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Temporality, Spatiality and Looking in Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) and Agnès Varda's *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962)

Genevieve Pocius

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Genevieve Pocius

Candidate

Foreign Languages and Literatures

Department

This thesis is approved, and it is acceptable in quality
and form for publication:

Approved by the Thesis Committee:

Walter Putnam

Pamela Cheek

Katrin Schröter

**TEMPORALITY, SPATIALITY AND LOOKING IN CHANTAL AKERMAN'S
JEANNE DIELMAN, 23 QUAI DU COMMERCE, 1080 BRUXELLES (1975) AND
AGNES VARDA'S *CLEO FROM 5 TO 7* (1962)**

BY

GENEVIEVE POCIUS

**PREVIOUS DEGREES
B.A. DePaul University**

THESIS

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DEDICATION

To Katy: for being an amazing friend, colleague, and travel buddy throughout my academic career at UNM. My time in sunny New Mexico would have been a lot less bright without you.

And to my mom: for twenty-six years of unconditional love and support.

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*JEANNE DIELMAN, 23 QUAI DU COMMERCE, 1080 BRUXELLES (1975) AND
AGNES VARDA'S CLEO FROM 5 TO 7 (1962)***

BY

Genevieve Pocius

**B.A., French, Digital Cinema, DePaul University, 2010
M.A., French, University of New Mexico, 2015**

ABSTRACT

Temporality, Spatiality and Looking in Chantal Akerman's Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles (1975) and Agnès Varda's Cléo from 5 to 7 (1962) examines the ways in which atypical representations of time and space in cinema can alter the spectator's habitual perceptions, particularly regarding the structuring of looks identified by Laura Mulvey in her article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". In the present work, I argue that the use of real time in the films *Jeanne Dielman* and *Cléo from 5 to 7* allows these works to create an alternative viewing experience, eliminating the 'male gaze' that dominates Classical Hollywood Cinema in order to create a female oriented look. Both films are able to create Deleuzian time-images: images that are not related to or induced by action, and which subsequently present a pure and direct image of time. The lack of a 'goal-oriented' depiction of time allows the films to avoid the active, controlling male gaze and subsequent identification with the masculine position, ultimately emphasizing the value of representing the female quotidian: a subject frequently ignored in mainstream films.

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Introduction

Time is an enigmatic concept that many theorists, authors, and artists have explored. Henri Bergson, perhaps most famously, differentiated between an ordered clock time that proceeds in a linear fashion, and the more subjective, immeasurable “duration”. Duration cannot be clearly mapped; it is not a linear or spatialized vision of time, although the moment one begins to describe it, it becomes so. Duration is an idea of time that stretches simultaneously across past, present and future. Bergson’s theories about duration were influential to many artists, particularly Marcel Proust, whose *Swann’s Way* could be said to all take place in the moment when the protagonist bites into a madeleine and is immediately flooded with memories. Time is not represented as a simple progression forward, but as “the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances” (Bergson 6-7). Bergson was writing in the period when cinema was just beginning to appear as an art form, although he “associated cinema with mechanical, spatialised time rather than duration, seeing it as a kind of clockwork mechanism reducing time to the homogeneity of measurable space” (Mroz 37). Gilles Deleuze later attempted to apply Bergson’s theories of duration to his writings on cinema, developing his concepts of the movement-image and the time-image: “Deleuze...uses Bergson to delineate instantaneous images or immobile sections, movement-images, or mobile sections of duration, and time images that are ‘beyond’ movement itself” (Mroz 37). The concepts of duration and the Deleuzian time-image will prove useful in an analysis of the two films I will discuss: *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Chantal Akerman, 1975), and *Cléo from 5 to 7* (Agnès Varda, 1962).

Both of the films in question are able to create time-images, images that do not link time to action, but which are more concerned with a pure and direct image of time. *Jeanne Dielman* achieves this largely through its representation of ‘empty’ spaces, as well as through the uninterrupted portrayal of complex actions related to the female quotidian (for example making coffee, dusting, making the bed, etc.). *Cléo* similarly represents settings and objects that take on a significance of their own, and which are “not extended directly into action” (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 4). These time-images are not related to the forwarding of narrative, but are instead pure optical and sound situations. As Deleuze writes: “A purely optical and sound situation does not extend into action, any more than it is induced by an action. It makes us grasp, it is supposed to make us grasp, something intolerable and unbearable...it is a matter of something too powerful, or too unjust, but sometimes also too beautiful, and which henceforth outstrips our sensory-motor capacities” (*Cinema 1* 18). Matilda Mroz points out that this unbearable beauty might emerge for the viewer through the ‘upsetting of habitual perception’:

In habitual perception, as Bergson defined it, ‘we do not perceive the thing or the image in its entirety, we always perceive less of it, we perceive only what we are interested in perceiving’. Particular images can break this cliché, this pattern, allowing a different type of image...to emerge. Deleuze writes that the ‘pure optical-sound image, the whole image without metaphor, brings out the thing in itself, literally, in its excess of horror or beauty’. Escaping from clichés, the image opens itself up to ‘powerful and direct revelations’” (38).

I am interested in how representations of real time can alter our habitual perceptions, particularly with regards to the structuring of looks as described by Laura Mulvey in her seminal essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”. In her analysis, she posits male figures in Classical Hollywood Cinema as active lookers, while female figures remain passive objects to be looked at. Through visual techniques such as point of view shots, eyeline matches, and shot reverse shots, spectators are forced into identification with the masculine position. As I will mention in my first chapter, I am less interested in questions of empirical spectatorship, and more concerned with how representations of time and systems of looking affect an ‘ideal spectator,’ regardless of gender. A female character can appropriate a male gaze, and “the subversive qualities of a female gaze may just as well be shared by a male character” (Hansen 640).

In addition to manipulating spectators into identification with a given character or point of view, classical narrative cinema also manipulates time to a pleasurable effect. Time is often compressed via the editorial process, as any events that would be considered inconsequential to the forwarding of the narrative are eliminated. Traditional narrative cinema procedures, which compress time via the editing process, and which also force spectator identification, have become so standardized that one often forgets that the earliest films made (from the period of about 1895 to 1903) were completely different with regards to their representation of time and space. I would like to historically contextualize the techniques of the two films I will be working on by examining how early narrative cinema represented time and engaged in processes of looking. Both *Jeanne Dielman* and *Cléo from 5 to 7* are concerned with providing an alternative viewing experience for the spectator, and it is interesting that they are able to

do so in part by drawing on techniques found in some of the earliest examples of motion pictures.

Temporality in Early Cinema

In cinema, the manipulation of time is achieved through editing: altogether removing elements unnecessary to the narrative, while condensing others. Editing techniques have come a long way since the early days of cinema, where few to no edits were used. The first examples of films were often quite short (under a minute) and would typically present a view of a place, or document a specific action. The films of the Lumière brothers were largely focused on real events happening in real time, such as a train pulling into a station or workers leaving a factory, but even their fictional work represented time to a similar effect. In the 1895 film *L'arroseur arrosé* (*The Waterer Watered*), where a young boy steps on a confused gardener's hose, causing him to spray himself in the face, the entire sequence is filmed in one unedited long shot. Time is not compressed or manipulated via the editing process.

Even films that were meant to be constructed of multiple shots were often sold as several individual films of one shot each. Georges Méliès's *The Dreyfus Affair* (1899), for example, was comprised of ten shots, each of which was released individually as a separate film. It was only with his next work *Cinderella* (1899), that Méliès began to join multiple shots to be marketed as one film (Thompson and Bordwell 16). As cinema became progressively more concerned with complex storytelling, representations of time became increasingly sophisticated with advancements to editing processes. Perhaps Méliès's most well known film, *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) uses edits not only to condense time, but also to create visual tricks such as objects appearing or disappearing.

Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) was also influential in setting standards for representations of time, as it was one of the first works of cinema to use cross cutting in order to portray two scenes taking place simultaneously in different locations. It was a film that proved that viewers could 'fill in the blanks' in order to make sense of and connect a series of images that were not necessarily chronologically ordered. In the 1920s (by which time filmmaking techniques had already advanced significantly), Russian filmmaker Lev Kuleshov went further, proving that viewers were able to connect two originally unrelated images. "The Kuleshov effect is based on leaving out a scene's establishing shot and leading the spectator to infer spatial or temporal continuity from the shots of separate elements" (Thompson and Bordwell 132). By juxtaposing a shot of actor Ivan Mozhukhind with a neutral expression with one of a variety of other shots (of a plate of soup, a baby, a dead body, etc.) Kuleshov led spectators to interpret the actor's expression as differing from scene to scene, even though the exact same shot was used each time. Through this juxtaposition of separate images from different times and places, "the filmmaker built up a space or time that did not exist" (Thompson and Bordwell 132).

Although filmmaking made rapid strides with regards to storytelling and the condensation of time, the short films of the early period of cinema still tend to feel slow and strange compared to the fast paced editing styles of more contemporary works. A scene in *The Great Train Robbery* comes to mind where two bandits knock out and tie up a man working at the train depot. The scene feels somewhat awkward by today's standards due to the lack of different camera angles, distances, and movement, in addition to minimal editing. The rather lengthy process of tying up the man is not shortened in

any way but is instead filmed in one uninterrupted long shot. Ultimately the more 'natural' representation of this act feels somewhat unnatural to the modern filmgoer accustomed to snappy edits and close ups. The strangeness of moments such as these is something that more contemporary experimental films try to draw on, *Jeanne Dielman* included. When the viewer is slightly uncomfortable and removed from absorption in the narrative, he or she is also more able to think critically.

Spatial Representations

Early narrative cinema may also tend to feel strange to modern spectators due to the more theatrical representations of space. In the earliest narrative works, close ups were seldomly used, with the majority of the action taking place in long shots. The heaviness of early cameras, in addition to the rigid tripods that supported them, also allowed little possibility for camera movement, so most shots remained static (Thompson and Bordwell 14). For example, the first scene in *A Trip to the Moon* depicts Professor Barbenfouillis (played by Méliès himself) recounting his plans to travel to the moon to a group of astronomers who will accompany him. A contemporary film might use close ups of the professor as well as of individual outraged astronomers, but the entire scene is filmed in a long shot. The spectator's gaze is not overtly manipulated or directed to certain aspects of the scene; the viewer has more freedom to direct his or her gaze in the manner of his or her choosing.

Another film by Edwin S. Porter, *Life of an American Fireman* (1903), represents empty spaces in a manner that recalls *Jeanne Dielman*: characters enter a space, complete an action, and leave the space before the film cuts to another scene, leaving the viewer with 'dead time' that is not dictated by action. Before the use of cross cutting in

The Great Train Robbery, it was also difficult to represent events happening simultaneously in two different spaces. *Life of an American Fireman* (1903), repeats certain scenes in order to show how the action proceeds in different locations. For example, a scene of firemen entering a burning home to save a woman and her child is shown once from the inside of the house, and then repeated again, this time with a view from the outside. Instead of condensing time, the film expands it, and the ‘dead time’ that remains ultimately causes the look of the spectator to be less overtly manipulated.

This lack of a clearly directed gaze also prevents the spectator from identifying with characters in early films. In general, for the period of 1895-1903, there are very few films that offer clearly defined protagonists with interiority. In *The Great Train Robbery*, for example, there are obvious heroes and villains, but no one hero stands out in particular. The lack of close ups prevents the viewer from clearly recognizing characters, and the lack of point of view shots prevents forced identification. These early techniques are not necessarily pleasurable for modern viewers, since they prevent the spectator from truly becoming engrossed in the film, but this estrangement of spectator from action is later put to productive use in films such as *Jeanne Dielman* and *Cléo from 5 to 7*.

