

# Time and Reproductive Labour in Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles (1975) and Three Sisters (2012)

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## Abstract

In the article I examine *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Chantal Akerman, 1975) and *Three Sisters* (Wang Bing, 2012) to discuss how in these films extended duration serves to expose the nature of reproductive labour itself.

At first glance, the comparison between these films seems unusual, not only because of the 38 years that separate them, but also because of their different genres. *Jeanne Dielman* is a fictional film that follows the daily life of its eponymous character, a widow, housewife and prostitute who lives with her son Sylvian in Brussels, Belgium, whereas *Three Sisters* is a documentary film that accompanies three young sisters—Yingying (10), Zhenzhen (6) and Fenfen (4)—who live alone in Xiyangtang, a village located 3,200 metres above sea level in the mountain area of Yunnan, southwest China. However, the use of extended duration in the scenes and sequences in which Jeanne and Yingying withstand domestic labour suggests an improbable relation between the two. Despite employing different aesthetic strategies, in both films we see bodies engage in relentlessly laborious domestic tasks and the use of extended duration further enhances the persistent and repetitive nature of their labouring. In this way, I argue that these films not only make apparent what often remains invisible—reproductive labour—but they also deploy cinematic time to allude to the constant and ongoing process of reproductive labour itself.

*The daily fight in which the human body is engaged to keep the world clean and prevent its decay bears little resemblance to heroic deeds; the endurance it needs to repair every day anew the waste of yesterday is not courage, and what makes the effort painful is not danger but its relentless repetition.*

—Hannah Arendt<sup>1</sup>

In *The Human Condition* (1958), Hannah Arendt explicates that labour is distinct from work because it is not

dependent on its end result, on an outcome. According to her, labour “never designates the finished product, the result of labouring.”<sup>2</sup> Instead, it is a “constant, unending fight against the processes of growth and decay through which nature forever invades the human artifice, threatening the durability of the world, and its fitness for human use.”<sup>3</sup> Labour, then, is a continuous struggle that assures “the life of species” through necessity, against the effects of time.<sup>4</sup>

According to Arendt, the distinction between productive and unproductive labour reveals the critical distinction between labour and work, because labour “leaves nothing behind”.<sup>5</sup> The result of labouring is “quickly consumed [...] And yet this effort, despite its futility, is born of a great urgency and motivated by a more powerful drive than anything else, because life itself depends upon it.”<sup>6</sup> Although she does not use the term, in her argument labour becomes synonymous with reproductive labour, because it concerns the biological cycle of human life and consumption. The relationship between labouring and time is thus well defined. If the result of labour is ephemeral, then labouring becomes only visible in the bodies that endure “its relentless repetition”.<sup>7</sup>

In *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Chantal Akerman, 1975) and *Three Sisters* (Wang Bing, 2012) we see bodies engage in relentlessly laborious domestic tasks. In both films, the aesthetic strategies employed to depict these bodies’ gestures further enhance the persistent and repetitive nature of their labouring. At first glance, the comparison between these films may seem unusual, not only because of the 38 years that separate these films, but also because of their different genres. *Jeanne Dielman* is a fictional film that follows the daily life of its eponymous character, a widow, housewife and prostitute who lives with her son Sylvian in Brussels, Belgium, whereas *Three Sisters* is a documentary film that accompanies three young sisters—Yingying (10), Zhenzhen (6) and Fenfen (4)—who live alone in Xiyangtang, a village located 3,200 metres above sea level in the mountain area of Yunnan, southwest China. However, the use of extended duration in the scenes and sequences in which Jeanne and Yingying withstand domestic labour suggests an improbable relation between the two. These films not only make apparent what often remains invisible—reproductive labour—but they also both deploy cinematic time to allude to the constant and ongoing process of reproductive labour itself.

