



## **I DON'T BELONG ANYWHERE: THE CINEMA OF CHANTAL AKERMAN**

A film by Marianne Lambert

North American Theatrical Premiere

New York: Opens March 30, 2016

Los Angeles: Opens April 22, 2016

"A career-spanning documentary [that] provides valuable insights."

—*Variety*

"Offers an overview of Akerman's career while showcasing the behind-the-scenes process of her work." —*indieWire*

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## SYNOPSIS

*I Don't Belong Anywhere: The Cinema of Chantal Akerman* explores some of the Belgian filmmaker's 40 plus films, and from Brussels to Tel-Aviv, from Paris to New-York, it charts the sites of her peregrinations.

An experimental filmmaker, a nomad, Chantal Akerman shared with Marianne Lambert her cinematic trajectory, one that never ceased to interrogate the meaning of her existence. And with her editor and long-time collaborator, Claire Atherton, she examines the origins of her film language, and aesthetic stance.

*I Don't Belong Anywhere* includes excerpts from many films made throughout Akerman's career, including *Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), *News from Home* (1976), *The Rendez-vous of Anna, Je, tu, il, elle* (1974), *South* (1998), *From the East* (1993), *From the Other Side* (2002), *Là-bas* (2006) and what would be Chantal Akerman's last film, *No Home Movie* (2015).

## FILM FESTIVALS

World Premiere  
2015 Locarno Film Festival

North American Premiere  
2015 RIDM Documentary Film Festival Montreal

U.S. Premiere  
2016 New York Jewish Film Festival  
presented by The Jewish Museum and Film Society of Lincoln Center

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# DIRECTOR INTERVIEW

*Interview by the Centre de l'Audiovisuel à Bruxelles (CBA).*

*I Don't Belong Anywhere: The Cinema of Chantal Akerman is the first film you have directed, after spending a long time on film sets as a stage manager and production manager. Tell us about your journey to this film.*

Marianne Lambert: It was a slow and boring journey... Before studying journalism at the ULB, I had started – without ever completing – studying film directing at the IAD. Directing was always my aspiration. I have never worked as a journalist but I immediately wanted to join the world of film making. I wanted to understand how a film "is manufactured." In this documentary, things were linked very naturally... it was probably the right time.

*You have not chosen the easiest subject for your first film in Chantal Akerman, who directed more than 40 films, written books, and created art installations in the four corners of the world...*

I love Chantal, I have much admiration for her atypical, unique journey without concessions... true to herself, real. Before making this documentary I worked on three of Chantal's films, we got to know each other on set.

It is true that when the idea of this first film started to become a reality, I had a few moments of panic... Who was I to try to talk about her and her films? Others were surely better placed to do so? But when those emotions got the better of me, I tried to chase them as soon as possible and to go back to a form of simplicity and humility.

*What were your criteria for emphasizing some films more than others? How did you center your documentary around her work?*

The first criterion in the choice of Chantal's films initially was my personal preference. I have selected my favourite films, those that touched me at a time in my life and still touch me, such as *News from Home* for example, that I saw as a young girl and that I adored, *From the East (D'Est)*, a real masterpiece, *South (Sud)*, a superior documentary, or of course *Jeanne Dielman*.

Concretely we had a first filming phase in April 2014 in Israel, and on site, something peculiar happened : we found a strange installation on the edge of the desert of Judea, two pieces of stacked metal on which I wanted to perch Chantal to ask her to talk about one thing

only: confinement. She spoke about it for thirty-four minutes without interruption!

After that, based on the material we brought back from there, we have really started to structure the documentary, Luc Jabon and myself.

Firstly we asked ourselves how to approach Chantal's filmography. Would we approach it chronologically? By themes? But it would have been restrictive to focus on one or another of those approaches, even more so as Chantal herself never wanted for her films to be seen as feminist, lesbian, Jewish or experimental. I also did not under any circumstance want to make a 'commentary' film about the work of Chantal. I simply chose to place Chantal back in the locations or the backdrops where she lived and filmed in New York, Brussels or Paris to emphasise the permanent interweaving between her films and her life. While editing, we therefore also worked on that intertwining with Marc de Coster, the image editor with the precious 'eye'.

*The film cuts between Chantal Akerman's fiction and documentary films. Are there links you made between different sides of her work?*

It seemed completely normal to me to approach the documentary and the fiction without making a distinction between them as Chantal, herself, does not differentiate them. In her own words: *"In a fiction film there is documentary and in a documentary there is fiction. Simply because of the framing. As soon as you frame it is fiction"*.

