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Anti-Cinema as Visual Politics: Silence, Slowness, and the Refusal of Spectacle in Contemporary Art Cinema

El anticine como política visual: silencio, lentitud y rechazo del espectáculo en el cine de arte contemporáneo

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Abstract

This article conceptualizes anti-cinema as a mode of visual political communication rather than as a fixed genre. Through a qualitative comparative analysis of *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*, *The Great Beauty*, *Happy as Lazzaro*, and *Post Tenebras Lux*, it examines how silence, extended duration, spatial opacity, narrative withholding, and spectacular excess position spectators politically. The revised method uses a deductive-abductive codebook, sequence-level units of analysis, analytic memos, and cross-case comparison. Close readings show that the films do not merely represent bureaucracy, decadence, exploitation, or class violence; they reorganize the temporal and perceptual conditions under which these problems become communicable. The article distinguishes its approach from Rancière's political aesthetics and from political modernism by operationalizing anti-spectacular communication as an observable relation between form, attention, and spectator positioning. It concludes that anti-cinema offers communication studies a framework for analyzing non-persuasive visual politics in platformized attention economies.

Keywords: Anti-Cinema, Political Communication, Slow Cinema, Spectatorship, Visual Politics.

Resumen

Este artículo conceptualiza el anticine como una modalidad de comunicación política visual y no como un género fijo. Mediante un análisis comparativo cualitativo de *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*, *The Great Beauty*, *Happy as Lazzaro* y *Post Tenebras Lux*, examina cómo el silencio, la duración extendida, la opacidad espacial, la retención narrativa y el exceso espectacular posicionan políticamente al espectador. El método emplea un libro de códigos deductivo-abductivo, unidades secuenciales y comparación transversal. Las lecturas muestran que las películas no solo representan burocracia, decadencia, explotación o violencia de clase, sino que reorganizan las condiciones que hacen comunicables esos problemas. El artículo se distingue de la estética

política de Rancière y del modernismo político al operacionalizar la comunicación antiespectacular como una relación observable entre forma, atención y posicionamiento espectadorial. Se concluye que el anticine amplía el estudio de la política visual en economías de atención plataformizadas.

Palabras clave: anticine, cine lento, comunicación política, espectadorialidad, política visual.

1. INTRODUCTION AND CURRENT STATE OF THE QUESTION

Political communication research has traditionally concentrated on messages that seek to persuade, mobilize, legitimize, frame, or contest public issues. Campaigns, speeches, news discourse, propaganda, political advertising, and social media remain indispensable objects of study. Yet this emphasis can make politics appear to reside primarily in explicit statements, identifiable actors, or measurable effects. Audiovisual form also communicates politically when it organizes who or what can be seen, how long an image may be endured, which causal relations are made intelligible, and what kind of spectator is invited to judge. The political dimension of cinema therefore exceeds the presence of political themes. It also concerns the temporal, sonic, spatial, and narrative conditions through which a social world becomes perceptible (Barthes, 1977; Hall, 1980; Metz, 1974; Rancière, 2004; Veneti et al., 2019). This article examines that problem through the concept of anti-cinema. The term is not used as a stable genre label or as a synonym for every difficult, experimental, or slow film. It designates a relational practice: a film becomes anti-cinematic when it interrupts dominant expectations of narrative efficiency, psychological transparency, emotional guidance, and spectacular availability. Such interruption can occur through silence, extended duration, spatial disorientation, ellipsis, weak causality, or even through an excess of spectacle that exposes its own exhaustion. Anti-cinema does not stop communicating. It changes the terms of communication by making interpretation slower, less secure, and more ethically demanding (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002; Burch, 1973; Debord, 1994; Deleuze, 1989; Wollen, 1985).

The contemporary relevance of this proposition lies in the transformation of audiovisual attention. Platformized cultural production rewards continuity of engagement, rapid recognition, emotional intensity, and measurable circulation. Streaming interfaces, short-video platforms, recommendation systems, and social feeds do not determine every act of viewing, but they increasingly organize cultural visibility around retention, repetition, and immediate response (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Poell et al., 2022). Empirical work on online video similarly shows that sensational framing, strong emotional polarity, narrative simplification, and recognizable personalities can increase dimensions of audience attention (Dai & Wang, 2023). Against this environment, a film that delays information or refuses emotional extraction acquires a renewed communicative significance. Its politics may lie not in escaping media culture but in exposing the habits through which attention is captured and converted into value (Bucher, 2018; Citton, 2017; Crary, 2013).

The comparative corpus consists of Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (2011), Paolo Sorrentino's *The Great Beauty* (2013), Alice Rohrwacher's *Happy as Lazzaro* (2018), and Carlos Reygadas's *Post Tenebras Lux* (2012). These films differ in national context, visual style, production history, and narrative organization. Ceylan works through procedural delay and masculine silence; Sorrentino uses baroque movement and cultural excess; Rohrwacher combines social realism with fable and temporal rupture; Reygadas fragments chronology and destabilizes perception. Their diversity is analytically useful because it prevents anti-cinema from being reduced to minimalism. The corpus instead allows comparison among four anti-spectacular tactics: delaying, saturating, fabulating, and fracturing.

