

ensure those skirmishes would spill over into the larger production realm. Not least among these generating mechanisms was the young cadre of individual agents who, shaped by their milieu, knew how to exploit the many changes in demographics, finances, and attitudes. This was an era of daring auteurs and new government policies, and the results were stunning, if confusing, to many observers at the time.

Variety, the most internationally read trade paper of the post-World War II period, proved representative in the way it struggled to chronicle and comprehend the rapid changes underway in French filmmaking in the late 1950s. One of its recurring motifs during the New Wave years is that, at least from the perspective of its American correspondents in Paris, France's industry upheaval was just plain puzzling. *Variety* argued in 1959, for instance, that for all the talk of a New Wave, the box-office take in France that year was down 5 percent from the previous year and off 17 percent from 1957. How could there be anything to celebrate, it pondered. Yet, it also reported that French films were suddenly earning more of those decreasing ticket sales, with eight of the top ten box-office hits that year coming from French productions: "So as usual, French film biz shows its paradoxical nature with a crisis being opposed by the renaissance, and optimism mixing with pessimism."⁹² It is precisely the paradoxical and surprising sides of the French film industry and its New Wave in particular that make this era in French filmmaking so exciting and worthy of historical and aesthetic investigation.

2

Testing the Water: Alexandre Astruc, Agnès Varda, and Jean-Pierre Melville

In the work of Astruc and Varda we find the first stirrings of the New Wave.
—KRISTIN THOMPSON AND DAVID BORDWELL, *Film History*

Melville's characters are always caught between good and evil and even the most negative have some good in them. Melville is a God to me. His manner of telling a story is always "cool," calm, and touched by philosophy.
—JOHN WOO, "Le Style Melville"

AMONG THE most important generating mechanisms behind what was to be called the New Wave were three precursors: Alexandre Astruc, Agnès Varda, and Jean-Pierre Melville. Each of these directors contributed in unique ways to the context of experimentation in modes of production and storytelling that helped create the New Wave's initial successes. They provided various blueprints for subsequent directors, even though all three produced films that were fundamentally different from one another. Astruc has certainly gained the most attention historically for his revolutionary article, "Naissance d'une nouvelle avant-garde: La caméra-stylo," ("The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: *La Caméra-Stylo*"), published in *L'Écran* in 1948.¹ Yet he also shot short and feature films, including *Une vie* (*One Life*, 1958), based on a story by Guy de Maupassant. Agnès Varda, who was a trained photographer but knew little of the cinema, shot her first feature film, *La Pointe Courte*, in 1954 at age twenty-seven, and though this feature was never commercially distributed in France, it proved a minor sensation among the rabid *cinéphilie* of 1950s Paris. But it was Jean-Pierre Melville who provided the initial model for post-World War II directors, proving, first, that Astruc's complaints about the excessive barriers to entry into the French film industry were all too true, and second, that individuals

Agnès Varda and Alain Resnais than they do with Godard and Chabrol. Having connections to *Cahiers* does not prevent a director from being defined as belonging to the allied Left Bank Group.⁵⁵ Similarly, Jean-Michel Frodon argues that Doniol-Valcroze and Kast share both political convictions, like the Left Bank Group, and similar film styles, which move them each to be historicized on the immediate edge of the New Wave: “Doniol-Valcroze and Kast shared a culture, an aesthetic taste, and a talent for pushing their ideas forward. They also shared an elegant film language, with references to Choderlos de Laclos and eighteenth-century libertines,” and those references were embedded in very modern frameworks.⁵⁶ For Frodon, like de Baecque, these two directors are highly modern and interesting, but their subsequent films become increasingly tangential to most of the central concerns and strategies of their New Wave comrades. Michel Marie, too, argues that Doniol-Valcroze and Kast are symptoms of renewal in France rather than key participants in the New Wave.

However, minimizing these directors as somehow “less New Wave” than others hardly helps one understand the breadth and depth of French filmmaking during this era. Doniol-Valcroze and Kast were successful critics-turned-filmmakers who managed to shoot feature films in 1959, with low budgets and casts made up of lesser-known young actors and friends, including New Wave icons Jean-Claude Brialy and Bernadette Lafont. Taking into consideration their themes of youthful indiscretion, sexual experimentation, and consumerism, plus their references to film history and fresh performance styles, one may productively praise their slightly mannered *mise-en-scène* as evidence of active and creative participation in the ongoing renewal in French cinema. In these ways, they fit perfectly the exuberant spirit and tactics of the French New Wave and should not be overlooked anymore than the earliest films by Eric Rohmer and Jacques Rivette should be ignored in deference to their later, more commercially successful films. All four of these directors help reveal the diversity of stories, styles, and production techniques explored not only by the New Wave directors in general but by *Cahiers* critics-turned-directors in particular.

8

On the New Wave's Left Bank: Alain Resnais and Agnès Varda

THE FRIENDS and cohorts of *Cahiers du cinéma* may occupy the core niche within the New Wave, but there was also another subgroup of new French film practice during the late 1950s and early 1960s, known as the Left Bank Group. Definitions of this active cluster of young directors often concentrate on their differences from the *Cahiers* critics-turned-filmmakers and stress their deeper involvement in aesthetic experimentation, their connections to documentary practice, overt political themes, and increased interest in other arts beyond cinema. Typically, they are seen as working in the shadow of Jean Rouch and *cinéma vérité*, as well as the New Novel, and as early as 1960 some French critics were labeling them “*nouvelle vague 2*.”¹ The principal participants include Alain Resnais, Agnès Varda, Chris Marker, Henri Colpi, and Jacques Demy, among a few others. If I concentrate on just two directors, Resnais and Varda, as representative of this fascinating array of people and films, it is in part because they created some of the most distinctive and successful features of the Left Bank tendency, yet they are also most closely tied to the New Wave. Moreover, though Resnais and Varda were and are close friends and collaborators, they demonstrate the stunning variety of movies to come out of this era.

Alain Resnais (b. 1922) had distinguished himself with a series of highly influential documentaries, especially *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog*, 1955), before directing his first feature, *Hiroshima, mon amour*. That film, which premiered out of competition at the infamous 1959 Cannes Film Festival, created a sensation and allowed most observers to hail him alongside Truffaut and Chabrol as a founding member of the New Wave. Yet, quite rapidly critics began to separate Resnais and his rigorous formal experimentation from the more playful, genre-influenced filmmaking that typified much of the French New Wave. *l'Année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year at Marienbad*, 1961), written by Alain Robbe-Grillet, and then *Muriel* (1963), written by Jean Cayrol, revealed Resnais to be advancing along a

very unique auteurist path, as he explored sound-image relations, modes of adaptation, and themes of isolation and reflection. His work also parallels productively the formal rigor and alienation effects seen in other modern European directors, such as Michelangelo Antonioni and Pier Paolo Pasolini. Resnais worked closely with a faithful band of friends, as did the *Cahiers* directors, but his collaborators were mostly outside the *Cahiers* circles, including Chris Marker, Agnès Varda, Jean Cayrol, cinematographer Sacha Vierny, and producer Anatole Dauman. Resnais' thematic interests, radical aesthetics, and productive friendships make him typical of this new generation of young French filmmakers working to renew the modern cinema from very personal vantage points.