*Chantal Akerman is often perceived as an intellectual filmmaker. But in your film we see her smiling, light-hearted, but vulnerable too. Were you trying to make her more accessible or to make the young generation discover her?*

When I started to think about the film, I immediately wanted to show Chantal as I saw her. I actually think that the intellectual label that is stuck to her is restrictive. Although Chantal has read a lot and thought a lot she is above all an artist with great receptiveness to the world, guided by a permanent instinct. I also wanted to show her in her more accessible light, and inspire the viewers to go and discover her films.

*Viewers have the treat of seeing of Gus van Sant among the film's interviewees. Why did you choose him?*

By interviewing an American film maker, well-known and recognised by another public than Chantal's and asking him to speak about the influence of Chantal's cinema had on his work, I of course wanted to bring another view of Chantal's modernism. Gus van Sant often referred to *Jeanne Dielman* that he saw in his youth in the United

States, shortly after its release. When he started to prepare *Last days*, he viewed *Jeanne Dielman* again with his chief-op Harris Savides, and they analysed the way Chantal composed all her shots, all her angles, parallel to the wall, without lateral shots. It is that very special architectural representation of space and the characters which first and foremost inspired Gus van Sant.

*Another interviewee, Chantal Akerman's longtime editor Claire Atherton, gives viewers a behind-the-scenes look at the process behind selecting shots in a Chantal Akerman film.*

I met Claire when we were preparing *Almayer's Folly* and she simply has a brilliant mind. Like Chantal, she has a sense of expression and explains things very clearly and simply. I immediately thought of her because to me, it was impossible to conceive that she would not be part of the documentary. An editor brings a second 'eye', editing is like re-writing...

When I interviewed Claire Atherton, she was finishing editing Chantal's latest film, *No Home Movie*, and we have addressed the question of time in Chantal's cinematic work. That is where she very concretely talks, among other things, of two long shots edited one after the other and any creative work to find the appropriate rhythm, the correct length. According to her everything is decided at the level of the continuity shots because they lead to "either a liberation or a deletion of shots".

Chantal wants the viewers to feel the passing of time in themselves when they watch her films. If however they say "I did not feel the time pass," she has the feeling that "she stole two hours of their life...".

*The figure of the mother is omnipresent in I Don't Belong Anywhere, and generally speaking in the complete cinematographic work of Chantal Akerman.*

That maternal presence is particularly striking in *News from Home*. Chantal explains that already in those days she realised that her mother was the centre of her work. "And now she no longer is here, will I still have something left to say?" she wonders.

Chantal's mother was an Auschwitz survivor, she has known the horror of the death camps. I don't think that you can recover from that horror in one generation and Chantal is a "child of the second generation". The children of the survivors also carry this story.

*You shot your documentary in Brussels, Paris, New York, Tel Aviv and Oklahoma, and you chose the title "I Don't Belong Anywhere." Tell us*

*about Chantal Akerman's nomadism.*

Chantal is always on the move, one day in Paris, one in Brussels, and another one in New York. She constantly goes back and forth which I think is indispensable in her life. When Chantal stops she is in danger. When you are like that, it is clearly difficult to feel that you belong to a place, an environment, a culture...For me the title mostly refers to the question of belonging or not belonging rather than any type of "contemporary nomadism".

*Do you think that Chantal Akerman, an avant-garde artist from the start, embodied a certain modernism?*

I think that Chantal belongs to that category of individuals who permanently reflect on the world around them, in an interpretation of the world that needs to be continuously reinvented to find a place in it.... That is why Chantal is always on the move. And if she would no longer be supported financially (because that is a threat to film makers and artists in general), Chantal would be able to make a film with her "Blackberry" or to move on to other ways of creating, always and forever. That to me is modernism.



## FILM CREDITS

Title: *I Don't Belong Anywhere: The Cinema of Chantal Akerman*  
A film by: Marianne Lambert  
Running time: 67 minutes  
Language: In English and French with English subtitles  
Year: 2015  
Produced by: Patrick Quinet and Francis Dujardin  
Written by: Luc Jabon and Marianne Lambert  
Edited by: Marc De Coster  
Mixer: Philippe Charbonnel  
Calibration: Peter Bernaers  
Post-production: Julien Melebeck  
Original music: Casimir Liberski

A production of the Cinémathèque de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles and Artémis Productions

In co-production with RTBF-Unité Documentaire, Proximus and the Centre de l'Audiovisuel à Bruxelles

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