

Select TWO sequences (of between 5–10 minutes) from TWO films that exemplify the stylistic and narrative strategies employed in each; use these as a starting point for analysing how they represent historical events.

When looking at the medium of film generally and attempting to come to terms with it, one must delve into and really get to grips with the text at hand, in order to fully understand its significance as both a film and a piece of history. In the films *Control* (Anton Corbijn, Momentum Films, UK, 2007) and *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Chantal Akerman, Janus Films, USA, 1975) we can see two very differently executed films in terms of style, narrative and mise-en-scene yet it is intriguing to see how both of these come together to collectively work as two distinct pieces of film history.

The films mentioned, as with any text, construe different motivations and intentions. *Control* is much about mythologising the historically prominent band of Joy Division whereas *Jeanne* is more centred around the wider connotation of feminist empowerment as much as it is around the monotonousness of everyday routine. The former emphasises in particular, the real life death of the band's lead singer, Ian Curtis and really delves into the deteriorating mental state leading to his death, whilst the latter demonstrates as one of its many facets, the oppression of the woman in the household setting. Despite the quite obvious differences in narratives, both films are united in their effective representations of historical events, and this analysis will try to identify this within a particular sequence from each film.

Following from the sequence where Ian (Sam Riley) asks Deborah (Samantha Morton) “do you want to sleep with other men” in *Control* (Figure 1) and where Jeanne (Delphine Seyrig) babysits the child in *Jeanne Dielman* (Figure 2), we can see reason as to why filmically and narratively, both of these convey their own twists on certain aspects of history. The sequences in question are fragmented in five and three shots respectively. The sequence in *Control* is obviously more fast flowing to due its telling narrative whilst in *Jeanne* we are more accustomed to lapses of silence without much narrative significance. Nevertheless in this regard, whatever is lacked in terms of dialogue is made up through Akerman’s use of gesture, mise-en-scene and artistic ingenuity. As *Control* depicts similarly, both of the protagonists at hand clearly have something on their mind; albeit worry, a questioning of one’s own existence, a mental disorder – or even insanity.



(Figure 1)



(Figure 2)

Notwithstanding this, and using the ever present theme of emotional and mental paralysis as a pretext, the sequence in Figure 1 begins with Ian in his angst, blurting out to Deborah that he doesn't mind if she were to 'sleep around' with other men - that he doesn't think he loves her. This whole exchange is seen through a low angle long shot accentuating the domesticity of suburban Manchester whilst attempting to clearly establish the iconic epoch of the late 70's. We can see the time-honoured presence of the Vauxhall Viva car situated provocatively within our field of vision, as with the other dated cars and perfectly aligned residential houses emblematic of 70's Salford. Everything is portrayed in such a way as to authenticate Ian, the lead singer of a Manchester band, as just that – a product of Manchester.

Slightly opposed to this paradigm, is Akerman's babysitting sequence in *Jeanne*. We see a certain type of domesticating in contrast to that which is shown in *Control*, domesticating in its traditional use the word - of the home setting. *Control* domesticates Ian as an imbrication of cult status in and of Manchester. The critic

Dave Haslam (2015) points to James Joyce's credence, that his novel "Ulysses contained all you needed to know to rebuild Dublin brick by brick." Haslam adds that "If not by 1980, then certainly by 1990 the same might have been said of Manchester, via its music." (1). Corbijn attempts to cement the legacy of Ian as part of this 'Manchester Mystique', whereas Akerman's sequence restricts itself more to the role of the woman in the household; both in terms of the labour roles that society has women performing in, and subsequently as mentioned before, to demonstrate the paralysis that is a result of this oppressive societal function. In an interview from 1977, Akerman herself stated that:

I do think it's a feminist film because I give space to things which were never, almost never, shown in that way, like the daily gestures of a woman. They are the lowest in the hierarchy of film images. A kiss or a car crash comes higher, and I don't think that's accidental. It's because these are women's gestures that they count for so little.

It is no surprise then, as to why gesture is resonates so heavily in the character of Jeanne. She is a repressed individual and her actions suggest so. Looking at the sequence in question, we see her lax demeanour exemplified here as we have been used to seeing from the offset of the film. She brings the baby in and lays it on the sofa opposing her, and sits down for a split second only to get back up. The baby starts to cry only as Jeanne unnecessarily moves to pick it up for the first time, and continues to do so for the remainder of the sequence as she goes back and forward agitatedly. Although we can clearly see the baby's unrest, we can see Jeanne's

unrest (though more implicitly) as she unnecessarily initiated the baby's cry by picking it up. Her outer-demeanour shows to be calm but it appears as if her inner-self is conflicted by other happenings in her life – a sheer suffocation from her daily routine perhaps. Her actions throughout are such that they become ritualistic, to the point we witness vulnerability in her lapse of thought. For instance she does the right things (trying to calm the baby), yet at the same time she does wrong (merely putting it down while it is still crying, not to mention shaking it vigorously) and repeats the ritual again. The baby's cry is as much an insight for us, as it is for Jeanne. It puts us in Jeanne's shoes in which way it reflects her capacity as a slave to petit bourgeois Belgian society; tending to the baby's every need symbolises this much. It stands as an insight for her in which way she is self-conflicted in terms of actually nurturing the baby or not, and it is an insight for us in which way we can see this external societal structure having its impact.

