

Auteurs on Netflix –

A Reception Study of *Roma* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2018)

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Abstract

The film *Roma* directed by Alfonso Cuarón gained critical acclaim when it was released in 2018. What is different about this art film is that it was released on the streaming platform Netflix. The film's reception exposes a tension at the heart of contemporary cinephilia that results from the challenges and opportunities that streaming services pose to art cinema. The film *Roma* challenges our idea of what *auteur* cinema is and the definition of contemporary cinephilia. Taking *Roma* as a point of departure, I analyse four scenes of the film and identify the *auteur* characteristics of Cuarón's film. With the literature review on traditional cinephilia, *auteur* theory and film reception, I assess how this director fits in today's landscape. Finally, I argue that the directors' participation with Netflix legitimises the streaming platform as a venue for watching art cinema.

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1 Introduction

Since the early years of cinema, an intellectual form of watching film started in France and has impacted French culture. This cultural activity known as cinephilia has spread through other countries, crafting it into a global phenomenon. This form of watching films had specific parameters in order to be defined as cinephilic culture. Cinephiles of the French New Wave era defined certain filmmakers at the time as *auteurs* (authors). The films from these directors could be traced back to them thanks to the particular style they used. Cinephiles support specific ways of experiencing film, particularly at art-house cinemas, *cinémathèques* and reading about them in certain film magazines. The introduction of new viewing technologies has put the existence of cinephilia into question among film scholars. With the new video-on-demand (VoD) platforms like Netflix, this film experience moves from the movie theatre to the home. But, what happens when an *auteur* joins an online platform to distribute his or her film? Does this mean that the director has turned to the mainstream domain of commercial cinema? Does the director stop being an *auteur*, even when the director's personal style remains intact?

In this thesis, I look at the traditional forms of cinephilia where auteur theory was developed and explore contemporary debates about cinephilia through the lens of reception studies. I analyse the film *Roma* (Cuarón, 2018) to assess its status as an auteur film and how it fits in today's new screen technologies landscape. I also discuss the tensions between an online streaming culture platform and the "serious" film culture of cinephilia.

1.1 Literature Review

The twenty-first century has seen rapid changes in the cinema industry. In this study, I assess how these changes have impacted cinephilia. Here I understand cinephilia as a literal translation of "loving cinema", a passionate interest for films in an intellectual way, as well as a curiosity to discover films from other parts of the world (Bosma 2015, 20). A passionate interest for films and the analysis, criticism and discussion of films is what we know as cinephilia. This word is used for those devoted to and knowledgeable about cinema. The origin of cinephilia is the counterpart of *cinéphobe*; where the person sees cinema as a vulgar activity (Fee 2017). The French press then took the opposite word and started using *cinephile* for people devoted to film. Over recent years the meaning of this word and how it is applied

has been widely discussed, taking into account spectatorship, cinema taste, and film reception. With the introduction of new digital technologies, some film scholars are encouraged by new technologies and the changes they have brought to the film industry, while others see them as adverse developments for cinephilia.

Cinephilia had a golden age in Paris during the French New Wave era. The young intellectuals at the time set up film clubs, art houses, cinémathèques and film magazines. Examples of these French magazines are the French magazines *Cahiers du Cinema* and *Positif*. A lot of these intellectuals became professional film critics and some filmmakers, including François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol and Eric Rohmer. Cinephilic practices became popular in the 1950s and continued up to the 1960s and the 1970s, being equally important to the cultured urban intellectuals in global capitals like London and New York. But with the introduction of the VHS and the DVD in the 1980s and 1990s, many traditional art cinema venues disappeared while multiplexes flourished.

Peter Bosma (2015) scholar in film studies writes about film curation and its relationship to reception and film production. Bosma outlines five different ways to understand the film culture of cinephilia. In the first place, he sees cinephilia as a shared identity, which means that film festivals, magazines and special forums are part of a collective experience of filmgoing. Once films and reviews were found only in dedicated film magazines, now they can be found on Internet forums, websites, and blogs.

A second way of defining cinephilia is as a source of inspiration for film directors (Bosma, 2015). Several directors have paid homage to this culture that sees movies as an art form. Bosma gives several examples, including *Nuit Américaine (Day for Night)*, François Truffaut 1973) and *The Dreamers* (Bernardo Bertolucci 2003). Some filmmakers portray what it was once and others what it is now.

Thirdly, according to Bosma (2015), cinephilia is also a marketing genre. This means that certain films are promoted as having cinephilic specifications (23). Bosma explains how art film works as a guideline for some film distributors in order to make release decisions, whether for DVD or other platforms. Even when the cinephile circuit is not as large as the mainstream cinema consumers, for Bosma is important to address this audience because their opinions can be valuable when promoting films.

A critical method of watching films and critically responding to them has been part of the cinephilia phenomenon since its beginnings. Bosma (2015) defines this critical method as the fourth way of determining cinephilia. The practice of film criticism, mainly exercised by

cinephiles, usually means, sometimes resulting in polemical stances selecting only certain films or directors. This practise leads to the fifth way to describe cinephilia as a curatorial element, a process of film selection with different purposes and procedures, for example, for film festivals with specific themes. Bosma refers to cinephilia as a particular intellectual film culture and a shared film taste. He argues that curation is a creative art and “A social phenomenon of artistic value that needs analysis and explanation” (4). Each venue has a specific issue regarding economic considerations, political implications, copyright, and artistic concerns. Curatorial aspects also include concerns about piracy issues; Bosma argues that in today’s market competition, protection of private property and piracy are common in the copyright arena “Free trade of cultural goods would indeed improve the smooth accessibility to film repertoire and heritage” (41).

It is common knowledge that nowadays there are more people watching films on their television screens than in the movie theatres. These changes in the setting from where to experience films have generated discussions questioning whether the cinephilic experience has died. We refer to this as the “death of cinema” discourse.

American writer, filmmaker and film critic Susan Sontag wrote an essay in 1996 for the *New York Times* “The Decay of Cinema” (1996), discussing recent transformations in cinema culture or cinephilia. She argues that commercial cinema has contributed to the disappearance of what was known as cinephilia. “Sontag’s essay—*cinéraire*, or funerary in its tone as the author evoked the death of cinephilia—was the beginning of a now-familiar eulogising, nostalgic trend in texts by cinephile critics and film scholars alike” (Fee 2017, introduction).

For scholar Mark Betz, Sontag’s essay describes a shared taste on certain films, films that resolved the “conflict between cinema as an industry and cinema as an art, cinema as routine and cinema as experiment” (2009, I).

Sontag’s (1996) essay divided scholars and film critics, with some seeing the digital turn as a positive change and others nostalgic for the traditional experience of watching analogue films in a dark cinema with strangers. Susan Sontag discusses the experience of watching films within a particular genre of films only exhibited in art house cinemas and cinémathèques, where intellectuals and film critics considered themselves a closed group with a private activity in common, considering themselves the pioneers of this shared love. Sontag’s essay is specifically mourning the traditional practices of French cinephiles. Sontag discussed the transformation in cinema culture or cinephilia. She argues that cinema became

over-commercialised and that cinema-going rituals are threatened by the closure of many cinemas in New York. Sontag's essay had divided scholars and film critics alike, with some seeing the digital turn as a positive change, others nostalgic for the traditional experience of watching analogue film in a dark cinema with strangers.

Other film scholars viewed this as a narrow discussion when related to the overall topic of cinephilia and its practices. Sontag's view is notable given the constant evolution considered by film scholars (Jonathan Rosenbaum, Adrian Martin, Marijke de Valck) of the historical origins of the cinephilia and film history. Nowadays, for these film critics, the changes in film consumption and distribution affect the traditional form of what cinephilia once was.

According to Sontag (1996), the audience has lost attention towards the screen. Confined now to the small home screens or the television, people have lost respect for the big screen, and thus for the films themselves. Cinema production has also changed, and she argues that now there are fewer quality films. Not that it is impossible to find quality films, but that quality films are rarer now than before. Sontag concludes that "if cinema can be resurrected, it will only be through the birth of a new kind of cinelove."

Some fear that cinema is losing its status as an art form, and film criticism is losing its status as a serious activity. Jonathan Rosenbaum (2010), film critic and scholar, has a more optimistic and dynamic view on the state of cinephilia than Sontag, he writes, "film culture has pretty much remained in transition for all of its existence, and will continue to remain so" (xiv). He writes about how viewing-choices have expanded and, cinema has changed through the years and the ways of watching and discussing film have evolved. Rosenbaum criticises those who think that technology will undermine cinema's status as an art form. He advocates for digitalisation because it has opened up access to films that were difficult to access in the past. He writes that in 2009 it was possible to download the "most unseeable of all major contemporary films" (xiii), *Out 1* a twelve hour series by Jacques Rivette and Suzanne Schiffman on the pirate website *thepiratebay.com*. Moreover, he argues that cinema is for the enjoyment of everyone and should not be hidden or restricted for people. Rosenbaum discusses how streaming platforms can be a vehicle for non-mainstream genres to become accessible to a passionate audience in order to generate more film productions. He advocates for the small groups that move outside the mainstream and Hollywood circles and can have screenings, sometimes with political focus. On a more hopeful note, he aspires for cinema to encourage empathy between viewers and global citizenship. In these views, Rosenbaum's

opinion is a more open view of cinephilia, and he puts forward a somewhat contrary position to Sontag, who has a more fixed definition of cinephilic practices.

Rosenbaum (2010) discusses how spectatorial practices traditionally were about a sharing judgement of films, film criticism; and a liberty of film experience. Spectatorial practices have now changed with newer choices of film watching, whether it is in someone's living room or a cinema theatre. More recently, home-viewing technologies such as DVD, online streaming and video-on-demand services like Netflix, have made the private home a popular alternative to the cinema.

The emergence of TV or home screens as a central site of film consumption means that the film culture of cinephilia has moved into the spectator's personal space. Several film scholars, including Barbara Klinger (2006), have shed light on the new phenomenon of domestic cinephilia. Klinger studies viewing practices and the new association of the home viewing with cinema. In her book *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home*, she explores the changes in cinema exhibition, production and consumption. Klinger rejects the comparison that reduces the home video experience to a limited version of a theatrical event. She argues that the emergence of home viewing has changed the social landscape. This new society of home viewers accustomed to DVD, audio systems, home projectors, and computers, have new preferences that are shaping the film industry. When discussing the introduction of digital technology Klinger writes, "contemporary home theatre reaches further than its predecessors toward this fusion of public entertainment media for domestic amusement. In the process, it involves multiple industries bent on redefining the home as a site par excellence for media consumption" (18). Streaming services have developed with technological changes, making their own film and TV series productions, giving a vast catalogue to choose to the consumers.

Jonathan Rosenbaum (2010) does not see this as an entirely negative development. He writes "if we start to think of cinephilia less as a specialized interest than a certain kind of necessity then it starts to become possible to conceive of a new kind of cinephilia in which cinema in the old sense doesn't exactly disappear but becomes reconfigured" (5). For some cinephile critics like Rosenbaum, transformation is an exciting phase where the experience and availability can be an advantage for the film lover, for example, to widen their collection of films. The digital age came with a world full of options; young generations became eager and excited to know more about films in foreign countries, while not forgetting about traditional cinema culture.

New developments in the film industry from the introduction of sound, introduction of colour technologies, the VHS and DVD and new multiplex have had dramatic consequences in audience taste. Nowadays, thanks to new video-on-demand platforms like online streaming services, the spectatorship process has been modified. Some film critics, scholars and cinephiles have condemned this whole experience in defence of the old traditional cinema experience, they have a nostalgic feeling for the long-gone cinephilic tradition. Cinephiles, critics and film scholars began to debate the changes to cinephilia after Susan Sontag (1996) declared “death to cinema.” Part of this new debate is discussions related to the fast film industry and low-quality productions versus highbrow film.

Jonathan Rosenbaum and Adrian Martin (2003) see cinephilia alive and finding its path in the modern world in their book *Movie Mutations: The Changing Face of World Cinephilia*. They consider that new technologies open up ways to connect cinephiles all over the world to have better access to film review, exchange and film viewing. Online magazines, blogs, and chat rooms specialised in films develop the opportunity for the regular cinemagoer to hear from others cinephiles opinions about any subject related to cinema.

The scholars Laurent Jullier and Jean-Marc Leveratto (2012a) have studied historical cinephilia, and they advocate recognising cinephiles that are not part of the highbrow traditional cinephilia. They argue that a great film within the cinephilic sphere will keep its status regardless of the route of consumption (12). These new routes also give a chance to any film lover to be part of the cinephilic sphere. Jullier and Leveratto (2012a) remarks about how the Internet has opened a path not only to serious film culture but also to the rest of the audience that enjoys watching films. This path is more accessible and easy to exchange the love for cinema watching whether it is to a person close to us or the other side of the world. Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener (2005) agree with Jullier and Leveratto, and encourage the new online viewing practices, considering this culture a “new cinephilia.” De Valck and Hagener believes the memory of film has opened new practices and forms of cinephilia. De Valck and Hagener discuss how cinephilia has evolved in the age of the Internet. They do not agree with Sontag’s essay concerning mourning a small closed group of French cinephiles, and their view is that new cinephilia can be more discerning and have a broader range of films in its canon.

Robert F. Arnold claimed in 1990 “that an understanding of ‘going to the movies’ as a historically determined social practice is a necessary starting point for a theory of film reception” (Acland 2003, 56). Reception studies involve the study of film reviews, film

magazines, theatre records, and in the digital era, blogs, online magazines and fan forums. In her book, *Cinema and Spectatorship* Judith Mayne (1993) writes, “scholars recognise that questions of reception are equally significant for sociological, cultural, and aesthetic theory” (11). Reception studies addresses the experience a spectator has when watching a film, and the influence and affect this film has on the spectator. This experience can be an affective response, such as pleasure, boredom, or excitement. Reception studies include how film critics write about film as an art form.

In recent years, reception and audience studies have emerged as a vibrant sub-field within film studies. With the rising of cinephilia in France during the New Wave, there was a new call for cinema in the writing by the young intellectuals of the French New Wave. In his article “The Rise and Fall of Film Criticism” for *Film Quarterly* magazine, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (2008) gives a recounting of the changes to film writing in English-speaking countries. He argues that two films, Godard’s *Breathless* (1960) and Michelangelo Antonioni’s *L’Aventura* (1960), were a turning point for film criticism in the 1960s. In his opinion film writing consisted only of straightforward reviews and there was nothing that backed up or challenged the viewer’s opinion after watching a film. When these two films came out, audiences did not know how to react, or how to judge this new type of cinema. For Nowell-Smith this new type of cinema called for a new type of film writing. Here we can see a clear connection between art film and film criticism.

For most film critics, it is essential to address the aesthetic value of a film and its place in a particular genre or the director’s body of work. Others feel it is essential also to address the ideological and political meanings in cinema. Scholar Amy Villarejo (2013) writes that film critics can reflect on films in different ways; taking into account cultural, political or ideological backgrounds. With different approaches, film critics can give a better understanding of the movies seen to improve the cinematic experience. Janet Staiger (2000) writes in *Perverse Spectators* how media influences the filmgoer’s decisions. She reconstructs responses the audience have from films taking historical context, film genre and film venues, into account, to understand how and why films connect to some viewers. Reconciliation between film reception with film studies, and an understanding on how film functions as an art form. Staiger argues that audiences should be studied within the cinema-going context; meaning before, during, and after the spectator watched a film. She uses film reviews for her analysis and studies the meaning audiences produce after watching a film. Staiger allows us to see that different spectators will not receive a film the same way. Indeed, a film can have

different responses across the globe with audiences responding to a variety of formal and stylistic elements in the film. Audiences also respond to the representations of race and gender in the film, or in other words, the political and ideological dimension as Klinger (2006) determines. Klinger states how change of venues from the theatrical exhibition to home viewing can change the audience experience, hence the film's reception also changes. She writes,

Just as motion picture theatres provide integral settings that influence reception, the home and its various systems create an influential domestic environment that affects how films will be consumed (19)

Film critic and scholar David Bordwell (2010) writes on his online blog that in recent years most critics have been forced to shift towards online platforms. Just as cinema, art film, and film criticism are connected, they also are following an online trend. Film criticism is shaping into blogs, chat-room discussions, podcasts and digital magazines. Bordwell argues that digital platforms are making substantial contributions to film scholarship. Film critics offer a view on art cinema with a vision "of society or politics or something beyond the individual movie."

Modern scholars consider that cinephilia is now a global phenomenon. Jullier and Leveratto (2012b) remarks on how the Internet has opened a path not only to serious film culture but also to the rest of the audience that enjoys watching films. This path is more accessible and easy to exchange the love for cinema watching whether it is to a person close to us or the other side of the world. However, few scholars have studied global cinephilic practices in the global south or the Scandinavian context. Scholars like Jasmine Nadau Trice (2015) discuss cinephilic practices in Manila and how the lack of diversity in film accessibility turns cinemagoers to piracy. Aboubakar Sanogo (2009) focuses on Africa, where cinephilia involves a love-hate relationship with western productions and the fight for a shared interest in film.