Agnès Varda had written and directed three documentary shorts of her own since completing *La Pointe Courte*. She then managed to synthesize many of her distinctive strategies and discursive tactics into the very important *Cléo de 5 à 7* (*Cleo from 5 to 7*, 1962). Cleo, who wanders through Paris for ninety minutes, agonizing over a probable illness, became one of the most interesting female protagonists of the New Wave era. Varda followed with *Le bonheur* (*Happiness*, 1965), an unsettling domestic melodrama. These two films offer startlingly different treatments of contemporary sexual politics that continue to figure prominently in debates over the representation of women in cinema. Thanks to an amazingly productive career making both documentary and fiction films, Varda has solidified her position as the world's most important woman filmmaker of the past fifty years. Significantly, while Resnais and Varda were each products of the same social and aesthetic conditions that gave rise to other young French directors, they can also be studied as a distinctive pair overtly exploring the very boundaries of cinematic language during the New Wave era. Their work proves the vitality of the young French cinema's impulse to tell new stories in new ways to a new audience.

Alain Resnais: Montage Revisited

Hiroshima mon amour proved to be as masterly and revolutionary as Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* eighteen years earlier.

—ROY ARMES, *French Cinema*

Among New Wave filmmakers, only Truffaut and Godard have received more critical and historical attention than Alain Resnais. His career is also the longest of any New Wave director. His parents gave him a much prized

8mm camera early on, so that by the time he was thirteen, in 1935, he was already filming. Resnais' film career began in earnest in 1948 with his first 35mm short film, *Van Gogh*, which won an Academy Award. He has been directing and editing movies ever since, earning hundreds of international awards, scores of France's César awards, and seven best director awards from the French Syndicate of Cinema Critics for films as varied as *La Guerre est finie* (*The War Is Over*, 1966), *Providence* (1977), and *Mon oncle d'Amérique* (*My American Uncle*, 1980). Moreover, in 1997, *On connaît la chanson* (*Same Old Song*), a joyous musical comedy, was a critical and financial success, followed in 2003 by the eighty-one-year-old director's stylish *Pas sur la bouche* (*Not on the Lips*). His *Coeurs* (*Private Fears in Public Places*, 2006) won two awards at the Venice Film Festival, including the Silver Lion for best director. For sixty years, Resnais enriched the cinema, challenged its conventions, and provided a remarkably diverse oeuvre of films concerned with art, literature, memory, and love. During the 1950s and early 1960s, he exploited daring narrative strategies in adapting original scripts by New Novelists, rapidly becoming a much respected giant of the international art cinema. In 1962, *Variety* called him the most controversial of the new French directors: His next film "will be awaited by film buffs, vied for by film fests, and haggled over by foreign film buyers."²

Resnais was born in Vannes, Brittany, and suffered bouts of asthma as a child. As a teenager, he had to be home schooled by his mother for part of his lycée education. He read a great deal of material, including art books and comic books, but also Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. Given the importance of memory and the blurring of objective and subjective depth of information in Resnais' subsequent films, the Proust reference has been emphasized by many biographers. Resnais has protested that though he read Proust, he does not believe *Remembrance of Things Past* overtly influenced his own work. He prefers to mention the time he spent as a youth watching films by Sacha Guitry, Abel Gance, Louis Feuillade, Harold Lloyd, and Jean Renoir.³ After lycée, Resnais moved to Paris to pursue his passion for live theater, and by 1941, during World War II, he was studying acting with René Simon, before giving it up in 1943 to enter the new I.D.H.E.C. film school, created by the Vichy government. Given his later dedication to leftist politics, it is strange that Resnais refers very little to the Occupation or the effects of the war in his own life. Regardless, he entered I.D.H.E.C. where he learned editing in particular. In 1945 he dropped out before his final year, claiming he found the school too theoretical and lacking in real production practice. For one year he

performed his required military service, after which he managed to find employment as an editor for *Paris 1900* (Védère, 1947) and began shooting several shorts, including a mime routine by Marcel Marceau (*La Bague* [*The Ring*, 1947]) and five short documentary "visits" with artists, including Hans Hartung.

Resnais credited these shorts about painting as valuable testing ground for making still images come alive through editing and camera movement. In 1948, after directing two other shorts, *Les Jardins de Paris* (*The Gardens of Paris*) and *Château de France* (*The Chateaux of France*), he made *Van Gogh*, first in 16mm, then re-shot in 35mm, thanks to funding from Pierre Braunberger. *Van Gogh* explores what Resnais calls the "imaginary life" of Van Gogh by selecting paintings and fragments of paintings in a carefully edited and narrated twenty-minute documentary that functions almost as a travelogue. In *Van Gogh*, and again in *Guernica* (1950), Resnais edits together details of painted canvases, filmed with a close, moving camera, accompanied by music, sound effects, and voice-over commentary, to re-present a larger, real world series of events. In both art films, the heavy dependence on short shots of static paintings placed extra weight on the soundtracks. As Resnais explains, "Sound was no longer used to 'accompany' the images, but to create the film's skeleton. Its role was to weld the paintings together into a coherent universe."⁴ For instance, *Van Gogh*'s life is narrated, while images from his paintings accompany the words. The narrator explains, "Other horizons called. Leaving Nuenen, one November evening, Van Gogh set out alone toward his destiny," while the simultaneous montage of early paintings includes a pair of old shoes, a snowy field, and a man and his dog wandering off down a country road. Similarly, the grim *Guernica* combines commentary from Paul Eluard's writings and often discordant music by Guy Bernard with a hectic, desperate montage of haunting images. Two other shorts, *Les Statues meurent aussi* (*Statues Die Also*, 1953), co-written with Chris Marker, and his study of the huge Bibliothèque nationale, *Toute la mémoire du monde* (*All the Memory in the World*, 1956), provide rich glimpses into Resnais' themes and formal experimentation that will reappear in his later features as well. Two of his most successful documentaries, the shocking *Night and Fog* and the giddy *Le chant du styrène* (*Song of Styrene*, 1958), prove the value of his mixture of careful documentation, a roving, observant camera, and an increasingly experimental film style.

Night and Fog was commissioned by the Historical Committee of World War II, with the aid of Argos Films. It was shot in both color and black

and white, alternating many brutal still photographs from the concentration camps with contemporary color footage of the camps. Jean Cayrol, a camp survivor, provided a mesmerizing voice-over commentary. *Night and Fog* won the prestigious Louis Delluc Award and still stands as one of the most troubling and brilliant cinematic treatments of the Holocaust. Further, while its contemplative pacing builds upon strategies employed in his earlier art films, *Night and Fog* also demonstrates Resnais' new, mature style that would influence a whole generation of documentary filmmakers. *Song of Styrene* is a very different, commercially commissioned project. It is a playful and colorful parody of industrial documentaries, with a clever alexandrine commentary written by Raymond Queneau. Both films exploit eloquent tracking shots, poignant montage editing, and evocative soundtracks, all of which will distinguish Resnais' eventual feature films. As Jean-Luc Godard wrote of Resnais' documentary work,

If the short film did not already exist, Alain Resnais would surely have invented it. . . . From the unseeing and trembling pans of *Van Gogh* to the majestic tracking shots of *Styrene*, what is it, in effect, that we see? An exploration of the possibilities of cinematographic technique . . . and without which the young French cinema of today would simply not exist. . . . Alain Resnais is the second greatest editor in the world after Eisenstein. Editing, to them, means organizing cinematographically. . . . [Further] Resnais has *invented* the modern tracking shot, its breakneck speed, its abrupt start and slow arrival, or vice versa.⁵

All Resnais' documentaries reveal themes, traits, and discursive strategies that will continually appear and develop across his entire career, from *Hiroshima* right up to *Coeurs*.

