Research Article

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The Temporal Resistance of Kelly Reichardt's Cinema

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Abstract: Across her six feature films since 1994, American director Kelly Reichardt has taken time as a mechanism to reveal and question social, political, and economic structures. This article looks closely at how her films display a range of temporal interventions and resistances to features of capitalist temporalities. While film theorists and critics often locate Reichardt's films within "slow cinema," this article expands the range of temporal concepts applied to her films to explore the sociopolitical critique at work through this auteur's aesthetics. The analysis focuses on time in three of Reichardt's feature films, starting with commodified and metaphysical time in *Old Joy* (2006), then addressing impatience, entropy, and environmentalism's temporalities in *Night Moves* (2013), and ending with an exploration of disconnection—and denial of coevalness—in *Certain Women* (2016). This article applies close scene analysis—along with a range of philosophical, political, and sociological concepts of time—to demonstrate how Reichardt elucidates and resists the temporal tensions underpinning social relations within capitalist culture.

Keywords: *Old Joy; Night Moves; Certain Women*

Independent American filmmaker Kelly Reichardt has used time as a mechanism to reveal and question social, political, and economic structures, putting a drag on capitalist temporal order to make its cultural operations visible. Building on the work of scholars and critics who explore Reichardt's films in the context of slow cinema, this article aims to expand the temporal concepts applied to her films to more subtly calibrate and specify the temporal workings of her cinema and their socio-political implications. This article explores three of Reichardt's six feature films to date, proposing that each one is structured around temporal divergence, which highlights tensions within capitalist temporalities. *Old Joy* (2006) addresses the commodification of time through the competing temporal logics of two old friends during a weekend reunion; *Night Moves* (2013) highlights the temporal differences between industrial capitalism and environmental politics (respectively aligned with linear and cyclical conceptualisations of time and progress); and *Certain Women* (2016) explores the challenge of sharing time and attuning to the time of others within conditions of capitalism, yet the necessity of doing so to overcome social disconnection. These tensions play out in the interpersonal relationships between characters, with Reichardt using a micro-level focus on their impacts to highlight the fundamental structuring principles of the temporalities that shape our lives in capitalist societies. These tensions also play out in the temporal aesthetics of her films, which I explore in this article through close attention to moments and techniques that highlight existing temporal structures and their consequences, and which suggest alternative temporal possibilities.

Time has been one of the key considerations for writers on Reichardt's films, but it has predominantly been addressed through the framework of slow cinema in both film criticism and academic analysis. For instance, focusing on *Meek's Cutoff* (2010), Elena Gorfinkel argues that "Reichardt's work is exceedingly

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coextensive with the aims and aesthetics of slow cinema" (Gorfinkel 125). While popular criticism tends to focus on slowness as a kind of endurance test for the spectator (for example, see Dan Kois' "Eating Your Cultural Vegetables"), Gorfinkel (and other theorists of slow cinema) recognise that time in Reichardt's cinema is not only an aesthetic but a political question: "Reichardt's constitutive aesthetic mode is an exercise in slowness as a politics of the difficulty of survival and endurance, from the perspective of a 'late liberal' geopolitical moment (Povinelli, 2011) and the subjects at its utmost margins" (Gorfinkel 135). The pace of her films and commonality with other exemplars of slow cinema have guided the interest in the dimension of time, but time is also a relevant consideration in relation to Reichardt's cinema because, as anthropologist Johannes Fabian suggests in the opening of *Time and the Other*, "Time may give form to relations of power and inequality under the conditions of capitalist industrial production" (xxxix). Temporal structures are power structures, and paying attention to time makes these power structures visible through their temporal articulation. The intertwining of power structures and social time has been explored through feminist politics and sociological analysis, and there is a current that flows through these films from second-wave feminists' struggles "to understand the politics of time as requiring both a redistribution of temporal resources and a recognition of alternative definitions of temporality. These struggles provide an example of how politicizing time both as a resource and as social meaning can resist dominant forms of temporality within patriarchal capitalism" (Holmes 51). Reichardt's cinema is coextensive with this feminist political project. While Reichardt's films certainly share temporal characteristics and aesthetic strategies associated with slow cinema, this article seeks to shift the focus to explore how a range of temporal constructs work to enact political and cultural critique in her films.

The temporalities of late capitalism are often characterised by speed, so characterising Reichardt's cinema as slow cinema is one way of exploring the temporal tensions and aesthetic resistance of her films. However, speed/slowness is only one temporal axis along which Reichardt's cinema is in tension with capitalist temporalities, and "time is not just about the scale and speed of linear processes" (Szerszynski 182). Late capitalism alters our temporal existence not simply by speeding it up, and a close look at Reichardt's films reveals and questions the deep structures of capitalist temporalities. These structures, and "the increasing dominance of capitalist temporality," have been examined in many sociological analyses of time, which trace "the commodification and standardization of time within industrial capitalism and the increasing control of capital over temporality" (Holmes 38). Jonathan Martineau's analysis of social time relations highlights how "capitalism universalises clock-time and makes the latter hegemonic" (85); capitalist clock-time dominates in the hierarchy of temporalities, "alienating, subordinating, colonising, absorbing and/or marginalising other conceptions and practices of time and concrete temporalities" (46). Social theorists from Max Weber to Barbara Adam have established how industrial time has been socialised, internalised, normalised and moralised, affecting the temporal rhythms of everyday life and our social relationships—its power is not restricted to hours when time is exchanged for money, but permeates "the most private times of consciousness, the moments 'when', the right time to act, the timing of interaction, the tempo embedded in natural and social processes, and the time-frames within which we organize social life" (Adam *Timewatch*, 28).