Scholars like Trice (2015) and Sanogo (2009) have focused our attention on global cinephilia outside of western capitals, where cinephilia emerged like London, New York, and Paris. Considering cinephilia as a worldwide phenomenon, I address cinephilia in Mexico and Norway, using *Roma* (2018) as a case study. This allows me to discuss the emergence of home viewing technologies and how DVD, VHS and now VOD have changed the traditional theatrical experience. Furthermore, online platforms, video-on-demand, online blogs, and

other streaming platforms are now dominating over cinema-going practices. These technological developments mean that cinephilia has also become a global practice because the Internet is available across the globe.

This study of *Roma* will shed light on how cinephilia has been transformed in the digital age, by asking:

Netflix is not seen as a legitimate venue for watching art cinema. But what if a major art cinema director joins Netflix, does that function legitimise the platform for cinephiles and critics?

How was the reception of *Roma* shaped by the exhibition context? Did critics and others receive the film differently because it was released on a streaming platform?

I will use scholarly literature for this study of new and traditional cinephilia, outlined above, to examine the case of *Roma* and its global reception. I also use film analysis to approach *Roma* as a work of auteur cinema to then consider the film's reception in a global context. In short, my methodology combines traditional film analysis with reception studies and scholarly approaches to cinephilia.

2 Cinephilia in a Historical Context: From Paris to Mexico City

Cinephilia is a cultural activity based on a shared love of films. Central to cinephilia is an exchange involving a discussion of films. As regular consumers, we classify our taste in music, art, and film as part of an everyday cultural experience. We identify with the things we like, and it is natural that we talk or share them with others. This activity involves an impulse to make suggestions to others and talk about this pleasure. However, what differentiates a cinephile from a regular consumer? A cinephile will defend and keep an ongoing conversation of the films that he or she loves. This person will defend and argue for his or her favourite films, in a “confirmation that gives back the love that cinema once gave to him” (Jullier and Leveratto 2012a, 18). According to film scholars Jullier and Leveratto(2012a), a cinephile is a person who not only goes to see films but a person who loves films and defends film (17).

In *Cinephilia or Uses of Disenchantment*, Thomas Elsaesser (2005) describes the cinephilia of *Cahiers du Cinema* as a nostalgic tone, which transforms these descriptions into memories. For Elsaesser, cinephilia has passed through generations of film lovers who sometimes agree, disagree and compete with each other (27). Antoine de Baecque and Thierry Frémaux (1995) also recount the beginning of cinephilia in “La Cinéphilie ou L'invention d'une Culture” as a way of watching films, followed by the method of “speaking about them and then diffusing this discourse.” Both take film criticism into account as an intellectual way of studying film aesthetics. De Baecque (1995) defines cinephilia as “life organised around films” when the public gathers among animated pictures and revive the art of film criticism. This art then develops into a specialised press that separates the spectators into mass culture and elite culture. Cinephilia cultivates the love of watching films within a particular framework.

Cinephilia was at its height in the 1950s in Paris, and it went through the 1960s with “numerous transformations since its golden-age” (Czach 2010, 1). Young intellectuals adopted moviegoing habits and devoted themselves to ciné-clubs, screenings at art house cinemas, film magazines and the Cinémathèque Française. Film clubs were set up by cinephiles, where future directors, film critics, and writers got together to watch what other countries had to offer and to discover films from other parts of the world, including national

productions. Jill Forbes (1992) writes, “Although the French industry does produce films for the mass audience, what is striking, characteristic and exceptional about it is that since the war it has provided an environment in which the art film can flourish” (2). These groups of cinephiles acquired knowledge and cultivation through the experience of watching films (Jullier and Leveratto 2012a, 18). They also gathered to discuss the films they watched and communicate their thoughts, views and sometimes wrote criticism for specialised film magazines.

It was at this time that the French New Wave emerged in France with directors who also wrote film criticism. Film critic André Bazin created the magazine *Les Cahiers du Cinema* in 1951, collaborating with young intellectuals like François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, and Claude Chabrol (Williams 1992, 309). After the Second World War Hollywood films were popular after being banned from the French theatres during the war. These young intellectuals were admirers of Hollywood film productions. They acclaimed the work of directors they called auteurs (authors), including Alfred Hitchcock, Samuel Fuller, and Howard Hawks. They claimed that these auteurs were artists who put their stamp onto their films in terms of their directorial style and vision (Bordwell and Thompson 1990, 397), “These works were debated, discussed, and generally admired by the young patrons of ciné-clubs, art cinemas, and the public screenings at the Cinémathèque Française” (Williams 1992, 300).

Not content with writing about films, these young cinephiles made their own productions. In 1959 Chabrol made *Les Cousins*, in the same year Truffaut made *Les Quatre cent coups* (*The 400 blows*), and in 1960 Godard made *A Bout de souffle* (*Breathless*). Truffaut took the Grand Prize at the Cannes Film Festival for *The 400 Blows*. These events were significant for this group because they considered it the recognition that auteurs needed in order to be part of film history. These young enthusiasts made a total of 32 films from the end of the 1950s to the mid-60s. The French New Wave directors introduced new cinema aesthetics and innovated their cinematic style where it had their own personal style. The filmmakers shot on location rather than the studio, and they also encouraged the actors to improvise during shooting (Bordwell and Thompson 1990, 398). Tracking shots, long takes, and mobile camera was also part of the style of the French New Wave.

This traditional culture of cinephilia relied upon certain exhibition practices. Film experts had the important task of passing on their opinions about films to the audience, in order to cultivate a common taste in film. These cinephilic practices open a path to future

generations of film directors. In-depth film analysis was shared with the audience through film magazines. Other cinephilic practices were attending art houses, cinémathèques, and film clubs where cinemagoers came together to discuss and exchange thoughts about the films watched. Ciné-clubs were open spaces where people gathered to watch films, but it involved more than just watching films. As film critic Harry Potamkin (1997) describes, “the film club is to the audience generally what the critic is to the spectator; that is, the film club provides the critical audience” (220). The ciné-clubs purpose was to keep up the conversation about the films screened, creating an open space for debate and criticism. These activities are part of what film scholars call traditional cinephilic exhibition. This includes the introduction of Film Festivals as Cindy Wong (2011) describes, “this cinephilia [...] as a practice, crystalized a film culture that eventually would allow film festivals to both thrive and gain ‘legitimacy’” (32). Furthermore, the French government support “through distribution, exhibition, and eventually production” (Bordwell and Thompson 1990, 399) helped this French New Wave style to move globally. “The ‘foreignness’ of foreign art films and their status as European culture also helped to make them culturally valuable” as Barbara Wilinsky (2001) states in *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (95).

2.1 Auteur Theory

In his book *Theorizing Art Cinemas: Foreign, Cult, Avant-Garde and Beyond*, David Andrews (2013) theorises the ‘art cinema’ definition, in order to legitimise a shared taste based on quality, authorship and anti-commercialism no matter where the films are projected. According to Andrews, during the post-war period, the notion of auteurism helped in “spreading cinephilia through cultures and initiating New Wave movements in a host of national cinemas across several continents” (38). Cinemagoers were curious about filmmakers from other countries, and the catalogue of auteurs was increasing across the globe. The French journal *Cahiers du Cinema* was vital for the propagation of auteurism from when it first published Truffaut’s “Politique des Auteurs” essay in 1951 (Stam 2000). With the emergence of several “New Waves” in Europe, auteurism was one of the main focuses for film critics and scholars. As I have stated, directors like Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol are examples of filmmakers from this period. In the post-war era, the category of art cinema was crafted by art-house cinemas the cinémathèques and especially by film magazines. In his account of film concepts, film scholar Dudley Andrew writes “Journals, then more than now, established values, mainly implicit ones, through the

kinds of works that received attention and through the attitude taken toward those works” (2014, 6). Reading the critical debates was also a way to keep the viewer informed about new releases. (Andrews 2013). Together with *Cahiers du Cinema*, *Positif* was also an established film journal at the time in France. In these journals, André Bazin, Truffaut, Godard, Rohmer and other film critics argued for certain films to be considered as artistic masterpieces. In their thinking about the filmmaking process the director was at the centre. As Stam (2000) writes, “The director was no longer merely the servant of a pre-existing text (novel, screenplay) but a creative artist in his/her own right” (83).

Cahiers du Cinéma was central in the spread of the auteur theory, where film critics advocated for the signature film, where the film will “resemble the person who made it” (Stam 2000, 84). This is not necessarily an autobiographical film but a film that follows the particular style of the filmmaker. They rejected the screenwriter tradition, encouraging directors to engage in a creative adventure and to invest meaning in the *mise-en-scène*. They argued that there were common themes and stylistic traits that connected films by the same filmmaker. As Stam writes, “Critic-directors like Truffaut and Godard were attacking the established system, with its rigid production hierarchies, its preference for studio shooting, and its conventional narrative procedures” (88). They remarked upon the use of long takes - longer than standard shots- and use of depth of field where different planes of action are composed within a single frame. This style can be seen in *Les Quatre cent coups* and in *A Bout de souffle*. With the different planes of action, the filmmaker then gives freedom to the spectator to make his or her interpretations based on the actions happening in the background besides the main plot.

The auteur policy helped directors to acquire ownership over their film, to influence the script and to put their creative stamp through the *mise-en-scène* (Andrews 2013, 38). For the auteur critics of *Cahiers du Cinema*, “Politique des Auteurs” is the application of a notion of cinema that is “widely accepted in the individual arts” (Stam 2000, 87). These intellectual critics not only decided what were the necessary attributes a director needed to have in order to be considered an auteur but also “*who* was granted this prestige” (87).

The persistence of the auteur theory has been central to film studies. When *Cahiers* critics turned to Hollywood and elevated the directors they discovered outside France, filmmakers Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford, Nicholas Ray, Luis Buñuel, and Roberto Rosellini, they helped influence film markets and move the auteur theory through continents, where this theory obtained the importance in film theory that it has now (Andrews 2013).

When the film critic Andrew Sarris (1962) introduced auteurism in the United States in “Notes on the Author Theory in 1962”, he took the Parisian characteristics of auteurism as a creative expression and a filmic style but added his own interpretation on how to identify an auteur. This interpretation is based on technological competence: a director needs to be knowledgeable about the filmmaking process. The film of an auteur must have specific characteristics of style that can be attributed to the filmmaker. Furthermore, there is “interior meaning arising from tension between personality and material” here he argues that the filmmaker must ‘fight’ or defend his creation (Stam 2000, 89). Cinema scholar Pauline Kael discredited these principles in her article “Circles and Squares” (1963). She rejects Sarris’ position about including and excluding certain filmmakers. She also states that the director’s position is not the only one to consider in the filmmaking process and that the auteur theory favours only some directors. This group of film critics also pointed out how the auteur theory leaves out the full team that makes the process of filmmaking possible. The filmmaker is not alone in the creation, but he or she relies upon the full crew production.

Film studies have focused on the constant growth and evolution of film since the early twentieth century, where film critics and scholars have argued that film needs to be considered as an art form. In 1979 the year of Woody Allen’s New York film *Manhattan*, the film scholar David Bordwell (1979) wrote the essay “The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice” where he describes certain tendencies of art cinema. First, Bordwell differentiates art cinema from commercial cinema by the ambiguity of the plot: there is not a common cause and effect logic, but rather loose ends. Second, natural realism is palpable in the art film; viewers get a more realistic experience from natural lightning, ambient sound, real locations and everyday events in which they can identify a close relationship to real life.

Moreover, the director’s cinematography or the *mise-en-scène* is key for the film. Perhaps the most persuasive argument for a film to be considered an art film is its claim to realism. This is a standpoint most famously taken by André Bazin (1967) who writes “Reality is not art, but a realist art is one that can create an integral aesthetic of reality.” For filmmakers, at the time, it was important for the audience to connect with the film through realism.

David Andrews (2013) explains how auteurism is the main structural logic behind film festivals he writes, “Auteur status is the fuel in the workings, the power source of the entire machinery” (48). From cult cinemas to world cinemas, production companies use the director/auteur’s name to promote films, and with his or her name, the movie can reach global

cinema industries. Andrews argues that theories should not limit auteurism because it is in constant change. For some scholars, the theorisation of film limits the integration of new technologies into the study. For Andrews “art cinema is useful and desirable, tapping into a very human preference for status and hierarchy, so it is widespread, multiform, and ever changing” (22). Art cinema a hierarchal position, but over time it has gone through many changes. However, the emergence of new technologies means that art cinema is not as exclusive as it used to be. However, that does not necessarily mean that it gets devalued as an art form, and it should not be intimidating to embrace new approaches to art cinema. Mark Betz (2009), in his book *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema*, argues that film studies should engage with the historiographical context of the New Wave, in order to understand the concepts of national cinema and art film productions. He states that the institutions are alive and we can access these institutions with reception studies, a methodology that allows us to take into account the discursive structure of art cinema in film magazines, film criticism, and journals.

2.2 Traditional Cinephilia in Mexico

According to scholar Robert Stam (2000) after cinema’s beginnings in France, UK and the US, cinema quickly “spread throughout the world” (21). Porfirio Diaz, the president of Mexico at the time, was an admirer of French culture. Moreover, as soon as he found out about the *cinématographe* in 1896, he requested a cinematographer representative from the *Frères Lumiere* company. On August 14 1896, Mexico City had its first-ever public screening (Martínez 1974). The screenings had a large number of attendees to see films like *The Gardener and the Boy* (*L’Arroseur arrosé*, 1896), and *The Arrival of a Train* (*L’Arrivé d’un train*, 1896) (Navitski and Poppe 2017). Soon after the first cinematograph exhibition, screening spaces quickly diversified (Mantecón 2017, 75). Newly equipped exhibition areas opened up for those curious about the new technology, showing mostly actualities, presidential excursions and historical events (76). In 1920 film production declined in Mexico after Hollywood pronounced itself as a “domain force in filmmaking” (Wood 2006). However, a decade or so after the Mexican Revolution ended in 1920, the Mexican film industry rapidly grew. As Lahr-Vivaz (2016) writes, “Golden Age melodramas of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s proved immensely popular with a spectatorship made up of individuals who might have wished to escape – albeit briefly – from the rigours of their everyday lives” (15). The Mexican film industry growth was thanks to the decline of film production in Europe and

the United States during the Great War. As a post-revolutionary cinema, melodrama was a popular genre in Mexico. In these films, the indigenous Mexican characters were portrayed in a positive light. The films featured strong character types such as the revolutionary, the farmer, and the domestic worker. Directors used traditional Mexican music, and folkloric dances to attract a mass audience (Noriega 2006). This genre of melodrama spread around Latin America in line with regional traditions from each country.

Another important moment was in 1932 when the Soviet filmmaker Sergei M. Eisenstein went to Mexico to film *¡Viva México!* A film that had a strong influence on Mexican film production despite never being completed (Domínguez-Ruvalcaba 2007, 76). Mexico has also historically been fond of comedy, and there are hugely popular figures like Joaquín Pardavé, Germán Valdés known as “Tin Tan” and Mario Moreno “Cantinflas”. These actors played rogues with good hearts, and they always overcame life’s misfortunes in films like *Aquí está el detalle* (*Here’s the point* 1940), *El Charro de Levita* (*Rough But Respectable* 1949) and *No Te Engañes Corazón* (*Don’t Fool Yourself Dear* 1936).

The period from 1950 to mid-1960s is called the “Golden Age”, a time of high levels of film production. In the Mexican neighbourhoods, cinemagoers formed bonds with the actors on the screen. They identified with the filmic characters and with the other attendees in the cinema. The Mexican government of the time saw in the cinema an opportunity to shape the national imaginary (Lahr-Vivaz 2016). As Hector Domínguez-Ruvalcaba (2007) writes: “it became evident that the revolutionary state, inclined to control its economy and education, considered cinema a means of citizen formation” (77). In 1930 under Lázaro Cárdenas’s regime, the Department of Filmic Activities was created. In 1936 he founded the First National Film Archive declaring, “all movie houses must release one Mexican movie per month” (77). Thanks to this legislation, Mexican film had a large number of cinemagoers all over the country. With the use of recognised stereotypical characters, like the strong male lead and the use of melodrama and comedy genres, Mexican film guided spectators through a national imaginary. Lahr-Vivaz (2016) writes:

In Mexico in particular, cinemas were often constructed to foment escapist fantasies, encouraging spectators who included newcomers to the city, part of a wave of migration that shifted population centers from rural to urban areas of the country, to sit back in their seats – even for a moment – to enjoy the luxurious surroundings (15).

Classism was a recurrent part of film culture after the Revolution (Digón Pérez 2010). *Nosotros los pobres* (*We, the Poor* 1948) was a very popular film among the general public. It features a poor carpenter who overcomes many tragic events in his life. Cinemagoers were fascinated with actors like Silvia Pinal, Jorge Negrete, and Pedro Infante. These actors sheltered the facades of the popular cinemas in the city for decades (Domínguez-Ruvalcaba 2007). Well-regarded directors like Alejandro Galindo, Alberto Gout and Emilio Fernández and cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa, played an essential role in this period, and their films flooded the cinemas week by week. Scholar Patrick Keating (2010) notes that Mexican cinema played an important role in the global cinema circuit when Gabriel Figueroa won the Best Cinematography award at the Cannes Film Festival in 1946 for Emilio Fernández's film *María Candelaria* (1944). Fernández-Figueroa were the duo that "constructed a new national identity by associating the Mexican people with the grandeur of the Mexican landscape" as Keating puts it (202).