But there was another important, formative film project during the 1950s: Resnais' collaboration with Agnès Varda on *La Pointe Courte* proved to be a valuable relationship for both their careers. As Roy Armes points out, *La Pointe Courte*, with its free style, mix of theatrical and documentary tones, and troubled lovers placed in an alien setting, anticipated much of Resnais' later cinema.⁶ Varda had already shot the footage when she asked Resnais to edit the project. They worked together for several months, cutting the ten hours of footage down in Varda's home; he worked for free, though Varda was expected to provide lunch. As she recalls, "It was a time of reflection. Like an apprenticeship in the kind of cinema I had to continue. . . . By scrupulously editing my film he allowed me to clarify my own

thoughts.”⁷ All these experiences proved Resnais as a major new presence in French cinema of the 1950s, but by the end of the decade he made the leap to directing his own narrative films.

Unlike most New Wave feature film projects, *Hiroshima, mon amour* did not begin as the director's personal idea. Resnais explained to interviewers in 1959: “All my films so far have been commissioned. . . . I should not be considered a struggling auteur; St. Resnais the martyr does not exist.”⁸ Rather, Argos Films, his producers from *Night and Fog*, approached him to make another documentary for them, this time on the atomic bomb. Choosing Resnais for such a serious topic seemed logical, based on *Night and Fog*, but also a bit risky, given his parodic *Song of Styrene*. In a way, the origin of *Hiroshima, mon amour* parallels Roberto Rossellini's *Rome Open City* (1945): Both films were initiated as potential WWII documentary topics but grew into startling feature-length fiction films. According to Resnais, “the three gods of Argos Films,” Anatole Dauman, Philippe Lifchitz, and Samy Halfon, were heading up an international co-production, which also involved Pathé and Daiei studios. They had funds stuck in Japan that could not be transferred out, so they organized a project to be shot jointly in Japan and France. Argos asked Resnais to make a documentary of roughly forty-five minutes in length. He watched a number of films on the atomic bomb, including Japanese productions, and became increasingly frustrated with how to present the mammoth and troubling topic. He discussed drafts with his friend Chris Marker, and the producers even suggested the popular young novelist Françoise Sagan help write the script, but then they contacted Marguerite Duras.

Resnais and Duras discussed the challenges of a movie on the atomic bomb for hours one afternoon, when Resnais pointed out that during their entire conversation, planes loaded with atomic bombs had been circling the earth, but everyone seemed oblivious. “Our days roll on as before, so maybe the movie that needs to be made is not the one we had in mind. . . . We should shoot a classic love story in which the atomic bomb would be more in the background.”⁹ Three days later, Duras phoned with a basic concept for a contemporary narrative. Over the next several weeks Duras worked on the scenario, although she apparently had real problems fashioning a love story set against the disaster of Hiroshima. Resnais provided photos and other materials from Japan, and as Duras struggled to find a footing, she claimed to begin to identify with the challenges facing her female character who “saw nothing” in Hiroshima.¹⁰ The final movie would include location shooting, some fragments from other documentaries, and

even some fictional reconstructions, but was anchored around the brief affair between a Japanese man and a French woman on the eve of her return from Hiroshima to Paris. Many aspects of the story fit themes and situations common to Duras' later novels and films, especially the woman's untenable position, torn between object and subject of love, her near madness, and the role of loss and mourning. While Duras wrote the script, Resnais encouraged her to forget about the camera and think more along the lines of an operetta or sung theatrical production, with Hiroshima and the French town of Nevers as the two lyrical poles for the drama.¹¹

Duras and Resnais prepared two different sorts of scripts, a normal scenario and a “subterranean” version that included detailed biographies of the main characters. According to Duras, Resnais wanted to intimately understand the characters, and asked her to explain, as a sort of “pre-visualization,” how the characters *saw* things: How the woman saw Nevers, how she saw the marble that rolled into the cellar one day, and so on. “So we invented Nevers as she must have seen it from the other side of the world.” Finally, Resnais began to frame and shoot “as if he were taking over a film that already existed.”¹² The result has been hailed as a uniquely creative product: “The most original aspect may be this: The two authors said what they wanted simultaneously in images and speech. One cannot imagine *Hiroshima* silent; the dialogue is never really explicative and it is a fundamental element of the story.”¹³ Stage actress Emmanuelle Riva was chosen by Resnais to play the woman, in part apparently because of the timbre of her voice, though Duras interviewed her as well. Eiji Okada was hired to play the Japanese man. Not only did Riva recite many of her lines as if hypnotized or dreaming, but Okada, whose French was actually quite poor, post-synchronized all his dialogue back in France, where he memorized his lines phonetically. Early in his career Resnais decided to select theatrically trained actors who could “give a certain type of intonation, a certain phrasing more difficult to obtain from actors trained in the cinema.”¹⁴ The collaboration between Duras and Resnais made *Hiroshima, mon amour* fundamental for both their subsequent careers.

Hiroshima, mon amour proves to be an exemplary art film from its first frames until the end title. The opening scene involves puzzling shots of two intertwined, anonymous bodies, their arms and legs locked in rather haunting embraces sequentially filmed with what Duras explains are “ashes, dew, atomic fallout—and the sweat of completed love,” all accompanied by a slow, sad musical score. These shots are soon followed with voice-off dialogue of the Japanese man telling the French woman that



Figure 8.1. Okada and Riva (*Hiroshima, mon amour*)

she saw nothing while in Hiroshima, and her protests that she saw “everything.” The rest of the opening includes montages of the places she mentions, including the hospital and museum, though she is never shown within those images. She mentions seeing melted bottle caps and deformed skin at the museum, while the image track reveals the objects on display. There are also shots from newsreels and reconstructed films, apparently also on exhibit at the museum. These images include disturbing footage of cruelly burned bodies and women’s hair fallen out from radiation, shots reminiscent of the horrors depicted in *Night and Fog*. But the man keeps protesting, even though she lists specific sights and the image track offers them up as evidence of their existence, including a map of Hiroshima, and footage of fish killed by atomic rains. Importantly, this opening sequence establishes the unsettling tone for the rest of the film as it mixes sex, death, and even laughter while foregrounding the juxtaposition of sounds and images. It is never proven that the conversation we hear happened simultaneously with the couple hugging in bed, nor can we be sure whether the images shown are her (or his) mental subjective memories, footage from the peace movie she is making, or simply shots inserted by an intrusive nondiegetic narrator. The status of every sound and image, as well as their resulting narrative time and space, will be continually contested in the course of the film. The opening also establishes him as metonymic with

the city. She recites: “How could I know this city was tailor-made for love? How could I know you would fit my body like a glove?”