This whole shot is focalised through a medium shot however the composition of the room makes for a new dimension in the actual scene. We can see all three physical walls of the room within the frame of the shot, leaving the position we are watching from to be the fourth wall of the room. We are conveniently placed as if we were a pet or a piece of furniture, and again this works well to domesticate her within the barriers of the home setting. This box-like framing is a stark contrast to that employed in *Control*.



(Figure 1B)



(Figure 1C)

The sparse and restrained location shooting in *Control* domesticates us within Manchester as opposed to just the household as done in *Jeanne*. Although the second shot moves to the home, the linearity of the narrative along with the cinematography allows for the story to be told through its quicker spontaneous cuts whereas in *Jeanne*, the camera remains static for a large part of the sequence. *Control* starts off with a wide angle shot which allows a greater depth of field, however as exemplified in Figure 1B and C, this permeates into a dolly

counter zoom in which way we are given the illusion of being still when the camera is actually zooming in on Ian as he exits.

As well as allowing a shallow depth of field, this zoom is interesting due to the fact it mainly focuses on Ian. The out-of-focus background mimics his clouded mental state as if to suggest the world around him is being blocked out and is a pretence to him. The end of this shot is amalgamated with the appropriately titled non-diegetic score of “Love Will Tear Us Apart”. Goodwin’s theory applies here, whereby Ian’s speech reflects this diegetic score. This is a well-executed method of trying to further mythologise Joy Division. This film is a biopic, and so by having Joy Division’s actual songs played over a narrative that supposedly represents a true likeliness of them, it pays homage to their legacy as a band whilst integrating an authenticity to the film as a whole.

The second shot in both sequences continue to differ stylistically. The camera tracks Jeanne as she moves to the kitchen, but it only tracks the parts where she exits the living room and enters the kitchen. The entire flight of her journey isn’t shown, and the director puts this down to the fact there is no reason to move the camera, in that her characters should speak for themselves. It is because of this reason that the ‘staticness’ of the camera speaks volumes. It reaffirms the maze-like setting of Jeanne’s home and makes her seem entrapped within it, physically, mentally and emotionally. It can never be said that Jeanne is truly sad, rather, we as an audience mistake sadness for what is a type of expressionlessness. Jeanne desires something, but like us, she doesn’t know what. Writing in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Betty

Friedan suggests women's yearning for something else, something bigger. Friedan states "I want something more than my husband and my children and my home" (2), and this echoes profoundly in Akerman's characterisation of Jeanne. Jeanne is a victim to her own desires in a sense, and the same could be said for Ian, as his suicide by the end of the film insinuates.

As Jeanne moves to the kitchen, we see quite narrow corridors, yet we revert back to the usual boxed framing typical of the film (as illustrated in Figure 4) to suggest that although the crying unsettles Jeanne, she is back to her usual bleak frame of mind. The shallow composition of the corridor along with the dimness in lighting is a stark contrast to the 'busyness' of the living room and kitchen (reminiscent of a prison setting). This goes to further elaborate a sense of being captive to the home.



(Figure 3)



(Figure 4)

As Jeanne sits, the baby's cry grows only more aggravating to her. The cry comes to an abrupt stop as and when she bites into the chocolate. Akerman's suave timing in executing this is successful due to what it could symbolise. The cry itself stands as a motif of self-destruction. Jeanne's agitated demeanour up until now was unpredictable, and the cry was pushing her over the edge. The chocolate here, works as a coping mechanism that allows her to regroup and recover whatever vanity she has left. The shooting of the film in 'real time' makes every conceivable emotion and gesture one that we can relate to even if we aren't in a similar situation to Jeanne, simply because of the fact it represents time as we know it. Unlike *Control* where we can deduce the perspectives of Ian and Deborah, Jeanne is the only protagonist that we see for the large majority of the film, and this is why the camera almost always fixates her at the centre of the frame. We can also notice that that the sound throughout this sequence, or lack thereof, gives voice to her apartment as an entity in itself. Every move she makes is one that is either done for, or in light of the four walls that confine her; whether that be household chores, babysitting or going out

shopping. Not looking at baby's cry (which is a rare instance when compared to the rest of the film) and some occasional dialogue, Jeanne is accustomed to silence. Often enough these moments of silence come across as cries of desperation which the film's climactic end reveals.

Although this essay is in no way looking at these films as mutually exclusive to one another, one can even go as far as to argue (from strictly a comparative outlook), that Ian's existential despair speaks for Jeanne's silence. In Ian's aforementioned dialogue with Deborah, where he permits infidelity (Figure 1), we as spectators can hear disillusionment in his voice. Whether this comes from the guilt of his own unfaithfulness, the meek discontent of his own existence, or from a heat of the moment, impetuous blurt out of emotion is made ambiguous to us – the fact of the matter remains that the sense of despondency is there and we can see an identical sense of disillusionment within the character of Jeanne.