The research question is: how do silence, slowness, spatial opacity, narrative withholding, and spectacular excess operate as forms of visual political communication in contemporary art cinema? The central argument is that these formal operations position spectators in relation to power. They regulate access to knowledge, interrupt habitual speeds of judgment, complicate identification, and disclose the limits of institutional or narrative mastery. The films do not simply communicate political content; they politicize the communicative situation in which content becomes visible and meaningful.

The article makes three contributions. First, it provides a genealogy that distinguishes anti-cinema from the broader traditions of political aesthetics, counter-cinema, and slow cinema. Second, it develops a transparent sequence-level method that connects formal description to communicative interpretation. Third, it proposes the concept of anti-spectacular political communication: an audiovisual mode in which political force emerges from the obstruction, suspension, or internal exhaustion of spectacle. This concept is intended to expand communication studies without collapsing it into film theory. It identifies concrete operations of address and spectator positioning that can be compared across films and, potentially, across other audiovisual media.

2. CONCEPTUAL GENEALOGY AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

2.1. From Avant-garde Negation to Political Modernism

Anti-cinema has several genealogies, and conceptual precision requires keeping them distinct. Early avant-garde and experimental practices challenged narrative continuity, representational realism, and the institutional conventions of commercial exhibition. Structural and materialist film later foregrounded duration, repetition, projection, and the physical conditions of the medium, often refusing character psychology or dramatic progression (Le Grice, 1977; Rees, 2011; Sitney, 2002). These practices established that cinematic communication need not depend on transparent storytelling. The screen could become a site where the mechanisms of perception were made visible rather than concealed, while the attraction of the apparatus itself could be foregrounded rather than subordinated to plot (Gunning, 1986).

A second genealogy concerns political modernism and counter-cinema. Brechtian and post-1968 film theory argued that classical realism naturalized ideology by hiding its own construction. Wollen's account of Godardian counter-cinema opposed narrative transitivity, identification, pleasure, and closure to interruption, estrangement, and reflexivity (Wollen, 1985). MacCabe (1974) and Rodowick (1988) similarly located political stakes in the contest between dominant realist discourse and formal strategies that exposed contradiction. This tradition remains crucial because it treats form as political rather than neutral. However, it often presumes a relatively programmatic opposition between dominant cinema and its modernist negation.

The present framework retains the insight that form organizes ideology but avoids turning formal difficulty into evidence of emancipation. It also follows Sontag (1966) in resisting interpretive habits that reduce sensorial form to a detachable content. Anti-cinematic difficulty can become a prestige code, a marker of cultural distinction, or a ritual of festival consumption (Bourdieu, 1993; Galt & Schoonover, 2010). It may distance viewers without producing critical reflection. The analytical question is therefore not whether a film is difficult, slow, or fragmented in itself, but how a specific formal operation structures the viewer's access to power, suffering, space, and judgment.

2.2 Feminist Counter-vision and the Politics of Spectatorship

Feminist film theory expanded the critique of cinematic transparency by showing that looking is socially organized. Mulvey's (1975) account of visual pleasure demonstrated that narrative cinema distributes

activity and passivity through gendered structures of looking. The importance of this intervention for the present study is methodological: spectatorship is not an after-effect added to an already complete image. It is designed through framing, duration, performance, editing, and narrative access. A film communicates politically when it positions viewers as possessors of bodies and meanings, but also when it frustrates that possession.

Later phenomenological and sensory approaches complicated purely ideological models by emphasizing embodied viewing, affect, and the reciprocal relation between screen and spectator (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2010; Sobchack, 1992). Recent work on the values of spectatorship also stresses that difficulty, discomfort, reflection, and boredom can produce differentiated forms of cinematic experience rather than a single predictable effect (Hanich & Rossouw, 2023). These approaches support a non-deterministic account: formal structures solicit particular orientations, but audiences may accept, negotiate, or reject them. The article therefore analyzes spectator positioning, not actual audience response.

2.3. Slow Cinema, Duration, and the Ecology of Attention

Slow cinema scholarship has examined long takes, minimal action, everyday temporality, and the refusal of accelerated narration. Earlier realist and time-image traditions likewise treated duration, spatial continuity, and the material world as more than containers for plot (Bazin, 2005; Kracauer, 1960; Tarkovsky, 1989). Flanagan (2008), Koepnick (2014), De Luca and Jorge (2016), and Çağlayan (2018) show that slowness can reorganize perception by making duration palpable. Yet slowness is not inherently oppositional. It can become a recognizable art-cinema brand, an aesthetic of contemplative consumption, or a transnational festival style. The political significance of duration must therefore be demonstrated at the level of scenes and relations rather than assumed from average shot length or sparse plotting.

The concept of an ecology of attention helps connect slow cinema to communication studies. Attention is not merely an individual cognitive resource; it is socially organized by institutions, technologies, genres, and economic incentives (Citton, 2017). Contemporary platforms make this organization especially visible because cultural objects are evaluated through clicks, completion rates, watch time, and recirculation (Poell et al., 2022). Anti-cinematic duration can interrupt those norms by refusing to compress a situation into its most immediately legible or emotionally extractable form. Its politics lies in the alternative distribution of time it asks the spectator to inhabit.

