Orson Welles.

The second chapter elaborates in more detail the technological complexity almost all film production professionals experience when working with longtake. Kan-Anek explains the difficulty of producing long takes, and remarks that the transition from film to digital camera brought about the democratization of the media and the possibility of using long takes also by low-budget filmmakers. Kan-Anek rightly points out that the long take is often understood as a manifestation of low-priced TV series format called "talking heads", but in fact it can involve completely different principles. Kan-Anek also properly and systematically describes individual parts and elements of long take film production from the sensitivity of the film stock, over types of cameras, to specialized systems made for enabling camera movements to motion capture studio equipments, including special effects tools, all of which, when used correctly, allow for filming longtakes.

In this way, his thesis is a theoretical work dealing with technical means of long take production and not so much with their dramaturgical use. There are examples of selected scenes from films, but I miss a more rigorous analysis of how the long take is working in these scenes, in particular I find lacking the final effect and dramaturgical impact of the director and cinematographer's work. It is not enough to say that the long take "allows the audience to really get comfortable in a scene, absorbing all the detail and happening without any editing", as Kan-Anek Rachatasakul writes in his thesis. It is not so simple. Very often, long takes are used to make a more complicated reading of the story possible for viewers. Such work serves dramatic effect, storytelling, exposure of the characters, relationships between the characters.... How closeups and long shots work together are working with reflection and storyline running outside of a picture frame, which is precisely the reason behind the decision to use longtake tools. Such tools open time and space so that the viewers' perception is felt as natural. A master of such finally acquired situations made via longtakes was Stanley Kubrick in *A Space Odyssey 2001*, who is not mentioned in Kan-Anek Rachatasakul's final thesis at all. The thesis is rather a lot of "how to use" long takes and surface claims of Kan-Anek Rachatasakul, such as the one made in his final conclusion: "... In my opinion, the long take is just one of the many powerful storytelling tools available to the modern film director and its use will not provoke a positive reaction from the audience every time. If a filmmaker uses the technique wrongly, then the story line may become boring for the viewers". I consider this statement an overly simplified way to conclude the thesis.

I recommend the work for defense. My evaluation of the Kan-Anek Rachatasakul's Master's thesis is between the grades of C.

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