Influences of Early Cinematic Methods

I write about all of this because I find it fascinating that early cinematic techniques of representing time and space that can be deemed somewhat crude by today’s standards are ultimately used decades later to an extremely powerful effect. Although some of the earliest films did engage in female objectification (Léar’s 1896 striptease *Le Coucher de la Mariée* being a prime example), the systematized objectification of women and subsequent identification with the masculine position via visual techniques was not

yet in place. It is only after years of standardizing cinematic practices that the problems Mulvey discusses in *Visual Pleasure* become a fixed part of the filmic experience. In spite of the frequency of erotic films available in the early days of cinema, one could argue that many early films remain untainted by a clearly defined male gaze, but this is only the case because they precede the later standardization of cinematic methods. Both of the films that I will discuss, *Jeanne Dielman* in particular, utilize some of the more ‘unpolished’ techniques found in the early period of cinema to provide spectators with an unusual viewing experience, one that breaks the established rules of classical narrative cinema. *Jeanne Dielman* eliminates close ups, point of view shots, and shot reverse shots, representing relatively banal actions such as doing the dishes in long unedited takes. In challenging typical representations of time and space found in mainstream narrative film, *Jeanne Dielman* is also able to alter the systems of looking found in such works. Mulvey writes of a forced identification with the masculine position, and a male gaze as being dominant in Classical Hollywood Cinema, which *Jeanne Dielman* seeks to do away with. Identification is not forced via visual manipulation, and we have little access to the interiority of the characters presented on screen. The camera remains a somewhat detached observer, estranging the spectator to the extent that he or she has more freedom for individual contemplation as opposed to blind acceptance.

Similarly, *Cléo from 5 to 7* represents time and space in such a way as to promote contemplation on the part of the spectator, while simultaneously being a pleasurable film to watch. *Cléo* does away with the patriarchal structuring of looks, but instead of altogether eliminating intradiegetic looking to avoid a male gaze, *Cléo* is able to create a wandering, sensual, female gaze in the way that Miriam Hansen imagines it. Where

Mulvey was criticized for ignoring questions of female spectatorship, Hansen attempts to tackle the subject. She writes, “the oscillation and instability (which Mulvey and others have observed) in female spectatorship constitutes a meaningful deviation—a deviation that has its historical basis in the spectator’s experience of belonging to a socially differentiated group called women” (636). Contrasted with the controlling, goal-oriented gaze that Mulvey discusses, Hansen describes a possible female look as dependent on a “sensuality of vision...a swerving and sliding gaze” (640).

It is the illustration of time that allows both *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* and *Cléo from 5 to 7* to be such groundbreaking works. Both films, in order to create the illusion of “real time,” contain elements that would be considered superfluous to a traditional narrative film. This shift in narrative structure allows the filmmakers to more freely experiment with visual representations, challenging the typical structuring of looks, and thereby giving more freedom to their female protagonists as well as to the spectator.

Chapter 1

The Extraordinary in the Everyday: Time and the Female Quotidian in Chantal

Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975)

“Le quotidien : ce qu’il y a de plus difficile à découvrir.” -Maurice Blanchot

Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles tells the story of three days in the life of Jeanne, a widowed housewife and sex worker in Brussels. Through the use of long takes and minimal editing, filmmaker Chantal Akerman represents the mundanity of Jeanne’s daily life largely in real time. In unedited, long takes we see Jeanne making meatloaf, washing the dishes, cleaning house, or having dinner with her son. The few temporal elisions that take place within the film occur when Jeanne sees her male clients. The film’s slow pace and lack of camera movement or close-ups caused discomfort in some spectators—during various screenings of the film, spectators were known to have walked out before the movie’s conclusion (Kinder 257). While the film was never destined for commercial success, it did receive a positive critical reception, with *Le Monde* declaring it as “the first masterpiece of the feminine in the history of cinema” (Haine 195).

While the subject matter of a lonely housewife driven to murder was certainly of great importance to the film’s critical reception, Akerman has implied that she resents the film being solely labeled as feminist. In a 2009 interview with the *New York Times*, Akerman stated: “If I did the film now I don’t know that it would be called feminist. It could have been done about a man, too.” She later continued: “All those labels are a bit

annoying...to name something is a way to possess it. I think it makes the film smaller” (Lim AR12). For Akerman, temporality and spatiality were the most important elements involved in the making of her second feature. During a screening of her film at the Los Angeles film festival Filmex in 1977, she stated, “Before I went to New York, say in 1968, I thought Bergman and Fellini were the greatest film-makers. Not any more, because they are not dealing with time and space as the most important elements in film” (Kinder 249). *Jeanne Dielman* is without a doubt a feminist film, because it is also a film about time and space. Ultimately the way the film represents time is what allows it to achieve its status as a feminist work: *Jeanne Dielman* is a cinematic experience that alters the way in which the spectator is accustomed to viewing a film. The film’s unusual representations of time and space allow it to transform all three forms of looking as identified by Laura Mulvey, and to create Deleuzian “time-images” that ultimately find power in the moments between the images, moments that are typically elided in the writing or editing process of a film.

Identification and Looking

In her seminal article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey identifies three looks that are present in the cinema: the look of the camera at the object that it records, the look of the audience toward the image, and the look that the characters exchange within the film (847). In mainstream cinema, spectator positioning is affected by the use of shot reverse shots: if we see a shot of a character looking, followed by a shot of what is being looked at, followed by a reaction shot, it is a way for the filmmaker to push the spectator into identification with the character looking. By sharing the gaze of a given character, the spectator feels a sense of identification with the character in

question. Mulvey brings attention to the fact that in Classical Hollywood Cinema, it is typically the male character that has a controlling gaze, while the female character becomes a passive object to be looked at. Ultimately Mulvey calls for the destruction of pleasure, freeing of the look of the camera “into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment” as the only way to avoid a cinema dominated by a male gaze (“Visual Pleasure” 847).

While Mulvey’s article was hailed by many as an extremely important step for feminist film theory, others criticized Mulvey for ignoring female moviegoers through her use of the *male* third person singular in reference to the spectator (Mulvey “Afterthoughts” 122). For the purpose of this essay I am less interested in the gender of an individual spectator and more interested in the effect that the cinema has (with regards to identification) on an ‘ideal spectator.’ Christian Metz likens the identification that viewers experience in a cinema to a child’s identification with himself as an object as discussed by Lacan in his description of the mirror stage. Metz states that the cinema is in many ways like a mirror, but “it differs from the mirror in one crucial aspect: it doesn’t reflect an image of the spectator’s own body” (Willemsen 210). This difference causes the spectator to assume the role of an invisible subject, not necessarily identifying (in the psychoanalytic sense of the word) with the images on the screen, but rather with himself. “The spectator *identifies with himself*, with himself as a pure act of perception...as the condition of possibility of the perceived and hence as a kind of transcendental subject, which comes before every *there is*” (Metz 823). Although Metz also uses the male third person singular, the sex of the spectator does not change processes of identification since the viewer becomes a *transcendental subject*, at once

identifying with himself as an act of perception and removed from himself as a specific individual. Jean-Louis Baudry likens the cinema to a dream state—the lights go out, we lose control over the images that are shown to us, and if we're lucky, we lose ourselves for a few hours. “The subject has always the choice to close his eyes, to withdraw from the spectacle, or to leave, but no more than in dream does he have means to act in any way upon the object of his perception, change his viewpoint as he would like” (Baudry 220). Due to the traditional structuring of looks established in Classical Hollywood Cinema, even a female spectator will identify with a male point of view. Mulvey notes in her article “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’” that at the time she wrote “Visual Pleasure,” she was more interested “in the relationship between the image of woman on the screen and the ‘masculinisation’ of the spectator position, regardless of the actual sex (or possible deviance) of any real live movie-goer. In-built patterns of pleasure and identification impose masculinity as ‘point of view’; a point of view which is also manifest in the general use of the masculine third person” (122).

Mulvey characterizes the male gaze as “active,” while female characters are typically portrayed as passive objects to be looked at. The woman is image while the man is the bearer of the look. This pattern of active male looking, and passive female “to-be-looked-at-ness” has been engrained in traditional narrative cinema to such a point that even a female character in a film can take on an active male gaze. In the film *Magic Mike* (2012) by Stephen Soderbergh, for example, male characters’ bodies are portrayed in a fragmented, objectified fashion while female characters take on the role of active lookers. This reversal of roles does not constitute a “female gaze,” however, but rather a male gaze perpetrated (often to *comedic* effect) by a woman. Mary Ann Doane writes:

Even if it is admitted that the woman is frequently the object of the voyeuristic or fetishistic gaze in the cinema, what is there to prevent her from reversing the relation and appropriating the gaze for her own pleasure? Precisely the fact that the reversal itself remains locked within the same logic. The male striptease, the gigolo—both inevitably signify the mechanism of reversal itself, constituting themselves as aberrations whose acknowledgment simply reinforces the dominant system of aligning sexual difference with a subject/object dichotomy. And an essential attribute of that dominant system is the matching of male subjectivity with the agency of the look (134).

At the time of the publication of Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure," film scholars such as Paul Willemen indicated that while Mulvey's depiction of classical narrative cinema was accurate, there was in actuality no way to change the system. Willemen writes: "Undoubtedly, the kind of voyeuristic pleasure which involves sadistic/fetishistic pleasure at the expense of an objectification of the image of women must be attacked and destroyed. But this does not mean that it is possible, or indeed, desirable, to expel these drives from the filmic process altogether, as such a move would simply abolish cinema itself" (213-214). Willemen's claims are somewhat exaggerated, as certain experimental films, including *Jeanne Dielman*, are able to destroy the subconscious voyeuristic tendencies of the filmgoer by foregrounding these tendencies. Instead of a voyeuristic pleasure in observing the titillating secrets of the film's titular character, the director of *Jeanne Dielman* creates an "unpleasure" for the viewer through her depiction of time and rendering of profilmic spaces.

Time and the Female Quotidian

Time is the most important aspect of cinema according to Chantal Akerman, and this is certainly the case for the director's second feature film. Through a combination of real-time and temporal ellipses, Akerman is able to structure the narrative of her film in an unorthodox fashion that ultimately brings attention to the inherent "falseness" of cinema. The tale of a lonely housewife and prostitute who is driven to commit murder is a story that could easily be portrayed in a Hollywood melodrama, and the drama of the story is one that brings attention to the fiction of this particular narrative, yet through the unusual depiction of time, *Jeanne Dielman* is able to focus on elements of the protagonist's life that bring a much more 'natural' or 'realistic' feel to the film—at least at first.

In order to better understand how *Jeanne Dielman* is able to challenge the traditional depiction of time in traditional narrative cinema, it is necessary to first understand how mainstream cinema depicts time. In his article "Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrational Principles and Procedures," David Bordwell writes that a classical Hollywood film usually centers around a hero trying to achieve a goal, and that the dramatic duration of the film is defined as the time that it takes to achieve said goal (19). What is shown in the film is what is essential to the forwarding of the narrative, while any superfluous elements (characters eating, travelling from point A to point B, et cetera) are not depicted. "Classical narration reveals its discretion by posing as an *editorial* intelligence that selects certain stretches of time for full-scale treatment (the scenes), pares down others a little, presents others in highly compressed fashion (the montage sequences), and simply scissors out events that are inconsequential" (Bordwell 23).

Jeanne Dielman produces the opposite effect, removing scenes that would typically be vital to the forwarding of the narrative (the scenes where she sees her clients), while focusing on moments that would normally be deemed irrelevant. The film devotes the majority of its running time to the everyday routines of a typical housewife, bringing to light the female quotidian, which is glossed over in most Hollywood style films.

Jeanne Dielman at first feels like a film about the everywoman, about what day-to-day life looks like for the average middle-class woman in Europe. Jeanne as a character feels almost anonymous, as the viewer barely gets a sense of her emotional life or her interiority. She is a woman who could presumably stand in for all women, because her daily life as presented on screen is comparable to the lives of many women in mid-twentieth century Belgium. In writing and directing the gestures in the film, Akerman was largely inspired by childhood memories of her mother and aunt during her childhood in Brussels. Although the activities that Jeanne carries out in the film seem almost universal in their banality, Akerman had an extremely precise vision of the way in which Delphine Seyrig was to perform Jeanne's gestures. As I will discuss later on, Jeanne is not necessarily a general stand-in or representation of what it means to be just any housewife: Seyrig's portrayal is decidedly more complex than a response to a simple desire to represent the 'average' woman on screen.

Witnessing the details with which Jeanne carries out her daily routine of cooking and cleaning may seem a rather dull concept, but by focusing on what would traditionally be elided from a narrative, the film is able to stifle the voyeuristic tendencies present in conventional cinema. Through this focus on the banal, Akerman creates an unpleasure that is satisfying in its own strange way. Marsha Kinder writes:

We must adapt to [the film's] unconventional style by going through several stages. At first, the routines and rhythms seem strange, frustrating, or even comical. We wait for something dramatic to happen; we wonder when the pace will quicken or when the camera will move. Some people in the audience grow impatient and walk out...Those who remain begin to realize that the entire film will move at this slow pace, that it is establishing new conventions...Increasingly, we feel at home with the familiar shots and slow pace (257).