Working against capitalism's naturalizing of industrial time, Reichardt explores the impact of the commodification of time on social relationships, and positions capitalist temporalities in conflict with alternative conceptualisations and approaches to time (from the metaphysical musings of Kurt in *Old Joy*, to the environmental temporalities in *Night Moves*, to the striving for human connection—despite the social divisiveness of capitalist temporalities—in *Certain Women*). Reichardt does this through the deployment of filmic techniques that operate as subtle interruptions of the "expanding non-stop lifeworld of twenty-first century capitalism" characterised by "a generalized inscription of human life into duration without breaks, defined by a principle of continuous functioning" (Crary 8). Jonathan Crary argues that the 24/7 environment operates on a non-social model involving "a suspension of living that does not disclose the human cost required to sustain its effectiveness" (9). Reichardt highlights this human cost of twenty-first century capitalist temporalities through a range of resistant temporal strategies, including—but not limited to—deploying aesthetics of cinematic slowness. By drifting through a few of Reichardt's less frequently

considered films[1]—*Old Joy*, *Night Moves*, and *Certain Women*—with a range of ideas about time (drawing particularly on Barbara Adam, Bronislaw Szerszynski, and Johannes Fabian respectively) this article explores how they function to enact temporal strategies of cultural critique.

Old Joy (2006)

> *Mark (Daniel London) drives his Volvo across bridge over the river and Kurt (Will Oldham) looks out for the right route toward the hot springs.*
> *Kurt: Slow down, go left.*
> *Mark: Ok, I'm in your hands.*

Old Joy dwells in the old friendship of two men whose lives and worldviews have now diverged, as they spend a weekend together in the woods. The liberal talk radio that Mark listens to in his Volvo at the beginning and end of the film, and the changing landscape passing by his car window, offer glimpses of the social and political backdrop to this two-hander portrait. However, the film's temporal focus (and lack of backstory) foreshadows Reichardt's later film, *Meek's Cutoff*, which, Reichardt notes, "all takes place at a moment in time—we don't know what happened before or what follows afterwards. Especially for the scale of film I make, which gets into the nitty gritty, you want a smaller time frame. You focus everything on the moment and the minutiae" (qtd. in Quart 42). As film critic Philippa Hawker notes, *Old Joy* is "not an eventful film, but an attentive one" (28), focusing on small moments that reveal an old friendship and its dissolution (much as *Wendy and Lucy* [2008] charts the separation of the titular characters). The pacing of the film, the sparseness of its dialogue and soundtrack, and its loose conformity to continuity editing conventions (particularly in the hot springs scene, discussed below) together allow for a greater focus on characters' actions, gestures, facial expressions and interpersonal gazes. As in Reichardt's films generally, the slowing down and paring back gives space to explore the subtleties and complexities of how humans relate to each other and to their environment in a context of neoliberalism's widening social gaps. A variety of temporal divergences underpin the dramatic conflict in Reichardt's films; in *Old Joy* specifically, the *passing* of time that has driven a wedge between Mark and Kurt highlights tensions between their *models* of time, allowing the film to explore competing temporal logics and how they map onto class difference.

Conversations between Mark and Kurt during their reunion weekend firmly fix their differences into position, including their contrasting relationships to time and their different class aspirations. As Fusco and Seymour note, "as the pair fall into increasingly strained conversations about their respective life choices and contributions to society, Kurt and Mark lose their literal and metaphorical way—and their sense of whatever once bonded them together" (8). One notable example of this is when Kurt tells Mark about his "amazing" visit to a hot spring in Arizona where everyone maintains silence, and Mark comments "I think I read about that place in a magazine," which points to Mark's less adventurous and more removed consumption of experiences through lifestyle or travel magazines. The separation of the two friends is again underscored through dialogue and visual grammar as they walk through the forest the next day. Mark proudly talks about how he volunteers one day per week with young people, teaching them woodworking and developing a community garden: "It's only one day a week, but it really pulls me out of myself." Mark's frugal and diligent attitude toward time echoes the time-thrift and time-discipline that emerged from the conjunction of the Puritan ethic with the capitalist mode of production (Adam, *Time and Social Theory* 115). The socialisation of clock-time logic, which underpins Mark's dutiful time-keeping, has roots in the strict time-discipline of Puritanism that spread out from the monasteries of medieval Europe (traced in Weber's account, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*), which became part of righteous conduct in broader society and prevented sinful wasting of time (Weber 104; Adam, "Reflexive Modernization Temporalized" 63). Kurt praises Mark for his service to the community and Mark replies, "It's not that big a deal, it's not that much time out of my life. It's nothing you couldn't do if you felt like it too." Mark's response is not only

1 For a broader encapsulation of Reichardt's oeuvre, readers may be interested in the book-length studies by E. Dawn Hall, and Katherine Fusco and Nicole Seymour.

condescending toward Kurt and reinforces the divergence in their class status, it also points toward Mark's righteous and disciplined attitude toward time, and the commodification and compartmentalizing of his time—characteristic of capitalist temporalities—which Kurt doesn't subscribe to in the same way (leaving him vulnerable to Mark's subtle but painful judgments).

The commodification of time is central to "the displacement of care for the economically precarious that occurs in the millennial neoliberal moment" (Fusco and Seymour 29) revealed in this exchange, so it is important to attend to the temporal dimensions of the dynamic between Kurt and Mark. In *Timewatch: The Social Analysis of Time*, Barbara Adam explains how labour time is commodified in Western industrial societies, and how, "With this commodification, the control of time has become an ineradicable, integral aspect of industrial social life and as such it affects the timing, the tempo and even the temporality of that life" (26). One recent implication of the commodification of time, as Sophie Bowlby explains, is that, "In Western countries, as time for informal caregiving has become squeezed by the demands that all citizens of working age (and some in retirement) engage in paid work, a wide variety of commodified and formal unpaid forms of care work have grown up" (2102). When time is a precious commodity, there can be a lack of willingness to "spend" time with others, a calculated attitude to "investing" time in others, and a limited allocation of time for care or caring (defined as physical and emotional labour on behalf of others [Bowlby 2101]). In *Old Joy*, Kurt has a more positive outlook on the delays and detours in their trip when they get lost trying to find the hot springs, leaning back in the booth at the diner where they've stopped for breakfast and commenting, "This is better anyway. We won't be rushed; we can take our sweet time." By contrast, Mark, who has budgeted time out of his life for a weekend away and fought with his pregnant partner over it, is less inclined now to wander and stray, and less interested in investing more time in their old friendship. He steps out of the diner to speak to his partner on the phone again, and this conversation with Tanya (Tanya Smith) reveals his frustration at being lost with Kurt.