As dawn arrives and the couple showers and chats, they learn more about each other’s past. He was a soldier, away during the war; she grew up in Nevers, but lives in Paris. He becomes intrigued with knowing more about Nevers, the memory of which clearly upsets her. She explains that she is an actress in a peace movie, and will fly back to France the next morning. Disappointed, he insists that they meet again, but she refuses. During the next scene, however, he shows up on her movie set, they watch the staged peace march, then he convinces her to come to his home. Both are married and claim to be happy with their spouses, but his wife is out of town, and her husband is back in France. In bed together, as the afternoon begins to darken, she tells him more about her life. “I’m just beginning to understand you,” he tells her, and he knows that her identity today depends upon what happened years ago in Nevers. His persistent questions, calming hands, and steady gaze draw her out, as if he were her analyst. She tells bits and pieces of her love affair with a young German soldier (Bernard Fresson) during the war. She was eighteen, he twenty-three. A series of shots of her riding her bicycle, leaping fences, and running across fields provides a descriptive syntagma of her many secret meetings with the



Figure 8.2. Riva recounts the past (*Hiroshima, mon amour*)

German. Her story, delivered out of order, and told on and off during the afternoon and evening, reveals that the German was shot by a sniper as she was going to meet him on the day before Nevers was liberated. She spent the night lying on his dying body. Her hair was shorn as a collaborator, and she was forced to stay home, where she struggled with grief and madness and was often stuck in the dirt cellar. Then one night, on her twentieth birthday, her parents sent her off to Paris on her bicycle and she never returned. Just after she arrived in Paris, Hiroshima was bombed.

During her reminiscences, the Japanese man mixes himself into her past, as the German: "When you are in the cellar, am I dead?" She increasingly confuses the lovers as well: "I loved blood since I had tasted yours." At the bar that evening, the Japanese man relentlessly pursues her tale, even pouring beer into her mouth as she hypnotically recites events from the past. At one point he slaps her to pull her out of her increasingly hysterical state. When the bar closes, she returns to her hotel, refusing to see him anymore. At her sink and mirror she speaks aloud of herself in third persona and even as her dead lover, "We'll go to Bavaria, my love, and will marry." "She never went to Bavaria." She soon slips into a voice-over as well, "I told our story. I cheated on you tonight." Her experience in Hiroshima, and concerns over forgetting the German's face and voice, increasingly take a toll on her mental condition. Thus, the recounting of her deep and painful memories has not proved to be any sort of deliverance or cure. Rather, her memories produce a mix of positive and negative effects. She leaves the hotel and wanders the street thinking: "You're still destroying me. You're good for me." The images of buildings alternate between Hiroshima and Nevers. The Japanese man follows her during portions of her rambling, and he tries to convince her to stay in Hiroshima a few more days. She explains that staying is even more impossible than leaving. She ends up at a train station waiting room, presumably to catch a train to the airport, but slips away and takes a cab to another bar. Her lover follows her and watches from a separate table as another Japanese man flirts with her in English. But then, after a false end, when the camera cranes up to the skylight to reveal the start of dawn, there is a second final sequence of her standing by her hotel door. The original Japanese man enters, she cries that she is already forgetting him. Finally, she tells him, calmly and sadly, that his name is Hiroshima. He says hers is Nevers, and the film fades to black.

Perhaps one of the more surprising aspects of *Hiroshima* was its international success. It was shown out of competition at Cannes so as not to offend the United States, the "they," mentioned by Riva's character, who had



Figure 8.3. She speaks to her dead lover (*Hiroshima, mon amour*)

dared drop the bomb. *Hiroshima* played for six months in Paris and London, won the Best Foreign Film prize in Brussels, and tied with *The 400 Blows* as the year's best film according to French critics. Even in the United States it did very well; it played both in sub-titled and dubbed versions and was called "a surprise arty sleeper" by *Variety*. In New York City, *Hiroshima* played for twenty-seven weeks at the Fine Arts theater, earning \$279,000 in its first run, more than any other New Wave film.¹⁵ It also won the New York Film Critics' award for Best Foreign Film. Review after review, in France and elsewhere, marveled at the mature and complex treatment of character, but also the radical reworking of time, with many critics comparing its strategies to the modern novel, and especially Proust. Godard called it Faulkner plus Stravinsky plus Picasso, while Rohmer added Dos Passos, and Rivette said it returned cinema to the fragmentation of Eisenstein within a narrative labyrinth worthy of Borges.¹⁶ Typical is Jacques Chevalier's review in *Image et son*: "For the first time, cinema achieves 'the remembrance of things past,' creating a temporality that one can call 'novelistic,' mixing the past and present in a dialectic fashion that previously seemed impossible to accomplish in the cinema."¹⁷ Even Alfred Hitchcock acknowledged the importance of Resnais' film when, in the fall of 1959, he claimed that his juxtaposition of the final scenes in *North by Northwest* (1959) was comparable to the montage style of *Hiroshima, mon amour*.¹⁸

Hiroshima's characterization is minimal, offering sketchy background information on the two protagonists across the course of the day. And, while reviews often referred to the man and woman's shared struggle to deal with the aftermath and loss of World War II, most of their conversations concern her past alone. The range of information also privileges her actions and visions. Despite the condensed plot time, just over twenty-four hours, there are many gaps. The film begins with the couple in bed making love, but we are not shown how they met, nor do we know what they have discussed up to this point. Much like the relations between Michel Poiccard and Patricia in *Breathless*, narrative information is doled out in small bits during intimate moments together, but their initial encounter is suppressed. However, unlike *Breathless* and many other New Wave films, the conversations between lovers here lack any spontaneity. Riva's often monotone revelations about her time in Hiroshima ("I saw the newsreels") or Nevers ("At first we met in barns. Then among the ruins") are spoken as earnest commentary on her own past, but hardly as naturally occurring thoughts. Her memories resemble Lena's summary of Charlie's life in *Tirez sur le pianiste* (*Shoot the Piano Player*, 1960), complete with visual flashbacks, recounted as if they had been practiced many times. Fate hangs heavily in the air during every scene. But even our understanding of her past is fragmentary at best. There are brief images of the German, but we never know anything about him. Similarly, we learn nothing about her current life in Paris. She mentions that she likes men, so apparently she takes many lovers, but whether this is a symptom of her painful loss of the German is unclear. Moreover, we have no idea whether she regularly selects non-French lovers, or whether she often looks at the men lying in her bed and confuses their hand with that of the dying German, as she does the first morning with the Japanese lover. As Christophe Carlier points out, "the Nevers episode is not a simple parenthesis that explains the woman's behavior."¹⁹ It is no wonder so many contemporary reviews referred to *Citizen Kane*; in both, one word, whether "Nevers" or "Rosebud," cannot be expected to sum up a person's life.