In *Jeanne Dielman*, the film’s main protagonist relentlessly performs house chores, such as cooking, washing and cleaning. We also see Jeanne shopping, sharing meals with her son, reading and writing letters from and to her sister (who lives in Canada), and greeting her clients. In contrast with the lengthy scenes in which we see Jeanne performing domestic chores, the sex scenes in the bedroom are never shown, with the exception of the penultimate sequence in which Jeanne kills her client with a pair of scissors afterwards. The sequence is exceptional; not only because it renders visible Jeanne’s sex work for the first time, but also because it interrupts “the perfect homology between literalness and fiction in the earlier domestic scenes.”<sup>8</sup>

The film opens with Jeanne preparing dinner in the kitchen until the ring of the doorbell interrupts her. She greets an older man, who hands her his coat. The camera is immobile, gazing at the door at the end of the corridor, where the frame leaves Jeanne’s face and her client’s body outside the shot. They then enter the frame in the direction of the room, closing the door. After a cut, the same shot of the corridor, this time dimly lit, suggesting that time has passed. The bedroom door then opens, and Jeanne and her client come out, entering and exiting the static frame. Now, with the camera placed in front of the main door, we see Jeanne being paid before she switches off the lights. In this sequence, an ellipsis is deployed to suggest the passage of time.<sup>9</sup> Because ellipses condense time, they are intrinsically different from the long sequence shots in which Jeanne performs housework with careful precision. Ellipses are false continuities, whereas the sequences of domestic chores are “time itself, ‘a little time in its pure state’: a direct time image, which gives what changes the

unchanging form in which the change is produced.”<sup>10</sup>

The fixed position of the camera and the use of continuous shots to depict these chores in real time stage a “literal representation” in which the “effect of a surplus reality” prevents the scenes of domesticity to become “something other than that concrete instance”.<sup>11</sup> Domestic tasks are usually “unworthy of narration” but in *Jeanne Dielman* they acquire a level of superior importance.<sup>12</sup> This is because duration gives emphasis to the cautious manner in which Jeanne peels the potatoes or coats the schnitzel with flour and egg, or methodically cleans the bath tub immediately after her bath, forcing the audience to experience time itself pass. At first sight, these fragments of Jeanne’s life do not appear to contribute a great deal to the narrative’s progression as nothing of significance seems to happen. In addition, because these chores are performed relentlessly throughout the film, it is impossible to argue that they are ever concluded, even though we sit through the time needed for Jeanne to perform them.

Each single household task is carefully executed, emphasising the ritualistic and repetitive nature of Jeanne’s daily life. The precision of Jeanne’s gestures is diametrically opposed to the frantic gestures of the character in an earlier short film *Blow Up my Town* (1968), in which we see a younger Akerman frenetically undertake domestic chores, resulting in the character’s suicide and the apartment being blown up. In this case, the character’s manic performance is closer to Martha Rosler’s abrupt and violent methods when using appliances and kitchen utensils in *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975). In *Jeanne Dielman*, on the other hand, the long shots of Jeanne doing housework and the precision of her gestures tacitly indicate that something more disturbing lies beneath her domestic bliss. The position of the camera in a medium shot composition, and the extended duration of the sequences contribute to the identification of a pattern in Jeanne’s daily routine, while also underlining the pattern’s disparities in subsequent days. Time, then, seems to offer a very peculiar way of producing meaning, since it is “only through careful attention to her rituals and to the pattern that is revealed by them that the film’s meaning emerges.”<sup>13</sup>

Half-way through the film, Jeanne’s behaviour changes: she appears distracted and immersed in her own thoughts, becoming increasingly less careful and methodical when performing her domestic tasks. Her poised and composed figure starts to dissolve gradually. After her second client, she comes back from the room with her hair tousled. Rather than carefully putting the money into the soup tureen (as she does in the opening sequence of the film), Jeanne forgets to close the lid. She then rushes to the kitchen, leaving the lights on, whereas she normally systematically turns off the light every time she leaves a room, only to find out that the potatoes left on the stove are burned. She seems hesitant, moving backwards and forwards between the kitchen and the bathroom as if not knowing what to do with the burned potatoes. In an attempt to rescue dinner, she buys more potatoes and returns to the kitchen to peel them slowly, one by one. The fixity of the camera—where a medium shot frames Jeanne seating at the kitchen table—enhances the length of the scene, filming Jeanne peeling the two potatoes in real time.