2.4. Beyond Rancière: From the Distribution of The Sensible to Communicative Operations

Rancière's concept of the distribution of the sensible is foundational for understanding how aesthetics determines what can appear, be heard, and count as common experience (Rancière, 2004). His emancipated spectator further rejects the idea that viewers are passive recipients waiting to be activated by politically correct form (Rancière, 2011). This article shares both premises. It does not claim that anti-cinema automatically liberates viewers, nor that political meaning can be reduced to authorial intention.

The proposed framework differs from Rancière in analytical scale and purpose. The distribution of the sensible is a broad philosophical account of the relation between aesthetics and politics. Anti-spectacular political communication is an operational framework for examining how particular films allocate time, speech, spatial knowledge, causal information, and affective cues. It asks which formal device is observable, what information it withholds or intensifies, how it positions the spectator, and what relation to power becomes perceptible as a result. Recent discussions of political aesthetics confirm the value of studying style and rhetoric as ways in which media perform politics, but they also demonstrate the need to specify the mechanisms that connect aesthetic form to communicative consequence (Koutras, 2024; Nieuwenhuis, 2022).

This operational emphasis also distinguishes the article from political modernism. Political modernism often framed reflexivity and anti-realist form as a break with ideological illusion. The corpus here includes a film such as *The Great Beauty*, whose political work occurs through seduction, rhythmic montage, celebrity culture, and visual pleasure. Its critique does not stand outside spectacle; it emerges when spectacle becomes repetitive, self-conscious, and empty. Anti-cinema is therefore defined as a critical relation to spectacle rather than a fixed inventory of austere techniques.

2.5. Contribution to Communication Studies

Visual political communication has grown rapidly, particularly in research on leaders, campaigns, protest, journalism, and social media. Reviews of the field emphasize the need to take images seriously as political acts rather than as illustrations of verbal messages (Bucy & Joo, 2021; Farkas, 2023; Schill, 2012). Most of this literature understandably focuses on recognizable political actors, strategic image management, visual framing, and audience effects, while broader work on visual global politics demonstrates that aesthetic forms can organize international and public meaning beyond explicit discourse (Bleiker, 2018). Art cinema introduces a different but complementary problem: political address without a direct strategic sender, explicit persuasive goal, or stable message.

The article contributes by treating film form as an arrangement of communicative constraints. A long take regulates the earliest moment at which a viewer can leave a situation behind. Off-screen action limits visual possession. Ellipsis distributes knowledge unequally. Silence may reveal the failure of institutional speech. Excess may make seduction inseparable from critique. These operations can be described and compared without claiming that every spectator reaches the same interpretation. Communication studies gains a vocabulary for non-persuasive visual politics, while film theory gains a more explicit account of how formal choices organize address, attention, and public meaning.

3. OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTION, AND ANALYTICAL PROPOSITIONS

The general objective is to explain how anti-cinematic form functions as visual political communication across four contrasting works of contemporary art cinema. The specific objectives are: (a) to historicize anti-cinema across avant-garde, political-modernist, feminist, and slow-cinema traditions; (b) to identify observable formal operations in selected sequences; (c) to compare how those operations position spectators in relation to bureaucracy, decadence, exploitation, and class violence; and (d) to clarify what this approach adds to communication studies.

The study is guided by one research question: how do silence, extended duration, spatial opacity, narrative withholding, and spectacular excess reorganize the spectator's relation to political meaning? Three analytical propositions orient the comparison. First, anti-spectacular form relocates politics from explicit message to conditions of perception. Second, the same operation can carry different political functions across cases; silence, for example, may communicate bureaucratic evasion, sacred opacity, or class unspeakability. Third, anti-cinema is politically ambivalent: it can interrupt dominant habits of attention, but it can also reproduce elitist distance. These propositions are interpretive guides rather than hypotheses intended for statistical testing.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Design and Case Selection

The study uses qualitative comparative film analysis. Purposive sampling was employed because the objective is analytical differentiation rather than statistical representation. Each film met four criteria:

international recognition within contemporary art cinema; a sustained tension with spectacular communication; sufficient formal complexity for sequence-level analysis; and contrast with the other cases in national setting and aesthetic strategy. The sample therefore maximizes variation within a theoretically delimited field (Rose, 2022; Schreier, 2012).
The corpus is not presented as a complete map of anti-cinema. It is a comparative set designed to test whether the concept remains useful across minimalism, baroque excess, fable, and perceptual fragmentation. The films were treated as primary audiovisual documents, while the theoretical literature informed the coding categories and interpretive questions.

4.2. Unit of Analysis and Codebook

The unit of analysis is the sequence, understood as a relatively bounded audiovisual segment marked by a change in location, time, action, or dominant formal problem. Sequence-level analysis is more transparent than general thematic description because it requires the argument to identify where and how a claim is visible or audible. The study does not use frequency counts as evidence of political importance. A brief scene may be structurally decisive, while a recurrent device may remain politically ambiguous.
The initial categories were deductively derived from the literature on counter-cinema, slow cinema, political aesthetics, and spectatorship. They were refined abductively during the second viewing when recurrent features did not fit neatly into the first scheme. In particular, spectacular excess was added so that anti-cinema would not be equated with minimalism. The final codebook includes six primary categories: silence, extended duration, spatial opacity, narrative withholding, spectacular excess, and spectator positioning. A second-order category, refusal of spectacle, is assigned only when at least two primary operations converge to obstruct immediate legibility, emotional consumption, or narrative mastery.