In *The Practice of Everyday Life Volume 2*, Luce Giard discusses the value that society accords household activities usually attributed to women, such as cooking and cleaning. Women in their daily activities are essentially invisible to society; the household work that they complete is not recognized culturally because “the upkeep of household goods and the maintenance of family bodies seem to fall outside the bounds of a valuable production” (Giard 156). Similarly, the cinema accords the everyday lives of women little cultural value. “Trapped in the passive roles defined by the culture, women perform actions that are considered boring and non-dramatic—except for having sex, giving birth, or going mad. In male-dominated action films, women are either passive sex objects or destructive sirens, victims or maniacs, mothers or whores” (Kinder 250). The fact that Akerman chooses to document the minutia of Jeanne's daily existence is unusual precisely because the activities she completes are not accorded any cultural value.

Seeing Jeanne complete these everyday tasks in long, unbroken takes allows the viewer to get a sense of the time, complexity, and dedication involved in running a

household. This is taken for granted by Jeanne's son, for example, who barely looks up or says thank you when dinner is served or his shoes are shined. In a scene where Jeanne's neighbor (voiced by Chantal Akerman) comes to pick up her baby, she converses with Jeanne about the drama of her own daily routine, and the stress of deciding what to make for dinner. Hidden from view behind an open door, she delivers a lengthy monologue, recounting a trip to the butcher's where she could not decide what to order. After listening to the orders of other women and still not being able to make a decision, the woman ultimately orders what the woman in front of her has ordered—two pounds of veal. "It's a good two days' worth," she laments, "and none of us really like veal. So the kids turn up their noses once again...If only they didn't come home for lunch every day, but my husband says the food at school isn't good, and they're small for their age as it is. I tell you, if it were up to just me...". The monologue highlights to what extent women's work is both all consuming and underappreciated. Even Jeanne seems to be disinterested in her neighbor's story, which she can surely relate to on some level. The fact that the neighbor remains hidden from view emphasizes the degree to which these women remain isolated: despite their similarities, there is no sense of community between them. Giard writes:

This women's work, without schedule or salary (except to be paid off through service to others), work without added value or productivity (men have more important things to calculate), work whose success is always experienced for a limited duration (the way a soufflé just out of the oven, balancing in a subtle equilibrium, in this glorious peak, is already wavering well before it finally collapses). Yes, women's work is slow and

interminable. Women are extremely patient and repeat the same gestures indefinitely (159).

The majority of Jeanne's time is spent cooking: going to the market, preparing meals, or planning what meals can be prepared with leftovers. The moments when Jeanne looks the most at peace during the film are the moments when she prepares dinner. The detail and precision with which she breads veal cutlets or forms a meatloaf expose the extent to which her life is dictated by precision and order. As will be discussed further on, an error Jeanne makes in her dinner preparations becomes the catalyst for her descent into madness. For Giard, culinary practices "situate themselves at the most rudimentary level, at the most necessary and the most unrespected level" (156). The only time that cooking is respected is when the quality of a meal exceeds the norm, an achievement typically relegated to great chefs who are, for the most part, male.

Giard points out the ways in which our actions are related to our identity, with cooking as a good example. "*Doing-cooking* is the medium for a basic, humble, and persistent practice that is repeated in time and space, rooted in the fabric of relationships to others and to one's self, marked by the 'family saga' and the history of each, bound to childhood memory just like rhythms and seasons" (157). While one may argue that actions are intrinsically related to a person's sense of self, most would agree that daily actions are not the only formative element of one's life or identity. It is safe to say that people have interests, thoughts, desires, that lie outside of their daily routine. For Jeanne, however, this is not the case. She is a woman whose only sense of identity appears to come from her daily chores, which she completes in an almost robotic fashion. Her life and activities are planned out to the minute. She wakes up, opens her bedroom window,

puts on her robe, turns on the heater, makes coffee, shines her son's shoes, etc., always in the same order, taking up the same amount of time. Jeanne's routine is compromised on the second day, presumably following an orgasm she experiences during one of her client's visits. Surprised by her own unexpected reaction, Jeanne forgets to check on the potatoes before she takes her bath, and ultimately overcooks them. Instead of making the potatoes into purée as she could have done, Jeanne, ever the perfectionist, decides to start over from scratch. Unfortunately only one potato remains, so she must go to the store, and dinner is served late.

These subtle changes to Jeanne's daily routine, which would seem almost inconsequential in a more conventional narrative, take on a heightened level of significance, turning actions so ordinary as dropping a spoon or almost knocking over a bottle of milk into the stuff of melodrama. It is evident that Jeanne is a woman with certain obsessive-compulsive tendencies, as the execution of her routine in a certain way and following a certain timeline is of the utmost importance to her. When dinner is served late, Jeanne still feels the compulsion to fit in all of her typical after dinner activities, such as knitting, reading the paper and going for a walk with her son. Because the timing is off, however, she can only knit and read for a fraction of the time that she usually does, eventually preventing her from truly accomplishing anything. Her son asks if they can skip their after-dinner walk since they dined so late, but Jeanne refuses, perhaps on the grounds that if she restores order to her routine, everything will go as planned the following day. This is not the case, however, as Jeanne wakes up too early on the third day and her routine is further jeopardized.

During the portion of the film dedicated to the third day, the spectator becomes much more aware of the weight and feeling of time passing as Jeanne tries and fails to fill up her day. Kinder writes that the use of real time “accentuates the central problem of boredom: Jeanne is not terrified by ‘Time’s winged chariot,’ but by the ‘vast deserts of eternity’ that threaten to engulf her” (251). As Jeanne loses control over her orderly routine, she also begins to lose herself. She repeatedly goes back into her bedroom to check the time, but to no avail: time still passes as it does on every other day and she cannot make it catch up to her. After having made a second pot of coffee Jeanne sits at the kitchen table in complete stillness for at least two minutes; suddenly she gets up, as if having remembered a chore, and goes to the balcony. She picks up a broom only to put it back down again: even a block of five minutes that is unplanned becomes terrifying to Jeanne. Later she sits down in a chair in the living room, but instead of relaxing as one might want to do after a day of work, she stares into space, as if trying to find another task to be accomplished. Seyrig’s body language in this scene is incredible—Jeanne sits completely still, almost blending in with the furniture. It is as if we are witnessing another moment of empty space and dead time, except this time Jeanne is a part of it. Her routine is her life and her sense of self, so when things do not go as planned, panic and chaos ensue.

Akerman underlines Jeanne’s discomfort with herself in a scene where Jeanne goes to her café for the second time. Usually Jeanne sits at a certain table and is served by a particular waitress. On the day when her timing is off, Jeanne arrives to find that not only is her usual server absent, but another woman is seated at her usual table. The camera is positioned in the same way as in the previous coffee shop scene, so as Jeanne

sits at a neighboring table, she is no longer in the center of the frame, thereby emphasizing the disorder of the moment. Jeanne appears perturbed, and Akerman plays strongly on the differences between the two women. The woman in Jeanne's seat is reading, writing, and smoking while she drinks her coffee—she clearly has a sense of identity that goes beyond her stereotypical roles as a woman, whereas Jeanne appears not to know what to do with herself. Even her break from routine in the form of a relaxing coffee becomes another strict rule or action that must be carried out in a particular fashion. Jeanne is so accustomed to the interminable routine of being a housewife that the little time she has to herself becomes equally systematic and work-like.

The robotic manner in which Jeanne carries out her daily chores adds an element of foreboding to the film. Juliana Margulies is correct in referencing Freud's work on the uncanny with relation to the film, because Jeanne is practically automaton-like in her behavior. Her actions are carried out without emotion, in an almost mechanical fashion: upon first glance she appears to be emblematic of the typical housewife, but upon extended viewing it becomes clear that something is off. Freud references Jentsch when he writes: "a particularly favourable condition for awakening uncanny feelings is created when there is intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one" (Freud 835). In the case of Jeanne Dielman, Seyrig evokes an animate being that behaves more like an inanimate one through the monotone delivery of her dialogue, coupled with the almost automatized manner in which she carries out her actions. In the scenes where she sits in motionless silence she appears less like a person and more like a machine that has been turned off, almost blending in with her surroundings. This in large part prevents the spectator from

identifying with Jeanne in the way one might be wont to do in a more mainstream narrative, but this uncanny or menacing aspect of the film is one of the elements that sustains the interest of the viewer. Jeanne at first seems like an “everywoman,” but her unusual mannerisms arouse a curiosity in the spectator that would not be possible with just *any* woman.

A feminist critique of many Hollywood style films is that they “do not show ‘real’ women but only the stereotypical images of an ideologically laden ‘femininity’”. This offers a female audience no opportunities for authentic recognition, but ample room for escape into fantasy via the identification with stereotypes. The effect is alienating rather than liberating” (Smelik 8). According to some feminist critics, the way to avoid this false identification with stereotypes in the cinema is to offer images of “real” women, in order to abolish the idealized fantasy of the feminine as portrayed in more traditional narrative cinema. While *Jeanne Dielman* at first appears to be an unglamorous portrayal of a “real” woman, carrying out her “real” day-to-day activities, as the film progresses, Jeanne and her actions feel less natural or realistic. The banality of her behavior becomes almost alarming. Jeanne appears less like a real flesh-and-blood woman and more like a nightmarish stereotype of what it means to be a ‘real woman’. It is safe to assume that most women watching *Jeanne Dielman* would prefer not to identify with her.

Visual and Narrative Estrangement

Identification is a problematic concept in cinema: empathizing with a character can be very satisfying, however the feelings of identification created through editing and framing can often be manipulative. Mulvey writes of the spectator’s tendency to identify with the “active,” male protagonist in a film, largely achieved through the use of shot-

reverse-shots. Although it is certainly possible to use the same structuring of looks to force a spectator into identification with a female character, as stated earlier, this reversal of roles does not necessarily change the male-dominated structuring of looks present in the cinema, and the masculinization of the spectator. In order to avoid the perpetuation of the ‘masculine position’ in cinema, Akerman prevents the spectator from identifying with her female protagonist (or any other character) both visually as well as from a narrative perspective. *Jeanne Dielman* is hyperreal in its depiction of time, while the acting tends to feel stiff in comparison with Hollywood-style cinema. The film contains little dialogue, and what dialogue exists is delivered in a flat and stilted fashion by the performers. When the characters speak, it is more in the style of a monologue than that of a conversation. This monotone method of performance is not due to the actors’ lack of talent, however, but is rather an explicit choice on the part of the director. Akerman appears to be an advocate of the Brechtian school of thought that if a spectator is too immersed in the narrative, he or she will not be able to truly be affected or inspired by the art—when one is too involved in the story, it leaves little room for contemplation on the part of the spectator.

In Brecht’s writings on theater, he calls for an acting style that produces a *Verfremdungseffekt*, sometimes translated as “estrangement effect,” where actors perform “in such a way that the audience [is] hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play” (91). This estrangement effect creates a distance between character and spectator, allowing the spectator the opportunity to make his or her own moral decisions with regards to the actions presented on stage. “The aim of this technique...[is] to make the spectator adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism in his

approach to the incident” (Brecht 136). Delphine Seyrig’s performance in *Jeanne Dielman* certainly creates a distance between her character and the spectator, something that was difficult for the actress to achieve. During the filming process, Seyrig attempted to make Jeanne relatable by adding more feeling to the delivery of her lines, and expressing emotions through her face (*Autour de Jeanne Dielman*). Akerman strongly dissuaded Seyrig from creating a more emotional, empathetic character, asking the actress to slow down her actions, avoid any jerky motions, and remove much of the expression from her face. “What is Jeanne thinking about?” Seyrig asked during a rehearsal for a scene where Jeanne prepares veal. “She’s thinking about her cutlets,” Akerman replied (*Autour de Jeanne Dielman*). While Seyrig was sometimes frustrated with the lack of room for creativity, Akerman’s extremely specific vision for her actors’ performances was ultimately successful. The lack of identification one feels with Jeanne not only underscores the feeling of alienation (one of the central themes of the film) but also creates an alternative kind of viewing experience. Instead of being absorbed in the film to the point of becoming a ‘transcendental subject,’ removed from oneself as an individual, the distancing of viewer from action allows the spectator more freedom for individual contemplation.