Tensions surface in their friendship by the campfire the night before they finally reach the hot springs, framed by Kurt's metaphysical musings on the nature of space-time. Kurt tells Mark that he has been taking physics classes at night school, and "all this core and superstring stuff, I know all about that." While Kurt can't remember the precise details of the theory he learnt in physics class ("it's like two mirrors moving through space and there's a single atom moving between them… fuck, I forget"), he has developed an evocative understanding of the physical world that serves as an apt metaphor for the interaction between these two old friends. Kurt's own theory is "that the universe is falling, man, that's what explains it all. The entire universe is in the shape of a falling tear dropping down through space… This tear has been dropping down forever, it just doesn't stop." Over time, their friendship has been undergoing an unstoppable falling too; it has become asymmetrical and out-of-sync, departing from the symmetry-based model of interaction implicit in the "two mirrors" theory. Kurt's "falling tear" metaphor is an expression of his experience of time and loss, and his way of trying to communicate his feelings to Mark indirectly before more explicitly turning to address their changed relationship and his feelings about it.

Kurt's theory works to denaturalise clock time and the linear perspective that have been "absorbed as common sense" (Adam, "Reflexive Modernization Temporalized" 64). By giving time to Kurt's ruminations about time, then, *Old Joy* brings an alternative temporal framework to the foreground and highlights the competing temporal logics between Kurt's approach and Mark's time-rationing. How the two old friends understand and relate to time affects their relationships with each other and society:

> Both the clock-time and linear-perspective norm act as filters through which reality is sieved and as lens through which all social relations and structures are refracted. As such they affect how industrial societies educate their children, relate to nature and fellow creatures, treat land and livestock, define and regulate their econo-political life and institutions. (Adam, "Reflexive Modernization Temporalized" 64).

Mark dismisses Kurt's questioning of such fundamental, taken-for-granted structuring principles by breaking the spell, looking bemused as he asks Kurt if he has shared his theory at night school. These notions of time are too esoteric and hippyish for Mark, who is more obedient to the temporal structures of capitalism and organises his own experience of time into efficient blocks such as a weekend away,

meditation time, and volunteering time. The conversation trails off and Kurt groans, bringing to the surface the distance between them: "I miss you Mark. I miss you really, really bad. I want us to be real friends again—there's something between us and I don't like it, I want it to go away." Kurt is shown in a tighter close up as he reveals his feelings, his face clearer than Mark's face, which is in softer focus through the heat haze of the campfire. Mark says that their relationship is fine, and so Kurt drops it. Mark's refusal to engage with Kurt's outpouring sustains the "almost unbearable suspensefulness" that Roger Ebert observes in *Old Joy*: "There are unarticulated tensions, feelings of sorrow, unease and even dread that course through the movie like a hidden creek." In this scene, however, the tensions bubble to the surface, exposing the "worn out joy" of their friendship. In both *Old Joy* and *Night Moves*, a slow-building tension is eventually met with a climactic stillness, and slow deterioration has its moment of finality.

In Kurt's metaphor of continuous falling, the men's shared experience at the hot springs the next day is akin to pulling the ripcord on their tandem skydive—enjoying a phase of drifting before landing on the ground (that is, back to the reality of their lives and their distant irreparable relationship at the end of the film). As Mark sinks into the hot springs, his facial muscles relax, in contrast to the restless frustration his expression conveyed during his efforts to meditate at the start of the film. This scene does not conform strictly to continuity editing, the dominant style of editing in American cinema that aims for the seamless preservation of temporal and spatial relationships. The sequencing of shots here is unconventional by Hollywood standards, at times allowing the camera to drift between their faces and at other times montaging shots of Lucy (Mark's dog), a bird, a slug, a reflection of a leaf on water, and both a long shot and various architectural details of the wooden structure encasing the hot springs. The grammar of shots creates ambiguity regarding whether Mark and Kurt have had a sexual relationship, but more significantly, it creates a sense that Mark has entered the expanse of a present moment, and has finally relaxed. While it becomes clear that these friends experience diverging temporalities in the lifestyles that each has bought into (or been caught up in), and they also face different futures, they share a past and a final peaceful present moment of connection as Kurt massages Mark's shoulders and then Mark's hand slips from the edge of the tub into the water in a gesture of pure relaxation.

The trajectory of their relationship is evocative of Henri Bergson's description of how, in looking back at childhood, we can see that our child-personality

> united in itself divers persons... But these interwoven personalities become incompatible in the course of growth and, as each of us can live but one life, a choice must perforce be made. We choose in reality without ceasing; without ceasing, also, we abandon many things. The route we pursue in time is strewn with the remains of all that we began to be, of all that we might have become. (105)

Spending time with Kurt after they had gradually lost touch, Mark is now confronted with those incompatible personalities (within himself and in his close friendship) that he has shed over time. Rather than the reunion and reconnection that Kurt had hoped for, the weekend together only reinforces their divergence, as Mark comes to terms with the past-possible life and personality that he shed as he settles down with his wife and now awaits their first child. Another useful way of understanding Mark's relationship with Kurt and with their shared past is Dave Kehr's comparison of the film with *Chimes at Midnight* (Orson Welles, 1965), where similarly, "The riots of youth have given way to the responsibilities of middle age (of fatherhood, if not of kingship) and now the leader of the revels must be dismissed, put away into an encapsulated past—the 'old joy' of the title" (54). Early in the trip, after Mark pulls out an old novelty marijuana container that used to be passed around in their friendship group, Kurt comments, "Mark, you really hold onto shit." The trip ultimately effects a letting go for Mark, not only in the sense of relaxing but also in letting go of the distant friendship with Kurt and accepting that their lives have significantly diverged. This letting go releases Mark from nostalgia, from any last lingering hope of reconnection, and from the responsibilities and obligations toward another person that friendship entails; he drives back into his domestic life resigned to leaving the friendship behind. "I'll call you soon, man," he says, but both Kurt and the viewer sense that their time together is done. In portraying the friends' time together over a weekend, Reichardt highlights their temporal disconnect and how the temporalities of social class widen the divisions between them.