Table 1: Coding Categories and Decision Rules.

Category	Operational Definition	Decision Rule	Spectator Task
Silence	Suspension or failure of speech that changes authority or knowledge	Code only when reduced speech has an observable narrative, ethical, or institutional function	Listen to pauses, ambient sound, and the limits of verbal explanation
Extended duration	Time made perceptible beyond immediate causal efficiency	Code when waiting, repetition, or shot duration exceeds plot necessity	Endure rather than rapidly extract information
Spatial opacity	Space resists orientation or instrumental background function	Code when framing, landscape, or architecture withholds social or causal relations	Recognize partial vision and situated knowledge
Narrative withholding	Incomplete motive, chronology, causality, or closure	Code when the gap remains structurally active rather than accidentally unclear	Interpret without full mastery
Spectacular excess	Attraction intensifies while revealing labor, repetition, artificiality, or emptiness	Code when spectacle becomes self-accusing rather than merely pleasurable	Experience seduction and critique simultaneously
Refusal of spectacle	Second-order convergence of anti-spectacular operations	Assign only when at least two primary categories obstruct immediacy, emotional extraction, or closure	Notice the communicative regime itself

Source: Author's elaboration.

Silence was coded when suspended speech, reduced dialogue, or non-expository sound altered the distribution of authority or knowledge; ordinary absence of speech was insufficient. Extended duration was coded when a shot, action, or repetition exceeded its immediate causal function and made waiting perceptible. Spatial opacity was coded when landscape, architecture, or framing withheld orientation, resisted instrumental use, or complicated social relations. Narrative withholding was coded when motive, chronology, causality, or closure remained deliberately incomplete. Spectacular

excess was coded when movement, music, color, performance, or montage intensified attraction while simultaneously exposing repetition, labor, artificiality, or emptiness. Spectator positioning recorded the interpretive task produced by these operations: waiting, doubting, enduring, being seduced, or recognizing the limits of knowledge.

4.3. Coding Procedure and Interpretive Consistency

Each film was viewed three times, as stated in the original design, but the procedure was made explicit for the revised manuscript. The first viewing mapped narrative structure, recurrent motifs, major spatial divisions, and shifts in rhythm. The second viewing segmented the film into sequences and recorded formal evidence in a coding sheet: location, duration relative to the surrounding scenes, shot scale and mobility, dialogue density, sound source, narrative information, spatial orientation, affective cue, and presumed spectator task. The third viewing revisited all sequences selected for interpretation and compared them across films.

Interpretive consistency was pursued through four safeguards. First, definitions and decision rules were fixed in the codebook before the cross-case comparison. Second, every interpretive claim retained in the results section had to be anchored in describable audiovisual evidence rather than theme alone. Third, analytic memos distinguished description from inference: for example, «the doctor omits the finding from the report» is an observable narrative action, while «institutional truth is ethically negotiated» is the interpretive proposition derived from it. Fourth, negative instances were considered. The Great Beauty was retained precisely because its rapid montage and visual abundance complicate the assumption that anti-spectacular politics must be slow or sparse (Saldaña, 2021; Schreier, 2012). The study was conducted by a single researcher and therefore does not report intercoder reliability. This is not concealed as a neutral limitation. Instead, the revised design prioritizes procedural transparency, scene-level evidence, and conceptual consistency. The coding scheme can guide replication or disagreement, but interpretive film analysis does not promise identical readings across analysts.

4.4. Ethical and Methodological Limitations

The analysis uses commercially released films and does not involve human participants or personal data. Its principal limitations are epistemological. First, the small purposive corpus cannot support generalizations about all art cinema or all spectators. Second, the study analyzes textual positioning rather than empirical reception. Claims about what a sequence asks of a viewer should not be confused with claims about what every viewer actually experiences. Third, the category of anti-cinema is necessarily relational: the dominant norms against which a film appears slow, opaque, or excessive vary across cultural and historical contexts. Fourth, close reading may overvalue authorial coherence by connecting heterogeneous details into a unified interpretation. The cross-case design and explicit consideration of ambiguity are intended to reduce, not eliminate, that risk.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Once Upon a Time in Anatolia: Procedural Opacity and the Ethics of Omission

Once Upon a Time in Anatolia transforms a murder investigation into an extended encounter with the limits of institutional knowledge. The opening search unfolds at night as three vehicles traverse nearly indistinguishable roads and fountains. Its loose causality and ambiguity also draw on the art-cinema narration described by Bordwell (1985), but Ceylan turns those conventions into an institutional rhythm rather than an authorial puzzle. The suspect, Kenan, cannot reliably identify

the burial site because he was intoxicated and because the landscape repeats itself. Ceylan frames the convoy through darkness, windshields, headlamps, and long stretches of road, allowing the state's technological apparatus to illuminate only narrow fragments of the terrain. The sequence does not simply delay the plot. It converts delay into the central experience of procedure: authority moves, questions, and records, but cannot make the world immediately legible (Ceylan, 2011).

