

## Is it possible to make an infinite film?

Arman Fatic

Maybe the better question than the titular one would be, why would somebody even want to try something like that? Well as a long-time cinephile, and a film critic, in the past five years I developed incredible love towards films with extremely long runtime. At first, I just enjoyed the big-budget, good old celluloid classics like: „Spartacus“, „Laurence of Arabia“, „The Deer Hunter“ etc. Then I got interested in a bit more experimental approaches to film, and the works of Lav Diaz (The Woman Who Left, Season of the Devil) or Béla Tarr (Satantango), and it was just splendid. The way these directors were telling meaningful and emotionally strong but simple and „low budget“ stories was just amazing for me!

And then, David Lynch released his „Twin Peaks: The Return“ which once again changed my perception of what is the film. Lynch released his newest work as 13 episode TV series, but let's be honest, there are no cliff-hangers, there are no clearly marked places where „one chapter“ should end and the other one should begin. Same could also be said about new Nicolas Winding Refn's „Too Old to Die Young“. These are more films than TV shows, they are just cut down to a smaller, one-hour portion, for the sake of the platforms they are released on.

We all can agree that the film has evolved over the centuries, and so did the audience. We don't live anymore in times where this is a form of spectacle where you need to dress up nicely and go to your local theatre so you can have shared the experience with strangers for a couple of hours. Streaming services opened up this new world of binge-watching where the new norm is watching 6/8/12-hour-long „tv shows“ in one/ two sittings. Naturally, as we are getting more and more accustomed to this new norm, there will be directors and productions who will want to try and make even longer movies/ tv series. So why not an infinite film?

Before we get into technical aspects of how to make such an absurd thing, let's check out what are currently the longest films made, how they were done, and what makes them special.

### Never-ending film 101

If you do a simple Google search and have a bit of faith in provided data, some of the current longest-running films are all experimental works and they are:

- „Logistics“ (51420 min or 570 hours or 35 days, 17 hours)),
- „Modern Times Forever“ (14400 minutes or 240 hours or 10 days),
- „Cinématon“ (9000 minutes or 150 hours or 6 days 6 hours),

- „The Cure for Insomnia“ (5220 minutes or 87 hours or 3 days, 15 hours).

When I started digging deeper into these films, I discovered what is the formula for the extremely long film form. So the concept of “The Cure for Insomnia” is poet L . D. Groban reading his 4,080-page poem over the course of 3 days, 15 hours. Besides Groban reading, there are occasionally spliced clips of pornographic videos and heavy metal music. This movie could be easily surpassed by any filmmaker deciding to fully cover oral poem/ book “1001 nights”. Actually, any good “Hakawati” (middle eastern storyteller) could surpass the runtime of this film.

“Cinématon”, on the other hand, consists of a series of over 2,000 silent cinématons. Every cinématon is 3 minutes and 25 seconds long, and they all showcase various celebrities, artists, journalists and closest friends/family of the director. The project started in 1978, so it is obvious that the concept is

inspired by Andy Warhol's "15 minutes of fame" where each person in front of the camera is doing whatever they want during the allotted time. The problem of "Cinématon" comes in defying the form. It sounds more like a performative/ conceptual art form, rather than film form. If we really take "Cinématon" as a film, then we could probably also take Brian Eno's "77 Million Paintings" as a film. Yes' Eno's work is played simultaneously on 12 screens (+ the surroundings) rather than just one, but still it lasts 77 days which is way longer than "Cinématon".

"Modern times forever" also belongs more into conceptual art form than in the film. The film was made by Danish artists' group Superflex and it shows how Helsinki's Stora Enso headquarters building would decay over the period of a few thousand years. Because the film was originally projected on the building itself, and because it is hard to find its runtime value (because the ageing process could have been slowed down or speeded up without any gain/loss), it is really hard to see it as the genuine film.