Night Moves (2013)

The opening shot is of a large valve on a dam. Nothing happens for a while in this static shot; then the valve begins to release water—a gentle spray at first but with increasing pressure and a gushing sound. During this shot, we spend time observing the routine operations of the Green Peter Dam, as do Josh (Jesse Eisenberg) and his co-conspirator Dena (Dakota Fanning), who appear in subsequent shots casing the location.

Josh and Dena, the protagonists of Reichardt's 2013 foray into the thriller genre, are young environmental activists who plot to blow up an Oregon dam with the help of ex-Marine, Harmon (Peter Sarsgaard). They buy a boat, load it with explosives made from ammonium-nitrate fertiliser and blow up the dam, but when a camper downstream goes missing after the explosion, the consequences of their actions surface and their differing reactions splinter the group. At the end of the film, adrift from his righteousness and co-conspirators, Josh wanders around a camping store and applies for a job, after a violent—yet ethereal and almost motionless—covering of his tracks effected by his quiet murder of Dena. The suspense engendered by this series of events, and the socio-political critique they set in motion, are underpinned by temporal tensions between industrial capitalism and environmentalism. In this section, I seek to elucidate these tensions, drawing particularly on Szerszynski's exploration of the temporalities of environmental movements and politics to apply concepts such as slow destruction, impatience, delay, entropy, linear versus cyclical temporalities, and glacial time.

The broader temporal context against which the protagonists' actions take place is the gradual march of environmental destruction under industrial capitalism, and it is this context that is highlighted in a documentary screened to the local community of environmentalists, including Josh and Dena. A generic montage of Industry and Environment in the documentary is accompanied by a voiceover reflecting on slow destruction: "The disaster we see is happening everywhere at the same time. The clock is ticking. It has been ticking for 150 years now, since the dawn of industrialisation… How long will it be until humanity understands that everything is interconnected?" The documentary conveys the fact that most environmental problems "occur so gradually that they remain difficult to incorporate within human consciousness and action, and for most people remain abstract, theoretical and distant" (Szerszynski 181). While many environmental issues develop at an almost imperceptible pace (so gradual that for some people, it is easy to deny or ignore), these same issues can also be justly characterised as accelerated problems—caused by rapid human population growth, consumption of natural resources, pollution, intensive farming, and so on—that require urgent responses and immediate action. This sets up one of the many tensions in this suspense film, one between the slow advance of environmental degeneration and the urgency of action (which environmentalists try to convey to fight apathy and encourage change).

The temporal tensions between different approaches to environmentalism are also established in this scene in the post-screening Q&A. Dena challenges the documentary's filmmaker to explain what her "big plan" is for addressing the big problems depicted, to which the filmmaker replies with a view echoed by Josh's community later in the film: "I think this 'one big plan' thinking leads to a lot of the problems were facing… I'm not focused on big plans, I'm focused on small plans—a lot of small plans." While this exchange captures Dena's sense that small actions and slow progress amount to inaction, it is Josh who seems most frustrated by the situation and its temporality, with the final shot of the scene showing his unimpressed, almost scowling, expression in response to the filmmaker's comment. As Adam has noted, global action on environmental issues is "extremely slow; it takes time… *Invariably, the time-frame of the perceived danger is out of sync with the time-frame for action* and all too often the exigency of the crisis is traded against political and economic interests, established habits, national pride and legitimation" (*Timewatch* 132). This helps to explain the frustration and impatience of the activists, as well as the views of other environmentalists in *Night Moves* that "a lot of small plans" is the best strategy.

In the world of *Night Moves*, a person's approach to environmentalism is based on their temporal orientation, and the activists must struggle against the dissonance of temporalities outlined above. Temporalities of human experience are not only quantitative but also qualitative, that is "they are also experienced in terms of *meanings*: as moments of urgency or resignation, remembrance or anticipation,

routine or revolution" (Szerszynski 181). For protagonist Josh, for example, the experience of environmentalist temporality is one of impatience. His characteristic impatience is established early in the film in a short scene when they go to collect something from the spa where Dena works. The scene is bracketed by Dena's minimal dialogue—her injunction that he "Wait here" when they first enter the gate, and her accusatory "You didn't wait" when she finds him in the reception area doodling on a brochure. Josh and Dena get stuck in traffic on their way to buy the boat, and Josh worries that they are not going to make it in time. Dena replies, "Breathe, Josh, we'll be there soon." Josh's impatience is also indicated by the way he regularly interrupts others—cutting off the boat-seller's reminiscing, Dena's joking about boat names, and Dena and Harmon's debate about breakfast foods (oats vs eggs)—to refocus attention on practicalities of the task at hand.

This impatience is exacerbated by delays in the process, which cause frustration for the activists, and potentially for the viewer accompanying them through every laborious task of their mission. Harmon hasn't sourced enough fertiliser to blow up the dam, so they have to visit a feed store to get more. Dena is redirected from inside the store to an outside area where larger amounts are kept, and from there to the front office, where she is asked for her ID and social security card. She shows her fake ID, but the manager will not sell her the controlled substance without a social security card. She returns to the truck, where Harmon and Josh encourage her to go back and try again. Finally, she is able to purchase the fertiliser, and they begin the work of mixing and bagging the explosives, emptying the boat's hull of its seats, and filling the gap with bags. They tow the loaded boat to Lake Wood to enter the water and make the journey up to the dam. The numerous tasks involved in the action, the time that these actions take, the delays to the process, and waiting for night to fall so they can position the boat against the dam—all these sustain a slow burn and require patience from the three activists and the audience alike.

