

Nuestro Tiempo / Our Time

Carlos Reygadas has made five very distinctive features over the last two decades. Each one is strikingly different in tone yet immediately recognisable as coming from his unique sensibility. While his films all have strong narratives, it is Reygadas' masterful use of cinematic language which defines his elemental stories in wonderfully unfamiliar ways. Reygadas uses the full spectrum of cinema's tools to revitalise the way in which he, and therefore we, see, hear and most importantly, feel the everyday world. These films are designed not to give us answers, but encourage us to question the world around us, to make us feel, to render us open.

Nuestro Tiempo is, on the level of story, a love triangle. A man, supposedly all for theoretical polyamory, finds himself being torn apart by the real prospect of losing the love of his wife for another man. It's a story which packs quite an emotional punch. But it is not the story itself, so much as how Reygadas tells his story that elevates this film into something so special. Nuestro Tiempo works more like a piece of music than traditional narrative cinema. It is structured like a symphony. It uses repetition, duration, tempo and the sweep of its images to cast its spell on our imaginations.

Reygadas uses his cinema to explore a strange tension between the weakness of being human, of navigating everyday life, played out against something more cosmic, something grander and out of our control, perhaps even out of our time. Nature and its rhythms seem to be what call the shots in this monumental piece of cinema. There is a musicality to the cutting and the rhythm of the images which works as an expression of feeling, a palimpsest of emotion and wonder. This is cinema which is not merely content to serve up story and character (of which there is plenty to enjoy) but chooses to employ the kaleidoscopic integration of the total fabric of cinema to place us inside the film, playing our mood and feelings like a master musician. Sound, images, and an acute sense of rhythm – found both within the complex framing of shots within shots as well as the actual cutting itself, work together in a manner unique to cinema as an art form. This is not filmed theatre, it is not based on any verbal or literary form of storytelling captured on film. It is pure cinema. It's rare to see a filmmaker trust so completely in their medium. And it is exhilarating. The rhythm of Nuestro Tiempo's shots veers from still emptiness one moment to a frenzy of images and sound in another. In any given moment we find ourselves immersed by Reygadas in intense moments of psychodrama with his characters only to abruptly juxtapose them with the empty landscapes his characters have only just vacated. We are asked by the flow of sounds and images to contemplate how little these people's lives mark the physical world in which they live. There is a relativism to it all. Throughout all Reygadas' work, and especially in both Our Time and Post Tenbras Lux, we are shown explicitly that knowledge, truth and morality exist only in relation to the society, culture and historical context in which we live – while nature is the only absolute, towering over us, beyond our understanding.

Reygadas has given us a fascinating exploration of human need but he has done much more than that. He gives us space and time within the film to form our own responses to the work in front of us. We are never told what to think. Instead Reygadas encourages us to participate in his film. To think and feel our way through the complex world he has made for us to inhabit across these three short hours. He asks us bigger questions exploring an idea that no matter how all-consuming and intense these characters' lives are for them, there is an implacable universe that continues on, unblinking, as if we pesky humans barely existed. It's at once unnerving, stimulating and profoundly moving. It's only Our Time for a fleeting moment, so we had best enjoy it while we can.

Simon Ward