If we know little of Riva's modernist character, this French actress played by a French actress, we understand less about her Japanese lover. There are no mental subjective inserts of his experiences during the war. Riva's character asks few questions of him, and never pursues his past in the way he probes her memory. We learn he is an architect and a hopeful politician, but we never hear any explanation of his motivation or goals. Does he hope to rebuild Hiroshima as a curative revenge for not being able

to stop its destruction? Rather, in a manner that is strangely echoed in Hitchcock's *Marnie* (1964) a few years later, the bulk of the plot concerns his nearly perverse obsession with plumbing the woman's troubled past, a past into which the Japanese man wants to insert himself. We learn that he too engages in romantic "adventures" fairly regularly, but we do not have enough information to ascribe any significance to his adultery. His wife, like the French husband, is simply elsewhere. The protagonists with no names remain obscure art film characters, which also helps assure the lack of any certain resolution to their tale. Okada's character seems to need more time with her, but what he hopes to gain from her is unclear. *Hiroshima* remains a stubbornly open-ended film.

Alain Resnais and Marguerite Duras were often asked what they thought "happened next" after the final fade to black. Typically, Resnais claims that he is not sure: "Perhaps she'll miss her plane. . . . Yes, she must miss it. . . . Day is dawning. She is in no hurry. But that might last two weeks. Their relation is not over. Nonetheless, it is a new person who will be returning to France."²⁰ Duras has been less definite, sticking closer to the New Novel notion that the diegesis is a fictional construct and there is no "before or after." She claims that Resnais and she were never really preoccupied with whether Riva's character would break her vow and remain.²¹ By contrast, Godard seems convinced she was in Japan to stay and claims that he would only believe that the actress returned to France if Resnais and Duras made another movie to prove it!²² *Hiroshima's* intriguing ending refuses to close off either the long-term traumas of the characters or the short-term affair. Moreover, neither character seems to have come to any cardinal turning point in their lives. After all, there is no apparent reward for her having told her tale of Nevers. She seems even more distraught upon returning to her hotel room after telling the story. The Japanese lover continues to pursue her, in a pathetic, ineffective manner. He has not learned some "key" to understanding or determining her behavior, which stands in stark contrast to the function of flashback sequences in classical realist films like *Casablanca*, where Rick's memories of better days in Paris help us understand his bitter character today. In *Hiroshima*, the characters go to the Casablanca bar, but find no closure there. They end up in her hotel room, and name each other after their home towns, which only inscribes their sense of alienation all the more. Her rehashed memory has not delivered anyone from anything. Leaving and staying are equally impossible in this circular, mise-en-abyme story in which we never see the characters meet or separate.

Clearly, Resnais reworks every aspect of film style in *Hiroshima*. The camera work and editing complicate notions of perceptual and mental subjective depth of information, while also undercutting conventions for presenting space and time. But the complex relations between sound and image account for much of the film's experimentation. As Pierre Marcabru points out, "*Hiroshima* is miraculous because we are unable to determine where the image begins and the word ends."²³ There is rarely a simple equivalence between dialogue and images, even during the woman's narrated memories of Nevers. For instance, in the Japanese man's apartment, he asks her whether her lover during the war was French. Once she mentions that he was German, a slow dissolve brings the German into the shot. A montage of her riding her bicycle through woods and fields follows with no accompanying dialogue, so the images seem to fit her private memories. She does not mention a bicycle to him, much less the fences she hops across. Similarly, later that night in the bar she tells him, "Then one day I screamed again, so they put me back in the cellar." Rather than the image dissolving to her being moved back into the cellar, the accompanying image is of a marble falling through her basement window. The camera pans to show her crouched on the dirt floor, picking up the marble and rubbing it against her lips. We hear, "It was warm. I think then is when I got over my hate." There is no way her diegetic narratee, the Japanese man, would have any idea what was "warm" from her dialogue. Only the audience sees the tiny marble, yet that image can hardly explain why this moment was her turning point. Her conversation must often be completely incomprehensible from the Japanese listener's perspective, but even the audience, privy to both sound and image, cannot fully comprehend the thoughts and feelings of this traumatized French woman.

Finally, the unusual sound to image relations, combined with the disarming plot structure, create an intricate, modernist text. As Thompson and Bordwell point out, "Often the viewer does not know if the sound track carries real conversations, imaginary dialogues, or commentary spoken by the characters . . . While audiences had seen flashback constructions throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Resnais made such temporal switches sudden and fragmentary. In many cases they remain ambiguously poised between memory and fantasy."²⁴ The film's earlier mix of documentary photographs, newsreels, and reconstructed movies, as well as disembodied voices and the long, smooth tracking shots down hospital and museum hallways, provide the spectator with a wide array of material that can never be easily sorted out. It is rarely clear whether an image or sound is ob-



Figure 8.4. The warm marble (*Hiroshima, mon amour*)

jective or subjective, past or present, and the often hypnotic acting fails to prove whether the characters can always tell the difference either. Robert Sklar summarizes *Hiroshima* as, "An allusive film, austere and cryptic, it raises questions about individuality and identity in ways film theory would pursue in the coming decades: what is human subjectivity, how is it formed? 'The art of seeing has to be learned,' the actress says."²⁵ These narrative strategies, which blur reality and fantasy, throughout Resnais' career and influence much of subsequent international art cinema. Resnais followed up *Hiroshima* with another for rigorous narrative, *Last Year at Marienbad*, based on a script by an famous New Novelist, Alain Robbe-Grillet.

If the characters in *Hiroshima, mon amour* owe much of their humanity to Duras, the cold, mannequin-like figures in *Last Year at Marienbad* clearly belong to the fictional world of Robbe-Grillet. Moreover, the labyrinthine plot, *Last Year at Marienbad* fundamentally challenges the entire notion of fiction, and especially narrative discourse, while its refusal to separate past from present, or fact from fiction, motivated some to consider *Hiroshima, mon amour* and its characters in light of this subsequent Resnais film. After all, a character in *Marienbad* conjures up a past that may or may not be accurate: Perhaps the French actress in *Hiroshima* was making up the entire tale of Nevers. Susan Sontag summarized

core difference: "As the idea of *Hiroshima* is the weight of the inescapably remembered past, so the idea of *Marienbad* is the openness, the abstractness of memory . . . the past is a fantasy of the present, according to both."²⁶ *Hiroshima* and *Marienbad* prove the success of Resnais' synthesis of a distinctive novelist's personal script with his own rich cinematic concerns. Robbe-Grillet was much more established in the literary canon in 1960 than Duras had been, yet Resnais' reputation was also rising quickly, so their collaboration on *Marienbad* immediately motivated a great deal of curiosity within international cinema and literary criticism.