As already stated, classism is a regular topic in Mexican film, where the white European look is desired. Stavans Ilan(1995) writes, "Mexican cultural exports are invariably Westernized products" (22). Class relations have long been a central topic in Mexican culture "For years, the formula has only consisted in reworking its [films] biggest successes with the same structure of the rich laughing about the poor and the poor laughing about the rich" (Divagador 2016). The upper class in Mexico take a considerable distance from the lower classes and the truly Mexican symbols seem uncultured, kitsch or lowbrow. The border between high social class and the working class in Mexico is very significant and is represented in films from the melodrama genre.

In 1950 Luis Buñuel filmed *Los Olvidados* (*The Young and the Damned*), which was not comprehended in Mexico; the plot of the film was a representation of how the forgotten orphans in Mexico were left to their fate by the government. Because the film lacked a happy ending that most of the audience was expecting, Buñuel was forced to shoot an alternative ending to avoid censorship in Mexican cinemas (Digón Pérez 2010). Some scholars attribute this moment to the end of the Mexican Golden Age, while others believe the period ended when Pedro Infante died in 1957 (Lahr-Vivaz 2016).

During the Mexican Golden Age, cinemas contributed to the architectural landscape of the city. Grand façades and old colonial buildings functioned as prestigious cinema theatres in Mexico City (Mantecón 2017). With the popularity of the golden age, cinemas in Mexico were built in well-established areas in the city (130). But there were also cinemas with much

simpler façades located in the city slums and middle-class neighbourhoods, which had a large number of attendees. In Mexico, cinema was “fundamental” in people’s lives (Ibargüengoitia, 2017). Even films showed their characters going to the movies, for example, in *Distinto Amanecer* (*Another Dawn* 1943) and *Su última Aventura* (*The Last Adventure* 1946) (Mantecón 2017).

The Mexican audience was separated between the ones attending the big theatres and the ones going to cinemas located in slums or small cinemas in the city. In some cinemas, merchants did not mind interrupting a screening to sell their products, some audience members treated the cinema as a picnic area, others cursed or shouted. The atmosphere was not very different in high society cinemas, attended by a high-class audience, where cinemagoers still misbehaved occasionally. A 1950 report illustrates that; small cinemas close to the city centre had a more intimate atmosphere (Mantecón 2017). The attendees knew each other; which meant that they attended the same cinema. They turned the film and the activity of attending the cinema into a social function in which they talked about the film among themselves. Cinemagoers also had the opportunity to ask for certain film rereleases, and ask the exhibitor to extend a film screening. They could ask directly at the ticket office or by telephoning the cinema (158). This interaction between the public, the cinema exhibitors and the press decreased with time. Moreover, contrary to countries like France and the UK, in Mexico the spectator’s opinion carried less value in terms of the films they liked or disliked (159).

The culture of cinephilia in Mexico emerged during the 1960’s. Film watching became a popular activity among students, especially students at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Students and professors from UNAM created film clubs from which highly recognised film critics emerged. Jorge Ayala Blanco is one of the pioneers of film criticism and had a newspaper column dedicated to films in 1963 (Cano 2015). In Mexico ambulant cinemas (*cine ambulante*) also existed for villages and towns without a fixed cinema.

Furthermore, as an alternative to the big commercial cinemas, cine-clubs was created for selected audiences. The purpose of ciné-clubs was to show non-commercial, or artistic films, and to create collective discussions among the viewers (Mantecón 2017, 161). *Cine-clubs* were significant in helping students from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) to promote the cultural activities related to cinematography. These *ciné-clubs* were essential for the development of cinephilia in Mexico. Two important historical

developments were the *Cineclub de Mexico* created by The French Institute of Latin America (IFAL) in 1948 *Cine-Club Progreso* (Progress Cine-club), created by UNAM in 1952. These two institutions took part in the production, distribution, and exhibition of cinema in Mexico and helped to promote cultural activities related to cinema. Cine-clubs have traditionally promoted the national cinema of Mexico and worked to promote cinema in small communities around the country.

In 1959 the general Section of Cultural Diffusion at UNAM created the Section of Cinematography Activities. In the 1960s cine clubs were formed in most of the University faculties (Rodríguez Álvarez 2014). These spaces were important for students to interact, discuss, and discover films from around the globe. Through the creation of cine-clubs in Mexico, some films reached audiences that would not otherwise have been able to be seen. By 1960 Mexican cine-clubs had a large following and among them were important critics and filmmakers. In 1972 UNAM published a manual for cine-clubs, and in 1998 the Public Secretary Education (SEP) presented the “Manual for the Management of Equipment and Film Material in Film Clubs” that functioned as a guide for newly open screening spaces. Mexico City has had a large number of *cine-clubs* since the 1950s, run by private or public associations, most of them following the same model: a non-profit activity to share and discuss films from all around the world.

With the arrival of the cinematographer, journalists started commenting on the films and, slowly they turned into film critics. Many times these critics had humorous opinions, for example, written in the newspaper *El Imparcial*. Alfonso Reyes is considered one of the most influential film critics in the Spanish language, he wrote for the journal *Fósforo* in 1915 (Digón Pérez 2010). Furthermore, the magazine *Contemporaneos* in 1931 supported by *Cine Club Mexicano*, marked the emergence of serious film criticism in the country. Notable critics at this magazines was Xavier Villarutia and Salvador Novo (De Los Reyes 1994). It is important to remark that the support of the French Institute of Latin America made the *Cine Club de Mexico* a possibility. They gathered a large number of rare films and an important number of films from other parts of the world. This allowed other cine-clubs during the 1970s to follow cinephilic trends from other parts of the globe (Mantecón 2017, 163). Film critics in Mexico were then inspired by the auteur cinema tendency led by the French magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Critics like José de la Colina, Fernando Fuentes, and García Riera were part of the most important generation of film critics in Mexico (De Luna 1978). Together with the student cine-clubs, they joined projection and debate in the film rooms.

According to Lahr-Vivaz (2016), Mexican directors became interested in profitable films rather than pleasing the mass audience. In the 1980s, the introduction of multiplex cinemas and the VHS format negatively impacted cinephilic culture. Nevertheless, in the 1990s, cine-club activities took strength among students and regained their lost popularity (Rodríguez Álvarez 2014). Cine-clubs introduced new programming strategies like marathons, retrospectives and festivals. Blogs, magazines, or TV shows in Mexico are not always formed by film professionals, more like music, theatre and film reviewers can take the part of what once was from the film theorists in Mexico of the 1960s. It was the cine-club task to build audiences with this stylistic awareness (Mantecón 2017, 161). The cine-club audience build a path for the next generation of film critics. Because their film perception is purely aesthetic, they identified stylistic features in comparison to other artistic works.

2.2.1 The Mexican New Wave

The end of the Mexican Golden Age model came when private production companies began to invest in the film industry. During the 1980s, Mexico suffered several events, and the Mexican peso consequently lost value against the American dollar. These events included a major earthquake in Mexico City in 1985 (Hamnett 1999). With the low response from the government at the time, against significant crisis, the once long-term government the PRI party started losing popularity after more than seventy years in the government.

Elena Lahr-Vivaz, in her book *Mexican Melodrama: Film and Nation from the Golden Age to the New Wave*, explores the changes in the film industry in Mexico from the Golden Age to the Mexican New Wave. She explains that changes in film production, distribution and financing changes came with governmental change in the 1990s and 2000s when films were “produced, distributed, and screened with the support of public funds” (Lahr-Vivaz 2016, 15). A new era for Mexican cinema began thanks to the financial support of private funding and gave a new path to private film productions. This new era is known as the “New Wave” and at its centre are the directors Alejandro González Iñárritu, Alfonso Cuarón and Carlos Carrera (Lahr-Vivaz 2016)

This privatisation in the 1990s also led to the emergence of new cinema multiplexes. The multiplexes had more comfortable seats, a more exclusive design, and of course, an increased ticket price, which meant that only the upper and middle classes could afford it.

Film directors from the New Wave took back melodrama but this time with a crude point of view of Mexico from the 2000s. Rejecting the national identity that the Golden Age

created in Mexican spectatorship, filmmakers of the New Wave highlighted a fragmented Mexico. They attempt to show the spectator the cracks of a fragmented society, making crude point of views on how society is fragmented and separated (Lahr-Vivaz 2016, 31). Filmmakers showed that if there is a unified Mexico, it only exists in the spectators' imagination. As scholar Juana María Rodríguez points:

A Mexican identity as such only makes sense outside a Mexican context. It is the experience of having to define oneself in opposition to a dominant culture that forces the creation of an ethnic/national identity that is the readable by the larger society: "Mexican" is a term that most English speakers understand; *Lacandon*, *chilango*, or *norteño* is not. The myth of harmonious Mexican nationalism that masks ethnic and social multiplicity and conflict is reconsolidated on the other side of the border, often as a form of resistance to dominant Anglo-American culture. The constant translation between spaces is never absolute. (Rodríguez 2003, 10)

We can see this cultural specificity in films like *Y tu Mamá También* (*And Your Mother Too*, 2001) where Julio (Gael García) and Tenoch (Diego Luna) explain to the Spanish Luisa (Maribel Verdú) the meaning of *charolastras*. This is an expression used to define a friendship close to brotherhood. Idioms like this one can be found in New Wave Mexican film. As Lahr-Vivaz (2016) points out, the Mexican identity can be found through different points of view "depending on a given spectator's gender, race, and nationality, among other characteristics" (7). She points to how "complex and multifaceted" *Amores Perros* and *Y Tu Mamá También* are and how they can be discovered from "many different places at once" (2016, 7).

Film spectatorship also went through the same changes in Mexico as in the West with the introduction of home viewing technology. Ana Rosas Mantecón (2003) writes, "As television viewers' equipment grew, the number of moviegoers decreased" (10), in "New Processes of Urban Segregation: The Reorganization of Film Exhibition in Mexico"

3 Cinephilia in the Age of Streaming

During the 1960s and 70s, film culture was important for the cultured urban intellectuals in global capitals like London and New York. Directors in Hollywood showed an interest in the European moviemakers and vice versa (Valck, M. and Hagener 2005). This interest created opportunities for film exchange and for cinephilic institutions to become popular. And as Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover write,

Despite the Eurocentrism of its earlier conceptions, art cinema has always aspired to globality. Contemporary academic, critical, and festival rubrics include a growing range of contemporary film practices under the moniker of art cinema. (Galt, and Schoonover 2010, 23)

For David Andrews (2013) art cinema is driven by art-house cinemas, cultural spaces and specialised film magazines. Today we can update this assertion to include film subscription services and streaming platforms like Netflix. The video-on-demand service Netflix proliferated from the year 2007 when it started as a DVD delivery service. Netflix has been praised for its quick development in the film industry, but it has also been criticised for the digital format that it presents. Netflix has also been criticised for its continual efforts to be part of the serious film culture industry by participating in film festivals, and film awards. These efforts have included associating the platform with recognised auteurs in the film industry. Robert Stam (2000) reflects on the impact of different technologies and media forms on a director's status as auteur, writing "Auteurism shifted attention from the 'what' (story, theme) to the 'how' (style, technique), showing that style itself had personal, ideological and even metaphysical reverberations" (92). He questions whether the auteur keeps his or her craftsmen status even if he or she moves to another medium like commercials, music videos, or the small screen.

In *Film Programming Curating for Cinemas, Festivals, Archives*, Peter Bosma (2015) reflects on how cinema exhibition has evolved and how this impacts the shared cinema taste of audiences. These art houses, film theatres and cinémathèques are almost extinct nowadays. Cinemagoers prefer the multiplex or more often domestic viewing in the home, made easier thanks to online streaming services.

Technology has transformed the way one experiences film and how the film is exhibited. Film has witnessed several changes through history and the recent transition to

digital is only one of them. Susan Sontag (1996) in her article “The Decay of Cinema” remarks how cinephilia or cinema has changed becoming common currency. The experience of sitting in a specific seat in a specific cinema has wholly changed, taking all this magic experience out of watching films. She argues that the visual aspect of films has been transformed through the years because of new technologies and blockbuster's new popularity. Sontag's essay conveys a nostalgic feeling of loss regarding the changes to spectatorial practices. This change includes closures of art-house cinemas and the resulting transformation of cinema culture or cinephilia. She argues that cinema has become over-commercialised and that cinema-going rituals are threatened by the closure of many art cinemas in New York City. With the introduction of VHS in the late 1980s and DVDs in the 1990s, moviegoers shifted towards the home viewing experience, a shift that began with television. Nowadays, with the popularity of video-on-demand, the cinema-going experience is seen to be even more under threat. Betz (2009) argues that what Sontag mourns has moved on and is transformed by new technologies, however the film watching love is still latent (3).

For cinephiles, the film experience starts when they sit down in the theatre, then they reflect upon and discuss the film, sometimes with friends, in a journal or on a blog or social media platform. Film reception looks at the positions that film critics take towards a film and the impact it has on cinemagoers. For some film critics, it is intended to provide discussion material for the spectator so she or he can start a critical conversation with others, aiming to awake a critical curiosity.

The opinion of film critics is essential because they can have an impact on which films are selected for preservation and restoration by national film institutes. They also impact which films get DVD re-releases. There is a debate among film critics on how new digital platforms are changing the film industry. Klinger (2006) says that traditional institutions have migrated to home viewing practices. An example she gives is the film distributor Criterion Collection selling special editions for film collectors, in order to reproduce institutions of cinephilia in the home. She argues that the “criterion collection has been especially associated with film as a ‘high art’, promoting the work of renowned directors and classic films” (60). One could make the same argument for Netflix: it has not especially been associated with ‘high art’, but that is part of its strategy, one that has been used by Criterion since 1997 (Klinger 2006). A platform like Netflix brings more convenient access to films in combination with important actors in the film industry. Streaming services, movie blogs, chat rooms among many other online services can offer a more natural way for film critics and

film viewers to interact. I consider that streaming services allow for a new form of cinephilia. It is a platform that is open with a wide range of films to watch, talk about and reflects.

3.1 Streaming Platforms and Global Cinephilia

Video-on-demand services (VODS) have been part of TV consumption since the early 2000s. The ease in which the user can log on to devices connected to the Internet to watch TV shows and movies have had a significant impact on traditional cable TV consumption. Hilderbrand (2010) discusses the appearance of video-on-demand in 2000 as a helpful tool for the “pay-per-view” system. It is not specified when and how VoD started being used as a regular activity, but it can be considered the same time as when cable providers started promoting full packages of cable TV, high-speed Internet, and telephone together. For Jonathan Rosenbaum (2010), the key point of view is increased access. In his book *Goodbye Cinema, Hello Cinephilia: Film Culture in Transition*, he writes, “various films that were once literally or virtually impossible to see are now visible” (xiii). For users, it became easier to access and select the content they want to watch whenever they want rather than depending upon the regular scheduled that the broadcaster services provided (Jenner 2016). Video-on-demand services also provides additional functions such as the opportunity to fast-forward, change language and select subtitles for videos or films that are streaming. The consumer can pay to own or rent a film or a television show with monthly, weekly or by view subscription. The video data that users can access is thanks to Real-Time streaming protocol technology. With these changes in how TV and film are watched, traditional television broadcasters struggled with the new service model of not having advertisement breaks, something that is more attractive for the consumer (Jenner 2016).

These media distribution systems are capable of being personalised. With a measurement system called algorithms, these services track individual preferences and target audiences for the content they are selling. Corey Barker and Myc Wiatrowski (2017) discuss how Netflix has effectively made its content a binge-worthy and developed a path in film production and in other national industries like the UK and Mexico. They argue that consumers easily find films or shows according to his or her taste, “including the prestige drama, the rebooted multi-camera sitcom and the superhero franchise” (1). Nowadays there are a large number of video-on-demand services including, Hulu, Mubi, Netflix, iTunes, and Amazon Prime. Some streaming services focus on TV series, others on films, documentaries, and art house films. Consumers can choose from different platforms according to their taste,

interests or needs (Tryon 2013). Art house films can be found on Mubi or Fandor, while popular TV shows can be found on Netflix or HBO. Each also has different release systems. The platform Mubi has more selective content targeting cinephiles showing films like *La truite* (1982), and *Don Giovanni* (1979) by Joseph Losey.

Mubi is a platform that has a catalogue of repertory films, documentaries, and art-house films. In his book *On-Demand Culture*, Chuck Tryon (2013) gives the example of when the large DVD distributor Criterion ended its contract with Mubi and began to work with the streaming service Hulu with the purpose of attracting cinephiles and taking cinephile subscribers away from Netflix. He argues that streaming services are transforming the old multiplex model. What he means is that the competition between rival services, competition for prices, ticket sales, film deals and exclusive deals is comparable to how it was in the past with the multiplexes (32).