> *The water beside the jetty moves in gentle ripples for ten seconds until the boat,* Night Moves*, drifts in from the left side of frame. Josh waits while Dena parks the truck. He checks his watch. Dena and Harmon arrive back to the jetty, and the three of them set off in the boat. They cruise along the river in silence, past children playing and dead trees in the water.*

Rather than generating the tension, anticipation, and anxiety typically associated with the thriller genre's mood, the quietness in this film contributes to a slow-burning suspense, an anxious waiting that is not accompanied by an edge-of-your-seat feeling. The sound design is sparse, and music is included on the soundtrack in only one sequence. Each shot feels deliberate and static shots are typical, held onto for a beat after a character walks out of frame—as if the film is less dictated by the actions of human actors in the frame or keeping up with their movement to capture them within its edges, and more motivated by taking its time to dwell in the space after a character's exit. It is also a way of highlighting the relationship between characters and their environments, conveying how many of Reichardt's aimless and futureless characters "drift," their lack of anchorage within filmic space mirroring their precarious existence in the (figurative and literal) American landscape. Fusco and Seymour argue that this post-action lag is one of Reichardt's "new visual strategies to underpin her exploration of the U.S. precariat", describing it as "a decidedly antisentimental technique; her camera acts as if it doesn't care enough about its human or animal protagonists to follow them out of frame, thereby mimicking the way a society may be happy enough to let its 'failures' drift from view" (23). Yet if this technique both conveys the character's phenomenological experience of "drifting" through their environment, and (as Fusco and Seymour characterise it) figures a system that stands by as subjects become strays, it also feeds the film's broader temporal critique. For viewers so accustomed to capitalism's 24/7 lifeworld of continuous functioning (Crary 8), the pace of Reichardt's films—created by the use of static shots, long takes, and post-action lags—induces a sense of constant frustration and impatience (a posture embodied in characters such as Josh in *Night Moves*, Mark in *Old Joy*, and Lucy in *Wendy and Lucy*). Reichardt's tendency to have the camera dwell on the scene (in post-action lags) functions as a general resistance to the fluidity and ease of movement achieved through continuity editing. By unsettling the anchoring of characters in the space of the frame and the duration of the shot, this signature technique is part of Reichardt's broader political-aesthetic strategy to put a drag on the capitalist temporal order and denaturalise its operations.

In this context, the destruction of the dam can be thought of as an *entropic explosion*, a moment that accelerates disorder within the system. The concept of entropy suggests that as time moves forward, the disorder of a system increases. The temporality highlighted here is the irreversible "arrow of time," with the explosion being a significant marker of the "irreversible unidirectionality" of processes (Adam, *Timewatch* 18). As Adam explains, "There can be no rejuvenation, no unknowing, no reconstitution of pollution back into aeroplane fuel" (*Timewatch* 18), and likewise, the activists cannot reverse the process of destroying the dam, nor stem the flow-on effects. The facial expressions of the three activists when they hear the explosion captures a singular moment of suspension in this suspenseful film between the execution of their planned tasks in the first half, and the messy consequences of their actions in the second half. The significance of this shot is highlighted by its long duration of almost ninety seconds, in which we watch the trio catch their breath for a full minute before they finally hear the distant the boom of the explosion. This tight three-shot of the co-conspirators squeezed together in the front seat of their getaway vehicle accentuates the dissipation of energy and dissolution of relationships that will mark the second half of the film.

In this sense, the explosion is a pivotal and irreversible moment of change that sets disorder in motion: a camper is reported missing downstream (adding a human cost to their crime) and social relationships break down, not only between the three activists but also with their friends and co-workers. Entropy is transformation to a dissipated state, or diminished useful energy for work—an apt metaphor for the activists' unstable collective and for their individual experiences of stress, paranoia, and inability to function. Dena will struggle with guilt over the death of the camper, breaking out in a rash from the stress and eventually confiding in a friend; Harmon will not be seen again in the second half, only heard over the phone feeding paranoia to Josh; while Josh's paranoia, fear, and impatience will lead to him murdering Dena in an impulsive act motivated by his efforts to keep her quiet.

Back at work on the CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) farm after their action over the weekend, Josh listens to the breakfast-table discussion about the explosion on the national news. Josh previously derided the ignorance of people "Killing all the salmon just so you can run your fucking iPod every second of your life," and believed that after their big action, "People are going to start thinking. They have to." However, in the aftermath, the media and community focus on the missing man who was camping downstream, so the activists' environmental message is lost and their action therefore ineffectual, or even detrimental to the cause. The media and community reactions to the explosion point to the complex consequences of a media bias toward the "spectacular violence" of perceived immediate crises and direct impacts, over the typically anonymous and attritional "slow violence" of environmental disaster, a bias that contributes to the difficulty of drawing attention to environmental calamity (Nixon 3). While the three activists have succeeded in completing their planned action, they do not have control either of the consequences or of the narrative in the media and the community.