The communicative function of this delay becomes clearer at the village mayor's house. The officials pause for food while the mayor petitions the prosecutor for a morgue. His request links bureaucratic infrastructure to migration and death: elderly residents die in a village whose children live elsewhere, and bodies must wait to be seen. When the electricity fails, the mayor's daughter enters carrying lamps and tea. The men's conversation stops. The scene's low light, slowed movement, and suspended dialogue briefly reorganize the hierarchy of the room. The young woman is highly visible yet has no discursive authority; the officials' silence reveals a masculine field that can look but cannot articulate what the interruption means. The sequence therefore makes gendered spectatorship part of institutional fatigue rather than treating the daughter as a detachable symbol.

A second scene-level pattern concerns speech that fails to disclose its own stakes. During the journey, prosecutor Nusret recounts the story of a woman who predicted the exact date of her death. He presents the case as a mystery, but Doctor Cemal asks whether she had access to medication and suggests suicide. The anecdote gradually appears to concern the prosecutor more personally than his official tone admits. The scene is built from pauses, indirect questions, and the mismatch between professional certainty and private unease. Silence here is not the absence of information; it is the pressure exerted by information that institutional language cannot safely accommodate.

The recovery of the body continues this displacement of genre. The corpse is not presented as a sensational revelation but as a material burden: it must be uncovered, inspected, wrapped, and awkwardly fitted into a vehicle. Practical problems interrupt the expected emotional hierarchy of crime cinema. By refusing a triumphant discovery, the film makes the body's treatment—who touches it, how it is transported, which details are recorded—more politically significant than the detective solution.

The autopsy provides the clearest evidence for the claim that the film communicates the limits of institutional legibility. The assistant notices soil in the victim's respiratory tract, implying that he may have been buried alive. After a pause, the doctor dictates that no abnormality was found. The image does not explain the omission through a speech or moral lesson. It places the viewer beside an act in which official truth is produced through selection. The doctor's decision may be read as compassion for the family, complicity with procedure, or exhaustion before an unbearable fact. The political force lies in the impossibility of separating these motives. Anti-narrative here does not mean that nothing is resolved; it means that resolution is exposed as an administrative construction.

Across these scenes, Ceylan's anti-spectacular communication operates through delayed movement, low-key visibility, off-screen sound, and speech that circles around its object. The spectator is made to inhabit procedural time rather than merely observe a critique of bureaucracy. This distinction is central to the article's contribution: the state is communicated as rhythm, partial illumination, paperwork, and omission—not only as a represented institution.

5.2. The Great Beauty: Spectacular Saturation and Cultural Exhaustion

The Great Beauty initially appears to contradict the category of anti-cinema. Its opening combines a cannon blast, a choir, monumental views of Rome, tourists, and rapid transitions into Jep Gambardella's rooftop birthday party. The camera moves through bodies, music, choreographed gestures, and frontal looks. Rather than withholding pleasure, the sequence offers too much of it. Yet the opening tourist who collapses while photographing the city establishes the film's central relation between beauty,

consumption, and death. Rome is immediately available as image, but that availability is physically and spiritually exhausting (Sorrentino, 2013).

The party sequence makes spectacle self-conscious. Jep moves through the crowd as both participant and master of ceremonies; the camera's mobility and rhythmic editing produce attraction while his voice-over identifies his ambition to become not merely a guest but the person capable of making parties fail. The political problem is not that pleasure is false and must be replaced by seriousness. It is that a cultural elite has converted historical space, artistic memory, and social connection into endlessly reproducible events, a postmodern condition in which style and historical depth become difficult to separate (Jameson, 1991). Spectacle becomes circular rather than progressive. The viewer is seduced by the same surfaces the film asks them to distrust.

The performance-art episode provides a more explicit demonstration. A performer with a political symbol painted on her body runs headfirst into a stone structure. Later, Jep interviews her and asks for a precise account of her art; her answers rely on generalized language about energy and the untranslatable self. The scene does not reject experimental art in favor of conservative realism. It stages a conflict between visible radicalism and communicative accountability. The performance is immediately legible as transgression, but its political vocabulary collapses under questioning. Sorrentino's excess therefore becomes anti-spectacular when the image of rebellion is shown to function as a consumable credential. A related scene depicts a child artist forced to produce large paintings before an admiring audience. She cries, throws paint, and strikes the canvas while adults applaud the resulting work. The formal attraction of color and movement is inseparable from coercion. The sequence makes visible the labor hidden inside the cultural event and complicates the spectator's pleasure: admiration for the image can no longer be separated from awareness of the child's distress. This is a concrete instance of spectacle turning against itself.

The funeral sequence develops the same critique through social performance. Jep explains the rules of elegant mourning—where to stand, how to display grief, and when to leave—treating the funeral as another scene to be managed. Yet his own tears exceed the script. The sequence alternates controlled behavior with affect that cannot be fully instrumentalized. The film does not offer authentic emotion as an easy cure for decadence; it shows that even within a rehearsed communicative order, something remains resistant to performance.