Once established, streaming services have pursued small or selected groups of viewers with specific tastes. More catalogues with independent films, documentaries, art house films and quality TV shows have started being part of many streaming platforms. Most of these new catalogues have different subscription systems. Mubi is a clear example of this: its curation consists of Film Festival films. The platform created an association with festivals that was very attractive to cinephiles. Depending on the digital rights Mubi obtain, they have different arrangements with distribution companies. This idea of limiting access counters Rosenbaum's view of digital film culture. As Tyron (2013) argues, "on-demand culture is characterized not by universal access but by the process of limiting and restricting when and where content is available" (41). For Jennifer Hessler (2018), these platforms "demonstrate that cinephilia is not dead, it is simply transformed" (5). In her essay *Quality You Can't Touch: Mubi Social, Platform Politics, and the Online Distribution of Art Cinema*, Hessler denounces the politics, between distributors and subscribers that surround and transform cinephilic practices using the platform Mubi as an example. She argues that the different content and the variety that Mubi offers is a thriving force for some users. Different from other VoD platforms that offer the fast-film consumption model. Mubi has the option to offer a carefully selected menu for the ones that have specific preferences on what they watch. Hessler writes that Mubi also provides a wide selection of foreign films, and it diversifies its options in a quest to discover new films from all around the world.

Frequent changes between companies sometimes give the consumer reduced access to content (Tryon 2013, 41). These changes happen when rights, permits and schedules interfere

with the available content. Conflicts can arise between streaming platforms, distribution companies, and cinemas. Another issue regarding access is that not all countries have the same content because distribution companies have different arrangements between countries, making their content more exclusive and selective, sometimes with a shorter streaming period.

In *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplex, and Global Culture*, Charles Acland (2003) argues how cinema-going activity and audience habits could be measured with the ticket box office. However, with new streaming services, it is harder to trace people's viewing habits. Moreover, with the all-in-one system, offered by platforms like Netflix, film watching is nowadays more of an "event" than the regular TV watching activity (54). A new term for this called by audience and critics is "binge" where one can watch TV series or films all-in-once.

Mubi not only distributes film but also contributes to cinephile knowledge by engaging the viewer with its blog "The Notebook". This platform is aimed at those "actively engaged with movies and the social and political cultures associated with them" (Tryon 2013, 35). The VOD service Mubi brings a more sophisticated approach for the cinema lover. Mubi introduced a selective curatorship form, where the user can discuss the film on the platform's blog with the Mubi staff. All sorts of discussions come from the 30 films that stream every month. This selection comes mainly from art-house or independent movie producers or art production companies. Mubi stands out from other streaming platforms by providing a highly curated selection of art cinema by global auteurs.

With the transition to digital and the creation of blogs and personal websites, the cinephilic practice of film has become democratised (Jullier and Leveratto 2012b). In these blogs, we can find professional film critics and academic cinephiles together with regular film viewer's opinions. In 2009 Girish Shambu wrote an essay on the new possibilities regarding cinephilia and how blogs can build bridges among all kinds of groups from the amateur cinephile to the serious film critic. This can result in a democratisation of film criticism, meaning that cinephiles can be valued more for their level of commitment and comment than by their status in the industry. These different dimensions of cinema culture can be combined when the cinemagoer can relate and learn from professionals and at the same time, stay updated with current cinema trends. Cinephiles no longer need to be professional critics to gain status based on their level of commitment and comment. As Roy Menarini and Lucia Tralli (2016) write,

The so-called new cinephilia developed another kind of relationship with new media and web culture, thanks to strategies such as social networking, which somehow manages to give a different, more progressive meaning to cinephilia. These strategies are currently practised by a new generation of equally devoted cinephiles who display and develop new modes of engagement with the overabundance of cinematic material widely available through advanced technology. (138)

The cinema worlds can be combined when the cinema viewer can relate and learn from professionals in the cinephile group and at the same stay updated with new releases. A new model of engagement for this VoD services is the relationship with social networking. This new model is based on consumers interaction with others to develop a conversation about the catalogue that the services offer. With the development of online streaming services and with social networking strategies, streaming services use social media in different ways to engage with the consumer, bringing different options with the “overabundance of cinematic material” (Hessler 2018, 5).

3.1.1 Netflix

In *The Age of Netflix: Critical Essays on Streaming Media, Digital Delivery and Instant Access*, Barker and Wiatrowski (2017) note the change in user behaviour on digital platforms,

From the rise of binge-watching and password-sharing to intermittent debates about spoiler etiquette and how critics should cover programs that are released all at once, Netflix is the central force in the contemporary experience of media consumption. (2)

One of the most known video-on-demand platforms is Netflix. Founded in 1997, Netflix brought a new form of cinema experience to mass audiences. Once started as a DVD home delivery it is nowadays a preferred viewing system for television programs, movies and documentaries. Expanding in early 2016 to 130 new countries, it has now integrated more non-English language series and films (Barker, and Wiatrowski 2017, 1).

The experience that Netflix offers which makes it different from other video-on-demand platforms is the “immersion experience”. This model is the argument that Sidneyeve Matrix (2016) makes in her article *The Netflix Effect: Teens, Binge Watching, and On-Demand Digital Media trends*. Netflix provides users with the ability to watch full seasons of a TV series at once, instead of the traditional episode per week. This model brought about a

huge change in viewer consumption habits. While the user traditionally had to wait week by week for the latest episode, the VOD platform Netflix revolutionised viewing practices. People do not need to wait weeks for a new episode, but they can watch them all at once. According to Baker and Wiatrowsky (2017), “Netflix is the central force of contemporary experience of media consumption” (2).

Netflix is also taking part in a rapid expansion of its own productions and creating its content. *Lillehammer* (2012) was the first TV show Netflix co-produced. It is the story of an American mobster who ends up running away from the mob and ends up in Norway. Ted Sarandos, chief content officer for Netflix, states that this first TV show that Netflix invested in (together with the Norwegian Film Institute and NRK) was an essential start in their TV production (Elnan 2013). Despite this investment in television series, Jenner sees Netflix and VOD platforms as a move away from the television set” (Jenner 2016, 259). Scholar Lucy Küng (2017) argues that, with the increase in streaming services, television broadcasters have to adjust to an evolving model of consumption. Whereas as previously broadcasters could rely on the consumer to adjust to their fixed schedule, now the consumers their own time and place to watch.

Exclusive arrangements with film directors and Hollywood stars were a strategic move for Netflix in order to produce quality video content. In a break from traditional television production, Netflix has expanded. As Barker and Wiatrowski (2017) points out, “Netflix also utilizes A-list casts, lavish budgets, and endless marketing resources to brand its original productions as must-see events” (4).

3.2 New Viewing Strategies in Mexico

In order to understand the reception of *Roma* in Mexico, we first need to understand the role of Netflix and VoD in Mexico. Elia Margarita Cornelio-Mari (2017) writes about the introduction of Netflix in México. In a country where most film consumption is through illegal downloading and piracy, it was a challenge for Netflix to get into the digital market (201). Launched in September 2011 with the offer of a free trial month, Netflix had to go through a series of adjustments required for the Mexican audience because piracy plays a significant role in Mexican film culture (205). Consumers that have access to broadband Internet are limited in Mexico as the entire broadband services are available only to the upper and middle classes. Few of the Mexican users were willing to pay for Netflix membership, so the low pricing was also a factor in the success of the platform as a monthly subscription cost

only 99 Mexican pesos (around 50 Norwegian coroners) (206). This was a reasonable price for in a country where entire broadband services can cost up to five times more than that. It also is not a country dependent on credit cards so Netflix had to solve this problem with the same system as iTunes, where consumers could buy prepaid cards at any convenience store.

Mexico is home to the largest media and telecommunications company in Latin America, the Televisa Group. The arrival of Netflix resulted in reshaping the hegemony of these long-established companies. In 2014 Netflix launched the exclusive Mexican series *Camelia la Tejana*, and *Club de Cuervos*. For Cornelio-Marí, Hollywood's proximity is an advantage for Netflix, as the Mexican audience is familiar with Hollywood's productions. Cornelio-Marí (2017) writes how producing original content was crucial for Netflix's success in Mexico and Latin America. She highlights the Mexican consumer's social status because significant television audience uses free-to-air channels given by Televisa. Nevertheless, Netflix's target is the middle to upper classes who can afford satellite television and home Internet, and also the ones who download content illegally (213). However finding out who watches Netflix and their viewing practices are difficult, Cornelio-Marí points out the lack of information on the company side and the lack of scholarship regarding this subject (213).

Netflix, iTunes and HBO joined the competition against broadcast television in Mexico. Following the trend, the largest Television Networks like Televisa introduced its own streaming service. Taking Televisa's soap operas from Netflix had a significant impact on audiences who could now 'binge-watch' their favourite shows. The television streaming services also offer Hollywood content and an extensive catalogue of local content. Another competitor, *Claro Video*, joined the market in 2012 (Cornelio-Marí 2017, 219) with a lower cost subscription-free, promotions and offers more suitable for the ordinary Mexican consumer. A more sophisticated platform in terms of its content is FilminLatino, a streaming service with a more selected content where cinephiles in Mexico use.

In a way, FilminLatino can be seen as a continuation of the Mexican ciné-club culture because it is a streaming service that composes its catalogue with film cycles of different actors, retrospectives of auteurs, directors and Film Festivals. FilmInLatino can only be used in Mexico. Its catalogue includes some of the most recognised films with distinctions of awards and film festival prizes. It also has an extensive catalogue of commercial movies, independent films, documentaries and short films. These can be watched on devices like tablets, computers or mobile phones. Contributing significantly to the formation of audiences,

it offers alternative film premieres of works that modify the traditional model of theatrical exhibition.

FilminLatino is not the only video-on-demand platform in Mexico, but it has the most extensive Spanish language film catalogue thanks to industry funding. The Culture Secretariat (Secretaría de Cultura) and the Mexican Institute of Cinematography are in charge of the diffusion and the content of this VOD platform. The Secretariat of Culture is a State funding institution, in charge of the culture and education in Mexico. This Mexican government agency organises exhibitions and cultural events with the general public and is also in charge of schools and the education system. IMCINE is a public organisation in charge of promoting film activities by supporting the production, distribution, exhibition, collaboration, and dissemination of Mexican Cinema. This agency contributes to the promotion of films through festivals, exhibitions, cycles, and forums.

FilmInLatino has a free section called GatrisMx, which includes only Mexican films, documentaries, and short films. IMCINE contributes to this free service bringing Mexican national content to film viewers. The rest of the films are accessible by payment to cover copyright costs. FilminLatino allows you to rent movies or TV shows individually. One can also rent by event or premiere. Monthly and six-monthly subscription are available where the user have access to most of the films and TV shows in the catalogue, and can also have the opportunity to rent by individual film. Some films may have an additional charge, and this is due to different arrangements with the distribution companies. Most of the films are in their original version with Spanish subtitles, and a few of them have been dubbed into Spanish.

FilmInLatino releases new titles once a week. From classic to new films it also releases films simultaneously with movie theatres. Like Mubi, FilmInLatino also has a blog where film viewers can discuss the films shown and a section where professional film critics can write about it. The blog also informs viewers about the latest premieres and industry news. FilminLatino has a vast catalogue of fiction films; documentaries, independent and children films, and the platform can be used on different devices like tablets, computer or mobile phones.

Netflix's success in Mexico and the introduction of more selective platforms like FilminLatino demonstrate the audience's new taste for VoD services with both types of catalogues. Netflix's push to integrate an auteur like Cuarón triggered a debate in the Mexican press. This leads me to my research question, how was the reception of *Roma* shaped by the

exhibition context? And, does the introduction of an auteur in the Netflix platform function to legitimise the platform for cinephiles and critics?

4 *Roma*

In order to address my first research question: **Netflix is not seen as a legitimate venue for watching art cinema. But what if a major art cinema director joins Netflix, does that function legitimise the platform for cinephiles and critics?**, this section outlines the problems Netflix has faced in traditional cinephilic spaces.

Netflix is now one of the preferred global viewing system for television programs, movies and documentaries (Barker and Wiatrowski 2017). With the production of their own content, they have also taken the opportunity to submit films to film festivals around the globe. In May 2017 Netflix submitted two films for competition for the *Palme d'Or* at the Cannes Film Festival: *Okja* (2017) a science-fiction drama directed by Bong Joon-Ho and *The Meyerowitz Stories* (2017) by Noah Baumbach. This was a move that none of the festival organizers could reject because nobody expected it. Pedro Almodovar president of the jury in Cannes in 2017 stated, “I personally cannot conceive if not only the *Palme d'Or* but any other prize, being given to a film and then being unable to see this film on a large screen” (Wiseman 2017). A technical issue clouded the premiere of *Okja* (2017) at the Festival because, for about six minutes, the picture was projected in the wrong aspect ratio. This event caused not only the crowd to stomp their feet in indignation but also was widely reported upon in the press. Later Cannes released an apology for the error.

Thierry Frémaux, artistic director of the Cannes Film Festival, tried to push back against these submissions by introducing a new rule from 2018 that only films with a theatrical release plan could compete for the *Palme d'Or*. In response, Netflix did not submit any of its films to Cannes in the subsequent years. In 2018, the restoration of *The Other Side of the Wind* (Orson Wells 2018) and the acclaimed film *Roma* (2018) by the Mexican director Alfonso Cuarón missed the chance to be seen at the festival theatres of the French Riviera. In what some commentators have called a “cold war” (Gleiberman 2018b) between Netflix and Cannes. The conflict resulted in disappointment for both parties, and commentators like Owen Gleiberman (2018b) noted that the Cannes line-up in 2018 was unsubstantial. For Netflix, this protest means that it is closing itself off from a well-known festival. Luckily other film festivals like Toronto and Venice included the film *Roma*, which was a valuable addition and well received by critics.

The constant argument in favour of the big screen has been consistent for cinephiles. In 2012 Randall Stross wrote an article for the *New York Times* communicating a pessimistic

outlook for the screen transition from a large screen format to a laptop screen or even a cell phone. He argues that even if this can be convenient for the viewer “It comes at a price: the loss of the immersive cinematic experience”. The protection of the big screen has been a constant argument for the hard-core cinema lover. In the next chapters, I will assess the tension between what traditional and new cinephilia using the film *Roma* distributed by Netflix as a new strategy of showcasing global cinephilia.

In the next chapters, I will discuss the role of the Netflix film *Roma*, in the changing exhibition landscape. With the *Roma* success in international film festivals and the Academy Awards, some film directors and film critics did not agree that an online platform should be treated the same way as film production companies who comply with the traditional model of film exhibition in movie theatres. According to the magazine *Variety* (2018), director Steven Spielberg argued that the Academy jury should tighten the rules for a film to be considered for an Oscar.

Cuarón’s eighth film and only his third shot in Mexico is one of his most celebrated achievements. Seventeen years after shooting *Y tu Mamá También (And Your Mother Too, 2001)* he returned to his hometown to shoot a movie dedicated to his memories: *Roma*. This is a Spanish and Mixteco¹ language film in black and white situated in Mexico City in the 1970s. Cuarón signed with Participant Media and with the online platform Netflix for its distribution. The film had its world premiere in the 75th Venice International Film Festival on August 30, 2018, and it had a short theatrical release in Los Angeles, New York and Mexico from November 21. Less than a month later, on December 14, it was released on the online platform Netflix. Cuarón not only directed the film but also wrote the screenplay and was responsible for the cinematography. He received worldwide praises for both. Marina de Tavira and Yalitza Aparicio, the two main characters of the film, also received recognition for their performances. With ten nominations for the 91st Academy Awards and it became the first Mexican film to earn an Oscar at the category of Best Foreign Language Film, and it also won an Oscar in the category of Best Director and Best Cinematography. Yalitza Aparicio is also the first indigenous actress to be nominated for Best Actress. *Roma* also took awards at the 72nd British Academy Film Awards, the 76th Golden Globe Awards and the 24th Critics Choice Awards.

¹ *Mixteco* is a language spoken in Mexico, family from the Mixtecan group language.

Roma premiered worldwide on the streaming service Netflix on December 14, 2018. To bring his film to Netflix, Alfonso Cuarón made sure it was also going to be shown in theatres before it's worldwide release. In talks to the press, Cuarón said, "I will always advocate for the theatrical experience. I also know that my film is going to live for way longer in digital formats. I think that the important thing is to find the right balance" (Feinberg 2019). However, many cinemas were unwilling to show the film, a fact that will be explored and explained in this study.

In the following section, I outline how *Roma* reinforces Cuarón's status as an auteur, and how this film deals with authenticity following Bordwell's classification of art film and auteurism in his essay "The Art Cinema as Mode of film Practice" (1979). In terms of creating a sense of realism, Alfonso Cuarón cast non-actors for most roles in the film, like the main character Cleo (Yalitza Aparicio) and also took care to recreate what Mexico City used to look like in the 1970s.

4.1 Alfonso Cuarón: An Auteur on Netflix

Alfonso Cuarón has a distinguishable style throughout his body of films. Even in a franchise like *Harry Potter* (2001 – 2011), his control over the film's cinematography, the *mise-en-scène* and the editing style is recognisable. In 2018 Alfonso Cuarón's collaboration with Netflix did not mean that he abandoned his signature style for the film *Roma*. Alfonso Cuarón's auteurist style can be traced throughout his film career. Before discussing the implication of the director's auteurism, it is helpful to have an overview of the director's beginnings.