A counter-narrative is also presented by Josh's boss at the CSA, Sean (Kai Lennox), who notes that "The grid is everywhere. You'd need to take down like twelve dams, a hundred, to make a difference." He calls their stunt "theatre" and says, "I'm not interested in statements, I'm interested in results." When asked what he thinks the solution is, Sean points to what's out the window, the sustainable agriculture he has been developing: "It's a lot slower, but it makes a lot more sense to me." Josh's impatience is thrown into relief against his boss' approach of slow environmentalism. The contrast is one of *production* as a linear form of temporality with *restoration* as a cyclical form of temporality, with the band of activists epitomising the former and the sustainable farmers epitomising the latter. The conflict between Josh's and Sean's temporal approaches to environmentalism also throws into relief the irony that the activists' temporal orientation is aligned with capitalism's signature temporality. Szerszynski notes that "whereas the capitalist economies of the developed world are dominated by productivist or developmental linearities, subsistence economies are characterised by cycles of use and replenishment, plenty and paucity" (184). Another temporal framework for understanding the contrast and tension here is John Urry's account, which delineates *clock time*, its displacement by *instantaneous* time, and the reaction to this rise of the instantaneous that is *glacial time*: "*glacial* time manifests itself in a consideration for future generations, in the desire to protect local distinctiveness from global homogenisation, and in a concern about long-term global environmental

change as revealed by the natural sciences" (Szerszynski 182). Sean's enterprise displays his commitment to a glacial temporality, while the activists seek instantaneous action on urgent environmental issues.

Josh's boss and his family, along with the supportive community around them, have worked hard to develop a sustainable alternative to a capitalist mode of farming. While the first half of the film focuses on the linear, results-oriented tasks of making and positioning explosives, the second half of the film highlights the process-oriented maintenance tasks and routine chores of workers on the farm, from putting a frost cloth over crops to sorting vegetables, to mixing soil. The cyclic, restorative nature of this labour contrasts with the goal-oriented (albeit slow) action of the first half of the film, which details the steps the activists take to achieve their goal of blowing up the dam. The motif of the cement mixer appears in both halves to underscore this contrast between destructive linear action (mixing the fertiliser to create explosives) and a nurturing cyclical action (mixing soil on the farm). Despite Josh's activist action and work on the farm both being motivated by his environmentalism, they are at cross-purposes because restoration involves "those forms of action whose goal is the prevention of entropy or deplenishment" (Szerszynski 183). Josh's entropic explosion threatens to dissipate the good work of his boss, his boss' family and community, who have all been labouring over time to create an effective solution. When Josh's boss finds out who blew up the dam, he must ask Josh to leave, because Josh has put him in the position of abetting the crime. He asks Josh not to take the family and their CSA down with him: "Do you know how long it took for us to make this?"

Night Moves seems to suggest that the grind of restorative temporality is the only way to move forward. In contrast, Josh's actions—driven by linear temporality and impatience—bring life to a halt, most notably in the camper's death and Dena's murder. The murder scene is a moment of stillness; as Josh strangles Dena in the sauna we see his sweaty brow and his face quivering with the force, followed by a close-up of Dena's face, and then her feet settling to the stillness of death. In circumstances of accelerated disorder, Josh behaves with increasing haste and even impulsivity so that—as for many of Reichardt's characters stuck in difficult circumstances—the only decisions he can make lead to dead ends (for others and for himself). Common to Reichardt's films, there is no utopian future in *Night Moves*, and even those committed to sustaining the present—let alone any future or long-term improvement—must pin their hopes on cyclical labour and everyday commitment. This temporal critique is aligned with a general feminist revaluing of labour reflected in some of Reichardt's other films, such as *Meek's Cutoff*, and echoes feminist criticisms of "the privileging of linear 'production' over cyclical 'reproduction'" (Szerszynski 184). This revaluing is reflected in *Night Moves* in its sympathy for the community of environmentalists working on sustainable agriculture, which involves commitment to restorative labour and a patience not demonstrated by Josh.

The restorative, cyclical labour of the CSA collective contrasts with the entropic narrative of the protagonists. The accelerated disorder set in motion by the explosion plays out in the dispersion and disconnection of the band of activists in its aftermath, as well as in the theme of identity—or lack thereof—that permeates the film. For instance, Harmon gives Josh and Dena fake ID cards, and they must start to use each other's new names: "Tomorrow, this is who we are. No exceptions," says Harmon. The lack of identity they are aiming for is also highlighted when Harmon advises Dena to "Be as forgettable as possible" before she goes into the feed store to buy fertiliser and tries to avoid security cameras. In the wake of the explosion, the group's energies are dissipated and its members dispersed: Dena and Josh return to the same area but avoid contact, while Harmon goes off the map and encourages Josh to do the same (get "real lost" and stay lost, he advises). On the run after murdering Dena, Josh drops his phone and SIM card into two different vehicles in a car park in order to scatter the remaining evidence of his connection to the crime, and disappears into a job "in the system"—that is, in a retail camping store that commodifies experiences of nature. Josh hesitates to write a name on the employment application form in the film's penultimate shot, and then the final shot shows a store mirror reflecting several anonymous shoppers browsing items. In processes of entropy, "order, structure, and distinction are lost to random uniformity" (Adam, *Time and Social Theory* 63), and analogously the three activists slip away: Dena into death at the hands of accomplice Josh after crumbling under the weight of her guilt; Josh into anonymity in a new town as an employee of a retail chain; and Harmon into the ether, his whereabouts unknown (although he continues to play a key role in the post-crime disorder and paranoia, via phone conversations with Josh). The suspense of *Night Moves* is underpinned by the temporal tensions between environmental destruction and action,

and the qualitative experiences of these temporalities, including frustration and impatience. The strain of dissonant and irreconcilable temporalities—and the unidirectionality of the "arrow of time" and processes of entropy—lead to disorder, dispersion, and dissolution of relationships.