The giraffe at the Baths of Caracalla condenses the film's theory of appearance. A magician prepares to make the animal disappear and insists that it is only a trick. Monumental ruins, an impossible animal, and a theatrical act create a highly spectacular image, but the explicit acknowledgement of trickery deprives it of metaphysical certainty. The scene is followed not by revelation but by continued searching. Spectacle is not defeated from outside; it confesses its own mechanism and still retains power. The film's anti-cinematic operation is thus saturation. Rapid montage, music, architecture, performance, and beauty produce a communicative environment in which attraction becomes repetitive and self-eroding. Unlike Ceylan, Sorrentino does not make the spectator wait for information. He overwhelms the spectator with images whose abundance fails to produce meaning. This negative case confirms that anti-spectacular political communication is a relation, not a minimalist style.

5.3. Happy As Lazzaro: Temporal Fracture and the Persistence of Exploitation

Happy as Lazzaro begins at Inviolata, a rural estate where sharecroppers remain under the authority of the Marchesa Alfonsina de Luna even though the legal order that sustains their condition has ended. The film does not reveal the deception through an investigative protagonist. It embeds exploitation in crowded interiors, collective labor, debt calculations, repeated requests, and the constant availability of Lazzaro's body for other people's tasks. The warm texture of the 16 mm image and the apparent

timelessness of the estate create beauty without making the social order innocent (Rohrwacher, 2018). The Marchesa explains the arrangement to her son Tancredi as a chain of exploitation: she exploits the peasants, and they exploit Lazzaro. The statement is unusually direct, but the film refuses to make it the final explanatory key. Lazzaro's minimal speech and unquestioning generosity remain opaque. His silence does not provide a program of resistance; it reveals a limit in the social languages available to describe goodness. The exploitative order can command, calculate, mock, and consume his labor, but it cannot fully interpret him.

The staged kidnapping of Tancredi initially appears to introduce conventional narrative action. Lazzaro carries messages and supplies to the hiding place, believing in the seriousness of the plan. When he falls from a cliff, the film breaks its temporal contract. He later awakens physically unchanged in a transformed world, and no explanatory device stabilizes the passage of years. This rupture is not a decorative magical-realist effect. It blocks the modernization narrative through which feudal exploitation could be safely located in the past and recalls Benjamin's (2008) critique of homogeneous, progressive historical time.

The urban half confirms that the social relation has changed form rather than disappeared. The former peasants now survive through scavenging, precarious work, petty schemes, and insecure shelter. Their legal liberation has not produced material autonomy. Lazzaro's unchanged body becomes an index of continuity: he moves between historical periods while the others age, making the persistence of exploitation visible without reducing it to a linear social-development thesis.

The church sequence provides the film's strongest combination of sound, space, and political communication. Drawn by organ music, the impoverished group enters a church but is expelled by nuns. When the musicians attempt to resume, the organ fails; the music leaves the institution and follows the group into the street. The sequence redistributes sonic authority. Sacred sound is detached from the architecture that claims to contain it and accompanies those whom the institution has excluded. The scene is openly fantastic, yet its political meaning is formal and spatial: belonging is communicated by the movement of sound rather than by a speech on ecclesiastical hypocrisy.

The final bank sequence reverses the church's miracle. Lazzaro enters the financial institution to ask that the de Luna estate be returned to Tancredi. A slingshot in his pocket is mistaken for a weapon, and the crowd beats him. The scene joins misrecognition, fear, and collective violence. The bank's polished interior promises rational order, but the innocent request cannot be translated into its language. The crowd rapidly converts opacity into threat. Where the church sequence allowed music to escape institutional possession, the bank sequence shows an institution and its public destroying what they cannot classify.

Rohrwacher's anti-spectacular strategy is fabulation. Temporal rupture, saintly opacity, mobile sound, and anachronism prevent the viewer from treating exploitation as a solved historical problem. The film's slowness is less a matter of uniformly long takes than of historical hesitation: the spectator cannot confidently locate where the past ends and the present begins. Political communication occurs through the failure of modern time to deliver the emancipation it promises.

5.4. Post Tenebras Lux: Perceptual Fracture, Domestic Violence, and Class Opacity

Post Tenebras Lux opens with a small child moving through a waterlogged field among cattle, dogs, and horses as daylight disappears and a storm approaches. The sequence offers minimal narrative orientation. Exterior shots use a custom optical effect that keeps the center relatively clear while doubling and blurring the edges. The result is not merely an attractive distortion; it makes peripheral vision unstable. The spectator can see the child and the animals but cannot convert the landscape

into secure spatial knowledge (Reygadas, 2012). The next major rupture introduces a glowing red devil carrying a toolbox through the sleeping house. The figure is seen by a child and is never explained within a stable symbolic system. Its animation, color, and bodily explicitness clash with the domestic realism around it. The toolbox is especially significant because it joins metaphysical evil to labor, maintenance, burglary, and material intrusion. The sequence transforms the home from a protected interior into a porous space where fantasy and social threat cannot be separated. Juan's violence toward a family dog provides a different formal shock. The scene withholds a psychologically sufficient motive and keeps much of the brutality at the edge of visibility or off-screen. Sound and reaction carry part of the event. The refusal of explanatory psychology does not neutralize responsibility; it prevents the viewer from containing the violence within a causal lesson. Masculine authority appears as an unstable capacity to move from affection to cruelty. The European bathhouse sequence intensifies this instability. Juan and Natalia enter rooms named after major intellectual figures, while anonymous bodies, ritualized sexual activity, silence, and observational framing turn intimacy into an estranged social choreography. The sequence is neither presented as liberating transgression nor resolved as moral punishment. Its opacity forces the spectator to confront the limits of familiar categories—private/public, desire/coercion, confession/performance—without a secure interpretive guide. The film's class conflict becomes explicit when Seven and an accomplice burglarize Juan's house. Juan returns, confronts them, and is shot with his own gun. Reygadas alternates distance with a brief increase in visual proximity and then returns to a displaced point of view. The event is narratively consequential, but it does not organize the surrounding fragments into a stable social diagnosis. The relation between wealthy landowner and precarious worker is marked by employment, resentment, addiction, property, and violence; no single category masters it. The English rugby sequences are among the film's most disruptive elements. They interrupt the Mexican setting, introduce another language and institutional environment, and culminate in collective bodily struggle under rain and mud. Their autobiographical dimension does not make them narratively transparent. Within the film's communicative structure, they function as temporal and spatial dislocation: life continues elsewhere through rules, teamwork, fear, and repeated impact. The spectator must hold this material beside domestic cruelty and class violence without a conventional bridge.