The duration of this scene invites us to speculate on what Jeanne is thinking. Jeanne’s gestures were studied and her chores executed with maximum precision until she burned the potatoes. From then onwards, her ritualised chores are disrupted. In an interview,<sup>14</sup> Akerman has stated that for Jeanne, “knowing, every moment of every day what she must do the next moment brings a sort of peace and keeps anxiety at bay.”<sup>15</sup> The excessive zeal in her daily rituals hides, then, a growing anxiety that becomes apparent only when her routine is disrupted.

The next day, Jeanne wakes up an hour earlier than normal, upsetting her entire schedule. After an afternoon searching for a replacement for a lost button on her son’s coat, she returns to the café (where we have seen her

the previous day) to find her usual seat taken, and to realise that the waitress that usually serves her has already left. It is important to stress that what is identified as customary in her daily routine is only suggested through the repetition of almost identical scenes. In other words, repetition confirms what is habitual or unusual in her life. The film then offers a formal repetition that is implicit in the austere ways in which the household tasks are performed and also depicted. Jeanne does not perform the exact same chore, but the long scenes registering Jeanne's tasks in real time in the course of three days suggest the appearance of repetition rather than repetition as such. This therefore means that the film deploys a repetition of difference, not of the same.

Because the sex scenes are elided, they appear as exceptionally different from Jeanne's household duties. There is, however, one exception when we see Jeanne with a client in the bedroom. Jeanne undresses in front of the mirror, before lying in bed with her client's body on top of hers. After climaxing, Jeanne dresses up again in front of the mirror and grabs a pair of scissors that she had left in her room before she was interrupted by her client's arrival. She then stabs her client, using the full weight of her own body. The mirror, used twice to frame Jeanne, before and after the orgasm, evidences the operation of a false repetition in an attempt to suggest the ritualistic nature of her gestures, whereas the scissors left inadvertently in the bedroom suggest that the murder was not premeditated.

This sequence is often interpreted as the moment in which Jeanne becomes "aware of her position in patriarchal society"<sup>16</sup> because the climax is understood as a release of "repressed pleasure".<sup>17</sup> According to Ivone Margulies, this understanding of the sequence uncovers the widespread "essentialist feminist" interpretation of the film.<sup>18</sup> Until the murder, the sex scenes are replaced by ellipses; for that reason, these are seemingly in sharp contrast with the long sequences in which we see Jeanne making the bed, brushing her hair, and peeling potatoes in real time. Yet, prostitution is not unlike Jeanne's household tasks. The domestic chore scenes and the sex scenes are different only in *form*, because housework and prostitution are two sides of the same reproductive labour.

Reproductive labour comprehends all the labour necessary for the reproduction of the labour force. This includes child rearing, feeding the family, cleaning the house and providing emotional and sexual labour. Since the emergence of the feminist movement in Italy, which motivated the Wages for Housework International Campaign in 1972, Marxists feminists have theorised the function of reproductive labour within capitalist social relations extensively. Although it would be imprecise to claim that Akerman was aware of the campaign, the film's release in 1975 is contemporaneous with the emergence of the movement.<sup>19</sup> Because of this, the visibility given to the exhaustive nature of reproductive labour in the film appears consistent with the ways in which the Wages for Housework International Campaign intended to make visible how capital expropriates women's reproductive labour.

In *The Arcane of Reproduction* (1995), Leopoldina Fortunati argues that under capitalism "the male/female relationship is a relationship of production."<sup>20</sup> This relation "has two faces": the "exchange between *variable capital* and *housework*[...] and between *variable capital* and *prostitution*."<sup>21</sup> In all cases, women are always positioned in an indirect relation to capital, because that is mediated through the male worker, who acquires female labour power in the form of housework or prostitution. However, just like in his exchange with capital, the male worker can only satisfy his needs because it is capital that expropriates instead "the value created by her living labor."<sup>22</sup>