The currently longest film in the world, "Logistics" actually has the best idea of how to create this extreme film form. So, the story behind the film sounds like this: In 2008, two artists, Erika Magnusson and Daniel Andersson asked themselves where do today's electronic gadgets come from. So, they decided to follow the life cycle of a pedometer, from manufacturing plant in Shenzhen, over Málaga, Algeciras, Bremerhaven, Gothenburg, Insjön, Rotterdam all the way to the end sales in Stockholm. The whole journey of the pedometer took 35 days and 17 hours.

### **The purpose of the never-ending film**

From a technical aspect, it would be rather easy to make an extremely long film today. As we can see, making the long film mostly relies on the story that can constantly evolve. So, the new longest film in the world just needs to be live-streamed instead of filmed. If you put a live stream camera on a power supply on the field and plant a tree on the field, you could easily follow the progress how does the tree grow.

But here is the problem, who in their right mind would just sit there and spend their days looking at the empty field, waiting for a tree to grow? The problem of extremely long films is, their relevance, and I am not really sure is there something that we are gaining with their length? It is just the game of endurance in the end. But is there a way to make these films more interesting and embracing? If we could only find a way to make an extremely long film that people wouldn't find boring and unnecessary.

I believe there is a little bit of hope in the concept of live streaming the film, I mentioned a bit earlier. Because of this, I would like for a moment to focus on the potential of this form. Reality TV is using live streaming for decades now, there are dedicated TV channels/Websites for this kind of video form, and yes, there are some people who don't

find this boring and unnecessary. Truth to be told, not so long ago, we witnessed a gruesome case of live streaming that people found actually really engaging.

So in this next bit, I would like to introduce an article from the Sky News published on their website on Tuesday 19 March 2019. (Link to the whole article: [shorturl.at/sGI16](https://www.shorturl.at/sGI16))

“New Zealand: No one reported terror attack live-stream to Facebook for 29 minutes

Facebook says the footage was successfully reuploaded to its platform 300,000 times in the first 24 hours after the attack. No one reported the live-stream of the New Zealand terror attacks until the video had ended, Facebook has claimed. The social network said fewer than 200 people watched the footage during the live broadcast - adding that it was seen about 4,000 times in total before it was taken down. According to the tech giant, the video was first reported to moderators 29 minutes after the stream began, and 12 minutes after the live feed ended.”

As we can see, people are already accustomed to live-streaming as a form, so there were none reports and gruesome reactions of the New Zealand terrorist attack for almost half an hour since it happened. Our perception of video form “evolved” so much, sometimes it is so hard to recognise where the filmed fiction ends and where the reality begins. To those 4000 people who had seen the live stream of New Zealand attack on Facebook, it all probably looked like some first-person shooter game, or maybe it was even similar to Russian-American Sci-Fi film *Hardcore Henry*.

### **The limitations of live-streaming**

Let’s summarise what we have so far. If we wanted to create a new extreme length film or even the infinite film, we would need to use live streaming. Besides that, we would need to have an engaging story, that relies on one story about people in actions rather than on nature, the pure passage of time and too many different stories. The only problem now is the limitation of live streaming, or to be precise, working with one lens, in one continuous take. But, we can learn some lessons from already existing films made in “one continuous take”. Here, I’ll just focus on three more popular ones, Alfred Hitchcock’s “*Rope*”, Alejandro G. Iñárritu’s “*Birdman*” and Sebastian Schipper’s “*Victoria*”.

For all of you who know the stories of these three films, and how they were made in one take or made to look like they are done that way, please be patient. The process of how these films were made is extremely important to understand how we might make our “infinite” film.

So, from the first mention of Hitchcock’s “*Rope*,” it is obvious that it was impossible to make an analogue film in one continuous take, because of the limitations of the reels. One film reel could provide 8-10 minutes of continuous filming before Hitchcock needed to switch to a new one. So, the great author improvised, build his film stage in 3 parts and found a subtle way to unnoticeably switch roles, mostly during the movement from one part of the stage to another. To the film purists, yes, there are also few scenes that break this continuous take, but still, Hitchcock was one of the early filmmakers who experimented with this form and is more than worth a mention.