Through her absurd sense of gesture, especially her timing in responding to certain situations around her, along with her obscure delays of silence and stillness, it all amounts to a disenchantment with her position in life; a position given to her by a patriarchal bourgeois society. Her son and the baby are perhaps the only males with any purpose in her life. They bring out a different side to her, a joyous and maternal side, whereas her clients, her job as a prostitute and domestic labourer suffocate her and give her no escape from routine. Unlike Ian, she is not suicidal, nor has she lost the will to live. By the end of the film, it is just that she has come to the realisation that she has nothing to lose, and in this state of climax she kills her client while he lay post-coitally.

The Second shot in *Control* starts with a temporal shift. A medium shot slowly transcends into a close-up medium after Ian exits the frame, and so all the focus shifts to Deborah's perspective. The camera slowly zooms as she exits the living room and through a match on action cut, we see her entering the opposing room.

Whilst 'Love Will Tear Us Apart' still continues to be played non-diegetically, a series of fast paced low angle canted shots of Deborah scouring through archival documents reveal media headlines related to Joy Division. Provocative headlines such as "He's just a Bowie Starman" and "first gig in over a year" work intertextually, to further mythologise Joy Division's legacy - drawing affiliations to the label of 'new lad' and 'laddish culture'. When Corbijn is not trying to domesticate Manchester from the outside, he is glorifying the "tribalised anti-Glamour" (34) from inside of the home as the critic Mark Fisher (2014) suggests.

The final shots in both sequences conclude interestingly. *Jeanne*'s circular sense of time as opposed to *Control*'s more cinematically conventional linear time presents a warped depiction of time and space. Akerman's manipulation of spatiality and proximity within the frame complements its narrative arc. The physical space that exists for us to reflect upon our own pre-conceptions is as restrained as the space she leaves *Jeanne* to. This, coupled with the mise-en-scene, makes us morally polarised as to whether we should sympathise with *Jeanne* or condemn her. The temporal succession of real time allows us to scrutinise her for neglecting the baby for so long, yet also it also makes us empathise with which way time poses to be a

never ending commodity for her. In us enduring her cyclical routine throughout this sequence, we can witness first hand, the way in which her “social weakness [has] evidently made her” a product of ‘slave labour.’ (G. Greer, 1971) (296). This is especially crucial, considering that Akerman herself conceded in an interview in 2015, shortly before her death that the overtones of feminism prevalent throughout her films “were built into their very mise en scène and structure, not the subject matter alone”.

Although the same can be said of *Control*, emphasis is placed on the subject matter in terms of cementing the bands legacy as mentioned before. The film was originally shot in colour but then converted to Black and White by the director, to replicate Ian’s mystique of being a troubled young man, conflicted against the austerity of existence. The use of these opposing colours echoes the binary opposition between Ian’s existence and reality inasmuch it does with the mystique of Manchester against the rest of the ‘industrialised wasteland’.

Another major distinction between the two films stems from their genre categorisations. We can allude Akerman’s film to be true to the art-house category due to its unconventional narrative and use of spateotemporality. *Control* on the other hand could more generally fall under the genre of being a biopic, yet even this is debateable as the individuality, creativity and representation of national identity (Britishness) that Corjibin chooses to encapsulate, makes it in itself a type of art house film.



(Figure 5A)



(Figure 5B)



(Figure 5C)

The final two shots of the sequence in *Control* are diametrically opposed through temporal discontinuity between Figure 5A, B and C. Although Deborah chasing up Ian's affair remains perhaps more narratively significant to the sequence as a whole, the sequence conveniently builds itself up like a crescendo to its final shot - leading to a somewhat final homage of the band. A slow, perpetual medium-pan introduces Ian as the lead singer, then an establishing shot from the right familiarises all the members of the band including their manager, together. The non-diegetic song is reintroduced and synchronised to now become the diegetic score. The sequence in *Jeanne* comparably ends on a high note as the baby is collected and Jeanne is back to normality, however this normality is not in any sense of the word, a 'normality' that the average person would consider, it is Jeanne's farcical reality.



(Figure 6)

Jeanne is spared the burden of the baby, however greater burdens still exist for her. She remains afflicted by the apartment she is confined within, by her routine, her 'slave labour' and by her subservience to men in her side job as a prostitute.

The title statement at hand instructed an analysis on how the respective sequences represent historical events. Indeed, one can argue after dissecting both of these, that the stylistic and narrative strategies employed in each work to effectively comment on certain aspects of history. The monotonousness of everyday routine along with the theme of passivity to social and cultural constructs in *Jeanne Dielman* provides a structuralist lesson into the subtext of Feminism, whilst the atmospheric realism of *Control* delves much more into the Manchester mystique, and mythologising Joy Divison and their cult status.

TOTAL WORD COUNT EXC TITLES: 3090**REFERENCES:**

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Control (Anton Corbijn, Momentum Films, UK, 2007)