Last Year at Marienbad was another project initiated by producers, Raymond Froment and Pierre Courau. During the winter of 1959–1960, Resnais and Alain Robbe-Grillet first met, at the producers' suggestion, to discuss whether they might collaborate. Thanks to Resnais' success with *Hiroshima* and Robbe-Grillet's international reputation, the producers provided \$400,000, making this a fairly expensive film by New Wave standards. Robbe-Grillet, by then author of four celebrated New Novels, including *La jalousie* (1957) and *Dans le labyrinthe* (1959), was famous for his precise descriptions and even catalogues of physical details that ultimately composed impossible or dreamlike places. For instance, the first paragraph of *Dans le labyrinthe* offers two incongruous introductory sentences; in the first it is cold and rainy, in the second it is bright and sunny. He already had a strong interest in pursuing filmmaking, which he saw as a way to make his nouveau narratives more concrete. Based on conversations with Resnais, Robbe-Grillet spent several days sketching out four project proposals of roughly one-and-a-half pages each. Together, they decided to pursue *Marienbad*, since, as Resnais pointed out to him, it seemed like an extension of *All the Memory in the World*, with its camera probing long dark hallways.²⁷ *Marienbad* also harkens back to his early films on gardens and chateaux. Robbe-Grillet's scenario, which was subsequently published, was so precise that Resnais claims it took him just over two days to write up the shooting script. Robbe-Grillet had even written in suggestions for camera placement ("the camera movement ends with a close-up of her face"), instructions for the actors ("her face should be calm and empty, only a trifle tense at moments, not at all upset"), and even sound levels ("starting from zero, the sound increases very rapidly, attains normal volume and immediately fades").

Soon after *Marienbad*, Robbe-Grillet would have a chance to write and direct his own film, *l'Immortelle* (1963). Though he was absent during the actual filming of *Marienbad*, the experience with Resnais obviously proved

inspiring for him. Many of the puzzling discontinuous editing strategies of *Marienbad* recur in *l'Immortelle*, such as matches on action that cut on characters and their gestures, but insert them into a completely different time, space, or setting. Most of these false match shots were written into the script by Robbe-Grillet: "Abrupt cut: although X and A are still close to each other, evidently in the same place on the screen as in the preceding shot, the scene is now entirely different."²⁸ Resnais reinforces the discontinuity by changing the costume on both characters; although gesture, dialogue, and editing logic provide an illusion of continuity, there are clear markers of discontinuity in the *mise-en-scène*. Similarly, basic objects such as mirrors, beds, statues, and even people may be displaced from shot to shot, and scene to scene, so that every element of the diegesis is merely a temporary or potential item of the storytelling. This sort of manipulation of story time and space goes far beyond the subjective memory and occasionally jarring leaps within *Hiroshima*, and makes *Marienbad* more overtly concerned with exploring cinematic language and technique, while undercutting the story's veracity. As Thompson and Bordwell explain, "*Last Year at Marienbad* pushed modernist ambiguity to new extremes."²⁹

Last Year at Marienbad involves a triangle of central characters, designated in the script as a woman A (Delphine Seyrig), a man X (Giorgio Albertazzi) who is pursuing her placidly but relentlessly throughout a chateau, and another man, M (Sacha Pitoeff), who is probably her husband (M for "mari") and encounters them on occasion. The filming was done on location at several chateaux near Munich. There are some parallels here with *Hiroshima*, since much of the conversation revolves around a seductive man trying to connect the past with the present, while the somewhat traumatized woman resists. The characters within *Marienbad*, however, are also like characters in a theater of the absurd drama. People have gathered, perhaps like last year, at a vast and luxuriously furnished chateau, with a formal garden, though it is uncertain whether all the exterior shots are supposed to be in one place, or an obviously impossible geography, in the style of Lev Kuleshov's composite locations. The figures in the chateau dress formally and drift uncomfortably from one distraction to another. There is a theatrical performance, joyless dancing, somber card games, and even a shooting gallery, but in *Huis clos* (*No Exit*) fashion, no one ventures outside, except A and X.

X seems to be alone, an outsider, and spends much of the film meeting up with A, trying to convince her that they met last year, either here (wherever that may be) or at Frederiksbad or Marienbad or somewhere similar.

and his colleagues of the rive gauche would invent much in the realm of editing, never hesitating to abandon conventional punctuation, to reverse shots, juxtapose shots that did not match, and disrupt chronological order."⁵¹ In interviews with the press, Resnais played down the "intellectual" side of his films, claiming he simply had a great respect for the skills of the audience. He said he was amused that critics claimed he owed a debt to Dos Passos and Faulkner, when these were writers influenced by the cinema of Griffith: This showed cinema had indeed come full circle.⁵² Nonetheless, Resnais, along with Godard, was one of the New Wave's most daring storytellers, and, like Godard, he continually experimented within the parameters set by his own practice. David Bordwell provides the best summary of Resnais' early years:

The career of Alain Resnais offers a good instance of how the art cinema as an institution encourages a filmmaker to formulate a discernible "project" running from one film to another. Resnais's recurrent concern has, of course, been the representation of time. In its day, *Hiroshima mon amour* caused considerable surprise for its minimal cuing of flashbacks, and *Last Year at Marienbad* was widely understood as blurring the line between memory and fantasy. *Muriel* contained no flashbacks or hallucination sequences but did exploit a highly elliptical approach to the moment-to-moment unfurling of the syuzhet. . . . The creation of a distinct formal project can lead the filmmaker to innovate fresh intrinsic norms from film to film. No two Resnais films treat the same aspects of narrative time, or handle time in quite the same way.⁵³

Agnès Varda: "Cinécriture"

My years as a photographer taught me much about the rendering of each lens and every film stock. I learned to work with light, and especially daylight, and to consider white and black as colors. As a filmmaker I strive to bring the spectator into these sensations.

—AGNÈS VARDA, *Varda par Agnès*

Agnès Varda has never been comfortable with being included within the New Wave, much less the Left Bank Group. "It is not my fault I made a movie just before the New Wave. But, I cannot control how histories treat me, as a precursor."⁵⁴ Nonetheless, *La Pointe Courte* established Varda as an exemplary young filmmaker and producer, inspiring many to follow her lead. While she continued her career, making three short documentaries



Figure 8.10. Varda at work on *La Pointe Courte* (courtesy of Agnès Varda)

during the remainder of the 1950s, she did not direct her second feature film, *Cleo from 5 to 7*, until 1961. Ironically, while her first feature helped pave the way for the New Wave, it was the critical and economic environment generated by the New Wave that helped her obtain production funds for *Cleo from 5 to 7*. Meanwhile, two of her documentaries had been completed thanks to financing from two of the New Wave's top producers: *Ô saisons, ô châteaux* (Oh Seasons, Oh Castles, 1957) was produced by Pierre Braunberger and *Du côté de la côte* (*The Riviera—Today's Eden*, 1958) was produced by Anatole Dauman's Argos Films. In between, she produced *l'Opéra mouffe* (1958) through her own Ciné-Tamaris. Varda's documentary practice was inspired and informed by a wide range of influences, mixing poetry, art, photography, and elliptical narration into pure

cinematic expression, all of which is clearly demonstrated in *La Pointe Courte*. She allows contingency and spontaneity, including chance encounters and sudden inspirations, to affect the final projects. She is often compared to an artist with a sketch pad, observing, capturing, and reworking the world around her. Throughout her career, Varda has continually refined and explored the relations between documentary and fiction, often forging a synthesis with subjective documentaries and authentic fictions.