Table 2: Comparative Corpus and Scene-level Evidence.

Film	Primary Operation	Representative Scene Evidence	Political Communication Problem
Once Upon a Time in Anatolia (2011)	Procedural delay and silence	Night search; mayor's house; prosecutor's anecdote; autopsy omission	How institutional truth is produced through partial visibility, fatigue, and selection
The Great Beauty (2013)	Spectacular saturation	Opening tourist; rooftop party; performance artist; child painter; giraffe	How elite culture converts history and art into repeatable events while recognizing its own emptiness
Happy as Lazzaro (2018)	Fable and temporal rupture	Inviolata; cliff and awakening; church music; bank violence	How exploitation survives legal and historical change
Post Tenebras Lux (2012)	Perceptual and narrative fracture	Twilight field; red devil; dog violence; burglary; rugby; self-decapitation	How class, masculinity, and violence exceed a stable explanatory code

Source: Author's elaboration.

The later image of a man apparently tearing off his own head pushes narrative refusal toward bodily impossibility. The effect is shocking, but it is not organized as a climactic revelation. It appears among memories, future images, deathbed scenes, and returning motifs. Spectacle here does not provide mastery because the most visible event is the least assimilable. Reygadas fractures rather than delays

or saturates. The political result is ambivalent: class inequality becomes sensorially unavoidable, but the film also risks obscuring it within private mythology and authorial enigma. This ambivalence is analytically important. Post *Tenebras Lux* demonstrates that opacity can resist reductive social realism while also limiting political accessibility. Its anti-spectacular force lies in the breakdown of interpretive security, not in the guarantee of a progressive reading. The spectator is positioned as a witness to incompatible registers—domestic realism, dream, confession, class conflict, childhood memory, and spiritual horror—that cannot be synthesized without remainder.

5.5. Cross-case Comparison

The comparison reveals that identical formal categories do not carry identical political meanings. Silence in *Ceylan* exposes the limits of bureaucratic and masculine speech; in *Rohrwacher*, it marks a goodness that exploitation cannot translate; in *Reygadas*, it intensifies class and domestic unease; in *Sorrentino*, silence appears as the exhausted remainder after noise. Slowness similarly varies: procedural delay, historical suspension, perceptual drift, and cyclical decadence are not interchangeable experiences. The strongest commonality lies in spectator positioning. Each film blocks one form of mastery. *Ceylan* denies complete institutional knowledge. *Sorrentino* denies the fantasy that exposure of decadence automatically produces moral renewal. *Rohrwacher* denies linear historical progress. *Reygadas* denies a stable code for separating memory, dream, violence, and social explanation. Anti-spectacular political communication is therefore best understood as a patterned obstruction of interpretive sovereignty. The cases also demonstrate different relations to pleasure. *Ceylan* minimizes conventional suspense; *Rohrwacher* alternates tenderness and cruelty; *Reygadas* combines beauty with repulsion; *Sorrentino* maximizes sensory pleasure and then implicates it in exhaustion. This variation confirms that refusal of spectacle is not equivalent to refusal of attraction. A film may resist spectacle by withholding pleasure, redirecting it, or making pleasure self-accusing.

Table 3: Cross-case Spectator Positioning.

Case	What is withheld or Intensified	Dominant Spectator Position	Main Ambiguity
Ceylan	Complete procedural knowledge	Waiting participant in institutional fatigue	Omission may be compassion, complicity, or both
Sorrentino	Meaning beneath abundant visibility	Seduction followed by self-implication	Critique may glamorize the elite world it condemns
Rohrwacher	Linear historical progress	Witness to continuity across temporal rupture	Saintly opacity can simplify agency even as it exposes exploitation
Reygadas	Stable code separating dream, memory, and social reality	Disoriented witness	Opacity may resist reduction or obscure responsibility

Source: Author's elaboration.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. Political Communication Beyond Message and Persuasion

The results support an expanded understanding of political communication. None of the four films is reducible to a campaign, ideological statement, or strategic appeal. Nevertheless, each organizes relations among visibility, authority, temporality, and judgment. This is political communication because power enters the communicative situation through the allocation of speech, knowledge, attention, and interpretive privilege. The films make viewers experience how institutions know partially, how elites turn culture into event, how exploitation survives changes of legal form, and how class violence exceeds explanatory realism.