In the case of housework, the woman sells her labour power for an indeterminate period of time, whereas in the case of prostitution, the woman "sells her labour-power for a determinate time."<sup>23</sup> Here, I draw a parallel with the

film: while the sex scenes are elided to represent the unfolding of time, and in doing so suggest a defined temporality that is also implicit in sex work, the scenes of domestic chores enjoy a particular lengthy treatment, shot in real time, which evidences the ways in which a woman performs housework “for an indeterminate time both in relation to the single working day and to the span of the working days, which coincides with her natural life.”<sup>24</sup> It is through the deployment of an extended temporality in the scenes of domestic chores, then, that estrangement is experienced, exposing Jeanne’s “unbearable alienation” from her labour power.<sup>25</sup>

Even though reproductive labour is made visible in the film’s literal depictions of household tasks, their enduring nature is expressed through the film’s aesthetic procedures by means of the extended length of shots and the use of formal repetition. But the film also refers to the invisibility of reproductive labour itself. This is not only because of the elisions of the sex scenes, but also because of the disembodied voice of Jeanne’s neighbour. Between her domestic chores and the sexual encounters with her clients, Jeanne babysits her neighbour’s baby, yet when the neighbour comes around to deliver the baby she is never seen. Instead, we hear her long monologue about how indecisive she was at the butcher’s, listening to the other women’s requests while in the queue, hoping to get an idea of what to buy for dinner. The monologue attests to the frivolity and deceit of her apparent domestic happiness, and it acquires further importance because of the sparse use of dialogues in the film. The insignificance of the neighbour’s domestic routine is given further expression because during the entire monologue the neighbour stays outside the frame, concealed by the main door, whereas Jeanne is seen in a medium shot frame, simply nodding in response. The absence of the neighbour’s face and body not only functions as a mirror to reflect Jeanne’s entrapment in the banality of everyday life, but also reiterates the invisibility of domestic labour, because, more often than not, domestic labour is as invisible as the ones who perform it.

When Jeanne comes back from her shopping spree, after dusting the living room, she finishes her housework and sits pensively on the sofa, having nothing else to do. This little extra time in her routine is unusual in Jeanne’s over-ritualised life. We do not know what thoughts come to her mind, nor do we know if something happened before she burned the potatoes,<sup>26</sup> but throughout the film we witness the gradual disruption of her routine up until this moment. Jeanne’s world is reduced to domestic tasks, and the exact and contrived manner in which she performs them functions only to underline the banality of her existence. This means that from the moment her routine is unsettled, she can no longer perform her tasks around the house, nor her sex work. Following the murder scene in the bedroom, Jeanne goes to her living room, sits down and rests her hands on the table, with one hand and her blouse covered in blood; she closes her eyes, not because she is tired but because she is exhausted<sup>27</sup>.

When writing about Samuel Beckett’s plays, Gilles Deleuze argues that exhaustion is not the same as tiredness, because the tired body is incapable of performing an action. The exhausted body, on the other hand, “exhausts the whole of the possible”.<sup>28</sup> In order to exhaust the whole of the possible, one renounces “all need, preference, goal, or signification. Only the exhausted is sufficiently disinterested, sufficiently scrupulous.”<sup>29</sup> Deleuze identifies four ways of exhausting the possible, however, of which two are acutely relevant to *Jeanne Dielman*. According to him, there must be a prior repetition to exhaustion, what he calls the “forming exhaustive series of things”.<sup>30</sup> In the film, these are found in the meticulous depictions of Jeanne performing domestic tasks, but, as I have argued, it is not simply the case that Jeanne repeats the same household tasks, but, instead, repetition is found in the film’s formal structure. Because of the careful attention paid to Jeanne’s exhaustive series of routines in the form of housework, we recognise their inconsistencies. Because her routine is disrupted, all possibilities are subsequently exhausted. On the other hand, the fixed position of the camera, indifferent to the bodies that move in or out of the frame, and, ultimately, the duration of the sequences of domestic labour

appear to frustrate meaning, which can be understood as an attempt to dissipate “the power of the image”.<sup>31</sup>

