

frieze

CONTEMPORARY ART AND CULTURE

NO. 126 JANUARY • FEBRUARY 2016

UK £6.95 US \$12 €10



76

97 70962 067021

FAREWELL



Delphine Seyrig in
*Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du
Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*,
1975, 35mm film still

AN HOMAGE TO CHANTAL AKERMAN
1950—2015

Tributes by
James Benning
Manon de Boer
Jem Cohen
Tacita Dean
Chris Dercon
Joanna Hogg & Adam Roberts
Sharon Lockhart
Rachael Rakes

The great filmmaker **Chantal Akerman** died in October 2015; she was 65. She made her first short film, *Saute ma ville* (Blow Up My Town, 1968), when she was just 18. Her first feature, *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), established her reputation as a radical, feminist filmmaker. Over the next four decades, in her native Belgium and the US — as well as in China, eastern Europe, Israel and Mexico, among other places — Akerman made over 40 documentary and feature films; she also created installation and video art. The influence her work has exerted is inestimable. Following her death, the director Todd Haynes dedicated the screening of his latest movie, *Carol* (2015), to Akerman at the New York Film Festival, stating that ‘as someone thinking about female subjects and how they’re depicted’ her work had changed the ways in which he thought about, and imagined, film. Over the following pages, nine filmmakers, curators and artists reflect on what Akerman’s work meant to them.

An artist based in Brussels, Belgium.

In the week following Akerman's death, as an act of homage and as an attempt to hand down her work to the next generation, I started my film class with her film *Hotel Monterey* (1972). Sixty-five minutes of silence, just observing and tracing the hotel's corridors and spaces: a glimpse of a person behind a half-open door, the reflection of light on the walls, a blinking elevator button in the dark. To me, it is one of her most radical films in terms of the experience of time and of a wide-embracing concentration.

Watching this early film anew with my students, I was more deeply aware of its silence than previously. I remembered Akerman's voice. Her beautiful voice, so present in many of her other films. It was a deep but still-young voice in *News from Home*, where, in a voice-over, she's reading her mother's letters to her. It had become a more broken voice the only time I saw her in person, in May 2013 in Brussels. She was reading aloud her own letters to her mother in a four-hour reading session. She was sitting alone, not looking at the audience, almost physically absent, but her voice was fully there. It was filling the space, making you listen and inviting you to be with her, for a long time. There, as in all her work, she generously gave (her) time.

SHARON LOCKHART

An artist living and working in Los Angeles, USA.

I met Akerman only once, as a young artist, after her opening at the Jeu De Paume in Paris in the autumn of 1995. Her installation there of *D'est* was conceptually revelatory for me. By juxtaposing a formal cinematic version of the 107-minute work with a room of 24 fragments looping on monitors, Akerman acknowledged the curious relationship film has with the gallery space. Owning the durational nature of her film and its minimalist structure, she effortlessly recognized that it was a composition of individual and filmic gestures – a symphony of parts. The disappearing social space that was so important in the film was mirrored in her installation: individuals and groups congregated and flowed through the various screens. I've only seen such a deft negotiation of cinematic and gallery spaces a few times since, and I've always thought of that installation as a compass.

It was with profound regret that I read of her death. For a woman of such insight and clarity of vision to find this world uninhabitable was devastating. To me, she was the real deal.

CHRIS DERCON

Director of Tate Modern, London, UK.

In 1995, I conducted an interview with Akerman in Paris for my television documentary *Still/A Novel* (VPRO, Hilversum, 1996), about the question: 'Did the cinema die too early or too late?' I had worked with Akerman before. I showed, amongst other works, her *Les années 80* (The Eighties, 1983) and *La paresse* (Laziness, 1986) in the exhibition 'Au Coeur du Maelström' at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels in 1986. I had also loved her film on choreographer Pina Bausch, *Un jour Pina a demandé ...*

These and other films by Akerman – as well as the bewildering, unreleased film auditions for *Les années 80*, which she had 'smuggled' into my hands – I kept showing in the early 1980s to my film students in Brussels, Paris and Pasadena (among them, Sharon Lockhart). Nearly 20 years later, the conversation I filmed with Akerman in 1995 about the 'death' of cinema is still valid. Her words say a lot about how she felt about her beloved medium and her excursions into the field of art:

CHRIS DERCON

Is cinema slowly coming to an end?

CHANTAL AKERMAN

I don't think so. Look at the films of oldies such as Manoel de Oliveira, Jean-Luc Godard or Éric Rohmer. They seem younger than most films made by young ones. The excursions that I make are just like children's games: if you lose, you don't get punished, and if you win, it's like a party. And even though it makes little or no money, it still doesn't do any harm. On the contrary: you don't have to bother with major production costs or poor ticket sales. In the world of cinema, money is all that matters. In a museum or when you are writing, you don't have to constantly think about money [...] These installations in museums and exhibitions don't immediately have to raise money. I can always do different things. When I receive an invitation to do something, I can say yes or no. And we'll see what happens, or when. And of course there is the intense pleasure of 'the first time'.

A filmmaker living in Val Verde, California, USA.

Chantal Akerman. When she ate a bowl of sugar in *Je, tu, il, elle* (I, You, He, She, 1974), I was hers. A few years later, I met her in an elevator in Milwaukee. She was a giant. Later, *D'est* in Berlin. She was my hero. And then the news. I was saddened. She lived her life.

JEM COHEN

A filmmaker based in New York, USA.

We've lost control of time. Distraction and acceleration count amongst the world's primary business schemes. The determination to steal our time is now largely focused online, but it was pioneered by the entertainment factories of TV and cinema. In 1975, Akerman threw a mighty wrench into that machinery. It was called *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*.

I once witnessed Akerman introduce the film with the insistence that, unlike other movies, 'it did not take your time, but gave it'. This function was inseparable from its form. It set us across from a woman we'd otherwise never know. Her daily labour was bland and, ultimately, terrifying. The film kept us with her without escape until we had no choice but to feel time as she lived it: dispassionately, radically, unforgettably. The film has become a revenge and an antidote for all of the viewings where we end up feeling we've lost a couple of hours that we'll never get back.

We can't get Akerman back, but I am so thankful for what she gave us. After *Jeanne Dielman*, her generous and resolute granting of time continued in *News from Home*, *D'est* and many other projects predicated on deep, patient observation and a tough, curious, intelligence unlike any other. ♦

1 & 2
No Home Movie, 2015,
film stills
Courtesy
Paradise Films, Brussels, and
Marian Goodman Gallery,
New York