The visual composition of *Jeanne Dielman* also prevents the spectator from clearly identifying with a given character or perspective. The almost theatrical style of framing present in the film renders the spectator more conscious of the fact that he or she is watching a movie. As Metz writes, “the uncommon angle makes us more aware of what we had merely forgotten to some extent in its absence: an identification with the camera” (825-826). This realization of identification with the camera allows the

spectator to become more conscious of his or her voyeurism—in this way the film is able to comment on and challenge the voyeuristic viewing pleasure that is the staple of traditional narrative cinema. Akerman’s framing and editing techniques highlight the spaces in the film in a way that is unusual. There are many scenes where Jeanne leaves the room, but the camera does not: shots that linger on these empty spaces are another way for Akerman to more accurately depict time, and to avoid forcing the spectator into identification with a particular point of view.

Zain Jamshaid writes that *Jeanne Dielman* is a film about duration:

It provides us (in very much a Deleuzian sense) with images that are concerned with movement and the passing of time itself. Simply put, the film is not simply concerned with shedding light on the monotonous drudgery that women subsumed within a patriarchal system frequently endure on a daily basis. It is also concerned with giving us a sense of time as it is lived by such women; its character’s anxieties are not contained within the film. They reach out to the spectator as well (4).

These images that focus on the passing of time could be considered ‘time-images’ in the way that Deleuze imagines the term. Deleuze distinguishes between the movement-image and the time-image in cinema, stating that a movement-image links time to action (for example, montage) and is a less direct image of time, whereas a time-image does not necessarily relate time to action. Time-images are pure opsigns and sonsigns according to Deleuze: “A purely optical and sound situation does not extend into action, any more than it is induced by an action. It makes us grasp, it is supposed to make us grasp, something intolerable and unbearable...it is a matter of something too powerful, or too

unjust, but sometimes also too beautiful, and which henceforth outstrips our sensory-motor capacities” (*Cinema I* 18).

Pure optical and sound situations may contain two poles, for example: real and imaginary, physical and mental, objective and subjective. Deleuze speaks of the two poles coming into continual contact with the creation of opsigns and sonsigns, and that the coalescence of the two poles ultimately tend “towards a point of indiscernibility (and not of confusion)” (*Cinema 2* 9). An example of the poles of objective and subjective coming together to a point of indiscernibility occurs in *Jeanne Dielman* through the creation of a ‘free indirect subjective,’ loosely based on the idea of free indirect discourse in literature. The free indirect subjective describes an image that is somewhat removed from the characters in the film, but that serves as more than just a simple establishing shot (Vitale). It is an image that is neither completely objective nor subjective because in these moments the spectator is not aligned with the gaze of a character (who may even be absent), and since the images do nothing to directly forward the narrative, it is not necessarily the gaze of a narrator. “We can see images in the cinema which claim to be objective or subjective—but here something else is at stake: it is a case of going beyond the subjective and the objective towards a pure Form which sets itself up as an autonomous vision of the content” (*Cinema I* 74). This ‘autonomous vision’ is effected through an awareness, on the part of the viewer, of the camera’s presence. Deleuze cites Pasolini’s example of an ‘insistent’ or ‘obsessive’ framing, “which makes the camera await the entry of a character into the frame, wait for him to do and say something and then exit, while it continues to frame the space which has once again become empty, once more leaving the scene to its pure and absolute signification as scene” (*Cinema I* 74).

This framing technique is put to use in *Jeanne Dielman* in virtually every scene, as Jeanne is shown entering and exiting a room before the film cuts to another scene where Jeanne will enter a room again. This ‘camera-consciousness,’ as Deleuze terms it, not only allows for a Brechtian estrangement of spectator from action, but also provides the opportunity for a pure and direct image of time to be represented through this free indirect subjective.

Time-images in *Jeanne Dielman* are particularly evident in the moments between scenes, when Jeanne leaves a room but the camera does not. In these moments the camera lingers on the still ‘empty’ space, bringing a certain life to the inanimate objects that occupy various rooms. The unoccupied spaces in *Jeanne Dielman* are good examples of pure opsigns and sonsigns—they are not related to action or narrative, but they allow the filmmaker to provide a sense that time is passing. In an analysis of certain neo-realist tendencies, Deleuze describes how “objects and settings [*milieux*] take on an autonomous, material reality which gives them an importance in themselves” (*Cinema 2* 4). This same effect is achieved in *Jeanne Dielman*: through the representation of vacant rooms, various objects take on a significance that they would not normally have if a character were occupying the same space. In the first scene of the second day, Jeanne turns off a light and exits her bedroom after having buttoned her robe, but the camera lingers. This moment of solitude offers a certain feeling of freedom on the part of the spectator—the opportunity to explore a space without action. A curtain blowing in the wind may take on an air of melancholy that it would not have in a moment that is concerned purely with action and the forwarding of the narrative.

These images do not simply portray empty spaces, but rather Deleuzian still lifes. Empty spaces are focused on the absence of a possible content, while still lifes focus on the presence of objects (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 16). When Jeanne leaves her living room for example, one becomes aware of the presence of the furniture that fills the room, of the fact that these objects continue existing in time even when the protagonist is absent. These images allow the viewer to become more conscious of duration. Deleuze writes: “The still life is time, for everything that changes is in time, but time does not itself change, it could itself change only in another time, indefinitely. At the point where the cinematographic image most directly confronts the photo, it also becomes most radically distinct from it”. He continues, referencing Ozu’s extended takes of objects such as a bicycle or a vase: “Ozu’s still lifes endure, have a duration, over ten seconds of the vase: this duration of the vase is precisely the representation of that which endures, through the succession of changing states” (*Cinema 2* 17). In *Jeanne Dielman*, the lingering shots of unoccupied space are representations of time, but sometimes objects take on a more explicit meaning, as when Jeanne forgets to put the lid back on the tureen on the second day—this image marks the first moment in the gradual destruction of Jeanne’s obsessively ordered routine.

To further illustrate my point, I would like to analyze a sequence near the end of the film where Jeanne is confronted with extra time in her day that she doesn’t know how to fill. The sequence is a lengthy 18 minutes, and charts the moments between when Jeanne finishes prepping dinner and before her neighbor arrives with the baby. Jeanne typically finishes eating lunch when the baby is dropped off, and during the time she watches the baby she also begins preparing dinner. On the third day when she wakes too

early, her timing is disrupted: she finishes dinner preparations too early, leaving her with extra time before the baby arrives. This sequence is a turning point in the film; the viewer become conscious of the extent to which Jeanne's life is dictated by a precise timing.

The sequence opens with a long shot down an empty hallway that ends with the door to Jeanne's bedroom. Jeanne enters the frame, opening the door to her room and pausing once she enters: it is not explicitly clear to the viewer, who does not have a good view, but Jeanne is checking the clock that sits on her bedside table. The fact that the central action of this shot (looking at the clock) is hidden from the viewer manifests the "camera-consciousness" that is inherent to the film. The confusion on the part of the spectator brings awareness to the presence of the camera, and to the artifice of cinema in general. It also prevents the spectator from more clearly identifying with Jeanne—we have no close-ups to indicate what Jeanne is looking at or what her state of mind might be at this moment. It is only from the slow progression of the scene that the viewer is able to piece things together and realize to what extent Jeanne's routine is out of order. Following the shot of Jeanne entering her bedroom to check the time, we cut to a long shot of Jeanne sitting down at her kitchen table. In complete silence, and motionless, she remains seated for exactly one minute *to the second*. *Jeanne Dielman* contains no non-diegetic music, but in Jeanne's silent stillness, the rising and falling electric hum of the refrigerator become almost like its own musical score—adding a feeling of menace and discomfort to an already tense moment.

Throughout the sequence, Jeanne completes a series of activities that do not fit in with her ordinary routine. Although Jeanne retains her placid facial expression, her

increasingly rapid breathing betrays her sense of anxiety as she tries and fails to find ways to fill her time. After remaining seated for one minute, Jeanne gets up, walks out onto the balcony, picks up a broom and then puts it back, as if remembering that she had already finished sweeping. She reenters the kitchen and serves herself a cup of coffee, perhaps in an imitation of relaxation. Unsatisfied with the coffee's taste, she empties and washes the cup before testing the milk and the coffee again, at which point she starts to make a pot again from scratch. In this lengthy scene, which is only comprised of three shots, Jeanne enters and exits the frame multiple times, usually to fetch a glass or a coffee filter to place on the table. Each time she exits, we are presented with still lifes that are slowly altered as Jeanne moves or adds objects to the table:



2:35:07



2:35:38



2:36:09



2:38:04



2:39:34



2:43:02

These still lifes are interesting on multiple levels. The fact that the table becomes ever more cluttered with objects could be read as representing the buildup of Jeanne's anxiety, her need to fill the role of housewife as she imagines it. The fact that she neither drinks the coffee that she so patiently watches brew for three minutes, nor clears the table when she is finished preparing it is unsettling: it is unlike Jeanne to leave a mess in the kitchen. In this way Akerman is able to give us an insight into Jeanne's interiority strictly through her actions, avoiding manipulation through camera work and editing. The camera's height is also of interest in this scene in that it is aligned with the woman's workspace (the countertop) as opposed to providing a point-of-view shot from the perspective of a certain character. In this way the film is able to highlight the importance and value of women's work. More importantly, these still lifes become time-images: they depict the topology of time. The objects endure, they change, but time does not

change. To reiterate Deleuze: “for everything that changes is in time, but time does not itself change” (*Cinema 2* 17).

Later in the sequence, after Jeanne has checked her mailbox, dusted a few figurines, and checked her bedroom clock again, the camera cuts to a wide-angle shot of the living room, where Jeanne is already seated. A temporal elision has taken place, as we do not see Jeanne entering the room—it is unclear how long she has been seated, but she remains sitting in complete stillness for over three minutes. Up to this point, the scenes have been dictated by Jeanne’s actions: entering the frame, completing a task, and exiting the frame. In this last shot of the sequence, Jeanne becomes part of her own still life—she ‘endures’ just as other inanimate objects have endured previously. In this moment the viewer’s gaze is free to wander completely. The fact that the spectator has more control over his or her own gaze in some ways recalls the concentrated reception that Walter Benjamin discusses in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” although for Benjamin this concentrated reception was not ideal. One is able to view the scene in question in the same way one might regard a painting or a more static work. Although it is uncomfortable to watch Jeanne sit in silence for three minutes, the composition of the shot is quite beautiful.

Through these time images, Akerman is able to challenge the notions of identification and looking typical to mainstream narrative cinema. On the topic of identification and camera positioning, Mulvey writes that “the first blow against the monolithic accumulation of traditional film conventions...is to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment,” which is precisely what *Jeanne Dielman* accomplishes (847).

The look of the camera is not directly tied to the looks of the characters, nor to a specific narrator. The fact that most of the scenes are filmed in medium long shots prevents the camera from manipulating the spectators into identification with a specific character. Similarly, the viewer's gaze is not controlled by the camera to the extent that it is in Classical Hollywood Cinema due to the long takes and detached framing, allowing the spectator's gaze to wander. In this way Akerman is able to create a film that permits the spectator to contemplate the work from a distance as opposed to being completely immersed in the film's narrative trajectory.

The lack of shot reverse shots also prevents the spectator from developing a narcissistic identification with a particular character. The camera never takes the place of a character's gaze, and the character to character looking is also minimal. In Jeanne's interactions with others, we rarely see the faces of the people she speaks with. Her son, Sylvain, is one of the few characters the camera allows us to see, but even during their conversations, mother and son hardly ever exchange glances. During the dinner sequence on the first day, Sylvain barely says a word to Jeanne, and neither character engages in eye contact with the other. Sylvain reads a book at the table, and when Jeanne tells him to not read while eating, he puts down the book without looking at or speaking to his mother. Even during a very personal conversation where Sylvain asks his mother about his father, Sylvain looks straight ahead instead of engaging meaningfully with Jeanne, while Jeanne in the background stares at the wall as she reveals the intimate details of her relationship. Through camera positioning and blocking Akerman is able to eliminate virtually all intra-diegetic looking, thereby removing the possibility of an

objectifying, active ‘male gaze,’ whether it be from a male or female character’s point of view.

