

Editors

Letter from the Editors

The academic paper is the primary method of evaluating an undergraduate student's work, yet its life is often short. Often written in a hurry, revised once, reread a couple of times, marked with comments and a grade, the paper is glanced at one last time before being lost within a stack of similarly forgotten pages.

Despite the haste, students at Brown take their work seriously. Writing an academic paper is as much a creative process as it is a learning one; it requires a great deal of time, imagination, and energy to fill a page with words, never mind to make them cohere elegantly. Occasionally, those words do add up to more than just a letter-grade, though, and mature into an argument worth pursuing further than is required.

(parenthesis) is founded on the assumption that undergraduate papers deserve more than an early retirement in a dusty file-cabinet. We hope to extend the life of the paper by publishing those that succeed at fulfilling more than mere course requirements.

Each paper in this first issue was handpicked by a group of Brown students. The author then worked with an editor to revise it, smoothing over any rashly composed passages and overlooked blemishes. Hopefully, the finished product is not only polished, but also comprehensible outside its intended discipline, expanding its readership and extending its life.

Each issue will feature a dozen or so papers from the full range of humanities. This first issue features papers from students in the English, Modern Culture and Media, History, Comparative Literature, International Relations, and Music departments, and there is still room for growth. Our ultimate goal is to provide a forum for cross-disciplinary discourse, so please write letters and submit papers for our next issue.

We sincerely hope that you enjoy the reading as much as we have enjoyed the assembly process.

Thanks for reading,

Ian McAlpin & Barbara Galletly

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Killing Time

Time and the Real in *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*

Jennifer Pranolo

If “time is a kind of work,”¹ then Chantal Ackerman’s *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) may be seen, in its radical restructuring of a cinematic experience of temporal duration, to function as a sort of quiet “time bomb.”² Depicting three days in the systematically ordered life of a widowed Belgian housewife, the film, over the course of its three and a half hours, meticulously balances the mundane and the extraordinary, the literal and the fictional, and, most startlingly, the almost imperceptible difference between the sense of time that seems to govern an interminably quotidian reality and that which can erupt, as absolute contingency, to destroy any pre-established continuity. The character of Jeanne (Delphine Seyrig), whose name is only given in the title, embodies this oscillating relation to time and its various registers. At the heart of much of the film’s understated yet fascinating intensity—what Ivone Marguiles calls its “minimalist/hyper-realist style”³—is Ackerman’s insistence on showing the full spectrum of Jeanne’s everyday existence through her use of extended long takes, fixed frontal shots, and a strategy of extreme ellipses. Echoing film critic Andre Bazin’s theory of cinema as an “art of time,”⁴ this emphasis on duration in *Jeanne Dielman* is the hallmark of a cinematic realism that captures the “fundamental quality of reality” in its respect for a “spatio-temporal continuum.”⁵ Unlike Bazin, however, for Ackerman, formal continuity does not simply offer up the “true” essence of reality. The “all-too-perfect-equilibrium”⁶ she constructs between the poles of regimented order and disarray in the film becomes, rather, a tactic of defamiliarization that demonstrates her pointed rejection of any revelatory, teleological closure in Bazin’s think-

ing. By examining how Ackerman plays with cinematic duration, deftly deploying the “predictable” and “unpredictable” in filming Jeanne’s life, the “real” in this context emerges as a knot of insurmountable ambivalence towards the entropic and atrophying effects of time.

The ontology of the cinema Bazin articulates is key to thinking through the original nature of Ackerman’s work. Cinema, according to him, has a privileged relation to the real in that the “image of things” in film “is likewise the image of their duration.”⁷ In contrast to photography, which also has iconic and indexical properties, the qualitative core of a cinematic mirroring of reality is an aesthetic created within the boundaries of “lived time.” In *What is Cinema? Volume I*, Bazin comments on this feature of the filmic medium when he writes: “The reality that cinema reproduces at will and organizes is the same worldly reality of which we are a part, the sensible continuum of which the celluloid makes a mold both spatial and temporal.”⁸ For him the filmic index is always, beyond all else, a marker for the *passage* of time: the shift between one moment and the next, from “one state to the other.”⁹ This duration that can be indexed animates Bazin’s imperative towards an ethics of cinematic realism. Distinguishing it from other art forms, film serves as a tangible object of representation that can repeat an elusive temporal flux. It possesses, he believes, the potential to assuage the anxieties of an irreversible, subjective experience of time, and consequently, a universal, ontological insecurity over the fearful inevitability of death. Bazin is famous for his statement that only film can capture the singularity of death or orgasm and replay them, again

and again, in multiple other instances. In light of his elaboration of this almost spiritually redemptive aspect of cinema, there is a certain moral and existential process at stake in his opposition to classical Hollywood conventions of style and narrative which often elide and desecrate moments in time through analytically edited cuts, close-ups, and montages that, instead of preserving the integrity of reality, chop “the world up into little fragments”¹⁰ and distort it towards the purposes of an economy of diegetic illusion.