Certain Women (2016)

> *Laura* (Laura Dern) *is in the bedroom frame left, and Ryan* (James Le Gros) *is in the bathroom frame right, the wall between the two rooms taking up the stretch of space in between as they both get dressed. As Ryan then puts on his shirt and shoes in the bedroom before leaving, we can see Laura's reflection in the bottom of the round mirror on the wall, which is edged up in the top right corner of the shot's minimalist composition.*

Certain Women bears many of the hallmarks of Reichardt's style as it has evolved across her oeuvre, perhaps most notably the time and consideration given to small moments and strong performances. Like many of Reichardt's protagonists, the film's main female characters (played by Laura Dern, Michelle Williams, Lily Gladstone, and Kristen Stewart) are more focused on getting by, or on negotiating small everyday challenges, than achieving a goal. According to Reichardt, the film is about "small struggles, just small, personal politics with strangers, with neighbours, with husbands... And I think it might be about entitlement on some level: what some people feel they have coming to them and the expectations other people just don't have" (Reichardt qtd. in Hill 69). In this respect, there is a political undercurrent in *Certain Women*'s exploration of how people relate to and treat each other—in its exploration, for example, of Gina's (Michelle Williams') determination to buy a pile of sandstone from Albert (René Auberjonois) that has been sitting unused in his yard for fifty years. The film also shares a Northwestern setting with many of Reichardt's other films. As Reichardt explains, after four features in Oregon, she was drawn to Montana due to its pace: "The rhythm of things seems to me so much dictated. ... Faster, faster, faster—we all want things faster. I guess there is a part of me that likes the pull against that. Montana has a different pace than maybe another place would" (qtd. in Smith). However, it is not only Reichardt's characteristic slow pace, dragging on the accelerated speed of late capitalism, that has temporal significance in *Certain Women*. In this final section, I dwell on the relevance of coevalness (creating shared Time) to both the viewing experience and the film itself, while underscoring the significance of temporal disjuncture as a manifestation of social disconnection under capitalism (a theme common to *Old Joy*, *Night Moves*, and *Certain Women*).

Certain Women is a beautiful illustration of anthropologist Johannes Fabian's observation that "for human communication to occur, coevalness has to be created. Communication is, ultimately, about creating shared Time" (30-31). The first of the three stories sequentially told in the film follows a lawyer, Laura, trying to shake off a client, Fuller (Jared Harris), who won't accept that there are no further options for legal redress after his unsatisfying worker's compensation settlement. In the wake of these events, Laura gets caught up resolving a hostage situation when, desperate, Fuller holds a security guard (Joshua T. Fonokalafi) hostage and demands that Laura read out his case file. While Laura objects that reading all of the documents in the thick file aloud will take all night (and implicitly, that nothing can be achieved by revisiting the details), Fuller insists that she start reading. This reading forces her to share an elongated present moment with her client, whom she had tended to brush off and bustle out of her office, having lost patience with him after eight months of giving him the same answer. Now she is in a position where she must dwell with him in the details, and the frustration, pain, and regret of that past experience that destroyed his life and has kept him suspended in a difficult personal and financial situation. This first story sets up a thematic exploration of the power dynamics of coevalness, with relationships between characters in each story highlighting some of the ways that structural inequalities affect who is compelled to accommodate others' rhythms and adjust to their pace.

While Fabian's argument is in the context of anthropology, his observations about how the "denial of coevalness is a political act" (153) are useful for considering how class divisions are reinforced through temporal structures within the same society, and how Reichardt's temporal strategies enact political resistance. Just as the objects or referents of anthropological discourse are created through temporal

distancing (as Fabian outlines in *Time and the Other*), so time structures are used to reinforce class divisions under capitalism. Fabian notes how distancing devices create a "denial of coevalness" in his discipline, that is, "a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse" (31). Fabian's point that human communication is about "creating shared Time" (31) is illustrated at a micro level in Reichardt's films through the interpersonal relationships between characters. Reichardt encourages a sharing of the time of others under capitalism, positioning viewers to come to a temporal understanding of her characters in their different positions vis-à-vis capitalism.

Film critic John Powers' account of watching *Certain Women* points to how coevalness operates at the level of spectatorship:

> I once took a trip up the Amazon, and the boat went so slowly that for the first several hours all I noticed was my own boredom. But gradually, my inner clock began slowing down. And as *I gave myself over to river time*, I began to take in the wonders around me. I saw pink freshwater dolphins leaping out of the corner of my eye. You might find yourself having a similar experience watching the films of Kelly Reichardt… Ever since her 1994 debut "River Of Grass," this 52-year-old filmmaker has developed a stripped-down vision uniquely her own, one that asks you to *give yourself over to her quiet restraint and unhurried rhythm*. [my emphasis]

This notion of giving in to another's time suggests an effort toward coevalness, and the difference between viewers who love or hate watching a Reichardt film arguably aligns with a striving for coevalness versus a denial or refusal of coevalness. A call for patience is scattered through positive reviews of Reichardt's films, such as Peter Bradshaw's concluding remarks that although "some might find it frustrating… You must take time to immerse yourself in its quiet mystery." The changes that happens for Powers as a spectator—slowing down and giving into Reichardt's pace—are reflected within the text itself, as each of these "certain women" experience tension as a consequence of how time operates in interpersonal relationships and are forced to be patient (whether by waiting for an old man to give up his sandstone; reading through a thick file of documents to indulge a disgruntled client; or enduring regular four-hour drives for work).

Making an effort toward coevalness—striving to adapt to the time of others—is a means of overcoming the lack of connection between characters. Maile Meloy's collection of short stories, some of which were adapted to create *Certain Women*, feature characters "who resist or simply lack connections with one another" (Hastie 75). This theme is established visually in the first scene, described above, when Laura and Ryan get dressed after their lunchtime rendezvous. In the composition of these shots, stretches of blank walls push the characters to the edge of frame, keeping them separated from each other. Amelie Hastie observes that the film "communicates largely through its images" and the often-silent communication points to a lack of intersubjective connection between characters:

> . . . the characters in *Certain Women* don't speak much, and when they do, they mostly speak over one another. At times they appear thoughtless as if barely listening to what the other says. At other times, they are irritated, resistant to giving a companion what he or she seeks, even looking away from rather than toward those who speak to them. (74)