Making Strange

Akerman’s film successfully renders the familiar unfamiliar in a process that Ivone Margulies refers to as “making strange” (*Nothing Happens* 73). This effect of “making strange” is certainly attributable to the actors’ performances and the visuals, but it is also largely achieved through the manipulation of time. At first the film seems to represent events in a very natural fashion: events unfold in real-time, and the movie feels almost documentary-like in its depiction of a woman’s daily routine. As the film goes on, the time and detail that Akerman devotes to depicting Jeanne’s familiar daily routine becomes progressively stranger. “The sharpness of the depiction borders on the hallucinatory. Akerman’s hyperrealist style crosses a certain threshold of intensity. An oscillation between recognizing the familiar and being estranged from it is one of the central features of *Jeanne Dielman*” (Margulies, *Nothing Happens* 72). The subject matter of a woman going about her daily routine would theoretically make the film seem ‘realistic’, but the detail in which actions are depicted, as well as the static composition of shots produces a ‘camera-consciousness’ that emphasizes the deceptive nature of cinema, thereby creating a distance between viewer and narrative.

Because of this excess of descriptive imagery, the viewer initially has the impression of seeing everything in the minutest of detail, but this is not the case. As stated earlier, there are temporal elisions in *Jeanne Dielman*, since the film takes place over three days. Considering the detail of depiction, it is actually surprising how many ellipses occur in the film. Sometimes ellipses are used to avoid over-repetition: for

example on the first day when we see Jeanne taking a bath and cleaning out the tub, the action is completed in its entirety. On the second day Jeanne still takes a bath, but only the portion where she cleans out the tub is shown. “The feeling of repetition,” Margulies claims “is a well-orchestrated effect, since one in fact seldom sees any diegetic task performed in its entirety twice in the film. What we do see is the ‘interminable’ of the scene: the full duration of a task and of a character’s waiting” (*Nothing Happens* 66).

Akerman makes sure to bring other ellipses to the forefront, namely the scenes where Jeanne sees her clients. These temporal elisions are not presented in a natural way according to the conventions of classical narrative cinema—typically one scene flows smoothly into the next, making the viewer aware of any time that has been passed over without creating confusion or discomfort. In *Jeanne Dielman*, the omission of scenes where Jeanne sees her clients is presented in a purposefully jarring manner through the use of jump cuts. A stationary camera records Jeanne from the hallway as she walks into her room with a client and closes the door. The lights become darker, implying a jumping forward in time, and seconds later both parties exit the room. Deleuze writes:

Sometimes it is necessary to restore the lost parts, to rediscover everything that cannot be seen in the image, everything that has been removed to make it ‘interesting’. But sometimes, on the contrary, it is necessary to make holes, to introduce voids and white spaces, to rarify the image, by suppressing many things that have been added to make us believe that we were seeing everything. It is necessary to make a division or make emptiness in order to find the whole again (*Cinema 2* 21).

The fact that we never see Jeanne with her clients (until the third day), or with anyone besides her son, highlights the alienation of the character, underscoring yet again the menacing element present within the film.

Another aspect of the film that adds to this underlying feeling of anxiety is the use of titles to create a sort of ‘count-down effect’. At the end of every day, a title appears on the screen with “End of the first day,” “End of the second day,” et cetera. The titles not only further remove the spectator from the action, but they also create a feeling of counting down to a specific event or goal. Miriam Hansen describes the masculine look as “goal-oriented” (640), and Bordwell writes of how the fact “that the climax of classical film is often a deadline shows the structural power of defining dramatic duration as the time it takes to achieve or fail to achieve a goal” (19). For example, in a romantic comedy the goal might be for the male protagonist to successfully woo his female counterpart. The viewer is aware of the goal from the beginning of the film, and when said goal is achieved, the movie is over. If the narrative continues for too long past the achievement of the goal, the effect is a strange one. Although there is no explicit goal in *Jeanne Dielman*, a sense of deadline is achieved through the use of titles. The titles cue the spectator into the fact that there will be a limited number of days addressed by the narrative, and this creates a feeling of anxiety in the viewer. What will happen by the end of the second day, the third day? This sense of waiting adds an undertone of menace to Jeanne’s quotidian activities of cooking and cleaning, coupled with the fact that we are not privy to all of her daily actions. The feeling of ‘not seeing’ created through the jarring ellipses adds to the discomfort and unease experienced by the spectator.

Ultimately this feeling of anxiety is justified, and the countdown does lead to a certain 'goal' in Bordwell's sense of the term, because at the end of the film Jeanne murders one of her clients with a pair of sewing scissors. Despite the presence of a goal or decisive event that serves as the climax of the film, the gaze that Akerman portrays is not a masculine, 'goal-oriented' one. Jeanne's actions throughout the film do not explicitly bring her closer to her final act, and the spectator (and perhaps even the character) remain unaware of the goal in question. The camera remains a detached observer rather than a mastering one. The murder scene is a shocking moment because there are no visual or sound cues that forewarn the viewer of what is about to happen. There is no music, no dialogue, and there are no shots of Jeanne contemplating what she is about to do. After getting dressed, Jeanne walks off-screen, leaving her client lying on the bed. When she enters back into the frame, she stabs him, her back to the camera. She completes this act much in the same way that she completes all her other household activities. "*Jeanne Dielman*'s double ending represents the link between containment and excess, between sexual repression and violence. With impeccable narrative logic, we see for the first time what has been kept offscreen...With this downplayed "climax," Akerman equates the banal and the dramatic, the literal and the fictional—dressing and killing" (Margulies, "About Time"). In the following scene, Akerman gives us no indication as to Jeanne's emotional state; she simply sits at the table with a relatively blank expression on her face. In spite of the drastic shift in narrative tone, the final seven-minute scene is not portrayed any differently than the preceding ones: Jeanne sits at the table in thought while a stationary camera in a medium long shot observes detachedly.

Conclusion

Jeanne Dielman has been praised as a feminist work for its portrayal of the female quotidian, but the film's depiction of time and space is what allows it to truly break down barriers, altering the cinematic viewing experience. The creation of time-images allows for a revision of the typical structuring of looks, transforming both intra- and extra-diegetic looking. Through the elision of scenes that would typically take up the bulk of a more traditional filmic narrative, and the inclusion of moments that would normally be elided, Akerman challenges the conventional, patriarchal fashion in which Classical Hollywood Cinema represents women, affirming (in her own words) "la juste valeur du quotidien féminin"¹ (Schmid 37). Akerman adds a level of complexity to the film's representation of the female quotidian, however, by focusing on Jeanne's *particular* anxieties and obsessions. The film creates a portrait of daily life experienced by many women, but it must not be forgotten that the title refers to one individual only, her experiences being at once singular and commonplace.

¹ Translation: The true value of the female quotidian.

² Brackets are Flitterman-Lewis's.

Chapter 2

“On a si peu de temps; on a tout le temps”: Objective Time, Subjective Time, and

Looking in *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962)

“In my films I always wanted to make people see deeply. I don’t want to show things, but to give people the desire to see.” –Agnès Varda

In this chapter I would like to analyze another film that revolves around a woman going about her daily life in real time: *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962) by Agnès Varda. Although the film shares certain similarities with *Jeanne Dielman* in that it deals largely with real time and a representation of the female quotidian, it is a film that differs significantly from its successor. Instead of the story of a middle class Belgian housewife, *Cléo from 5 to 7*'s titular character is a wealthy, famous, Parisian pop singer. The film perhaps more accurately represents time than *Jeanne Dielman*, since the entirety of the narrative takes place in real time, depicting approximately two hours of Cléo's day spent awaiting the result of a biopsy. The effects of this unusual representation of time, however, are similar with regards to the structuring of looks. *Cléo from 5 to 7* deals with questions of objective time and subjective time, ultimately blending the two together to the point of indiscernibility. The simultaneously objective and subjective temporality of waiting present in the film is what allows it to break away from the patriarchal structuring of looks as identified by Laura Mulvey. Instead of a controlling, objectifying and fragmenting male gaze, the film is able to create a female gaze in the way that Miriam Hansen tries to identify it: a wandering gaze that focuses more on a sensuality of vision,

and that is less driven by action. *Cléo from 5 to 7* is able to restructure the systems of looking present in mainstream narrative cinema, but without relying on the destruction of pleasure that Mulvey calls for and that *Jeanne Dielman* accomplishes.

Cléo and Another Female Quotidian

I am interested in focusing on both *Cléo* and *Jeanne Dielman* because I see several similarities between the two films. Both films are primarily about time, but also focus on the female quotidian for their titular characters. *Jeanne Dielman* presents a quotidian of the “everywoman,” representing activities that are completed daily by many women around the world. While I would not argue that Jeanne is an “everywoman,” the actions that she completes throughout the film are culturally understood to be “women’s work”. In recreating a quotidian to which so many women can presumably relate, *Jeanne Dielman* ultimately estranges its viewers (to a productive effect) through its hyperreal depiction of time. It is interesting to note that while *Cléo* represents a female quotidian that is not that of the everywoman, Cléo is ultimately a more relatable, empathetic character than Jeanne. This is due in large part to the use of more traditional camera angles (close-ups, point of view shots, et cetera) as well as narrative techniques that provide a better understanding of character interiority.

Cléo is clearly of a higher social and economic class than Jeanne Dielman, and this is reflected through her daily activities and behaviors. Jeanne is an extremely frugal character, letting nothing go to waste, whereas Cléo is frivolous with her expenses. When Jeanne leaves the house, it is purely for practical purposes: to stop at the bank, buy food for dinner, look for a button to match her son’s sweater. Jeanne is unconcerned with her own personal pleasure and more focused on the maintenance of her household.

Cléo's quotidian is focused solely on herself—the narcissistic pleasure of shopping, admiring herself, and being admired by others. Practicality is the last thing on her mind, as evidenced by a trip to a hat shop where she purchases a winter hat in black fur on the first day of summer. In *The Practice of Everyday Life Volume 2*, Michel De Certeau writes of the experience of shopping in department stores as being almost poetic and somewhat removed from reality: “Downtown is the permission to always dream more about an other life, an *elsewhere*. A momentary forgetfulness of real life is at the heart of the practical urban experience of department stores” (103).

The hat shop sequence where Cléo tries on a multitude of different *chapeaux* is the first moment that she appears to be truly happy, almost childlike in her glee. She models the hats to Angèle and the saleswoman, and at one point when she looks in a mirror, Cléo's voice over states: “Everything suits me. Trying things on intoxicates me!” It is through her experiences of trying things on and regarding herself in the mirror that Cléo is able to put off her fear of death. Ultimately Cléo and Jeanne's daily lives do share certain similarities in spite of their economic differences: they are both in some respects concerned with distracting themselves from their greater fears. For Jeanne, her housework is a way to avoid confronting the “‘vast deserts of eternity’ that threaten to engulf her,” (Kinder 251) while for Cléo, her daily routine is a way to hide not only from her own mortality, but also from discovering who she truly is beneath her carefully constructed persona.

Male and Female Gazes

In my previous chapter, I offered an explanation of the patriarchal structuring of looks found in traditional narrative cinema, and the subsequent ‘masculinization of the

spectator'. As Mary Ann Doane writes in her article about female spectatorship, a simple reversal of roles, such as an active female look towards a passive 'to-be-looked-at' male character, would not constitute a 'female gaze,' but rather a male gaze perpetrated by a female character or spectator. The reversal of roles would be ineffective because it "remains locked in the same logic...an essential attribute of that dominant system is the matching of male subjectivity with the agency of the look" (134). In order to challenge a system so engrained in the cinema, Mulvey called for a destruction of pleasure, stating: "The first blow against the monolithic accumulation of traditional film conventions...is to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment. There is no doubt that this destroys the satisfaction, pleasure and privilege of the 'invisible guest', and highlights how film has depended on voyeuristic active/passive mechanisms" ("Visual Pleasure" 847-848).

Jeanne Dielman is a film that is able to challenge traditional film conventions in the way that Mulvey suggests, but this is largely at the expense of traditional spectatorial pleasure. Mulvey's call for the destruction of pleasure also leaves little room for an imagining of what a female gaze might entail. Although she does discuss questions of female spectatorship in her 1981 article "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'", writing that female spectators engage in "trans-sex identification" (125), finding pleasure in identifying with the 'active' masculine point of view, the look of the female spectator is still largely dependent on identification with the masculine position. The look of the audience at the film is discussed in terms of a female point of view, but an imagining of a 'female gaze' achieved through visual techniques remains unaddressed.