Alfonso Cuarón was born in the neighbourhood *Roma* in Mexico City in 1961. At a young age, he developed an interest in films; part of this was thanks to his nanny Libo who would take him and his siblings to the movies (Tapley 2019). He started studying film at the Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos but was expelled when he submitted a film for an exam in English (Zelazko 2019). After this, he found a job as director of the cine-club at the National Museum of Arte (MUNAL) (Zarandona 2009). However, Cuarón has signalled to the press that this job was not what he wanted to do, but it helped to support his family as he fathered his first child at a young age (Redacción 2019). After a year he resigned to start working for Mexican and American production companies which opened up the path for him to make his first film *Sólo con tu pareja* (*Love in the Time of Hysteria* 1991). Against his producers demands Cuarón worked to promote his film outside of Mexico and it was

received positively by directors and film producers in Hollywood. Indeed, the American executive producer Sydney Pollack called upon him to collaborate on his television series *Fallen Angels* (1993), and it was after this opportunity that Cuarón directed his first film in the United States, *A Little Princess* (1995), a children's film based on Frances Hodgson Burnett's book. His next film was the poorly reviewed *Great Expectations* (1998), a modernised retelling story from the Charles Dickens novel. In interviews with the press, Cuarón said, "I think it's a complete failed film" (Lang 2016). He felt that the visual style of the film would compensate for what it lacked in terms of the film's script. While it did not have a good reception with the press, it was well received for the visual design of the film (Zarandona 2009). Film critic Janet Maslin writes for the *New York Times* "The film makes up in visual exoticism some of what it loses in character and context" (1998). This film was made in collaboration with his old school friend, the photographer Emmanuel Lubezki. Despite its generally poor reception, the visual style of the film introduced what is now Cuarón's signature long take one-shot sequence. In the film *Great Expectations* (1998), Cuarón uses a single long take that continues for up to five minutes where Finnegan 'Finn' (Ethan Hawke) moves into different scenes, and the camera follows him without cutting. The scene ends when Finn goes to his childhood love Estella (Gwyneth Paltrow). This full sequence is a story on itself with a beginning, middle and end, which supports the narrative of the story. Cuarón decided to shoot the film from Finn's point of view, so the mobile camera follows the main character's perspective of his surroundings.

Instead of cutting, he uses camera movement to reframe the action. Pans and tracking shots give the scenes a smooth narrative flow and create the impression of a camera that is reactive to the thoughts and actions of the film's characters. In 2001 with Emmanuel Lubezki he returned to Mexico to shoot *Y Tu Mamá También* (2001). Together they further developed this style of single-shot long takes (Cohen 2013). In the film, the camera is unobtrusive as Cuarón uses pans and long shots with almost no close-ups. Like *Roma*, the film sheds a critical light upon the difference between social classes in Mexico. Cuarón immerses the spectator into the story of two friends, Tenoch Iturbide (Diego Luna) and Julio Zapata (Gael García), taking a trip to a paradise in the south of Mexico accompanied by an older married and beautiful woman Luisa Cortés (Maribel Verdú) (Acevedo-Munoz 2004). Upon its release, the film was challenged by the Mexican government, who decided to give it an R/over 18 age rating (Sandoval and Franco 2001). In interviews with the press, Cuarón criticised the government's censorship rating and questioned the logic of banning young people from

seeing a film about Mexican youth. However, the government ruling and Cuarón's outrage about it gave the film sufficient attention to make it "one of the most seen films in Mexico" (Zarandona 2009). After *Y tu mamá también* Cuarón directed *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004). The latter was rated as the most successful film of the Harry Potter franchise and provided him with the opportunity to work with digital visual effects. *Children of Men* (2006) was his next film, a science fiction-dystopia nominated for three Oscars. This film also has single-shot takes and makes extensive use of depth of field. He positions his characters in the foreground or the background of the frame, opening up the opportunity to tell two stories in one single take. Cuarón makes use of pans to give the viewer insight into what is going on around the main character in the film. In 2013, Sandra Bullock and George Clooney starred in *Gravity* (2013), an action drama set in space that Cuarón co-wrote with his son Jonás Cuarón, earning Alfonso Cuarón the Oscar for best director. After 17 years and having great success with films that were not "Mexican", Alfonso Cuarón returned to his home country to shoot *Roma* (2018) with Netflix.

The film is shot in black and white and is set between 1970 and 1971 in a neighbourhood called *Roma* located in the heart of Mexico City. The film focuses on Cleo (Yalitza Aparicio), a domestic worker and nanny for a middle-class family that is falling apart because of an increasingly absent father figure (Fernando Grediaga). The mother Sofia (Marina de Tavira) is now in charge of raising her children and supporting them financially. Sofia must join forces with Cleo to keep the home together, and at the same time, both have to figure out the complex aspects of their own lives. Most importantly, Cleo finds out she is pregnant, and the father-to-be leaves her as soon as she tells him the news. When her pregnancy is advanced, Cleo and her boss's mother takes her to buy a crib for her baby, but they find themselves in the middle of a student protest that turns violent. She unexpectedly sees Fermín, who is one of the thugs and points a gun at her in a moment of intense drama. After this incident, she is taken to the hospital but loses the baby during delivery. In the meantime, the family Cleo is working for is under pressure: the father tells his wife, Sofia, that he will not come back and she does not know how to explain this to her children. Sofia plans a trip to the beach with them and brings Cleo along. At dinner, she tells them that their father will not come back home and that she will get a new job to provide for them. During this beach trip, Cleo saves two of the children from drowning, risking her own life in the process. When they are back on the beach, the family gathers, and Cleo tearfully confesses that she did not want to have the baby. When they come back from the trip, they find out that

the father took all his belongings from the house. After this, life goes on as usual, and Cleo continues with her typical job.

Cuarón illustrates how a domestic worker like Cleo inhabits a separate world from her employers, the middle-class family. Even when living under the same roof, Cleo is treated differently: she is not allowed to use the electricity in her bedroom or to sleep in the same area as the family. Despite these harsh conditions, Cleo adores the family she lives with, and they love her back, but with their own limitations. In the following, I argue that a shift occurs when Sofía experiences her breakup. Cleo and Sofía build a union where the common link is the children of the house.

Stylistically, the film is a striking composition of natural lighting, interior and exterior, a combination of long shots, and ambient sound that the director puts together to create a particular atmosphere in order to authentically convey a sense of place that would be recognisable to viewers from Mexico City. Not only does he want to make the distinction between social classes, but he also outlines the unconditional love a person, who is not blood-related, can have for someone else. Cuarón shows this unconditional love in one of the last scenes of the film where Cleo risks her life to save two of the family's children from drowning even though she does not know how to swim. Love is shown in different forms in the film, as both separation and rejection.

4.2 Memories of Mexico: Scene Analysis

In order to further illustrate Cuarón's status as an auteur, I select key scenes from *Roma*. In this section, I analyse a scene in which the central plot intersects with the political context of Mexico in 1971. For Cuarón, it was not just important to put his childhood memories into the film, but he also decided to supplement them with events embedded in Mexican collective memory. This is why the scene from the student protest is so important. It is a re-enactment of *El Halconazo*; a student protest that happened in 1971 when the protesters were heavily repressed by police forces and a group of agitators. The press later confirmed that a group of people trained in martial arts were used to contain "agitators" during the Echeverría presidential period (Doyle 2003).

In this scene, Cleo and her boss's mother go to buy a crib for the soon to be born baby, but unfortunately, they find themselves in the middle of the conflict. The scene begins with Cleo inside a car; beside her is the family's driver Ignacio (Enoc Leño). The characters are framed in a medium shot: the camera takes the point of view as a passenger in the back seat.

Similar to a movie screen, the front mirror in the car shows people walking in the street with placards in their hands. Here they are in another perspective where we see the passengers inside the car looking towards the camera: Sofia's mother, Ms Teresa (Verónica García) is sitting in the back seat, reading a paper and seemingly oblivious to what is happening outside. Ignacio the driver says, "We need to park here because it seems there is a protest ahead."² Again the back mirror from the car shows us many people walking around in the street holding signs.

The camera follows the three main characters from the scene in a tracking shot. In this shot, there are two parallel planes of action (Fig 1). In the foreground, we see that policemen trucks are parked, with police officers sitting inside, and others are outside standing wearing riot gear. In the background, Ms Teresa, Cleo and Ignacio are walking towards the right side of the frame while the camera is tracking them. They are only visible to us when they walk past gaps between trucks. Some students are walking, and others are running around them. We also see businesses closing their doors as a sign of foreboding for what might happen next. There are also voices in the background from some of the men in uniform.



Fig. 1 Tracking shot follows the three main characters of the scene. In the front of the frame we see police trucks parked in the street.

² Tenemos que estacionarnos aquí porque parece que hay otra manifestación (All translations are my own unless otherwise stated)

Once they reach the end of the street, the camera reframes to an establishing shot and pans to the right for the first time, giving us a complete view of what is happening. We see a city square and a building in the middle; police officers and student protesters are in the same shot, and a group of men in civilian clothing are standing in the corner of the street with poles in their hands (Fig. 2). With this establishing shot, Cuarón situates the viewer in a specific space, a square where students are going to get together for a demonstration. Trucks of police officers line the street fully prepared for what might occur, and a group of men with sticks stand in the corner at the edge of the square as if prepared to attack. Cuarón cuts to a second establishing shot, and we are now inside the building we just saw in the square. With an off-screen sound, Ms Teresa is introduced with dialogue asking about baby cribs. Following Cleo and Ms Teresa to a crib, we can see that Cleo's pregnancy is now advanced. As they discuss the price, Cuarón uses the camera to pan from one side to another, producing the point of view of an outside observer scanning the space. This camera movement gives us a sense of anticipation, as though something is about to happen.



Fig. 2 Establishing shot of the gathering in the square; in the background we see a building with large windows with a sign reading 'Furniture'

The camera pans to follow the sales girl when suddenly we hear background noises. The camera then pans to the right, and we see people moving towards the window, curious to see what is happening and where the noise is coming from. The big window of the furniture shop

shows us the square where a big crowd is now gathered. There seems to be a fight going on, the people with poles in their hands are beating the protestors holding signs.

Cuarón uses the signs to distinguish one side from another in the *mise-en-scène*: one holds bats and the others hold placards. The camera movement is very slow and calm, contradicting what is happening outside. Without stopping the pan movement, we see Cleo and Ms Teresa re-enter the frame. They are curious about what is happening outside the window. These two characters then turn towards the camera, looking off-screen as another background sound is introduced. Before the camera shows us what they see, Ms Teresa and Cleo step back, and Ms Teresa protects Cleo's belly with her arm. The camera adopts the point of view of Cleo and Ms Teresa, who are witnessing what is happening inside the furniture shop. A man and a woman enter the establishment, asking for help and they run towards the left side of the frame (Fig 3). Four gunmen enter the scene. They are shouting in a threatening manner, asking where the students are. The camera then pans slowly to the left following the gunmen. This camera's point of view limits the actions of the main characters as the steady panning movement of the camera creates the impression that Cleo and Ms Teresa are trapped in a tight corner. Also, this point of view places the viewer together with Cleo and Ms Teresa, as witnesses to a tragic scene.



Fig. 3 Point of view from Cleo and her boss, witnessing what is happening inside the furniture shop.

A grandmother and expectant mother witness a person being killed, and from the medium close-ups of their face, we see that they are scared. The space feels confined and claustrophobic like there is no way out of there. People are confused, and we can hear screams and crying. The space is full of furniture, but even with all the obstacles, the armed men find their way around. The men reach the students without moving the furniture around them. Electric lights light the scene from above. The space between the ceiling and the floor is not very high, and some of the lamps hanging on the ceiling seem very close to people's heads. These elements of the *mise-en-scène* work together to give a sense of enclosure. Every wall and every space in the room is decorated with furniture, clocks, tables, chairs and lamps. Apart from the ceiling, there is no empty surface in the room. And even though the camera is mobile and free to pan, the room still feels enclosed like there is no way out from this establishment. With all the commotion happening in front of Cleo and Ms Teresa, unexpectedly a gun enters from the right side of the frame in close-up. The gun stays still, but many things are happening in the background.

We hear a shotgun fired, but it does not come from the gun in the frame. When the camera opens into a medium shot, we see that the person holding the gun is Fermín, Cleo's baby's father. With a reverse shot now from Fermín's point of view, we see Ms Teresa with her eyes closed, still with her outstretched arm protecting Cleo's belly praying for her life. She keeps her eyes closed, and she is squinting a little as if expecting Fermín to shoot her. At the same time, Cleo's shocked gaze is aimed directly at Fermín. She has her hands placed on her belly, with a worried look in her eyes and is visibly tense, as they do not exchange a word. At the same time in the middle of chaos, the silent encounter between Cleo and Fermín is a strong statement. This is the last time both characters will see each other, and we see how the characters have changed in this silent exchange: Cleo is a single mother looking for a crib for her baby that will be bought by her boss, and he has become a paramilitary member of a group that kills, beats and apprehends students, despite having told her that he took up martial arts to avoid a life of crime.



Fig. 4 Fermín backs away before he runs out of the shop.

Now the point of view shot shows Fermín walking backwards, and we can hear Ms Teresa praying out of the frame (Fig 4). In this confined frame, Fermín walks backwards, as his friends call him running towards the exit. We see customers protecting themselves and standing still from the shooters, as there is only one exit. Ironically Fermín is framed surrounded by baby cribs and rocking chairs, the perfect furniture for a nursery. Ironically baby cribs and rocking chairs, the perfect furniture for a nursery surround Fermín. Lamps hang from the ceiling and the distance between Fermín's head and the ceiling is not very high. He keeps his gun pointed at Cleo and stumbles against a rocking chair behind him before running towards the exit. This stumbled movement does not seem accidental in Cuarón's film. It seems that he purposely positioned Fermín in a difficult place to escape from his responsibilities. The camera stays static, carefully framing the action, even as most of the people that are in the store enter the frame running around and screaming. Fermín and his friends leave a chaotic scene behind them. One person enters the frame covering her eyes, and she has blood around her face and is crying for help. Cuarón gives us the impression of an extremely chaotic scene the rocking chair keeps moving after Fermín leaves a trace of the violence that just occurred. We return to a medium shot of Cleo and Ms Teresa, Cleo turns to look at her feet and with a tilt down; point of view shot, we see that her water has broken.

This scene's action takes place against the background of 1971 when Mexico was suffering from political instability. Even if these scenes are hard to understand without the historical context, Cuarón uses a combination of *mise-en-scène*, cinematography and sounds to express the drama of this turning point in the film. Cuarón shows a merging of two worlds where they touch each other dramatically. One side of the world is the recreation of the student demonstration *El Halconazo* (*hawk strike*) that, according to the *Proceso* magazine, was a student protest that was repressed by police agitators where several students got killed and many beaten (Doyle 2003). This event is the aftermath of what is known as *La Matanza de Tlatelolco* (*the Tlatelolco Killing*). Mexican journalist Elena Poniatowska (1971) writes that just before the Olympic games in 1968, hundreds of students were killed, many disappeared, and others imprisoned during a protest (166). Cuarón's portrayal of these events taps into the country's collective memory of a national tragedy.

The *Corpus Cristi Massacre* was during Cuarón's childhood, and these memories are invested in the film together with a sense of loss from those who got killed in the hands of the government, a painful subject that is still alive in the memory of the Mexican people. As Lahr-Vivaz (2006) tells us, the Mexican culture has its own idioms and ways of understanding one another within the country.

4.3 Mirror: Scene Analysis

Cuarón's single-shot long takes can be traced back to *Great Expectations* (1998) as we have already seen, we can also think of the tense scene from *Gravity* where Sandra Bullock is fighting for her life. I have identified single-long shots throughout Cuarón's filmography and as Bordwell (1979) writes, following Bazin, long takes and deep focus stylistically represent a realistic continuum of space and time in art cinema (154).

In the following scene, I show how Cuarón tries to create parallels between Cleo and Sofía. I argue that Cuarón uses his signature long take style to evoke similarities between the two women Sofía and Cleo, bringing them together despite their class difference. With a long take, Cuarón shows us a painful breakup, a mother desperate to show her husband that he has young children to take care of. She is trying to make him stay while Cleo and her son are spectators. This is one of the key scenes in this film. Sofía says a final goodbye to her husband during a 3 minutes and 22 seconds long take sequence. In her desperation to silently tell her husband how much she cares for him, she asks for the youngest child to say goodbye to his father even though he is late for school. Cuarón plays with deep focus, placing his

characters in the foreground and the background of the frame depending on what actions are essential for the viewer to see.



Fig. 5 Sofia hugs Antonio before he leaves the family on a trip in *Roma* (2018)

Cleo enters the frame lifting the father's bags and taking them to the car parked outside the house. In the background, the mother and the child see the father packing up to leave. The father then says goodbye to his child in the background while Cleo closes the car's booth. Sofia is standing in the background of the frame. She then follows her husband to the car, and both characters are now in the foreground of the frame. When he is ready to get in the car, Sofia desperately hugs and kisses him reminding him the family will always be there.