In Wang Bing’s *Three Sisters* we observe the tired and exhausted bodies of three children, either performing domestic tasks, or playing and fidgeting, or simply at rest.<sup>32</sup> Unlike *Jeanne Dielman*, the girls’ gestures are spontaneous, free and imprecise, such as when Yingying attempts to clean Fenfen’s boots, or when she cuts her nails, or sharpens her pencil with a sickle. Her hair is often tousled, with strands falling on her face despite her attempts to tame it with a comb. Rather than repetition, Wang Bing extricates stillness from the constant movement of these small bodies, and from the banality of their daily lives. However, the manner in which we experience these moments during which nothing seems to be happening that is memorable or eventful, is not unlike our experience when viewing Jeanne executing house chores.

Yingying, Zhenzhen and Fenfen live alone in a rural area of Yunnan, southwest China. Their father left home to work in the city, and their mother is also absent, but no information is given as to why she left. Yingying is responsible for taking care of her younger sisters Zhenzhen and Fenfen. In the film, we see them walking alone on the road and through the mountains, joining their granddad, aunt and cousins for meals and to watch television, taking care of animals, collecting potatoes and also manure, cleaning and fixing the holes in their shoes, having tantrums, playing and singing, getting rid of hair lice and nits, washing clothes and gathering around a fire to warm up. By assuming the parental role for her younger sisters, Yingying carries out laborious domestic tasks, which are depicted through long but fragmented sequences. When the father returns to the village, he decides to take his two younger daughters with him, and Yingying stays behind to attend the school in the village and help her granddad take care of the cattle.

Wang Bing’s first film, *West of the Tracks* (2003), is a nine-hour-long triptych that portrays the gradual decline of a factory complex in the district of Tieixi in Shenyang, China. His documentaries are characterised by their length and the use of long sequence shots that disclose the growing social inequalities in contemporary China. By turning the camera to those “left outside the narrative of economic success” his films seem to offer a “counter-narrative” to the Chinese regime’s official account.<sup>33</sup> In an interview, Wang Bing states that, even though “the Chinese economy appears robust to foreigners, ordinary people have absolutely nothing.”<sup>34</sup> When shooting the film in Yunnan, Wang Bing encountered many children like Yingying and her sisters,<sup>35</sup> since their story is not unusual. The growing disparity between rural and urban incomes has resulted into a colossal rural exodus to the urban centres. The harsh residential permit system prevents workers from gaining access to healthcare and education, and, for that reason, migrants are dissuaded to take their children with them, because they are unable to pay for their school fees. As a result 60 million children in China have been left by their parents.

The film’s opening sequence finds the three young girls gathering around a fire in a dimly lit living space. The limited light sources in the room barely illuminate the girls’ faces. The camera chooses different angles, not only to incessantly follow the girls, but also to provide a spatial description of their deprived dwelling. Here, the camera seems hesitant: it first attempts to keep up with Fenfen, the youngest one. However, she swiftly leaves the frame, moving to the adjacent room where they sleep. Because of that, Wang Bing’s camera remains in the first room, resting the gaze instead on Zhenzhen, who remains seated.<sup>36</sup> Because the opening sequence is fragmented and divided into several shots, it “allow us to experience the passage of time as well as its discontinuity”, ruptured with “real time”.<sup>37</sup>

The director frequently holds the camera against his body to try and follow the three young girls, who in turn move in and out of the frame, unconcerned with the limits of the shot composition. This does not mean,

however, that they are indifferent to the presence of the camera. When explicating the significance of the filmed body in Wang Bing's films, Julie Savelli affirms:

*With his camera on his shoulder, the director seeks to capture the body's particular choreography, while never directing its movements. His main purpose is simply to be there, to be present. Exiting and entering at will, the filmed body moves freely, unfettered by the conventions of cinema.*<sup>38</sup>

In *Jeanne Dielman*, the camera is static, in different to the bodies that move in and out of the frame, whereas in Wang Bing's film the exact opposite occurs. Despite their differences, the aesthetic procedures deployed in *Three Sisters* and *Jeanne Dielman* result in similar ends. In *Three Sisters*, the camera pursues the movement of the bodies, whereas in *Jeanne Dielman* the body's movement is affirmed through the static position of the camera. But in both films, the focus point is the movement of the body in time.

