

## Document Citation

Title	<b>Jeanne Dielman</b>
Author(s)	Jonas Mekas
Source	<i>Soho Weekly News</i>
Date	1976 Dec 09
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles, Akerman, Chantal, 1975

# Movie Journal

## Jonas Mekas

Three weeks ago in my column I criticized Chantal Akerman's film *Jeanne Dielman*. Two weeks ago Amy Taubin reviewed the film. I have to admit that the film is much better than one may understand from reading my remarks or Amy's review. To make matters worse, some smart editor put the title "A Woman's Tedium" to Amy's review, smart headings and titles being part of some journalistic schools these days. It's unfortunate, because Akerman's film is really very good. I find no problems (although Amy does) with the heroine's character. The film's first virtue, to me, is its uncompromising "naturalistic" style and pace. It's almost like *Greed*. For a film to be revolutionary you don't have to show a "conscious" heroine making pronouncements against woman's position today every five minutes. A silent heroine like one portrayed so brilliantly by Seyrig (of *Pull My Daisy* fame...) shouts more piercingly than any pronouncements (or the final murder scene of the film) would do, or does. By the way: concerning the murder scene, I may learn not to be distracted by it the same way as I've learned not to be distracted by the murder in *Wavelength*, another "narrative" film that I didn't mention above, and in which Amy plays the lead part.

You may wonder why in my first remarks on Akerman's film, I concentrated on negative aspects. It's like this. I don't see myself today as the only writer on the Avantgarde Film. I stated that very emphatically in my last *Voice* column. I hope that by now you see my point. Anyway, I feel now it's O.K. to voice my negative thoughts on some otherwise very fine work: I know there are

others who will extol it enough without me. But when I see that doesn't happen, as I feel is the case with Akerman's film, I have to "reverse" myself and come out to balance the situation and praise the artist as I am praising now Chantal Akerman for her unique achievement.

An item of pleasant curiosity: Maya Deren is one of the personages in James Merrill's narrative poem "The Book of Ephraim" that appears in his latest collection of poems, *Divine Comedies* (Atheneum, 1976), \$8.95 hard cover.

A week ago I visited Detroit. We were sitting in a dark college bar, drinking beer, Joseph Bernard, who brought me there to College of Art and Design (a few weeks ago he had Brakhage), and Ian Barna who came from Ann Arbor to have a beer with us — I hadn't seen him for months. Barna was telling me about Stroheim book he was completing, and how it will present Stroheim not as a victim, as he's always presented, but as an artist who never made a single compromise, who never failed. Barna also told us about his plans for a book on Kubelka and Brakhage. Oh, yes, many other things he told us, and we sat and talked and drank beer and were happy. On Sunday I received a telephone call. Barna died on Saturday (Nov. 27th), the heart.

Nov. 29. After Roger Jacoby's show I was wondering if film-makers should really talk about their films. Maybe they should leave them alone. Roger likes to talk and he drowned his films in words, so much that the images began disappearing. Operas and Hollywood movies began appearing in place of his semi-abstract and beautiful films. I was wondering if the origins of inspiration and the sources of images are really that important to know, particularly when you are so close to the film itself. Later, months, years later — perhaps. Permit the film to grow in first — then talk, explain, joke.

In the case of this particular show, film-maker's words became obstructions. Over the strong presence of the films' images he layed a layer of cheap Hollywood sentiment, opera banalities — as he continued

talking I had no choice but to leave the theater before the images of his films were totally destroyed, for me. Later I read Amy Taubin's very negative remarks (Last week, *Soho News*) on Jacoby's work. And I heard he is very upset by it. But I couldn't blame Amy too much for missing the essence of his work. She, too, was destroyed by his words and behavior and missed the films. It's unfortunate, because I think the films themselves are original and personal.

Here is a letter I received from Annette Michelson, it makes several important points on Chantal Akerman's film:

"Your brief and violent dismissal of Chantal Akerman's film, *Jeanne Dielmann*, in last week's issue of the *Soho Weekly News* has shocked and distressed a number of those for whom her work has particular importance. It is, therefore, not only for myself but for the men and women concerned with the future of film that I wish to register that shock and that distress.

"This is hardly the place to set out all the reasons for our interest in Akerman's work. These I intend to develop elsewhere in an analytic and critical context. The seriousness of her enterprise, the sense of renewal it has brought both to a narrative

mode and the inscription within it of feminist energies, seem to me exemplary and to deserve a minimum of lucid generosity sadly missing from the brief mockery of your paragraph or two. It is important that this film be seen for what it is: a collective enterprise animated by Akerman and using the skills of other talented women among them Delphine Seyrig, actress, and Babette Mangolte, camerawoman. Both of them have brought to this film their own unusual, internationally recognized competences, helping to make a major work by a young artist which transcends the narrow and empty categories of the commercial and the art film.

"Akerman is, moreover, the first European to assimilate in a concrete and powerful manner the experience and achievements of the American avant-garde. The economics of her situation, to which you so maliciously allude, are no more contradictory than those of our friends and of yourself, supported by foundation or government grants. This, of course, you are only pretending not to know and one is reduced to scrutinizing that pretense rather in the manner one reads directives from Peking, hoping for clarification."