Cléo from 5 to 7 eliminates the male gaze, but not at the expense of identification or spectatorial pleasure. In an interview with *Cineaste* in 1983, Varda spoke of her desire to make films that would reach a wide audience, not just declared feminists: “A film is not a basket to put everything into. It is a piece of entertainment, of communication, and if you want communication with many men and women, you have to find a fluid way to communicate” (221). *Cléo* is certainly a feminist film, but it is also a piece of pleasurable entertainment. The film allows for spectator identification with the main character, but in a different way than many Hollywood films. The feelings of identification are not achieved through a visual manipulation of shot reverse shot; identification is instead enabled by the presentation of characters’ interiority, often achieved through the use of voice over. Instead of a controlling, manipulative presence, the camera becomes more of a detached, wandering observer. The viewer is not forced or manipulated into feeling a certain way; there is more room for contemplation on the part of the spectator.

Before proceeding, I think it is necessary to explain in more detail what I mean by a “controlling,” or “masterful” gaze. It is evident that Agnès Varda is a filmmaker who has control over the images she chooses to create. Her shots are artfully composed, well planned and executed, and filled with symbolic meaning. Although Varda’s precise vision for her films could be labeled as controlled or masterful filmmaking, what is of interest to me is the gaze of the camera in relation to the profilmic space. When I say a controlling or masterful gaze, I mean a gaze that is clearly goal-oriented, that seeks to control the people, places, and things it records, as well as the feelings elicited in the spectator. The male gaze as identified by Mulvey is a controlling or dominating one in that there is fragmentation and objectification of female bodies, as well as forced

identification with the masculine position. The look of the camera in *Cléo from 5 to 7* is less masterful, and more wandering, allowing the viewer more power to reflect upon the images presented.

The idea of a wandering, less dominating gaze is something that Miriam Hansen discusses in her article “Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship”. While avoiding an essentialist argument on the grounds that gender is a social construct, Hansen attempts to envision what a female gaze might look like in comparison to the dominating male gaze that Mulvey discusses. Hansen writes:

If such generalization is at all permissible, women might be more likely to indulge—without immediately repressing—in a sensuality of vision which contrasts with the goal-oriented discipline of the one-eyed masculine look. Christa Karpenstein speaks in this context of ‘an unrestrained scopic drive, a swerving and sliding gaze which disregards the meanings and messages of signs and images that socially determine the subject, a gaze that defies the limitations and fixations of the merely visible’ (640).

As I mentioned in my previous chapter, it is interesting that Hansen describes the masculine look as a ‘goal-oriented’ one, because David Bordwell’s depiction of time in traditional narrative cinema posits the duration of a film as the “time it takes to achieve or fail to achieve a goal” (19). A film’s narrative could span decades, but only the aspects of the story necessary to the completion of the primary goal must be shown. In mainstream cinema that portrays events in real time, the goal of the film must usually be accomplished within the timeframe of the movie. For example, in *Run Lola Run* (Tom Tykwer, 1998), the main character has only 20 minutes to bring 100,000 marks to her

boyfriend before his gangster boss (to whom he owes the money) kills him. This time constraint lends a sense of urgency and purpose to every minute within the film.

Although *Cléo from 5 to 7* has a fixed time constraint, there is no explicit goal that events are meant to lead up to in the film. Bordwell writes that in classical narration each scene brings a character closer to his or her goal: “The classical scene continues or closes off cause-effect developments left dangling in prior scenes while also opening up new causal lines for future development” (20). One could argue that the ‘goal’ of the film is for Cléo to discover the results of her biopsy, but there is no sense that each scene brings the protagonist closer to her objective. There is a narrative arc in that Cléo as a character evolves and changes throughout the course of her day, but she does not set out at the beginning of the story to accomplish a specific action. Her main objective is to pass the time while she awaits the results of her medical test. She goes shopping, sits in various cafés, pays a visit to a friend, takes a walk in the park, and so on. The pace of the film is a leisurely one: the timing and content of sequences are not driven by a need to constantly move forward towards a clear-cut conclusion. This lack of a definitive goal allows the film to focus more explicitly on a depiction of time passing. Varda has stated that “all of [her] films are based on the principles of contradiction-juxtaposition,” in the case of *Cléo*, objective time and subjective time (Flitterman-Lewis 218).

Objective and Subjective Temporality

In a documentary about the making of *Cléo from 5 to 7*, Varda explains her conception of objective and subjective time:

Showing time is difficult. Time can be experienced, whether we feel good, bad or afraid. We wait for someone or we’re having fun. I’d call

this subjective time. And then there's objective time. It's intransigent. It's mechanical time divided into hours, minutes and sometimes seconds. This type of regularity, like a metronome, marks every instant. I wanted to blend both in the film. The objective time of clocks scattered throughout, and the subjective time that Cléo experiences during the film (*Remembrances*).

Varda's notions of objective and subjective time share many similarities with Henri Bergson's differentiation between clock time and duration. Clock time represents time in a more mathematical fashion: time progresses forward linearly. Duration, on the other hand, is a more complex, subjective interpretation of time. It is a vision of time that simultaneously extends through past, present, and future: "Our duration is not merely one instant replacing another; if it were, there would never be anything but the present...Duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances" (Bergson 6-7). It would seem difficult for cinema to represent duration, since a film lasts for a specific amount of time, and this time, as well as the images presented in time, do not change. *Cléo from 5 to 7* successfully represents duration, however, through its use of objective and subjective time.

Pam Fox Kulken further elaborates on the idea of objective time, subjective time, and duration in her analysis of *Cléo* when she associates objective time with the masculine, and subjective time with the feminine: "Objective time (like *temps* or men's time) obeys laws and facts that prescribe time to run out as if to a finish line: the ending. Subjective, unpredictable, anxious time (*durée* or women's time) is creative and covets more life, activity, and drama" (352). It could be said that most mainstream narratives

deal with an objective time that is more goal-oriented: there is a finish line that must be reached by the end of the film. *Cléo* makes use of objective time in that there is an end point to be reached (7:00 p.m.) but because this objective time is intermingled with subjective time, the need for a conclusive goal is minimal. In fact, although the film's title implies that a two-hour period will be covered, the film only lasts an hour and a half. Varda has even reminded viewers that the film's content actually only follows Cléo until 6:30 p.m. (*Remembrances*). This lack of goal-oriented narrativity is reinforced by the wandering look of the camera present in the film. Ultimately the representation of time as simultaneously objective and subjective allows for a separation from the goal-oriented masculine look towards a female gaze focused on a subjective experience of duration as opposed to a mechanical race forward to a conclusion that is typically associated with the masculine position.

The fact that the film takes place in real time reinforces the sense of a countdown, which allows the film to engage in a temporality of waiting: a temporality that is both objective and subjective. It is objective in that there is a specific, mathematical amount of time that Cléo awaits her diagnosis, but this objective time becomes wrapped up in Cléo's own subjective duration. Bergson discusses a temporality of waiting where mathematical time can coincide with duration:

If I want to mix a glass of sugar and water, I must, willy-nilly, wait until the sugar melts. This little fact is big with meaning. For here the time I have to wait is not that mathematical time which would apply equally well to the entire history of the material world, even if that history were spread out instantaneously in space. It coincides with my impatience, that is to

say, with a certain portion of my own duration, which I cannot protract or contract as I like. It is no longer something *thought*, it is something *lived*.

It is no longer a relation, it is an absolute (12-13).

The titles in *Cléo from 5 to 7* reinforce this objective, mathematical time, as the clock gradually approaches seven. However, wrapped within this ‘objective time’ are instances of ‘subjective time,’ or duration: moments where the spectator has insights into particular characters, into the way they live time. “Lim’s formulation of Bergsonian duration comes to mind: ‘while we wait impatiently, we become (somewhat painfully) aware not only of our own duration but of the multiple durations outside our own’” (Mroz 77). The film brings awareness to the multiple durations that exist within this mathematical block of time through the use of titles pertaining to individual characters, for example: “Angèle de 17h08 à 17h13.” After this particular title, as happens frequently with other characters throughout the film, we are given a glimpse into the inner thoughts of Angèle through the use of voice-over. The distinct chapters throughout the film not only map out clock-time, but they also provide examples of how various characters experience time subjectively. These interior monologues are often meandering, and more effective at creating a certain ambiance than helping characters reach a particular goal. Such moments are not necessary to the forwarding of Cléo’s narrative, and Cléo is frequently oblivious to other characters’ thoughts and desires.

This lack of a goal-oriented narrative is also reinforced by the visual techniques used in the film. One could even argue that *Cléo from 5 to 7* creates Deleuzian time-images, as the images presented in the film are not directly related to or induced by action. Scenes that would normally be removed in a classical style of cinema, such as

characters walking from point A to point B are included in the film. In the first half of the film, there are several scenes of Cléo walking down the street, either alone or with her assistant Angèle. In a bird's eye view, the camera follows Cléo as she travels from the fortuneteller to a café, and later from the café to the hat shop. The fact that these scenes are filmed in extreme long shots exemplifies to a certain extent the "camera-consciousness" inherent to the film. These shots that in a slow pan track Cléo's movement from one place to the next give an almost voyeuristic perspective of our heroine, yet it is a perspective that is not shared with a particular character. The gaze of the camera in the film is a wandering one in the way that Hansen describes: there is a certain "sensuality of vision," a "swerving and sliding gaze" that is created through Varda's representation of her heroine. In the scenes where Cléo is shot from afar, the spectator is made aware of his or her identification with the camera, and therefore his or her voyeurism. This technique creates an effect that distances viewer from action.

Varda is careful not to present images that explicitly objectify her protagonist, while simultaneously bringing awareness to the fact that Cléo's sense of identity is largely constructed through the gaze of others. Cléo is a character that obviously cares very much about her appearance, as she is a pop-singer whose image is constructed by a team of professionals. Her appearance in the eyes of others is her livelihood—indeed, she even associates beauty with life and ugliness with death when she states: "As long as I'm beautiful, I'm more alive than the others."

Although Varda does not objectify her female heroine through the use of visual fragmentation and a controlling, masculine gaze, she does make a commentary on the way in which women are frequently objectified in cinema and in life. Not only is Cléo a

commodity constructed through the gaze of others, but she also actively makes herself into a fetish object. Cléo's fetishization of herself is represented largely through the film's use of mirrors:



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

The first half of the film contains the majority of the scenes that depict Cléo looking into mirrors, recalling in many ways Lacan's description of the mirror stage.

Lacan describes the moment when a child is first able to recognize his own reflection in a mirror, specifying that although the child recognizes himself in his reflection, he also identifies with his image as an object outside of himself, and object over which he has total control. Cléo identifies with herself as an object in these instances, and presumably the pleasure of seeing her own beautiful reflection gives her a feeling of control that is otherwise missing in her life. She is able to forget her fear of death when she looks in the mirror, because she is reminded of her beauty. This association of beauty with life and ugliness with death is something that is reinforced by other people in Cléo's life. In the first half of the film, no one seems to take her fear of death seriously. Angèle reassures her that her illness is probably nothing, and many other characters write off her worries as childish. Even Cléo's lover José says: "Your beauty is your health". When Cléo asks him nervously, "What if I was really ill?" José changes the subject.

It is unsurprising that few people take Cléo seriously, as she is an incredibly self-absorbed individual. Her looks are her primary concern, evidenced by her blonde wig, fancy dress, and ridiculous hat. Her point of transformation in the film comes after she sings the macabre song *Sans toi*, that references death and decay. In this moment Cléo realizes just how superficial her relationships are, and to what extent her life is based solely on appearances. "Everyone spoils me. No one loves me," she says before changing into a simple black dress and removing her wig. As she leaves her apartment building, she stops and looks into a mirrored window on the street (Figure 10). It is at this point in the narrative that Cléo ceases fetishizing herself: instead of joyfully contemplating the superficial aspects of her reflection, she is finally able to recognize herself along with her fears. In a voice over we hear Cléo's thoughts: "My unchanging

doll's face, this ridiculous hat...I can't see my own fears. I always think everyone's looking at me, but I only look at myself. It wears me out". From this point on, Cléo transitions from only looking at herself to beginning to see the world around her. As several critics have noted, the point when Cléo decides to change her appearance and go off on her own marks her transition from object to subject. Varda has summarized her thoughts on the matter wonderfully:

During the first part of the film, Cléo is described and defined by those who see her. Her assistant, the hat saleswoman, her lover, the musicians, and the mirrors. Cléo is seen. In the middle of the film, I wanted a clean cut, a sharp change. Forty-five minutes into the film, the beauty feels herself cracking. The baby doll, the blond starlet, everything cracks. She rips off her negligee, her wig. She leaves. At this point, she begins to look at others. She looks at people in the streets, in cafés, she looks at her friend, and then the soldier. I consider this a feminist approach. I wanted to focus on her as a woman who defines herself through others' vision. And at some point, because she's the one looking, she changes. She redefines herself on her own (*Remembrances*).