In *Cinema 2*, the relationship between the body's gestures and filmic temporality is made apparent when Deleuze argues that it is "through the body (and no longer through the intermediary of the body) that cinema forms its alliance with the spirit, with thought."<sup>39</sup> According to him, the body has the capacity to force "us to think what is concealed from thought, life."<sup>40</sup> Everyday gestures establish "the before and after into the body, time into the body, the body as a revealer of the deadline".<sup>41</sup> In respect to the body in cinema, Deleuze identifies two poles—"the everyday body and the ceremonial body".<sup>42</sup> The everyday body is found in Andy Warhol's long fixed-shot films *Sleep* (1963) and *Eat* (1963), however, the everyday and the ceremonial bodies are perhaps not different at all, because in Warhol's works, as much as in the case of *Jeanne Dielman* and *Three Sisters*, these everyday gestures become ceremonial themselves. This is the case because of the careful attention in which the camera chronicles ordinary bodily performances. Still, on *Jeanne Dielman*, Deleuze argues that in Akerman's film the "states of the body secrete [a] slow ceremony", which means Jeanne's everyday gestures acquire a ceremonious quality.<sup>43</sup>

In *Three Sisters*, though, the ceremonial body is not only found in the girls' daily gestures, but also in the director's bodily presence. In a sequence shot filmed in the courtyard of their aunt's house, the camera watches the girls' cousin Yanyan rinse potatoes under the water tap. Yingying and Zhenzhen cross the courtyard, coming in from the right to the left of the frame, passing in front of the camera while also staring at it, refusing to surrender to the logic of cinema. At this point, the presence of the director's body is felt, because the camera moves to give way to the girls' passing while also lifting from its position level to the cousin's height.

His bodily presence is sensed again, when the father returns to the city with the two younger girls. On the way to the bus, the father is carrying FenFen on his shoulders while also helping Zhenzhen to cross a small river. The camera is placed on the opposite bank, recording the three small bodies in motion in the distance. When the father reaches the camera, he turns to Wang Bing and says: "You got here fast!" The image trembles when following the father and the two children, thus signalling the walking movements of the body behind the camera, while the sound of Wang Bing's wheezing breath, in his effort to go up the hill in direction of the bus, also suggests his bodily presence. Inside the bus, the driver enquires if the reservation includes the cameraman's ticket, underlining the presence of the director behind the camera.

In his discussion about *West of the Tracks*, Manuel Ramos-Martínez highlights that the body of the director is persistently but inconspicuously present in the film, and that because of that, his body becomes a supporting "structure of the film."<sup>44</sup> The presence of his body causes the director to become a mute "eyewitness".<sup>45</sup> Similarly, in *Three Sisters*, his body is visually (through the movements of the camera) and audibly present

(through the wheezing of his breath). This bodily presence puts him in relation to the bodies in front of the camera (e.g. the sequence in the girls' aunt's courtyard), a relation that is both temporal and spatial. His presence "influences with its every movement the way we perceive the filmed world" since we are capable of recognising the "traces left by this missing body".<sup>46</sup> Despite being indebted to the tradition of observational documentary, Wang Bing's films seem to also question the integrity of filmic representation itself—not only because of the girls' defiant gaze but also because of his own bodily presence. The questioning of the integrity of filmic representation could be understood as a way to dissipate "the power of the image", in the same way that in *Jeanne Dielman* the fixed camera position and extended shot duration simultaneously frustrates and gives meaning.<sup>47</sup>