Following Bazin’s anti-illusionist stance, in *Jeanne Dielman* Ackerman takes his injunction that “the total unity of a spectacle is of its essence”¹¹ to an extreme with her hyperrealist inclusion of minute details, gestures, and behaviors in the excessively long camera takes she aims at recording the “rigid...self-imposed chronology”¹² of Jeanne’s life. Stationed within an unchanging repertoire of flat medium-range shots, the first two and a half hours of the film sift through the unremarkable household chores that Jeanne obsessive-compulsively performs with utmost efficiency and a disinterested, mechanized control. The film opens with a scene of her lighting the kitchen stove and boiling potatoes for dinner. The doorbell rings and she takes her time washing her hands, taking off her apron, tidying her sweater, and checking the pot before answering the door. We learn that Jeanne, at first appearance a typical bourgeois housewife, is also a prostitute who schedules one gentleman caller each afternoon. The sexual encounter is not shown, however, and in the subsequent shots Jeanne sees the man out, puts the money she earns in a white soup tureen on the dining room table, and returns to the kitchen to drain the potatoes, timed exactly by now to be cooked and done. The following sequences on this first day of Jeanne taking a bath, wiping the tub clean, having dinner with her son, leisurely combing her hair (where she appears to be counting the fifty or so strokes as she gazes at herself in the dressing table mirror), and carefully buttoning her robe before bed, set up a kind of mnemonic blueprint for the scenes in the second and finally the third day when Jeanne’s immaculate mastery of her settings and easy grasp of time gradually dissolves and implodes upon itself. It becomes clear, in this preceding build-up of literalness where each task undertaken is not only evoked but resolutely completed in its tedious, distended duration, that Ackerman’s “obdurate fixity”¹³ on the “images between images”¹⁴—precisely

on everything usually deemed irrelevant and peripheral to the content of a film—hinges on a treatment of time that goes a step further than the expansive attentiveness Bazin so enthusiastically argues for in his valorization of the long-take and its uninterrupted revelation of the real. Here every slight ripple on the surface of Jeanne’s routine, like jarring variations on a theme, redirects the spectator’s attention all the more emphatically to what is not seen, and what cannot be seen or apprehended beyond the constricted scope dictated by the “relentless frontality”¹⁵ of the camera’s immobile yet constant gaze.

If the bulk of *Jeanne Dielman*’s formal and narrative trajectory is as manically structured as her stifflingly uniform life, the introduction in the latter part of the film of new camera angles and a subtly erratic pacing of cuts and ellipses reflect the “derangement of Jeanne’s chronology”¹⁶ and a relation to time that grows progressively awry. In her reading of the film, Marguiles invokes Bazin’s notion of the corrupting flow of time and how Ackerman’s cinema reflexively foregrounds this reality. One scene in the film, where Jeanne is making coffee, illustrates her obviously desperate need for predictability in the face of an acute awareness of how time works *on her* just as much as she attempts to fill, conquer, and inhabit it:

“[Jeanne’s] apathy is given a purpose—to wait for the coffee to seep slowly through the Melita filter. Thierry de Duve has described this figuration of time—the water seeping through a domestic apparatus shaped rather like an hourglass—as a representation of one of the temporalities administered by Jeanne and by Ackerman. Providing a metaphoric level for all the film’s scenes in real time, the Melita coffee scene constitutes an image of ‘time as entropy, as irreversibility.’”¹⁷

This “structuring image”¹⁸ of the water trickling through the coffee filter inaugurates one of the two “distinct images of death”¹⁹ that Marguiles proposes in *Jeanne Dielman*. The accumulated paralysis of a life lived at a minimum degree of permissible contingency,²⁰ staunchly refusing chance or change, harbors a “lethal quality”²¹ that saturates the film and undermines the apparent calm of Jeanne’s life. In the enervating duration of watching Jeanne blindly alternate between the frenzied busyness of washing the dishes, making dinner, etc. and her restrained waiting for the coffee to be