In the background, Cleo is standing behind the child; both are looking at the couple saying goodbye (Fig. 5). Once her husband is ready to go, Sofia moves to meet Cleo and her son and watches the car leave. The mother's distress is well captured by the increasing volume of ambient sounds, including trumpets, and drums from an approaching marching band. The camera then pans to the left following the car's departure when Sofia enters the frame and just as the car disappears she stays standing still looking at the direction where Antonio has left and the marching band coming towards her. Here the intradiegetic sound becomes louder when a medium shot of Sofia's face surrounded by the source of all that noise shows her looking for Antonio. In the background, Cleo stands behind the child holding him by the shoulders in a protective gesture, attempting to shield him from the tragic event that

has just occurred. We can see how Cleo is mirroring the gesture of Sofía as she tried to make her husband stay (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6 Sofía watches the car leave, while the camera stays in place. A marching band passes in front of the camera.

The scene ends with the same static shot. The car is long gone, the band has passed, and Sofía turns her head and walks determinedly towards Cleo yelling “Goddammit! I told you to clean the dog shit!”³ She snaps that she will bring her son to school herself, which is usually Cleo’s job. This is seemingly a punishment for not cleaning up the dog mess as if she is trying to regain some control over the household after her husband’s departure. Cleo says nothing to her and silently watches the mother and child leave. He turns and says goodbye to Cleo, and she waves back. We feel empathy for what Sofía has just experienced but our empathy suddenly switches to Cleo because of this encounter. Cuarón illustrates the child’s innocence: he does not know his dad is leaving them, and he does not mind that the mother is angry with Cleo, he still cares for her enough to say goodbye. The long take emphasises the duration of this painful farewell scene. There is not really an explanation for Antonio’s departure, no background story or dialogue. However, with this single long take, Cuarón tries to explain how confusing and desperate one might feel to see someone leaving. The noise from the marching band contrasts with Sofía’s silence faced with her husband’s betrayal. Sofía, after

³ “¡Con un carajo Cleo, te dije que limpiaras las pinchas cacas del perro!”

she sees herself left alone, turns to her employee and in this moment of anger and confusion, she yells at her in a way that seems spiteful, as though channelling the clashing sounds from the band.

In the next shot, we see all the dog waste laying in the courtyard of the family home, Cuarón uses a low-level camera to follow Cleo's feet as she cleans the mess with a broom. In an uncommon transition for this film, Cuarón edits the next scene using a sound bridge, it comes from people laughing and voices in a foreign language, and we next see where it comes from: a cinema. Sound bridge are not common in this film, and one might argue that he uses this transition to attach these two scenes together because they both show break-ups in relationships, the first of Sofía and the second of Cleo. In my opinion, Cuarón tries to relate both scenes, to mirror the experiences of both women. The scene opens with a wide-angle lens using deep focus. In the background, there is a film screening, and this provides the primary source of light for this scene, we see that the laughing is coming from the audience watching the film. In the foreground of the frame, we see Cleo and Fermín kissing each other and not paying attention to the film. Cleo interrupts him and confides that she might be pregnant. After a few seconds and a couple of kisses, Fermín excuses himself to go to the bathroom, and without any camera movement, we see Fermín leaving the static frame (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7 Fermín leaves the cinema, abandoning Cleo. There is non-diegetic sound, only the sound from the film and the audience watching it.

The film has ended: the lights turn on inside the cinema, and people start exiting the room. Cleo stands up and looks for Fermín, taking both of their jackets. She exits the frame, and the camera remains static, as though Cuarón wanted to place us in the position of a spectator in the cinema witnessing this drama. The next shot shows the entrance to the cinema and the camera is positioned in a high angle shot. However, we are not given an establishing shot, so for a moment we experience confusion, the space feels confined and overcrowded. The diegetic sound comes from the people gathered outside the cinema entrance. Cleo comes out from the cinema, she moves slowly and carefully, looking straight ahead looking for Fermín among the crowd, but from her expression, she cannot find him (Fig. 8).

She positions herself in the right side of the frame and seemingly defeated, knowing that the father of her future child just abandoned her, she sits down on the steps. The camera follows with a short tilting movement to reframe to a close up of Cleo. With the diegetic sounds, Cuarón ensures complete immersion in the scene: loud vendors and unruly children gathering outside the theatre are all around, and Cleo's expression is one of worry.



Fig. 8 Cleo comes out from the cinema looking for Fermín.

This is not the first scene set in the cinema, in a previous scene where Cleo and her friends Adela, Fermín, and Ramón go to the cinema, Cuarón shows us that the theatre they go to is called the *Metropolitan* and that the two couples are going to see *La Hermana Trinquete* (1970) starring Silvia Pinal and Manolo Fábregas, two popular Mexican stars. According to the journal *El Universal*, *Metropolitan Cinema* was inaugurated in 1943 in Mexico City with

the opening film *Les Misérables* (Richard Boleslawski, 1935). It was such an important event that the president Miguel Ávila Camacho attended the opening (Gutierrez, 2008). Since the 1990s the cinema has only hosted concerts and theatre. It was always a popular venue and is located in the centre of the city not far from the *Roma* neighbourhood.

The scene of the father leaving the family, and Fermín leaving Cleo have stark similarities. First, the sound used in each scene is loud. Loud noises and chaos are surrounding both characters at the time they are left by their partners. Second, even when both characters are in an overcrowded space, neither the band nor the vendors touch them or interact with them. Sofia and Cleo are preoccupied with the loss of their partners and each scene shows the women staring into the void. Again, a sound bridge reinforces the connection between the two scenes.

Breakups can be painful and strident, no matter the economic status. One can assume that both Cleo and Sofía have to see for their children after the paternal side of the family is gone. Even with the economic differences, both have to work for the same purpose. Cuarón mirroring of the two women is further underlined by the length of each scene: 3 minutes and 22 seconds. Everytime we see him, he struggles to fit with his family. I believe this feeling of “not fitting” is communicated by the car that won’t fit into the courtyard and the fact that he is often absent. By the time he separates from Sofía, she struggles with the separation, especially about how she will tell her children. In one scene, she is confiding this fear to her mother. Sofía’s mother also plays a similar role with Cleo: she helps her with her doctor’s appointments and comforts her when she loses her child. Both women are pillars of the families, and with all their difficulties, they will find a way to carry on their lives. However, class differences remain even when Cleo saves two of the children from drowning. This event happens in one of the last scenes of the film when the family and Cleo go on a trip to the beach, and she saves two of the older children from drowning. But it also points out the obvious; she is working for the family. When they return from the trip, the children are excited to tell the story to their grandmother about how Cleo saved their lives, but not before asking Cleo for a milkshake so as soon as she is back from the trip she gets on with doing laundry, making milkshakes, and generally serving the family. Cuarón intentions are to show the similarities between Cleo and Sofía, who are separated by social differences. This is illustrated by the single long takes, focusing on the two subjects and what surrounds them. Both are heartbroken, and both have the same goal to take care of the children. Even though they are not Cleo’s children, she feels responsible for their wellbeing.

Cuarón pays homage to cinema culture with this representation of cinemagoing culture in the 1970s. The film comes together as an example of a tendency that Bosma (2015) describes as historical cinephilia on screen whereby filmmakers choose to pay homage to cinemagoing culture in their own films (22).

4.4 *Barndomsminne fra Nordland*: Scene Analysis

As Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (2010) write, “The term ‘global’ speaks to the international address, distribution, audience, and aesthetic language of the art cinema” (20). I argue that *Roma* is not just a Mexican film but is an example of global art cinema. It is interesting to notice the synergy between the global nature of the platform Netflix, its global access, and the aesthetic characteristics of the film. With this analysis, I show how this film is part of the global art cinema. In 1896 Elias Blix wrote *Childhood memory from Nordland* song that appears in this scene. In it, the singer nostalgically remembers the Norwegian mountains, the beauty of the land, and wishes to return there.

The following scene to be analysed begins with Sofia making the decision, in the absence of mister Antonio, to take her children and Cleo to spend New Year’s Eve at the ranch of a family friend. The ranch is located in a large rural area, and the owners have several native workers from the nearest town. Sofia’s friends receive her family and also other guests for the New Years celebrations. Among them, some people speak English. During their time at the ranch, the children entertain themselves by running around the forest while the adults have picnics, drink and shoot guns.

On the night of the New Year’s Eve, Cleo is taking care of the youngest children while the adults are drinking and dancing, the music comes from a record player. One of the housemaids invites Cleo over to their own party located on the ground floor of the big house and Cleo goes with her. In a cheerful ambience, the workers dance to folk music played by some people with guitars and singing live. Cleo sits down and has a drink with her friend. Meanwhile, the family who own the house and their guests enjoy their fancy party in the upstairs floor.



Fig. 9 Cleo is looking at the ranch.

The scene begins with Cleo walking back from the farmer's celebrations downstairs passing through an area on the upstairs floor near where the other party is going on. The camera is from Cleo's point of view as she witnesses a man making a pass at Sofia. He approaches Sofia and tries to kiss her. Sofia rejects him, and he walks back to the party. Sofia notices the presence of Cleo watching, and she walks back towards the party on her own. Cleo walks through the balcony and stops where Sofia was standing before. Cleo is looking forward towards the dark night. Here there is a cut to Cleo's view from the balcony, a view of trees surrounds the house, and we see part of the courtyard with strings of holiday lighting (fig.9). The intradiegetic sound comes from the people chatting, dogs barking and fireworks. This shot lasts for a few seconds when suddenly sparkles comes from the trees followed by loud voices, and dogs are barking. "Fire" a person shouts, bells start ringing, and people are screaming "fire". We do not see the dog or the person, but there is more screaming. We cut back to the medium close up of Cleo. She is leaning out to see what is going on. The screaming is getting louder. There is a cut to the courtyard, and the camera slowly tilts up showing us what is going on. We see people running towards the fountain that is in the middle of the courtyard. They have buckets in hand and they are filling them with water. The camera keeps tilting up towards the forest ahead and we see smoke coming out between the trees. The

intradiegetic sound is the same, people screaming fire, bells ringing and the sparkles shooting out from the trees.

The next shot is located in the forest. It is a long shot of an open space and on the right side of the screen the forest is burning down while farmers with buckets in their hands enter from the left side of the frame. The camera tracks to the right, following the action.



Fig. 10 Guesthouses and workers walk through the forest with buckets fill with water.

Houseguests in suits and dresses join to put out the fire. Together with the farmers, they form a chain and start passing the buckets with water (fig. 10). The *mise-en-scène* is striking here. We see a field surrounded by fire, in this space there are chairs and a baby buggy left from the previous picnic. A tracking shot to the left shows us all the people that are fighting the fire. Children enter the scene running around with little buckets in their hands. They start stomping over little flames in the grass. Cleo enters the scene helping a girl to put out the fire. A woman yells to the children not to step over the fire. The camera keeps tracking to the left, following the children. Cuarón's intentions are to show as much information as he can with the camera movements. The slow movement of the camera is ironic against the chaotic subject of the scene. Cleo is asked to help the children to gather water from a puddle. She then goes to a puddle filled with water and start taking the children's buckets to fill them up. With buckets full of water, they drop some in each little fire in the grass (Fig. 11).

The intradiegetic sound is from children screaming, and the sizzling noise of fire being extinguished with water. From the back left of the shot, a strange figure appears. A man

dressed in what seems to be a suit made of straw with a cane in his right hand walks towards the front of the frame. His head is fully covered with straw, he then walks towards the right in the background of the shot, walking among the children running and screaming around him. With a tracking shot to the right, the camera follows the man that is walking in the background.



Fig. 11 Cleo helps the children to fill up their buckets with water.

The scene has changed, the fire is still going, but the presence of the families' parents and friends have increased, and the farmworkers are not noticeable. Some of the children are still running with buckets. A woman in a white coat is standing looking at the flames with a champagne glass in her hand. A man comes with a dog on a leash with a glass on his hand. A child dressed in an astronaut suit is standing close by. Many of the guests are standing, looking around with drinks in their hands.



Fig. 12 A man with a costume stands in the front of the frame to sing a song.

The camera stops tracking when it reaches where the main fire is, and we see then the farmer workers running around trying to put out the fire. The person in the straw suit is still moving to the right side of the camera. Someone is counting backwards and screams “Happy New Year” a very surreal scene, a big forest is burning down, and people are celebrating while others are rushing to put out the fire. When the person in the straw suit reaches the foreground of the shot positioned in a medium shot, he takes off his mask (Fig. 12). He begins to sing a song in Norwegian. The song is called *Barndomsminne fra Nordland*. He looks calm, considering what is going on around him. He is in the middle of the shot while the background on his right side are workers, and some children are still trying to put out the fire. On his left side, party guests are gathered, drinking and pointing at the fire.

The sound of wood cracking becomes louder, and people start moving backwards when a big tree covered in flames falls over. The diegetic sound of children screaming and burning trees does not interrupt the man singing in front of the camera. He finishes his song, and a person in the background screams “bring me more water”. The scene ends when he turns his back and walks away towards one of the party guests. He takes his wine glass, exchanging it for his mask and walks to towards the background of the scene. The very chaotic scene still shows all the commotion trying to put out the fire as the camera cuts.

As I understand, this sequence of the Norwegian song functions as an interlude in the film. On the one hand, Cuarón focuses the viewer's attention on Cleo's ethnicity, her native language and her belonging to a minority group in Mexico, particularly in the party scene. On the other hand, in the forest fire scene, he places a Norwegian man in the middle of the forest, singing about his homeland. I read this as a displacement of ethnic otherness onto the white Scandinavian character. The *mise-en-scène* marks him as indigenous, with the straw costume and his singing in a completely different language, aloof from what is going on around him. By introducing this stark contrast, Cuarón challenges the spectator to see his ethnicity as exotic and different rather than Cleo's, because despite being a white European, he is the exotic character among upper-class Mexicans, farmers and indigenous house workers in this scene.

4.5 Work of an Auteur

Bordwell (1979) writes, "art cinema defines itself as a realistic cinema" (153). We can understand how Cuarón's film fits into the art cinema category by referring to Bordwell's essay "The Art Cinema as Mode of Film Practice." According to Bordwell's art cinema "It will show us real locations (Neorealism, the New wave) and real problems (contemporary 'alienation,' 'lack of communication,' etc.)" (153). It is not only Cuarón's shooting style that creates a realistic world but also the actress Cleo, Mexico City and his family represented realistically. In interviews with the press, Cuarón has underlined the autobiographical intention in his film *Roma*. The film is based upon his memories of Liboria Rodríguez, an indigenous woman from Oaxaca, who as the director tells the press, "joined the family when Cuarón was nine months old" (Tapley 2019, 41). He provided a long and detailed questionnaire to Liboria before shooting the film in order to get the most details about her time as Cuarón's nanny. This questionnaire included questions about how she started her day, and what was her everyday routine in the family house (Tapley 2019).

Cuarón situates his memories at a specific historical time when he was a child, and he makes an effort to communicate his reality. In this regard, it is similar to the French New Wave film *The 400 Blows* (1959), where François Truffaut delved into his childhood memories. It is also similar to the neo-realist film *Umberto D* (1959) and the use of non-professional actors and real locations by Vittorio De Sica. Cuarón's memories are not the only ones that are communicated in this film but he also uses historical events in Mexico. This is

also the collective memory of Mexico City in the 1970s. The recreation of *El Halconazo* helped Cuarón to enrich the narrative of the film with realism. Cuarón takes care to keep this part of the film as historically accurate as possible. The inclusion of the student protest *El Halconazo* in the film is identifiable by his viewers, especially those from Mexico. This sense of realism can be extended to the use of other real locations as the *Metropolitan* cinema. In the cinema scene, we see Cleo outside a cinema theatre, looking out for Fermín. This chaotic image shows us how the cinemas were in 1970s Mexico. Ana Rosa Mantecón (2017) writes about the experience cinemagoers had in 1970s Mexico, from buying snacks inside the theatre or the big size soda, entering when the film had already started to a room full of people engaged in screen. The glamorous theatres had golden walls and grand chandeliers were hanging in the foyer. Outside the theatre, vendors yelled, trying to attract children to buy toys. When Cleo comes out of theatre looking for Fermín, Cuarón creates a realistic representation of cinemagoing at the time.

The social narratives of the film are associated with the alienation of the working class. Cleo and Fermín's character are part of an alienated social class in Mexico. As Bordwell (1979) writes, "the art cinema uses 'realistic' –that is, psychologically complex—characters" (153). Fermín's ambitions made him took a direction of violence as we see in the Memories of Mexico scene. *Roma* sheds light on the harsh daily reality of domestic workers in Mexico. Financial difficulties lead women like Rodriguez to take care of other people's children in which the affection of the families sometimes turn into a form of enslavement. In *Roma* even with all her misfortunes, Cleo continues to take care of the family and keep up with her duties. This is reinforced in the last scene of the film: clothes still get dirty, and the children still want milkshakes. The day-to-day characteristics of city life are made to feel like touching the feelings of class differences.