The lack of connection between characters that Hastie foregrounds is also identified by a number of reviewers. For instance, Durga Chew-Bose describes Gina and Albert as sharing "a faraway quality that vaguely implies a connection between them, though what that connection is, is never made clear," and similarly frames the relationship between Jamie (Lily Gladstone) and Beth (Kristen Stewart) as "a story about how inexplicable feelings, without any notice, can compel us… to seek the simplest connection: human company" (17). As in *Old Joy*'s diner scene, the diner scenes in *Certain Women*'s third story highlights the temporal disconnect between the two characters. As Beth quickly wolfs down a meal after class before her long drive home, Jamie sits opposite observing her and asking questions to get to know her, displaying unrequited desire for connection in this brief opportunity for company. Just as the differing temporalities associated with class aspirations came between Kurt and Mark in *Old Joy*, Beth does not have time to invest in Jamie (indeed, hardly enough time to notice her) as she rushes back from her teaching job in Jamie's town to have a few hours of sleep before going to her other job in a law firm. Beth is unaware and unattuned to the

rhythm of Jamie's life as a rancher, aside from a brief shared moment riding a horse (discussed below). The impossibility of adjusting to the time of others creates distance between people, preventing communication and connection. Like Mark in *Old Joy*, and Josh in *Night Moves*, Beth's temporal existence and relationship with others is affected by an impatience that is a function of her exhausting employment situation; she doesn't pause to unwrap her serviette from around the cutlery before she uses it, let alone have the time or energy to respond to Jamie's shy interest in her.

Reichardt's engagement with the way capitalist temporalities divide and isolate people is further underscored by the awkward scene when Jamie drives the four hours to Livingston to see Beth. During their short conversation in the carpark, the subtext and body language make painfully clear the unrequited nature of Jamie's interest in Beth. While, in the earlier story, Fuller successfully forced the protagonist, Laura, to share his time, shy and humble Jamie drives away after her embarrassing and subtly heartbreaking encounter with Beth in the carpark. Yet Reichardt insists we share this moment with Jamie by holding on a long take of her expression for two and half minutes (cutting away just once, in a ten-second point-of-view shot of Beth—Jamie's last glimpse of her), commanding the viewer's patience and coevalness.

A number of sublime moments in the film take place when the characters briefly overcome their lack of connection by sharing a passing present moment (often in silence). One example of momentary connection is when Jamie offers Beth a ride to the diner on her horse, and they move slowly through the quiet night with Beth's arms around Jamie in a rare moment of connection and intimacy. Hastie's description of the scene highlights the role of lighting in capturing their fleeting connection:

> As they head out, Beth's head nearly against Jamie's body, a low light shines between them—it separates their figures and draws them nearer. And as they head back and the horse crosses under a street lamp, a crown of light, the colors of a rainbow, cast outwards from them. In this moment, the light encircles and holds these women in place. But then of course it is indeed only momentary—not quite the speed of light itself, but certainly the fleeting pace of film. (78)

This horse ride is a moment of silent communication between the characters in which they are sharing the same temporality, suspending their usual routines to give into the slow clip-clop of the horse's pace. The intersubjectivity of temporalities can be a way of overcoming the drives toward disconnection under capitalism. If "social interaction presupposes intersubjectivity, which in turn is inconceivable without assuming that the participants involved are coeval, i.e. share the same Time" (Fabian 30), then intersubjective time is significant in forging social relationships. From the opening long take of the slow arrival and passing of a train across a Montana landscape, Reichardt invites the viewer to a slow and patient spectatorship, to share time with her characters and share in the personal and interpersonal experiences of strain and isolation engendered by capitalist temporality. In the process, Reichardt insists on an effort toward coevalness to overcome the cleaved connections under capitalism, while illustrating how sociopolitical structures underpin temporality and associated power relations in late capitalism.

Conclusion

The dramatic tension in each of these three films is underpinned by contrasting temporalities: Mark's commodification of time versus Kurt's "falling teardrop" in *Old Joy*; Josh's impatient desire for "big actions" versus the slow environmentalism of his boss and community in *Night Moves*; and asynchrony versus coevalness in *Certain Women*. All three films have final moments of characters disconnecting from each other, and it is the differing temporal structures of their lives, and the meanings they attribute to temporal experience, that drive characters apart (with one character typically more aligned with capitalist temporalities, and a more patient antagonist presenting resistant or alternative temporalities). As explored through close readings of the three films, characters' responses to their own and others' temporal experiences create tensions that lead to *divergence* (*Old Joy*), *disorder* and *dispersion* (*Night Moves*), and *disconnect* (*Certain Women*). Reichardt's films convey struggles, frustrations, and various forms of impatience while

highlighting how society sloughs its outsiders.[2] Through her temporal aesthetics, and close attention to the time of others, Reichardt puts a temporal drag on the structures of capitalist temporalities, throwing them into relief and critiquing them to illustrate their social consequences.

The industrial norm of clock-time logic, which normalizes the need to commodify, compress, and control time, is resisted in Reichardt's cinema, not only through aesthetics of slow cinema, but also through denaturalizing a range of capitalist temporalities, exploring their consequences, and raising alternative temporal understandings (from the teardrop-shaped universe in *Old Joy* to the environmentalists' temporalities in *Night Moves*). Denaturalising capitalist temporalities and offering alternate visions is important political work, as social theorist Barbara Adam writes:

> As long as the underpinning assumptions remain naturalised, taken for granted and unquestioned, unwilling recipients will find it difficult, if not impossible, to make their protests heard and heeded. Only when the fault lines in the logic begin to become exposed and irresolvable contradictions begin to destroy the system from within can alternative visions take hold and openings for change be operationalized. ("Reflexive Modernization Temporalized" 72)

The work of Reichardt's cinema exposes and interrogates the tensions—or "fault lines in the logic"—of capitalist temporalities, and explores the impact on lives and relationships of living within these tensions. From the minutiae of interpersonal relationships to broader structural power relations, temporal tensions structure social relations in conditions of capitalism and are elucidated and challenged in Kelly Reichardt's cinema.

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2 To 'slough' means to shed or—as a noun—a situation characterised by a lack of progress/activity. Reichardt's disadvantaged characters can be thought of as being sloughed by society in both senses of the term.

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