Where *Jeanne Dielman* chose to do away with most intra-diegetic subjective looking in order to avoid a masculine gaze, *Cléo from 5 to 7* attempts to reimagine subjective looking from a feminine perspective, avoiding the objectification and mastery associated with the masculine look. Varda certainly has a masterful control of her camera in the sense that every shot is precisely composed, but the images she portrays do not seek to control or clearly define the objects and events recorded. We can begin to

identify a female gaze in the film, a wandering gaze in the way that Hansen describes it: there is a certain “sensuality of vision,” or a “swerving and sliding gaze” present in the film, one that can be evaluated in more detail through the analysis of a scene (640).

The scene in question occurs in Chapter VIII of the film, “Quelques Autres de 17h45 à 17h52”. Cléo enters a café, and for the first time in the film there is a point of view shot depicting what the protagonist sees upon entering. Although the camera’s gaze is aligned with that of Cléo, it is not a ‘goal-oriented’ gaze in the way that Mulvey identifies the masculine look. Similarly, there is no goal or conclusion to the scene in question other than a wandering observation. Cléo walks slowly from table to table, listening to pieces of various conversations, observing her surroundings, but not in search of anything in particular. While some of the conversation topics are interesting, they are not vital to the narrative, and the entirety of any one conversation is kept from the viewer. The camera occasionally shares Cléo’s gaze, panning across different spaces in the café, but never resting for too long on a single subject. What Cléo sees in this scene is not important; what is crucial is the fact that she is finally able to look as a subject, abandoning her role as an object to be looked at.

Perhaps one could even say that in this moment Cléo becomes aware of the multiple other durations that are happening at the same time she is experiencing her own duration of waiting. At one point Cléo sits down and we begin to hear a voice-over of her thoughts, but this is drowned out mid-sentence by the voices of others talking. It is as if Cléo’s narcissism is being suppressed by the sudden realization of the existence of others. This scene provides an example of objective and subjective time coming into contact to the point that they become indistinguishable; this idea is illustrated through the

multiple variations of subjective time present in the scene: one subjectivity does not outweigh the other, even the subjectivity of our heroine. In an analysis of *L'Avventura*, Matilda Mroz makes a claim that is equally applicable to *Cléo from 5 to 7*: “The slow pace and lingering rhythms, where time ceases to be subject to strict narrative development and instead unfolds its own particular concerns, encourages an attentive awareness of the passage of time through the film” (53).

The portrayal of real time in the film allows for a fruitful use of “dead time,” or time in which nothing happens that is directly linked to the forwarding of the narrative. In traditional narrative cinema, dead time is usually eliminated, but in order to give a realistic feeling of real time passing, dead time is essential. This time that is not explicitly related to action helps create a certain ambiance in the film. An example of this would be the scene where Cléo and Angèle take a taxi from the hat shop back to Cléo’s apartment. A large part of this sequence is filmed out of the window of the taxi, providing a view of Parisian streets flying by. These images are not attached to any particular character, but instead create a general atmosphere or mood. Varda has stated that “Paris for me is linked with feelings of fear and anguish,” and she successfully creates a mood of anxiety in this scene in particular through her representation of inanimate objects (Flitterman-Lewis 230).

The Mythical in Architecture and Objects

Paris plays a central role in *Cléo*; it is almost like another character in the film, which is interesting considering that Varda chose to film in her home city for purely practical reasons (*Remembrances*). Michel De Certeau discusses city settings, and the almost lifelike quality that architecture and inanimate objects can take on in cities such as

Paris. “These wild objects, stemming from indecipherable pasts, are for us the equivalent of what the gods of antiquity were, the ‘spirits’ of the place. Like their divine ancestors, these objects play the roles of actors in the city, not because of what they do or say but because their strangeness is silent, as well as their existence, concealed from actuality” (136). De Certeau goes on to describe how places and objects take on an almost mythical or god-like quality in painting, in part because places are often still recognizable decades after a painting is completed. The same can be said of the cinema: *Cléo from 5 to 7* was filmed over 50 years ago, yet many of the locations used in the film remain recognizable today. Paris is not an anonymous backdrop in *Cléo*; Varda documents the Parisian cityscape with an almost cinéma vérité-like approach. Many extras in the café scenes were actually just people going about their daily lives. Similarly, Varda tends to focus on very specific locations in Paris—we are often aware of the names of streets, bus stations, or squares that characters pass throughout the film. This precision of location is helpful in creating a believable sense of real time: crewmembers carefully documented the time it would take to move from one location to the next, and they remained as faithful as possible to the time it would take Cléo to complete her trajectory (*Remembrances*).

Deleuze has spoken of the importance of settings and objects in neo-realist filmmaking, and how objects can take on an almost lifelike quality, becoming important in and of themselves. In discussing the ‘inventory of a setting’ Deleuze writes:

So the situation is not extended directly into action: it is no longer sensory-motor, as in realism, but primarily optical and of sound, invested by the senses, before action takes shape in it, and uses or confronts its elements. Everything remains real in this neo-realism (whether it is film

set or exteriors) but, between the reality of the setting and that of the action, it is no longer a motor extension which is established, but rather a dreamlike connection through the intermediary of the liberated sense organs. It is as if the action floats in the situation, rather than bringing it to a conclusion or strengthening it (*Cinema 2* 4).

In the cab ride sequence, there are several almost dreamlike moments that are more sensory oriented than they are related to action. At one point the cab slows to a halt, and out of the window we see a display of African masks in a storefront. The film cuts to close-ups of individual masks, which have a menacing air about them. It is not the masks themselves that are frightening, but the way in which they are portrayed: the close-up gives the object more significance than it would ordinarily have. The fact that these objects are not directly related to the narrative also lends to the unsettling effect created. It is in small moments like these that feelings of dread are able to cut through otherwise relaxing sequences. We are reminded of the very real fear of death that consumes Cléo throughout the film, and the effect is almost visceral.

Time and Spectator Estrangement

The awareness of time passing in *Cléo* is emphasized through the use of titles, as well as sound effects. In the opening sequence, after Cléo visits with the fortuneteller, she walks down a spiral staircase to leave, her footsteps matching up with the almost metronome-like rhythm of the music. Soon, the improbable, rhythmic sound effects begin to be matched by the editing: jump cuts create a ‘visual ticking’ that not only bring awareness to the passing of time, but also to the fact that one is watching a film. *Cléo from 5 to 7* does not engage in spectator estrangement to the extent that *Jeanne Dielman*

does, but there are nevertheless moments in the film that remove the spectator from his or her involvement in the narrative, thereby allowing room for individual reflection. One example of this is the opening sequence, where Cléo has her tarot cards read. The first image presented in the film is a color image of the cards on a table, leading the spectator to believe that the film will be in color. However, the dialogue between Cléo and the fortuneteller is in black and white. When asked why certain portions of the opening scene were filmed in color, Varda responded, “The fortuneteller believes the tarot’s message. Cléo believes what she’s told, she’s afraid, feels threatened, sees the hanged man. Naturally it’s fiction. A fiction in color, that draws us into the rest of the film. To reality. We switch to black and white. Ninety minutes of reality” (*Remembrances*). The stark contrast between black and white and color also draws awareness to the fiction of the narrative. In traditional Hollywood films, edits are meant to go unnoticed by the spectator, and a scene should flow smoothly from one shot to the next. In the opening sequence of *Cléo*, the cuts between the colorful tarot cards and the black and white conversation make the viewer more conscious of the editing process and the artificial nature of the construction of a scene. The sequence is at first quite jarring, but this somewhat alienating effect engenders a more active and contemplative spectator. Varda has stated:

I’m not really interested in problems, but in certain questions. [Even the spectator who goes to the cinema primarily for entertainment needs certain films which pose questions.]² In the end, I think that people have a taste for reflection...I like a film which acts as a sort of discoverer

² Brackets are Flitterman-Lewis’s.

[*révélateur*]. . . I try to pose these questions in a way which is both clear and ambiguous, so that the spectator may pose them to himself [or herself] in turn (Flitterman-Lewis 234).

To a certain degree, the film produces a Brechtian estrangement effect. In Brecht's description of epic theatre he writes of taking a production's subject matter and putting it through "a process of [estrangement]³: the [estrangement] that is necessary to all understanding. When something seems 'the most obvious thing in the world' it means that any attempt to understand the world has been given up" (Brecht 71). Another example of this estrangement effect in the film occurs after Cléo leaves the café where she spends a moment in quiet observation. In this moment of relative calm, no one seems to notice Cléo's presence, but when she leaves the café, she is immediately overwhelmed by the gaze of others and the weight of time passing. As Cléo walks down a Parisian sidewalk, the soundtrack is silent except for her footsteps, creating another clock-like sound-effect. Everyone she passes seems to stare at her, evidenced by shots from Cléo's perspective of passersby practically staring directly into the camera. The pace of the editing begins to quicken as images from the street are interspersed with previous imagery, and ultimately characters from Cléo's life (Angèle, the fortuneteller, José, etc.) staring directly into the camera. The obvious sound effects, in addition to the look directly at the spectator create a distancing effect in the audience. Mulvey writes:

There are three different looks associated with cinema: that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen

³ The 1964 translation I use originally translates this as 'alienation effect' which has since become outdated and replaced by 'estrangement effect'.

illusion. The conventions of narrative film deny the first two and subordinate them to the third, the conscious aim being always to eliminate intrusive camera presence and prevent a distancing awareness in the audience. Without these two absences...fictional drama cannot achieve reality, obviousness and truth (*Visual Pleasure* 847).

When *Cléo from 5 to 7* brings awareness to the gaze of the camera, it is precisely to avoid 'obviousness and truth' in favor of ambiguity and a more active spectator. The film creates a distancing awareness in part through the use of a fourth look: the look directly at the viewer.

The spectator looks at a film, but he or she is not subject to a look. It is for this reason that the viewer is able to imagine him or herself as 'invisible'. Willemen cites Metz's formulation: "the scene ignores that it is seen...and that ignorance allows the viewer to ignore himself/herself as voyeur" (211). This look at the audience surprises the viewer in his or her voyeurism, creating a feeling of discomfort or even shame. "In the filmic process, this look can be represented as the look which constitutes the viewer as visible subject" (Willemen 216). The viewer's removal from absorption in the narrative and subsequent consciousness of his or her individual subjectivity allows the spectator more freedom for interpretation and thought. In the scene in question, the feelings of discomfort are amplified by the minimalist sound effects, and several close-ups of Cléo's anxious expression. A close-up of a clock, presumably from Cléo's bedroom, is also interwoven with the other images, accompanied by a ticking sound. Any comfort Cléo may have felt in her quiet observation of the café has now been shaken by the reminder of time passing, and the fear associated with her waiting. The

representation of time in the film is linked to mortality—one cannot prevent time from passing, just as one cannot prevent death from arriving.

Time and Mortality

As Edgar Allan Poe once wrote, “The death... of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world” (4). Although this phrase may be considered somewhat problematic by feminists today, it is impossible to deny that the death of a beautiful woman is also a very cinematic topic, as evidenced by a variety of films including Hitchcockian thrillers such as *Psycho* or *Vertigo*. The illness or death of a female protagonist is also often central to the ‘woman’s film’ genre, as Molly Haskell points out. She writes: “Doomed heroines, by not dying until the last moment, do not (as far as the experience of the film is concerned) really die. Women with fatal diseases receive all the attention and sympathy of an invalid without actually acting or looking sick. A heroine gets moral credit for not telling anyone of her illness...while only divulging it to an audience of millions” (27). In woman’s cinema, according to Haskell, “all women begin as victims” (24). *Cléo from 5 to 7* begins no differently: Cléo receives news that can only be read as a death sentence in her mind, and she subsequently feels victimized and helpless for a large portion of the narrative. In general, *Cléo from 5 to 7* embraces clichés found in mainstream cinema while simultaneously subverting them. The beautiful heroine condemned to death is a plotline found in many Hollywood melodramas, but *Cléo* plays on these clichés by overturning the conventions associated with this topic. Instead of playing the stoic, uncomplaining heroine, Cléo expresses her certainty that the sickness will be fatal. She is both theatrical and narcissistic in the discussion of her illness—she divulges the information to Angèle while looking in the

mirror, and immediately breaks down into a loud fit of tears, inciting Angèle to comfort her like a child. In some ways Cléo is acting out a fantasy: she wishes to receive all the attention and sympathy that a Hollywood heroine would receive while still holding on to her beauty.