Because of the use of durational aesthetics,<sup>48</sup> *Jeanne Dielman* and *Three Sisters* could be examined under the exegesis of "slow cinema", which has been gaining traction as a critical and theoretical device. Despite my reluctance to adopt such a term, I engage briefly with some of the arguments advanced by its proponents and its critics, since it might inform a discussion on the deployment of filmic temporality as inherently political in the films under scrutiny here. The term "slow cinema" applies to a range of films that use extended duration as an aesthetic practice, offering a theoretical outline to position duration as an aesthetic paradigm within contemporary cinema. Its proponents have been prolific in highlighting the possibilities of cinematic temporality in amplifying the "awareness of the viewing" experience.<sup>49</sup> This is the case because the specific filmic temporality challenges meaning, and, therefore, it demands a type of *labour* from film audiences.<sup>50</sup>

Even though filmic temporality has been discussed in relation to representations of labour and of labouring bodies, these debates offer little thought in regards representations of reproductive labour. More often than not, reproductive labour is reduced to unproductive labour and labour narrowed to the realm of the viewers in these theoretical discussions. In spite of this, some emphasise the political potential of slow cinema, since the concept shares "its discursive genesis with a much larger socio-cultural movement whose aim is to rescue extended temporal structures from the accelerated tempo of late capitalism."<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, slow cinema is said to evolve "from spaces that have been indirectly affected or left behind by globalization", thus capable of rendering visible the marginal spaces that subsist, accordingly, outside capital's circulation.<sup>52</sup> This is, however, in my view, not only insufficient to underline cinema's political possibilities, but also suggests, in a problematic manner, that extended duration is a stylistic device in direct opposition to fast-paced capitalist financial flows.

A similar argument can be found among slow cinema and/or contemplative cinema's detractors, such as in the case of Steven Shaviro, who argues that "the long-take, long-shot, slow-camera-movement, sparse-dialogue style has become entirely routinized" in contemporary art cinema.<sup>53</sup> For him, these "cliché" devices are not only essentially evasive and retrograde, but also negligent to the ways in which "globalization, financialization, and technological innovation" profoundly changed the world in the last decades.<sup>54</sup> Extended duration may be an aesthetic default in many examples of contemporary art cinema, but the assumption that extended filmic temporalities equal "nostalgic longing for pre-industrial temporalities" is imprecise, because capitalism encompasses a variety of temporalities and intensities.<sup>55</sup> If not, how would capital expropriate value from reproductive labour in the first place?

In the case of housework or child rearing, a woman's labour time—from which value is expropriated—is unlimited, because it corresponds to "her natural life".<sup>56</sup> This is "the exact opposite of how time must be organized within the process of production", wherein capital extracts value from a limited time of the worker's labour.<sup>57</sup> However, the way in which this unlimited time is dispensed from a woman's labour does not belong to a pre-industrial period, but rather is defined according to capital's logic and needs. Despite the different aesthetic procedures



and the 38 years that separate the films discussed, all the more confirming the distinctive historical and social-political circumstances in which they were produced, both make reproductive labour visible by means of capturing its enduring nature. In *Jeanne Dielman* and *Three Sisters*, the use of fixed shots in the former and handheld camera shots in the case of the latter, paired with the amount of time granted to the scenes and sequences of domestic labour clearly expose the relationship between time and reproductive labour. Rather than referring to a “pre-industrial temporality”, these films instead evidence the ways in which time is secreted from these on-screen bodies when subjected to labour’s relentless repetition and how ordinary bodily gestures are then captured by the logic of capital, only to become worn out.

Notes:

1. Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press. 1998 [1958]. p. 101.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p.101.
8. Margulies, Ivone. *Nothing Happens. Chantal Akerman’s Hyperrealist Everyday*. Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press.1996. p. 5.
9. An ellipsis consists of the omission of a scene or a part of the story in the film’s narrative.
10. Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. London: Continuum. 2005. p. 16.
11. Margulies, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
13. Fowler, Catherine. “*Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*”. In *The Cinema of the Low Countries*. Ernest Mathijs (ed.). London and New York, NY: Wallflower Press. 2004. p. 136.
14. This interview can be found on the Criterion Blu-ray release of *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*. Available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8pSNOEYSllg>. (accessed 2018-11-05.)
15. In the same interview, Akerman states that this excessive zeal in daily rituals was inspired by her Jewish

heritage, given that within her family every daily activity was ritualised; both her parents and her aunts were Nazi concentration camp survivors and this ritualisation brought a sense of peace.