representation (“re-presentation”) (70). In suggesting that theory is no longer representation (portrayal), but only discursive action, Deleuze and Foucault disavow their role in “representing” (in the sense of serving as proxy for) subaltern subjects that cannot articulate themselves. Spivak states, “[t]he banality of leftist intellectuals’ lists of self-knowing, politically canny subalterns stands revealed; representing them, the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent.” Spivak suggests that Marx’s analysis parses the two senses of representation and thus effectively envisions a disarticulated subaltern subject; she calls for a “radical practice” that would “attend to double session of representations rather than introduce the individual subject through totalizing concepts of power and desire.” Her valorization of Marx’s text as a model for this radical practice leads her to let Marx’s rhetoric pass almost without examination or criticism. Spivak contends that she does not “ignore that, by implicitly defining the family and the mother tongue as the ground level where culture and convention seem nature’s way of organizing ‘her’ own subversion, Marx himself rehearses an ancient subterfuge” (74). This reference to the family unit, which was posited earlier as an alternative term to class instinct in the passage from Marx’s *Surveys from Exile*, seems to have little direct relevance to the envisioning of subaltern subjectivity which is Spivak’s focus. In any case, Marx’s indiscretion, constructed as aberrant in terms of Spivak’s textual focus, is “more recuperable than the clandestine restoration of subjective essentialism” committed by Deleuze and Foucault (74). Spivak seems content to predicate her model of radical practice on work that distinguishes between desire and interest and between registers of the term “representation” and thus delineates a heterogeneous and unintelligible subject, but which does not explicitly address race or gender and re-inscribes the gendered rhetorical construction of the “family” and the “mother tongue.” Her criticism of Deleuze/Foucault’s re-inscription of a coherent subaltern subject leads to an over-readiness to reclaim Marx as a radical theorist of difference.

In Rubin and Spivak’s essays, Marx serves as an organizing figure for models of gender, racial, and national difference which strive for and struggle against a comprehensive model of subjectivity and power. Their readings of Marx, whether criticized in the name of a non-capitalist periphery whose construction reveals an

inability to confront difference that parallels the work of Marx himself, or uncritically valorized despite an inability to confront gender and national distinctions through the deconstruction of language and family structure, reveal the textual ambivalence that haunts their visions of difference. The evocation of Marx becomes the site at which difference displays its inherent resistance to comprehensive critique.

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Violence, Peace, and Justice

in the Early Middle Ages

Matthew Sweetman

The surviving documentary evidence from the early Middle Ages paints a picture of a society racked by violent conflict. The Salic Law of the Frankish Kingdom, for example, enumerates a host of violent crimes which early societies recognized as infractions worthy of state intervention—these crimes run the gamut from assault to rape to the “killing of little children” (*Salic Law* 131.) The author of the early French ballad of Raoul of Cambrai depicts a conflict so total that it nearly consumes an entire generation of honor-bent warriors and their families. Gregory of Tours, a French bishop writing in the early seventh century, records a tome’s worth of violent tales in his *History of the Franks*. He tells stories of warfare between ethnic tribes, of violence between families, and of violence within families. Such conflicts stretched across regional and national borders and carried themselves through decades, spread from murdered fathers to dishonored sons. Though the number of extant historical sources is small, few writers neglect to discuss violence, and many focus on it; the pervasive aggression portrayed by these texts furthermore suggests that the experience of interpersonal brutality transcended class, gender, and religious boundaries. Though it is difficult, if not impossible, to judge exactly how much or how little accounts like the ones discussed here exaggerate their claims of hostility, it appears nevertheless that violent conflict played a major role in the personal, political, and intellectual histories of the early Middle Ages. Lost among such sensational tales of blood and gore, however, is another story. Though each of the writers considered here focuses much of his energy on discussing conflict, each account also stresses the steps undertaken to ensure the peaceful resolution of feuds. Texts

like the *History of the Franks* and the *Ballad of Raoul of Cambrai* leave no doubt that early medieval monarchs, courtiers, priests, and laymen hoped to avoid the social disintegration associated with major wars and petty grudges alike. The value of peace, however, did not necessarily supercede other cultural prerogatives, like the impulse to defend one’s honor and redress perceived injustices. Broadly speaking, uninterested parties—frequently, clerics and kings—intervened to stop conflicts only when the material and social costs of violent struggle became prohibitively high. Third parties like these, however, were not the only members of early medieval society with the power to end such aggressions. Opposing combatants themselves often agreed to set aside their arms when they recognized that they had inflicted a roughly equivalent amount of harm on one another; both, mourning the loss of children or kinsmen, could stop fighting because they had found a point where neither could consider himself more aggrieved than his foe.

Salic Law, one of the earliest post-Roman legal codes left to historians, enshrined such notions of pragmatic balance. As a legal document, it both responds to the actualities of fifth century life and expresses the broader ideology of the Frankish monarch Clovis’s kingdom as it blended Roman and Germanic understandings of conflict and justice. Salic Law reveals the pressures that the sometimes-conflicting demands of a complex and hierarchical social structure put on the Frankish state. The murder of a free Frank incurred a fine of 8000 denars, for example, but the murder of a Roman under the king’s protection earned a sentence of 12,000