The concept of anti-spectacular political communication does not replace analysis of representation. Bureaucracy, inequality, gender, and cultural elites remain represented. The concept adds a second level: how the viewer is made to encounter those representations. It is the difference between being told that procedure is limited and being held within procedural delay; between being shown decadent parties and being seduced by their rhythm until repetition becomes visible; between learning that exploitation persists and experiencing a temporal rupture that abolishes the comfort of historical distance.

6.2. Theoretical Innovation and its Limits

The framework advances beyond Rancière by operationalizing the distribution of the sensible into scene-level communicative variables. It advances beyond political modernism by refusing a binary between classical spectacle and emancipatory counter-form. It advances beyond slow-cinema discourse by treating duration as one mechanism among several and by including spectacular saturation as a possible mode of refusal. These distinctions do not invalidate the earlier theories; they specify the level at which this article intervenes.

The innovation is therefore modest but concrete. Anti-cinema is defined by a relation among formal operation, spectator task, and political problem. A claim is analytically persuasive only when all three are described. The framework cannot establish audience effects without reception research, and it does not claim that opacity is inherently democratic. It offers a transferable vocabulary for comparative analysis, not a universal test of political value.

6.3. Anti-cinema in Platformized Attention Economies

The contemporary platform context gives these films a significance that exceeds their release dates. Platformization changes how audiovisual works are discovered, categorized, excerpted, recommended, and measured. Even films that resist speed circulate through thumbnails, trailers, rankings, short clips, and recommendation interfaces. Their anti-cinematic form therefore exists inside, not outside, the attention economy (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Poell et al., 2022).

This context sharpens the politics of duration and opacity. When audiovisual visibility is increasingly optimized for rapid recognition and retention, waiting can become a counter-practice. Yet the opposition should not be romanticized. A slow or difficult film can also function as a niche commodity, a marker of distinction, or a prestige asset for a platform. The political question is not whether the film is available on a commercial service, but whether its formal organization interrupts the habitual conversion of social complexity into immediately consumable affect.

The films analyzed provide four models for such interruption. Ceylan delays resolution until institutional confidence weakens. Sorrentino accelerates and saturates until spectacle becomes repetitive. Rohrwacher introduces a temporal break that reveals continuity beneath historical change. Reygadas destabilizes perceptual codes so that class and violence cannot be packaged as a transparent issue. These models could inform future research on series, online video, museum screens, and political audiovisual communication beyond cinema.

6.4. Normative Ambivalence, Accessibility, and Elitism

A recurring danger in discussions of anti-cinema is the assumption that difficulty equals resistance. The results do not support that equation. Difficulty may slow judgment, but it may also exclude audiences who lack time, cultural capital, or access to art-cinema institutions. Opacity can protect complexity, but it can also conceal political responsibility. Spectacular excess can expose emptiness, but it can also reproduce the pleasures and hierarchies it criticizes (Bourdieu, 1993).

For that reason, the political value of anti-cinema must be evaluated relationally and provisionally. The relevant questions are: what habit of perception is interrupted; whose knowledge is withheld; what kind of labor is required from the viewer; and whether that labor opens or closes the social problem. Ceylan's final omission invites ethical disagreement. Rohrwacher's fable makes exploitation emotionally and historically legible. Sorrentino's seduction risks glamorizing the elite world it diagnoses. Reygadas's fragmentation risks converting class violence into private cosmology. These risks are not external objections; they are part of the films' communicative politics.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This article has argued that anti-cinema can be analyzed as visual political communication when formal operations reorganize the spectator's relation to knowledge, time, space, affect, and judgment. The comparative analysis demonstrates four distinct anti-spectacular tactics. *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* delays and partially obscures institutional truth; *The Great Beauty* saturates the senses until cultural spectacle reveals its exhaustion; *Happy as Lazzaro* fabulates across a temporal rupture to expose the persistence of exploitation; and *Post Tenebras Lux* fractures perception so that domestic and class violence remain resistant to explanatory mastery.

The principal contribution to communication studies is the concept of anti-spectacular political communication. It shifts analysis from asking only what a film says about power to asking how a film organizes the conditions under which power becomes visible and interpretable. This move does not dissolve the specificity of political communication. It identifies a form of public meaning produced through non-persuasive audiovisual address, where the management of attention is itself political.

The revised methodology responds to the limits of generalized interpretation by defining sequence-level units, explicit coding rules, a deductive-abductive codebook, analytic memos, and scene-based evidence. The study remains interpretive, single-coded, and limited to four films. Future research should combine this framework with audience interviews, reception experiments, or comparative studies of theatrical and platform viewing. It should also test the concept beyond art cinema, particularly in documentary, video essays, political satire, short-form platforms, and immersive media.

Anti-cinema should not be celebrated as automatically emancipatory. Its force depends on what its difficulty does. When silence, delay, opacity, or excess merely signal prestige, they may reproduce cultural hierarchy. When they interrupt the demand for immediate visibility and uncomplicated judgment, they can create a politically significant discipline of attention. In an audiovisual environment increasingly organized around speed, prediction, and continuous engagement, the capacity to wait, doubt, and remain with unresolved images is not outside communication. It is one of the forms through which visual politics can be practiced.

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