Roma does not have any sound montage, all we hear in Cuarón's film is ambient sound; these sounds are connected to the images we see on the film, and also to the background noises at the time of filming each scene. The film is shot in black and white, and this can be interpreted as reflecting the historical period when the film is set. Cuarón style is consistent through most of his films in terms of the *mise-en-scène*, sound, framing and camera movements are part of his films. *Y tu mamá también*, *Children of men*, *Gravity* and *Great Expectations* all have examples of the long takes and contrasting scenes, film traits that he recuses as a director. As Bordwell (1979) states the director uses "stylistic signatures in the narration: technical touches" (155). In most of Cuarón's films, the camera acts as a witness to

the scenes taking place and he invites the viewer to see more than what the main character is seeing. Contrasting scenes are characteristic signatures in Cuarón films. It can be the main character, not noticing the chaos happening in the background or being a spectator of a different story unfolding around them. This can bring seemingly two different worlds into contact with one another. An example of this is the student protest: Cleo and her boss are shopping for a crib, and a mass protest is taking place outside the window and just when you think they will be mere spectators of this event, the stories cross each other with Fermín's appearance. Cuarón also made the theme an open canvas where the characters leave an open ending, and life moves on. There is no big melodramatic finale for either family; rather, they simply continue with their routine.

5 *Roma*'s Reception and Exhibition

In 2018 the director Alfonso Cuarón premiered the film *Roma* globally through the streaming service Netflix. Film critics were excited by the new film by a consecrated *auteur* while the collaboration with Netflix was not well received by some in the film industry (Gleiberman, 2018c). Netflix's decision to screen the film in a limited number of cinemas was not well received by some, as this appears to have only been done so that the film would be eligible for prestigious film awards around the globe. Film critic Owen Gleiberman (2018c) writes: "A vote for "*Roma*" is, on some level, a vote for Netflix, and some may not want to cast that vote." However, this strategy paid off, and *Roma* took several awards including Best Director in the Oscars Academy Awards.

Netflix's efforts to include auteurs on its platform have brought into question how these directors are part of the art film scene. These new tensions between VoD platforms and traditional film exhibition have been a significant part of *Roma*'s reception. Stam (2000) reflects on how an auteur keeps his or her status, even if the medium is different from the established traditional film exhibition. Andrews (2013) also agrees with this view, he writes, "art cinema is useful and desirable, tapping into a very human preference for status and hierarchy, so it is widespread, multiform, and ever changing" (22). This directly addresses the second research question, **how was the reception of *Roma* shaped by the exhibition context? Did critics and others receive the film differently because it was released on a streaming platform?** In the next sections, I address how *Roma* was received in Mexico, Norway and US and UK I also address the exhibition context and how film critics responded to the director's preference for the film's screening.

5.1 *Roma* in Mexico: Film Reception and Exhibition

In this section, I address the film's reception by the Mexican press and how the Netflix's and theatrical exhibition influenced this. How Cuarón took his childhood memories and translated them from the main character's point of view is a predominant topic in the press.

The primary conversations are regarding the status of domestic workers in Mexico. Economic differences is an often-recycled subject in Mexican entertainment. Stories of economic differences can be found widely in Mexican entertainment in both films and soap operas. However, the stories typically follow a traditional plot. The story of a poor girl falling in love with a rich man has repeated in Mexican television for decades, *María la del Barrio*

(1995-1996) and *Marimar* (1994) portray a young girl from a low-income family falling in love with a wealthy and good-looking man from the city. These stories typically finish with a fairy tale happy ending. However, *Roma*'s open ending was surprising for some of the Mexican audience. The Mexican newspaper *El Universal* dedicated a whole column to the issue of differing opinion between film critics and the cinema audience. They point to the review site *Rotten Tomatoes*, where the qualification given to *Roma* differs between these two groups (León 2018). In the column, León (2018) points out that the critic barometer in *rottentomatoes.com* is 96% approval while the audience gives 85%, with one anonymous viewer describing the film as “horribly boring and inconsequential.”

Much of the reception of the film in Mexico focused on the reaction and discussion around the leading actress, Yalitza Aparicio. The film opened up a national debate about the status of domestic workers. In the film, for example, we see that Cleo has no insurance when she goes into labour. The Mexican press took up this subject and papers like *El Pais* (2019), and *Vice Mexico* (2019), dedicated articles to this topic, addressing what the current status of domestic workers in Mexico is. *Vice Mexico* interviewed real domestic workers in Mexico City and asked them how they felt when they watched the film. “If I identify something in *Roma* is that home labour never ends,” says María de la Luz Padua for *Vice* (Ramírez 2019).

Seeing an indigenous woman praised by the foreign press was something surprising in Mexico, especially considering beauty standards tend mainly towards a light-skinned European look (Vicente 2019). This tendency can be observed in many forms of advertising in Mexico. The actress Yalitza Aparicio, a primary schoolteacher from the south city of Oaxaca, gained much fame thanks to Cuarón's film. She became the first indigenous woman to be on the cover of *Vogue* magazine and also the first indigenous woman to be nominated for an Oscar for Best Actress.

However, for the psychologist Ricardo Trujillo, Yalitza is only a marketing vehicle for Hollywood to pose as an inclusive industry (EFE 2019). Her appearance in the film also brought to light a latent racism in Mexico against indigenous people. Newspapers inside and outside Mexico reported that there were a large number of comments on social media about her facial features as an indigenous woman. Indeed her achievements as an actress got less public attention than her looks. Alberto Nájjar (2019) reports on the “polemic” surrounding Aparicio's performance by drawing attention to the racial slurs used against the actress. For some actors in Mexico, the Oscar nomination of Yalitza is unjustified, declaring that her performance was not good enough to receive an award nomination of this kind. Others were

quick to point out how short her career has been, and how she was simply lucky to get this as her first job as an actress. We can understand these comments as racist in nature. Alberto Nájjar (2019) reports on the “polemic” surrounding Aparicio’s performance by drawing attention to the racial slurs used against the actress. Nájjar writes about the criticism Yalitzá went through by these professional actors: “One of the most frequent comments is that her fame came to her was pure luck by chance, and she was not prepared to be an actress” (Nájjar 2019)⁴.

The film received positive responses from film critics like, Jorge Ayala Blanco and Patrick Olliver whom praises the camera travelling movements and the long takes in Cuarón’s film. These critics underline the importance of the meaning in comparison to the constant cutting takes in other films. “A true author work,” writes film critic Carlos Bonfil (2018) for *La Jornada* newspaper. María Fernanda Mujica (2018) writes for the film blog *Otros Cines*: “The beauty of each painting in Rome, which at times reminds us of Italian neo-realism, is undeniable”. Mujica’s observation connects back to the status of the film as art cinema with the use of real locations mentioned earlier.

The theatrical release began in selected cinemas on November 21, 2018 in New York, Los Angeles and Mexico. The Netflix release was on December 14 simultaneously with the general film release in cinemas. Only 40 theatres in all Mexico agreed to project the film. Although we might expect cinemas not to show the film because it was going to be streamed on Netflix, the reasons are actually more complex and practical in nature. Big cinema companies like *Cinepolis* and *Cinemex* did not want to present it because of the tight time frame, but for other theatres, the impediment was that they did not have the necessary equipment to show the film in the format Cuarón made it in. Tonalá cinema had to obtain 4k projectors and the Dolby Atmos audio system. However while not ideal, this format and equipment were not completely necessary, other cinema theatres exhibited the film in 2K and 5,1 surround sound. The film release was overshadowed by a constant battle with cinema theatres, especially in Mexico. One of the big cinema corporations, *Cinemex* argued that the window of time they had to screen the film was too narrow. They felt that less than 90 days was not enough time (Sánchez Fermín 2019). The national institution for film culture in Mexico *Cineteca Nacional* (National Cinémathequè) offered to screen Cuarón’s film from November 22 to December 6 selling out all tickets. With similar dates other cultural spaces

⁴ Uno de los comentarios más frecuentes es que la fama le llegó por suerte, y que además no se preparó para ser actriz

like former Cuarón's University CUEC, *Casa del Cine*, and eight cities around the country like Tijuana, Culiacan and Queretaro. However, Cuarón lamented that the largest cinemas in the country did not project his film. The main cinemas in Mexico pushed to have the usual 90-day exhibition window for the film, but since they could not arrange for this with Netflix, they did not show the film. In November 20 Cuarón tweeted:

I want many more functions in Mexico, we have all the theatres that we have managed to get, sadly, they are 40. To put things in perspective, in Poland it will be exhibited in 57 rooms and in South Korea at 50. Rome is available to all the rooms that want to exhibit it"⁵ (@alfonsocuaron, Nov 18, 2018).

After his tweet, more venues join in to screen *Roma*, still none of the leading companies were part of this initiative.

With the governmental changes in 2018, the new president Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador broke the tradition of living in the official presidential house *Los Pinos*. This was due to serious accusations of corruption during the previous governmental term. Lopez Obrador then reopened the doors of the former presidential palace to the public as a cultural centre and on December 17, 2018, *Roma* screened there. The actresses Yalitza Aparicio and Marina de Távira introduced the film, and the audience enjoyed the film in *Los Pinos*'s heliport. This event was well promoted under #ROMATÓN, where Cuarón encouraged public or private cultural venues to project the film for free. *Roma* was projected in different cultural spaces, private houses, schools and churches and in open air spaces. Even residents of a small town in Chiapas joined in sharing pictures of a *Roma* screening on social media using the hashtag #ROMATÓN.

Cuarón releases the film on Netflix on December 14. We might assume that demonstrates his support of alternative viewing practices on VoD platforms. However, in an interview, Cuarón stated that the film was made for a specific film projector and screen. Not many of the cultural venues where the film was displayed had this equipment (Padilla 2019). So despite it being a "Netflix" film, Cuarón still felt that a traditional theatrical release was preferable.

⁵ "Quiero muchas más funciones en México, tenemos todas las salas que hemos podido conseguir que, tristemente, son 40. Para poner las cosas en perspectiva, en Polonia se exhibirá en 57 salas y en Corea del Sur en 50 Roma está disponible a todas las salas que la quieran exhibir."

In speaking to the press, Cuarón defended the online release of *Roma* while at the same time advocating for the traditional theatrical cinema experience “The complete experience of ‘*Roma*’ is unquestionably in a movie theatre. Nevertheless, I think the experience of watching the film at home will have the same emotional impact.” He says at the film’s Los Angeles premiere (Sippell 2019). What was unusual about *Roma* was the push for theatrical exhibition before its release on the streaming platform. It is unclear whether this was simply a way to make the film eligible for film festivals and awards or if it was a way of making the film accessible to a broader audience that did not have Internet or a Netflix account. In Cuarón own words, his decision to join with Netflix was due to the enthusiasm Netflix showed for a black-and-white Spanish language film Cuarón says, “It was not only its ambition towards the film but the aggressiveness of how it wanted to do things” (Tutt 2018a).

Film critics in Mexico also commented on how Netflix imposed the home viewing experience over the cinemagoing experience. Hidalgo Neira (2018) writing for the web magazine *Reporte Índigo*, defends traditional cinema distribution above the new online forms of experiencing movies, he questions, “What is the future of cinema with streaming companies?”⁶ However, for the production companies, moving to streaming platforms can be more profitable than relying on cinema earnings. Neira remarks that Mexican independent cinema struggles to see any profits after showing in cinemas and they opt for selling their films to streaming company services in order to cover production costs rather than risk a costly wide cinema release. One example is the film *Museo* that after a few weeks in cinemas, passed on to the YouTube Original streaming service.

5.2 *Roma* in Norway: Film Reception and Exhibition

In order to understand the reception of *Roma* in Norway, it is first helpful to have some historical context regarding the impact film has had in this Nordic country. The history of communication and film in Norway is often presented and discussed within the overall context of Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden and Denmark).

In Norway, access to telecommunication systems is taken as common goods, and all citizens have access. The Nordic region has evolved and progressed since the first broadcasting services emerged in 1933 (NRK), and digitalisation is one of the challenges the Nordic countries have faced. Even though these countries are sometimes seen as one system,

⁶ ¿Cuál es el futuro del cine con las compañías del streaming?

each country has historically adapted in different ways to media and communication systems. The Nordic media and communication services (e.g. radio and television and film) have obligations stated by the government, such as offering “cultural, informational, and minority content in return for financial and distributional privileges” (Syvertsen et al., 2014).

Being a relatively small country on a global scale, there is little historical literature in the English language regarding film production, distribution and reception in Norway alone. Nordic film history goes hand in hand with the governmental support and film institutes (Gustafsson and Käätä 2018). In comparison with other cinemas, there has not been a large amount of film content exported to other countries argues Tytti Soila, Astrid Söderbergh Widding, and Gunnar Iversen (1998), “Language barriers, national aspects of the film genre and the low numbers on film production are some of the reasons for this”. The government was involved in production and regulation with the aim of protection from American influence. The fact that the number of film productions is very low in these countries, made the involvement of the state a necessary measure to ensure high film quality (Gustafsson and Käätä 2018, 5). Norwegian films aimed at a specific audience were the main exports in the 1950s. With the introduction of television in the 1950s, the government offered support to various national film industries (4) because of the size of these countries high profits from their national film productions were not expected. It was felt these countries needed to rely on the government. This governmental support provided a great push for film producers; they started following more competitive genre strategies and started gaining popularity internationally. In the Nordic region, there was an early interest in film culture. Like in Mexico, film journals in Nordic countries became popular in the 1950s and 1960s, examples of which are *Film & Kino* in 1965 and *Fant* from 1956-1974 (Hjort & Lindqvist, 2016). A change of mind towards more competitive and commercial productions started from the 1980s. In 2011 Norway became the first country in the world to convert all of its film theatres to digital projection, which was beneficial for small and middle sized theatres that were then able to offer more premieres and extended screenings (Jensen 2011).

There are many art house cinemas in Norway, especially in Oslo, These include *Cinamateket*, run by the Nordic Film Institute, and part of the Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) an organisation in charge of the preservation of the world’s film heritage, *Cinamateket* opened in 1984 and showed independent cinema, classic films and alternative films (Lindfors, Nissen, Oppoyen, and Muinonen 2000). There is also *Vega Scene*, opened in 2013, which functions as a cinema they and performance space.

5.2.1 *Roma's* Reception in Norway

Roma (2018) screened in Trømsø, Trondheim and Oslo. The Norwegian Film Distribution was in charge of the film's distribution for the short distribution window. The film was projected in these three Norwegian cities from the 7 to December 14. The press focussed on how the film is dedicated to the women that raised Cuarón, the stylistic aspects of the film and the portrait of the family issues occurring at the same time as the social issues that happened in 1970 Mexico. Online magazines are the main source for my focus on *Roma's* reception in Norway.

Morten Ståle Nilsen (2018) writes for *Vg.no*, "*Roma* is the first full-blown movie masterpiece to go straight to Netflix". Furthermore, he comments on the limited amount of cinemas that will show the film and its recommendation not to miss the film. Øyvor Dalan Vik (2018) remarks that *Roma* should be experienced on the big screen, writing, "Alfonso Cuarón [sic] has made a movie that should be seen in the cinema if you have the opportunity, or choose your home's biggest screen when the movie is released".

Filmpolitiet writes about the three awards *Roma* won at the Academy Awards. And how Cuarón in his speech, thanked to his old friends Emmanuel Lubezki and Alejandro G. Iñárritu (Vik 2018). In the journal, *Dagbladet* Tom Stalsberg (2018) comments on the actor's performance writing, "So close, so ingenious and so trustworthy". He concentrates on how Cuarón portrays the every day life of Cleo. "*(Roma)* is semibiographical without being sentimental or clichéd". The art house cinema *Vega Scene* (2018) writes how Cuarón's film is a "beautiful love letter to the women who raised him". This art house cinema had one screening of *Roma* on December 8, 2018.

The reception in Norway was mainly centred on the Norwegian song scene, and its identification of the Norwegian culture, the Norwegian actor, and song. Cuarón remembered a foreign family who used to spend time with them when he was a child. For this reason, a Norwegian family was included in the scene of the New Year's Eve celebration. During this scene, there is an unexpected fire in the forest, and one of the Norwegian family guests sings the song *Barndomsminne fra Nordland* (*Childhood memory from Nordland*) while the other guests and farmworkers attempt to put out the fire. The actor is Kjartan Halvorsen, an engineering professor from University in Monterrey Mexico. *Pål Nordseth* (2018) notices the contrast of having the actor singing in the foreground of the screen while in the background the forest is in flames he writes that the actor "plays a limited, but noteworthy role in a surrealistic and not-so-slightly humorous, low-key cut in the film". In an interview for *Filter*

Film of TV (2018), the actor was surprised at how important this scene became in the film. The NRK blog states “The award for *Roma* is the closest we get to a Norwegian award during the Golden Globe awards. In a scene with a forest fire, Kjartan Halvorsen from Stavern sings the song ‘*Childhood memory from Nordland*’”.

5.3 *Roma* in US and UK: Film Reception and Exhibition

Roma was screened at several film festivals and received numerous awards in both the UK and the US. The New York Film Critics’ Circle named *Roma* Best Picture of 2018 together with the Chicago Film Critics’ Association and the London Critics Circle. *Roma* was awarded the Golden Lion at the 2018 Venice Film Festival and also competed at the Toronto International Film Festival. Furthermore, it was nominated in 10 categories at the 91st Academy Awards. *Roma* won 3 of the categories including Best Director, Best Cinematography and Best International Feature Film. It also earned the same three awards at the Bafta Awards, among many others.