The technique Hitchcock made, because of his limitation with reels was later used also by Iñárritu in his “*Birdman*”. The camera moves around with the characters, but as soon as there are no characters on screen, and there is just empty, static “room” there is a cut. In the end, the film was just masterfully seamlessly stitched together. This all seems like a good option for live streaming. Whenever the camera battery is low, the shot of the “infinite” streamed film would just need to become static, until the camera charges. In theory, it would also be possible to make this kind of film with dual cameras rigged to a certain kind of gimbal, where when one camera’s battery is getting low, filming just continues on the second one, with minimal jitter. This just shows that technically this kind of film would be possible.

When it comes to Sebastian Schipper's "Victoria", which was actually shot in a single take, we can see how this kind of film could be done from the actors' standpoint. Schipper's actors rehearsed for the film as they would rehearse for a theatre play, everything was pre-planned and when they got out on the streets to film, they just had one trial, which worked fine, before shooting the complete film. With its runtime of 138 minutes, it is the longest-running single-take film so far. 138 minutes isn't really extreme length when thinking in a sense of the theatre play. So in theory, there are no troubles in trying to live stream, let's say 140 minutes long film.

### **Live streaming the film doesn't really mean infinite film...**

Or does it? Once again, let's return to the problem of extreme length films. It is hard to find an engaging story that would keep people watching the film for insane amounts of time. Yes, it would rather be interesting and spectacular to try and live stream drama film like "Victoria". Yes, live streaming would open up such amazing opportunities for a lot of different genres, I mean just try and imagine something

like “Blair Witch Project” or “Jigsaw” live-streamed? It would easily find its audiences and would be at least for some time an amazing cinematic cash grab gimmick.

But then again, those would be live streams that would last less than 3 hours. Even if we had mastermind scriptwriter that would make a story that might be streamed for let’s say 36 days, if we had actors ready to live a film for more than a month and if there were no camera battery, or internet connection issues, who would be ready to invest it’s time to watch this kind of a film. This is just a common-sense logic, without even getting into the problems of budgeting and earning money from the film, finding the live streaming platform that would be capable to handle such a thing and copyright issues (because if you live stream film let’s say on Facebook, how much of the film is yours and how much of it is Facebooks).

### **Back to theatre**

Maybe the ultimate solution to the infinite film actually lies deep within the theatre, from which we already got inspired and borrowed a lot of ideas for live streaming the film. If we broke the 4th wall with live streaming film, we would practically enter the territory of infinity. If we figured out the way to cross the bridge between reality and fiction, in theory, we would have an infinite film.

So here is the idea. The infinite film can only be played in a film theatre. Imagine any kind of drama that could be played across the city streets and live-streamed. Then just add this ending to the script: and they enter the cinema. By entering the cinema, at the end of the film, during live streaming the film, actors are breaking the barrier between what is real and what is shown on the silver screen. The rules of space and time in film and reality are broken, what was shown on the screen just became reality, and reality is (for now) in theory infinite.

Actually, for making something like this we wouldn’t even need to have a continuously shot, live stream film. For the filmmakers that want to be more flexible with the lenses, takes, battery life etc. there is another way to make an infinite film. What if you end your script this way: “x is looking at his computer screen: CUT TO: Live Stream”. In this sense, it would be possible to make a regular film, which would give a movie projectionist the role of “a second editor”. Basically film would be played in the regular way in the cinema all the way to the last minute, where the projectionist would during the scene “x is looking at his computer” just need to switch screen from the projection device (DCP/ media player on computer etc.) to a screen of e.g. Facebook feed where there is a live stream of actors that are going to enter the cinema to break the barrier of fiction and reality by entering, once again to the cinema.

### **So, is this the future of the cinema?**

Overall, it doesn't seem like live stream might overtake what we perceive as a film today, but rather it is a nice gimmick. Live streaming might be a new and unexplored ground for filmmakers and audiences that could be way worthier our time in the next decade than VR films and gamification of the form. As at the moment, there are no cases of live streaming films and there are no filmmakers publicly talking about making the infinite film, all of this just stays as just another unexplored experimental film theory.