16. Margulies,*op. cit.*, p. 5.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
19. Commenting on her first viewing of the film at the Edinburgh Film Festival, Laura Mulvey contends that Jeanne Dielman was the result of a “particular conjuncture” of the radical feminist politics and the radical aesthetics of 1970s experimental cinema. See Mulvey, Laura, “A Neon Sign, a Soup Tureen: The Jeanne Dielman Universe”. *Film Quarterly*. Vol. 70. No. 1. 2016. p. 25.
20. Fortunati, Leopoldina. *The Arcane of Reproduction Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital*. New York, NY: Autonomedia. 1995. p. 27.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
25. Margulies,*op. cit.*, p. 90.
26. Laura Mulvey, for instance, argues that Jeanne returns from the room “disoriented by sexual pleasure during the encounter”. However, this speculative interpretation results from viewing the encounter with the third client, when we see Jeanne climaxing, later in the film. See Mulvey,*op. cit.*, p. 29.
27. In “Images of Housework: On the Time of Domestic Labor in Gilles Deleuze’s *Philosophy of the Cinema*”, writing about Luchino Visconti’s *Ossessione* (1943), particularly about a sequence wherein Giovanna, the female character, executes domestic chores in a kitchen, Cesare Casarino engages with Deleuze’s distinction between tiredness and exhaustion to argue that Giovanna’s gestures are of a person that is exhausted rather than tired. It follows that his argument inspired my own engagement with Deleuze’s text and my analysis of the last scene in *Jeanne Dielman*.
28. Deleuze, Gilles. “The Exhausted”. In *Essays: Critical and Clinical*. Trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco. London and New York, NY: Verso. 1998. p. 152.
29. *Ibid.*, 154.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

31. *Ibid.*
32. In one specific scene we see Fenfen falling asleep seated, while her sisters and her cousins watch television.
33. Pollacchi, Elena. "Extracting narratives from reality; Wang Bing's counter-narrative of the China Dream". *Studies in Contemporary Film*. Vol. 11. No. 3. 2017. p. 218.
34. Anselme, Isabelle. "An Interview with Wang Bing conducted by Isabelle Anselme". In *Wang Bing Making Movies in China Today*. Caroline Renard, Isabelle Anselme and François Amy de la Bretèque (eds). Aix-en-Provence: Presses Universitaires de Provence. 2015. p. 138.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 138
36. Savelli, Julie. "Perceiving the People". In Renard, Anselme and de la Bretèque, *op. cit.*, p. 159.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
39. Deleuze, "The Exhausted", p.182.
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*, p.184.
43. *Ibid.*, p.189.
44. Ramos-Martínez, Manuel. "The Oxidation of the Documentary the Politics of Rust in Wang Bing's *Tie Xi Qu: West of the Tracks*". *Third Text*. Vol. 29. Nos. 1-2. 2015. p. 7.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
46. Savelli, *op. cit.*, p. 167.
47. Deleuze, "The Exhausted", p. 161.
48. De Luca, Tiago and Jorge, Nuno Barradas. "Introduction: From Slow Cinema to Slow Cinemas". *Slow Cinema*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2016. p. 3.
49. De Luca, Tiago. "Slow Time, Visible Cinema: Duration, Experience, and Spectatorship", *Cinema Journal*. Vol.56. No.1. Fall 2016. p. 25.

50. Schoonover, Karl. "Wastrels of time: Slow Cinema's Laboring Body, The Political, The Spectator, and The Queer". *Framework*. Vol. 53. No.1. Spring 2012. p. 71.
51. De Luca and Jorge, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
52. In this respect, editors of *Slow Cinema* cite Matthew Flanagan to highlight slow cinema's political potential. See De Luca and Jorge, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
53. Shaviro, Steven. "Slow Cinema Vs Fast Films". *The Pinocchio Theory*. Available online at <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=891>(accessed 2018-11-05.)
54. *Ibid.*
55. De Luca and Jorge, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
56. Fortunati, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
57. *Ibid.*