With *Ô saisons, ô châteaux*, Varda was given an assignment from Braunberger, as part of a national tourism project, which she did not initially relish. However, upon arriving in the Loire Valley in October 1957 to document the famous castles, she was surprised by the beautiful setting: "I stumbled into a sublime late fall, all golden, bathed in sunlight. I was taken with the gentleness of the Loire Valley, and the film became instilled with the melancholy of bygone epochs."⁵⁵ The twenty-two-minute film includes an architectural tour of castles in chronological order of their construction, but also scenes with gardeners, voice-over commentary by Danièle Delorme, and sixteenth-century poems read by Antoine Bourseiller. Her second documentary, *L'Opéra mouffe*, is an even more unique, avant-garde film. Varda, then pregnant, made a personal study of a trajectory through one neighborhood in Paris, behind the Pantheon and along rue Mouffetard. She planted herself, and the camera, along the street, observing and occasionally filming the people and places. As Varda explains, pregnancy is a contradictory time of hope and anxiety, and this sensibility affected her vision of the neighborhood, adding special poignancy to shots of the homeless but also happy families working and living there. "After two days no one noticed me, I was just like the merchants selling lemons and bread, I was part of the decor."⁵⁶ Many reviewers pointed out the film's parallels with *La Pointe Courte* in its sensitive observation of the locals, but also cited connections to neorealism and other film traditions: "We rediscover somewhat the biting tone of Jean Vigo's *A propos de Nice*, but improved by tender touches and even an admirable, erotic freedom."⁵⁷ Varda's resolve and individuality permeate *L'Opéra mouffe*, particularly because she shot almost all the footage herself (cinematographer Sacha Vierny quit after several days). Starting from her "pad of notes by a pregnant woman," Varda filmed, edited, and produced the unique film. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis celebrates *L'Opéra mouffe* as a landmark in feminist cinema, with its emphasis on Varda's subjectivity and perception: "The images generate a variety of reflections both on the life process itself (love, death, birth, old age) and on the gentle absurdity of ordinary daily activities."⁵⁸

The third documentary, *Du côté de la côte*, continues Varda's penchant for loose, picaresque journey structures. Here, too, the film wanders perceptively along a predetermined path, the length of the French Riviera, revealing its alluring and deceptive beauty. For Varda, the Riviera offers a false Garden of Eden, so she concentrates on the strange, even surreal, exoticism of the people and locale. *Du côté de la côte* was dedicated to André Bazin. Unlike *La Pointe Courte*, these documentaries were all released commercially in French movie theaters. *Du côté de la côte* was even shown before *Hiroshima, mon amour* in much of France. But the real tribute to this first phase of Varda's career came at the Palais de Chaillot theater in Paris on June 2, 1959, when the evening screening of her four films attracted an astonishing two thousand people. As Jean Douchet explained to the readers of *Arts*, it had been unjust that during an era when a new generation of filmmakers was being heralded, almost no one was crediting Agnès Varda, who "was the true precursor and promoter of the renewal" in French cinema.⁵⁹ Varda's unique path had begun to pay off. In the pages of *Cahiers*, Truffaut had written that Varda's documentary work exhibited five cinematic virtues: "fantasy, taste, intelligence, intuition, and sensitivity," while Godard added that, "Within the French film industry, Agnès Varda's short films shine like real little gems."⁶⁰ Varda's earliest films were vital to revising French film language, and her inspiring pregnancy with her daughter Rosalie became symbolic of France giving birth to a new cinema.

For international audiences, however, it was the stunning *Cleo from 5 to 7* that launched Varda's name. This film, shot in chronological order during June and July 1961, had a small budget of \$64,000 thanks to Beauregard and Ponti's Rome-Paris Films. With *Cleo from 5 to 7*, Varda had now worked with each of the top three New Wave producers. Varda came to know Beauregard through Jacques Demy. She and Demy had met at the Tours film festival in 1958, and the following year they fell in love and became a couple. In 1960, Demy shot *Lola* for Beauregard, to whom Varda pitched her plans for a color costume drama shot in southern France and Italy. Beauregard suggested she shoot something inexpensive for him instead. She quickly considered ideas set in Paris, and landed on the notion of a study of a woman in a limited period of time, somewhat like *Lola*, but Varda wanted her story to reflect more of the angst of present-day life. Throughout her career, Varda researched her films personally. For *Cleo from 5 to 7*, she developed the idea of a woman who fears she may have cancer and Varda actually made appointments at local cancer hospitals so she could listen to conversations in the waiting rooms, learn more about the anxiety

of waiting, and “capture the fear” of real experience. She also inserted real, found individuals, including street entertainers and on-lookers, into the project as she proceeded.

Cleo from 5 to 7 follows a successful pop singer as she nervously waits for cancer test results, between 5 and 6:30 one afternoon. The story unfolds in real time, with chapter intertitles outlining the precise timing of each scene: “Cleo, 5:25–5:31.” Gradually it becomes clear that Cleo (Corinne Marchand) has been waiting for two days for the results of her medical exam, though we only see the final slice of that time, the last ninety minutes. The film opens at a fortune-teller's, shot in both color and black and white, where the tarot cards foresee a complete transformation of Cleo, including the prediction that a talkative stranger will enter her life. Disgusted and fearful, especially by the death card, Cleo flees the fortune-teller's apartment, commenting in voice-over that at least she still has her external beauty. Cleo next meets her secretary-assistant, Angèle (Dominique Davray), in a café, where Cleo pouts about her illness. The servile Angèle blows Cleo's nose for her, but dismisses her fears as childish. Angèle and Cleo then stop in a hat store where Cleo buys a black winter hat despite Angèle's warnings against buying new things on Tuesdays. The women take a taxi home, where Cleo feigns embarrassment when the female taxi driver turns on the radio to a station playing one of Cleo's songs. Once home, Cleo takes refuge in her large, empty white loft dominated by her bed, a piano, a swing for exercise, and many kittens. Even her hot water bottle is shaped like a cat.

Cleo's middle-aged lover, the dreamy, calm José (José Luis de Villalonga, who played Raoul in Malle's *The Lovers*), appears briefly, and he too treats her like a child. When he sees the hot water bottle, he wants to know “What is it today?” After José leaves, Bob (Michel Legrand) and his lyricist (Serge Korber) arrive and joke at being doctors examining her. They rehearse several songs, but Cleo is testy, complaining that they never show her any respect. During one striking new song, “Cry of Love,” whose lyrics include “I'll have been laid to rest, ashen, pale, alone,” Cleo breaks down. She rebels against the somber song, changes from white clothes into black, and leaves the apartment. On her walk, she is disgusted by a street entertainer eating live frogs. Next, she enters Le Dôme café where she nervously orders a cognac, plays one of her own songs on the jukebox, and watches for reactions. No one seems to enjoy the song, so she leaves. But as she stomps along the sidewalk, shots of various people from the film so far are inserted, as if she is haunted by all of them looking at her.