Through this somewhat self-reflexive technique, the film is able to comment on the commodification of woman as image found in many Hollywood films. In mainstream cinema it is a woman's primary duty to remain beautiful no matter what hardships befall her. As soon as Cléo is able to let go of this desire to be seen in a manner typical to a leading lady, she is able to accept her fear of death and open herself up to communication with others. The last chapter of the film (*Cléo et Antoine de 18h15 à 18h30*) is the first time we see a title focused on two people as opposed to one, underscoring Cléo's evolution from "the compulsion of seeing her own reflection in a mirror to having her gaze now returned by Antoine, this friend, this other" (Flitterman-Lewis 282).

The final scene of the film is an important one, and marks the culmination of Cléo's transformation from narcissistic object to seeing subject. Cléo and Antoine visit the Salpêtrière hospital to find out about Cléo's diagnosis. When they are unable to see the doctor, Cléo is at first upset, but then realizes that her preoccupation with knowing the results is futile. She becomes more interested in enjoying her time with Antoine before his departure. When he tells her that his boat will be leaving a little before eight, Cléo replies, "We have so little time." She subsequently decides that worrying about the doctor is "silly," and that she can phone him in the evening. Moments later, after asking Antoine where he would like to dine, she tells him: "we have plenty of time" ("*On a tout*

le temps").⁴ On the word “time,” the film cuts from a medium close up to a long shot in order to visually reinforce this idea. The fact that Cléo recites two such contradictory statements within seconds of each other illustrates the topology of time, the fact that “everything that changes is in time, but time does not itself change” (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 17). Subjective time may be ever evolving, but objective time will continually march forward to an ending.

Directly after Cléo’s second statement, the narrative takes an unnerving turn. In a medium close up, Antoine realizes that he had been wrong about Flora being the goddess of summer, and that Cléo’s namesake (her real name being Florence) is actually the goddess of spring, a season which ended the day before. Although Antoine reassures her that “Today is Flora’s summer,” the mix-up could easily be read as a foreshadowing of Cléo’s end, her death. Immediately after this realization, the film cuts to a long shot from a diagonal angle, amplifying feelings of uncertainty and confusion. A car approaches and the film cuts to a medium close up of the doctor as he delivers the news of Cléo’s illness. The doctor does not appear to be concerned, but confirms Cléo’s worst fears: she will have to undergo chemotherapy treatments for two months. The film visually exemplifies the powerlessness of Cléo and Antoine in these moments: as the doctor delivers the news, we are not privy to any reaction shots of our heroes; we only hear them in voice-off. As the doctor’s car pulls away, the camera does as well, dwarfing Cléo and Antoine as they look on in shock.

This revelation marks a somber feeling of finality, but the viewer’s fears are somewhat appeased when Cléo states that she is no longer afraid, that she even feels

⁴ A literal translation would be: “we have all the time”

happy. Surprisingly, death, once unmasked, is no longer as frightening for Cléo as it once was. According to Bíró: “What makes Varda’s film beautiful is that the idea of death becomes a fertile, vital principle. The sight of death, the sense of an ending, attract Cleo’s attention to the essential. Although—perhaps even because—she has never done so, she must now ask the question: who am I?” (6). Cléo’s transformation is solidified in the last few moments of the film as she and Antoine walk side by side, taking turns glancing at each other. In the last shot of the film, they come to a halt and both look into each other’s eyes: Cléo has not only become a seeing subject, but also one who allows herself to be seen by others in more than just a superficial fashion.

Conclusion

Cléo from 5 to 7 is a film about time, not simply the effects of time on characters in the film, but also how the representation of time can affect spectatorship. In representing a temporality of waiting that is not explicitly driven by action, the film offers up new possibilities of seeing. The camera is freed to explore surroundings and objects that are not necessarily linked to the forwarding of narrative, and the female protagonist is liberated from a fragmenting and controlling gaze. Ultimately, the representation of time also accords the viewer more freedom—the spectator is not forced into identification or manipulated to feel a certain way through the construction of the film. Although *Cléo from 5 to 7* has a distinct end point, and appears to come to a satisfying conclusion, the ending is not as clear-cut as one might be inclined to think. Much room for interpretation is left up to the viewer, and this ambiguity is made clear by the final music of the film. Instead of the chords progressing forward towards a musical resolution, the final chord of the film is a dissonant one, creating an unstable sound that is

surprising after the seemingly neat resolution of various storylines. This lack of musical resolution implies to a degree that the story is not over: although the objective clock time of the film has reached its conclusion, life is not as neatly ordered or clearly interpretable as cinema.

Conclusion

In “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Mulvey writes of an oscillation between narrative and spectacle that occurs in Classical Hollywood Cinema, stating: “The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation” (841). It is interesting that while neither *Jeanne Dielman* nor *Cléo from 5 to 7* objectify their female characters, the protagonists of both films (a prostitute and a singer, respectively) are forms that typically offer the opportunity for spectacle on screen. In some ways, the films are more powerful because of their alternative representation of women. In order to escape the patriarchal structuring of looks that is predominant in mainstream cinema, it is necessary first to understand the techniques in place, and perhaps even to draw upon some of them. As Mulvey writes: “There is no way in which we can produce an alternative out of the blue, but we can begin to make a break by examining patriarchy with the tools it provides” (“Visual Pleasure” 838). An alternative cinema can only exist as a counterpoint to mainstream cinema. Although the prostitute and the singer are types that are represented frequently in terms of spectacle, Akerman and Varda’s rendering of time and space allow for an elimination of the oscillation between spectacle and narrative.

A New Kind of Spectacle

As previously stated, the visual spectacle of woman as erotic object that structures Classical Hollywood Cinema forces narrative time to slow to a halt. The famous scene of Bo Derek running down a beach in the movie *10* is a prime example: the scopophilic

pleasure of observing Derek's character interrupts the flow of the narrative, and the use of slow motion only emphasizes this manipulation of time. Spectacle in narrative cinema forces female characters to remain passive, responsible for slowing down the progression of the narrative as opposed to propelling it forward. Ultimately the split between narrative and spectacle "supports the man's role as the active one of forwarding the story, making things happen," while the woman maintains her role as passive object (Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure" 842). The unusual representations of time and space in *Jeanne Dielman* and *Cléo from 5 to 7* are part of what allows the films to undo the oscillation between narrative and spectacle. In *Jeanne Dielman*, Chantal Akerman eliminates the spectacle associated with the prostitute by eliding all but one scene of Jeanne seeing her clients. The film downplays the importance of Jeanne's identity as a prostitute, focusing on her all-consuming role as a housewife and mother. The scenes where Jeanne sees her clients are elided in order to avoid a voyeuristic perspective, but these elisions also affirm the importance of the rest of Jeanne's daily activities, activities that would not normally be considered 'interesting' enough to be portrayed on screen. Jeanne is not defined by her prostitution—sleeping with clients for money is simply another chore that fills her day. In some ways, Akerman could also be said to create a different kind of spectacle: that of the everyday. Instead of freezing or slowing time, an excess of time is represented. The scenes where Jeanne prepares meals or cleans the house are not essential to the forwarding of the narrative, yet they are given an importance that is atypical in most mainstream films. These scenes could in some ways be read as a sort of spectacle, but one that estranges the spectator as opposed to creating pleasure.

Similarly, *Cléo from 5 to 7* is careful not to present its protagonist in an eroticized fashion. The film comments on the common portrayal of woman as spectacle in popular culture by playing up the fact that Cléo is in many ways an object constructed through the gaze of others. The film presents an awareness of this: in the first half of the film, Cléo dresses and acts much like the female star of a Hollywood picture, but at the same time, *Cléo from 5 to 7* does not visually represent its protagonist as an object to be admired by the spectator. She is a singer, but there are no music hall numbers, only one song that betrays the feelings of insecurity and fear that Cléo experiences. At one point near the end of the film, Cléo walks down a set of stairs in the Parc Mountsouris, singing and dancing in an imitation of a showgirl making an entrance in a Hollywood musical. The moment is not at all spectacle, however, because Cléo performs alone, for herself only, her voice barely audible as the camera records everything in one unconstrained long shot. Instead of freezing the flow of the narrative, this scene is able to comment on the somewhat absurd aspects of spectacle found in conventional narrative cinema. Cléo goes through the motions of the Hollywood showgirl, but she laughs at herself while she does so.

Alternative Viewing Experiences

Although both *Cléo* and *Jeanne Dielman* are groundbreaking with regards to their creation of an alternative viewing experience, they are not the only films that successfully transform spectator positioning. Other films that are focused on drawing the spectator's attention to the process of looking are able to achieve similar effects. The awareness of the camera is also vital to the elimination of woman as spectacle, as in mainstream cinema, the conscious aim is to "eliminate intrusive camera presence and prevent a

distancing awareness in the audience. Without these two absences...fictional drama cannot achieve reality, obviousness and truth” (Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure” 847). By illustrating the function of looking in cinema, a film can successfully turn the ‘invisible subject’ that is the spectator into a self-conscious subject. Paul Willemen cites the films of Stephen Dwoskin, in particular the film *Girl* (1975). *Girl* is a film that arguably objectifies its titular character, but it is not to a pleasurable effect. The film is comprised of one long, static take of a nude woman standing on a bath mat. The take lasts until the film runs out (about thirty minutes) and as time progresses the girl appears more and more uncomfortable: she fidgets, tries to cover herself, etc. Willemen writes that the viewer’s awareness of his or her own voyeurism elicits a feeling of shame that ultimately destroys the sadistic and narcissistic pleasure typical to the viewing process:

The act of sadistic viewing rebounds on the subject as the viewer becomes aware that the look upon the girl is having disagreeable effects on her...instead of the ‘innocent’ pleasure of watching a naked girl, the viewer now has to confront the considerable sadistic components present in his/her act of looking...The scopic drive has been turned back onto the subject and the active aim has become a passive one, delegating the role of actively viewing sadist, in a displacing gesture, onto the camera—sometimes, wrongly, identified with the filmmaker (Willemen 216).

Although the look of the camera is a sadistic one, the film does not present a clearly defined male gaze, since there is no opportunity for identification with the masculine position. The spectator identifies with the camera, and the awareness of identification

with the camera that is created over the course of the thirty minutes creates a distancing effect that in turn eliminates any opportunity for voyeuristic pleasure.

Although *Girl* is an interesting experiment with regards to time and the functioning of the look, what *Jeanne Dielman* and *Cléo from 5 to 7* achieve is arguably more complex. *Girl* brings attention to the problems inherent to the looks in cinema by making the viewer aware of the sadistic and narcissistic pleasure associated with watching a film, and how this pleasure is often at the expense of a female character. Because of the removal of any intradiegetic looking in *Girl*, this awareness is largely achieved through the sadistic gaze of the camera, and not of a particular character. *Cléo* and *Jeanne Dielman* also illustrate the extent to which viewing pleasure is dependent on woman being represented as object for spectacle, but the films are able to do so *without* the objectification of their female characters. Both films create an alternative viewing experience that goes beyond the desire to highlight the spectator's voyeuristic tendencies and identification with the masculine position. Through the elimination of spectacle achieved through spatiotemporal representations, the female protagonists of *Cléo* and *Jeanne Dielman* are no longer relegated to the typical female role of passive object, and yet they do not take on the same attributes of the 'active' male role present in Classical Hollywood Cinema. Instead of a simple reversal of roles, both *Jeanne Dielman* and *Cléo from 5 to 7* are able to create an alternative form of looking: the use of real time allows both films to create time-images that ultimately veer away from a goal driven, masculine point of view, allowing the possibility for a female oriented look.

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