While different film festivals and award ceremonies welcomed *Roma*, the lack of traditional cinema release was questioned by some film critics. One journalist questioned Cuarón about the decision of a combined release on Netflix with some claiming this as the death of independent cinema (Sippell 2019a). Cuarón defended the streaming platform because he knew that more people would see his film. At the Golden Globes award ceremony he argued that he made the decision to show the film on Netflix: in order to reach a wider audience.

In how many cinemas do you think a Mexican film in black and white, in Spanish and Mixteco, that is a drama without stars — how big did you think it would be as a conventional theatrical release? (Sippell 2019a).

He also thanked Netflix at his speech, “for bringing this very unlikely film into mainstream awareness” (Collins 2019).

Roma is a low budget film compared to Cuarón’s previous productions, like *Children of Men* (2006) and *Gravity* (2013). He uses non-professional actors, films in black and white in the Spanish and Mixteco languages. A film with these characteristics is typically not

considered for the main best picture Academy award category and it is instead considered in the foreign film category. But in the case of *Roma* it was in both categories.

The director Steven Spielberg opposed Netflix's inclusion in future Academy Award ceremonies. His opinion earned weight because he is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences. Spielberg makes the distinction between theatrical exhibition and television format by saying "Once you commit to a television format, you're a TV movie" (ITV News 2018). In an interview with the press during the publicity tour of one of his recent films, he criticized Netflix's strategy of reduced cinema distribution: "I don't believe that films that are just given a token screening in a couple of theatres for less than a week should qualify for the Academy Award nomination" (ITV News 2018). He wants to request tightening the rules by which films can be considered for an Oscar Award. According to *Vanity Fair* magazine, *Roma* was shown in cinema theatres for only 3 weeks, and mainly that was a strategic move on the part of Netflix to ensure that the film would qualify for award consideration (Sperling 2018). But for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science, Spielberg's opinion was out-dated. They responded saying, "Netflix does so much for filmmakers in terms of enabling them to make their movies and get them out to the world" (Lang 2019). Responding to Spielberg's comments, Netflix tweeted,

We love cinema. Here are some things we also love:

- Access for people who can't always afford, or live in towns without, theaters
- Letting everyone, everywhere enjoy releases at the same time
- Giving filmmakers more ways to share art

These things are not mutually exclusive (@NetflixFilm March 4, 2019)

In *Rolling Stone* magazine, film critic Peter Travers (2019) defends Cuarón's work but also criticises the release strategy, writing, "Count me among the cinephiles who claim that this widescreen wonder will never play as well as it does in a theater in front of all those wonderful people out there in the dark. But a work of art can't be compromised by how or where we watch it — and this is a true work of art."

Roma's aesthetic is often mentioned where Cuarón is praised by the use of the camera, and the overall composition although there is a consensus that the pace of the film will not be fully comprehended by all type of audiences. Many film critics feel that Cuarón is a great visual artist. Some have discussed how Cuarón's use of cinematography and his crafting of every shot delivers a more personal auteurist style. But it has also been observed that not

every spectator will enjoy watching such a slow-paced film. However, film critic Henry Harrison (2019), argues that the pace of the film works well, allowing the spectator to focus on little details that make the spectator feel close to the characters. Harrison praises *Roma*'s particular aesthetic qualities, arguing "the director's use of lengthy stills and slow pans gives one time to absorb and process what is happening."

Regarding the film's release Peter Bradshaw (2018) writes how art films typically have very few cinema releases in the UK, but that with the Netflix release strategy, *Roma* "is getting a wider showing than others in the past". Of the film itself, Peter Bradshaw writes for *The Guardian* that it is a "Triumphant blend of tragedy, comedy and absurdity."

David Agren (2019) writes for *The Guardian* that *Roma* "stirs up nostalgia" for the middle class in Mexico. He feels that the film brings to light the problems in Mexican society regarding domestic workers rights and their need to have access to basic social security services and medical insurance. This is an issue highlighted in the film when Cleo is brought to the hospital to deliver her baby, and the nurse asks her employer if she has insurance. Film critic Molly M. Martinez (2019) remarks that Cleo, the domestic worker played by Aparicio, "is a beautiful portrayal of the overlooked feminine strength that 'machismo,' an entrenched and historical ideal of proud masculinity, undermines."

For Cuarón the selection of the actress playing his former childhood nanny was very important, because of her physical resemblance and qualities (Tutt 2018b). Ashley Hoffman (2019) writes in *Time Magazine* that the actress Aparicio gives an emotional performance but was not ready for the spotlight she received with all the film's awards and ceremonies. Aparicio stirred up the press during *Roma*'s exhibition for being the first indigenous woman participating as the main character in a film by a well-known film director.

The Harvard Crimson pointed out how important it is that Aparicio's part represents the people that have been excluded from the screen for so long (Martinez 2019). *The New York Times magazine* interviewed Aparicio regarding her life changing role from a primary school teacher in a rural town in the south of Mexico to an Oscar nominated actress. The article addresses how inequality is rampant in the Mexican population (Tillman 2019). This was especially obvious when a Mexican TV network made a brownface parody of Aparicio on national television.

Film critic Richard Brody (2018) notes the lack of dialogue Aparicio has in the film and that her story is not completely told. He writes, "[Cuarón] turns the character of Cleo into a stereotype that's all too common in movies made by upper-middle-class and intellectual

filmmakers about working people...a silent angel whose inability or unwillingness to express herself is held up as a mark of her stoic virtue". Film critic Slavoj Žižek (2019) criticises how spectators are cherishing Cleo. He argues that they are doing it for the wrong reasons and that her character needs to break free from her own "goodness is itself a trap, the object of implicit critique which denounces her dedication as the result of her ideological blindness". Richard Brody (2018) writes for the *New Yorker* magazine: "In his effort to make his characters universal, he makes them neutral and generic. For all its worthy intentions, *Roma* is little more than the righteous affirmation of good intentions."

Aparicio's performance had mixed opinions, questions, criticisms and praises, her ethnicity is continuously mentioned, her looks, language and place of origin. In a way, the press no matter the country contributed to this alienation of ethnicities no matter the intention. In Mexico Aparicio's performance was commended by some. However, her ethnicity made her unlikely to develop a significant film career. In the US and European reception, Aparicio's acting was always celebrated with a commentary associated on her ethnicity. Both of these negative and positive types of reception still lead to a reinforced alienation of cultures.

The global tendencies in *Roma's* reception are mainly inclined towards the exhibition format of the film. The limited cinema theatre distribution of *Roma* and subsequent availability on Netflix resulted in a discussion between the national multiplexes in Mexico and Netflix. In the US and the UK press, there were questions regarding the lost art film. And the press in Norway put attention the low numbers of film venues to project *Roma* in Norway. The debate centred on Netflix not being seen as a legitimate venue for watching a film like *Roma* and it was mainly encouraging to watch the film at theatres. Cuarón himself stating his preference would be to view this film in theatres in a specific format compounded this view.

6 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have studied the film *Roma*, its visual aesthetic, its place as an auteur film and its dual theatrical and online distribution. I also carried out discursive analysis of the film's reception in Mexico, Norway, UK and US. Using the case study of *Roma* informed by scholarly literature on “new cinephilia” and traditional cinephilia I approached the question of whether a major art cinema director joining Netflix legitimised the platform for cinephiles and critics as a place for appreciating art cinema. I also addressed how the reception of *Roma* was shaped by the exhibition context, asking whether critics received the film differently because it was released on a streaming platform.

In order to understand the context for this study, it is essential to understand the recent historical changes to practices of film spectatorship as well as scholarly and critical reactions to these changes. Traditionally cinephilia has certain rules about how best to experience a film and these have been threatened by new technologies, from the introduction of the VHS, later the DVD, cinema multiplexes and now video-on-demand streaming services like Netflix. This culture of cinephilia is changing as viewers are moving from the cinemas to the home, resulting in an ongoing debate regarding the fate of traditional cinephilic practices in the new global landscape. Netflix challenges the perceived idea that it is a commercial platform for mainstream cinema when they collaborate with major art cinema directors like Cuarón.

In her article “The Decay of Cinema,” Susan Sontag (1996) rejected the idea of extending the same ideals of cinephilia to the commercialised cinema venues as to the art cinemas in New York City that were gradually closing “as movies became, mainly, one of a variety of habit-forming home entertainments” Sontag writes. However, more recently, scholars like Jullier, Leveratto and Andrews (2012a) see the changes to cinema culture in the digital age as signalling a democratisation of art cinema. They are positive about the step forward towards a global cinephilia where,

The cinephile today is inscribed in circles, both global and local; having commercial (films) of the year to television series never broadcasted in France. Lastly, cinephilia has been globalized, as evidenced by the systematic use of English neologisms by some cinephiles. This situation leads to a proliferation of cinematographic experience and a normalization of the cultural use of cinema (Laurent, and Leveratto. 2012a).

With this view of cinephilia as a global phenomenon, these scholars see an increased accessibility for ordinary cinemagoers and greater participation in forums of exchange.

Jennifer Hessler (2018) argues that, even though traditional institutions have migrated to home viewing practices, some cinephilic tendencies stay the same. She takes Mubi as an example of a platform with a selective catalogue aimed at a select group of film viewers. For Hessler, it “remains to be seen whether a model of art film distribution and the cinephilic interaction that many devout art film enthusiasts valorize can prosper in the ever-turbulent digital landscape” (14). I argue that traditional cinephilia and new viewing practices have come together with the selective content offered on these new platforms. These platforms highlight the curatorial aspect of film selection as Bosma points out “The phenomenon of cinephilia itself could be taken as a connecting theme for curating a film programme.” (28). In contrast to platforms like Mubi, Netflix integrates an extensive catalogue of art films, documentaries, TV series and reality television. With Netflix’s ambition to have a diverse catalogue and a broad target audience, it seems unlikely that Netflix will be considered as a legitimate art cinema platform for cinephiles.

I have argued that Netflix breaks down the boundaries of traditional cinephilic institutions by entering the domain of art cinema, thus changing the exhibition landscape and redefining what it means to experience art cinema. Whereas platforms like Mubi and FilminLatino actively encourage cinephile exchange in the form of discussion forums and blogs, Netflix, limits the possibility of intellectual exchange between viewers. It should be noted that Netflix’s current ambition does not meet the curatorial expectations of cinephilia, nor is there a platform for discussion or debate, which is a cornerstone of cinephilic practice.

This thesis shows that Netflix plays a mediator role in contemporary film culture by pushing into every possible market (Matrix 2014). The platform is attempting to reconcile art film and commercial cinema, so the viewer can have a wider viewing selection. Netflix is manoeuvring into the art film scene by submitting its own productions to film festivals across the globe, which is not a move that have been well received by all. Traditionally-minded cinephiles such as director of Cannes Film Festival Thierry Frémaux, see streaming services as a threat to traditional theatrical exhibition. However, when Frémaux argues that Netflix films should be screened in cinemas, he is also including commercial cinemas such as multiplexes, which used to be considered a threat to art cinema venues. Coming back to Sontag’s mourning for the traditional practices of French cinephiles. This complicates our understanding of traditional cinephilia as favouring art house cinemas. Most importantly,

because of these tensions between Frémaux and Netflix, the opportunity to screen an art film like *Roma* at the Cannes Festival was lost.

By understanding the historical context of cinephilia in Mexico, one can better understand the status of *Roma* as an art film. As I have shown, Mexico has a rich history of art cinema including important figures such as Buñuel and Eisenstein and cinephilic culture in Mexico began as early as 1906 with the creation of ciné-clubs (Mantecón 2017). With the purpose of showing non-commercial films, these venues were created as an alternative to the commercial exhibition circuit and later the multiplex. After the introduction of the VHS, DVD and digital technologies in Mexico in the 1990s, the control of long-established media companies like Televisa Group has been reshaped losing control of the market. Competing against them, video-on-demand platforms like Netflix arrived in Mexico in 2011. Since then, Netflix has been part of the film industry bringing its original content crafted towards the Mexican audience like *Camelia la Tejana* (2014), and *Club de Cuervos*. (2014).

I place Cuarón within this tradition of Mexican cinephilia and show how his auteurist style of long takes is consistent from films like *Gravity* and *Children of Men* to *Roma*. In understanding *Roma* as an art film, it has also been important to take into account Cuarón's attempt at aesthetic, historical and social realism. As Bordwell (1979) describes, "realism is palpable" in the art film. In *Roma*, we can appreciate this realism with the use of lighting, ambient sound, real locations, and everyday events, all important qualities of the art film as outlined by Bordwell.

The realist aesthetics can be attributed to the way he limits the amount of cutting during scenes. Instead, as I show in my scene analysis, there is an extensive use of panning, tracking shots and almost no close-ups. As well as engaging with the real life story of his nanny and the historical events of his home country, Cuarón also engages with his own cinephilia in the loving representation of the *Metropolitan* cinema in Mexico City.

In the press, there is little debate on whether *Roma* is art cinema or not. There is a general consensus that *Roma* is an art film and Cuarón is globally recognised as an auteur. However, this thesis outlines Cuarón's role as an auteur and the film's status as art cinema in order to explore the significance of the film's exhibition strategy. A Mexican film from a well-known Hollywood director returning to his hometown was of significant interest to the public. The film received significant attention because of the Netflix distribution strategy, but my research shows that the film also received attention because of the main character's ethnicity. Several critics focussed on Aparicio's role, and those that did not mention her ethnicity did comment

that she was not a professional actress. The critical response to Aparicio and to other indigenous actors in contemporary Mexican cinema would be an interesting direction for further study.

My research found that *Roma*'s reception in Mexico was shaped by multiplex exhibitors like *Cinépolis* and *Cinemex* who felt that the time frame between the theatrical release and the Netflix release was too narrow, resulting in a disappointing distribution in Mexico for Cuarón. The distribution strategy with Netflix resulted in potentially reduced exposure in Mexico for Cuarón's homecoming film. However, it can be argued that the global viewing was significantly larger than would normally be the case for an art film.

The limited cinema distribution of *Roma* and availability on Netflix resulted in a conflict with important figures in film culture. Director Steven Spielberg rejected the idea that a film intended for home viewing could be considered for prestigious film awards rather than television awards and disagreed with it taking three Oscars at the Academy Awards. However, my historical framework in this thesis sheds light on the contradictions in this type of rejection by serious cinema spokesmen. I see Cuarón embracing the popular platform of Netflix as a distributor for his art film as being similar to the film critics from *Cahiers du Cinéma* like Truffaut and Godard embracing certain mainstream Hollywood cinema in the 1950s, calling the films artistic masterpieces and the directors auteurs. At the time, this was also seen as a scandalous and polemical attitude. Even if there is disagreement about whether Netflix is a legitimate venue for watching art cinema, Cuarón's film has retained its status as art.

My research found that the reception of *Roma* in Norway was mainly centred on the forest fire scene emphasising the Norwegian song, Norwegian cultural identity and the Norwegian actor. One Norwegian response to this scene was that it could be the closest Norway ever gets to winning an award at the Oscars (Vik 2019). I argued that the song's inclusion also strengthens the film's status as global art cinema, bridging the cultures of Norway and Mexico. I consider that the integration of *Barndomsminne fra Nordland* gives a sense of a dreamlike interlude within the plot. During the film, one identifies with the main character Cleo and her difficult role as maid and nanny to a wealthy family. But during this scene, there is a change in tone when the actor begins to sing in Norwegian. I see this foreigner coming out of the trees as a supernatural or exotic element which challenges the traditional western portrayal of Mexicans as the exotic "other," replacing this representation with a blonde, white Scandinavian man. This scene results in the film being not just a Mexican film, but a global

film. As Galt and Schoonover (2010) write, “The term ‘global’ speaks to the international address, distribution, audience, and aesthetic language of the art cinema” (20). The international viewer in the UK, US and Norway is challenged to see the Norwegian character as a foreigner in the film.

This study reveals that thanks to digital technologies, new opportunities are opening up for the distribution of art cinema. Currently, Netflix and some other platforms have taken up this role. We may find that this new practice of exhibiting art cinema on VOD platforms will be reconciled with and assimilated into traditional cinephilia in the future. However, because of the diversity of content on Netflix, it is too early to tell whether it will become a legitimate platform for cinephiles and critics. While it is true that Netflix has pushed for its own productions to be part of the cultural art film scene, this might create a contradiction in their business model because unlike smaller platforms that have focused on art film specifically, Netflix pursues all genres of film from artistic to mainstream. Netflix has currently taken on the position of producing new content while other platforms like Mubi and FilminLatino focus on art film and the curatorial aspect of cinephilia. In the future, art cinema may increasingly share the same platform and the same exhibitions sites as commercial cinema, and there will perhaps then be less tension. Recently Netflix released a new function that again highlights the contradictory approach of Netflix to both art cinema and commercial cinema. This function allows the viewer to speed-watch shows, angering critics like Hannah Woodhead (2019) who writes in *NME* “you wouldn’t listen to Radiohead’s ‘OK Computer’ on fast forward, so why watch *Taxi Driver* or *The Godfather* in the same way?” Indeed, it is hard to reconcile such a feature with Netflix’s recent declaration of love for cinema on twitter (@NetflixFilm 2019) nor with the traditional viewing culture of cinephilia.

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