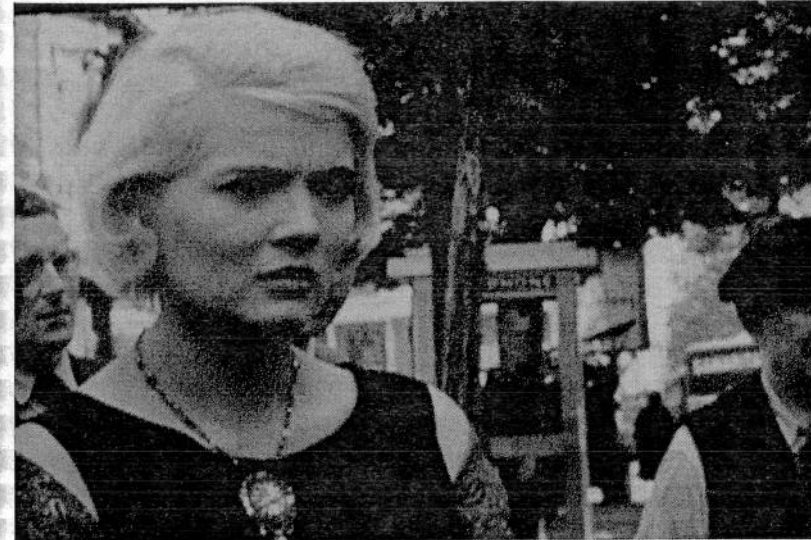


Figure 8.11. Cleo watches the street entertainer (*Cleo from 5 to 7*)

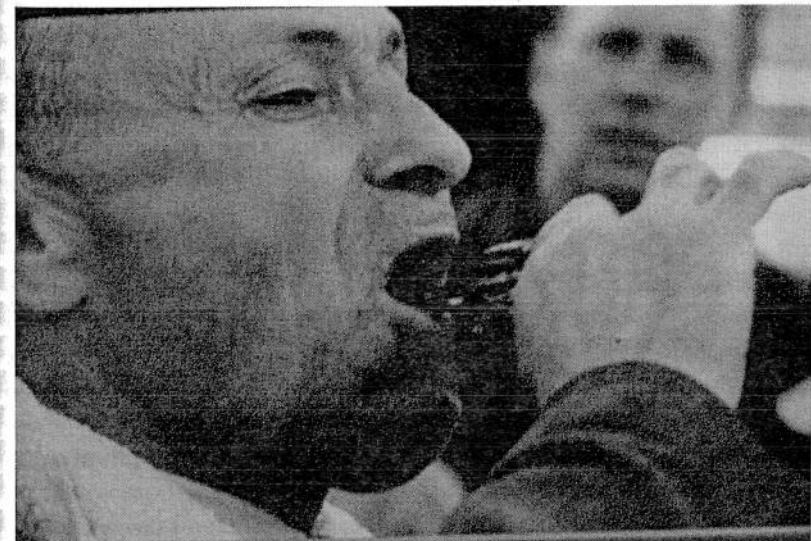


Figure 8.12. The man swallows frogs (*Cleo from 5 to 7*)

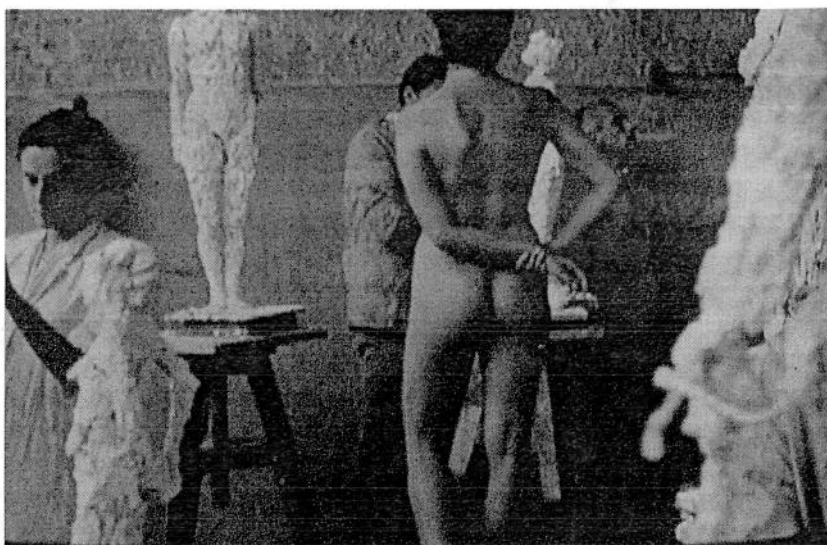


Figure 8.13. Dorothee models (*Cleo from 5 to 7*)

In the café Cleo overheard mention of the name Dorothee, so she heads to an art studio where her old friend Dorothee (Dorothee Blank) is a nude model. Cleo admits fears of illness to Dorothee, who tries to distract Cleo, taking her along on a drive to pick up some 35mm movies for her boyfriend, a projectionist. At the cinema, they watch a short silent film in which a young man (Jean-Luc Godard) mistakenly thinks he sees his girlfriend (Anna Karina) fall and die, but his dark glasses are to blame. Finally, Cleo heads into Parc Montsouris where she encounters a soldier, Antoine (Antoine Bourseiller), on his final day of leave before returning to the Algerian War. Antoine flirts with her, pointing out it is the first day of summer and the longest day of the year. She mentions her cancer test and they go together to the hospital. She promises to have dinner with him and see him off on a train later, in exchange for his companionship now. At the film's end, Cleo's doctor drives by and tells her that two months of radiation treatment should put her right again. Cleo, left standing stunned with Antoine, explains that her fear seems suddenly to have left her, and the film ends.

Cleo from 5 to 7, one of the richest works of the "young French cinema," combines techniques from documentary and fantasy, blurring shifts from objective realism to abstract subjectivity. The location shooting, with many elegant long takes and seemingly chance backdrops of funeral parlors and flower shops, is reinforced by cameras shooting from car windows

or a high perch, hidden across the street so that Cleo's strolls, like the meanderings of Antoine Doinel in *The 400 Blows*, look spontaneous, reflecting the contemporary honesty of the moment. Other scenes rely on poignant nondiegetic music, disruptive cut-ins, and even tiny jump cuts. Everything is possible in Varda's very personal cinematic style, which she cleverly labels *cinécriture*, or cine-writing, a unifying term meant to avoid the limits of "directing" by designating all aspects of communicating with the cinematic medium. She reminds us that we cannot think of an action without its representation via sound, editing, and camera work, all of which are equally significant narrative tools in her auteurist *écriture*. She also takes advantage of chance events, documents them, and weaves them into her fiction to lend a sense of immediacy and honest poetry to the final film. Like many other rewarding works of the New Wave era, including *Breathless*, *Adieu Philippine*, and *Jules and Jim*, Varda's *Cleo from 5 to 7* builds upon a wide range of discursive and historically informed stylistic options, offering the spectator a primer in modern cinematic techniques within a seemingly free flowing, personal narrative.

But *Cleo from 5 to 7* also owes directly to the context and personnel of the young French cinema. For the role of Cleo, Varda selected Corinne Marchand, who had played a minor dancer in Demy's *Lola*. Varda acknowledges that in real life Marchand was very different in taste and style from Cleo, but that Marchand became increasingly fascinated with the role. Varda also considered casting Jacques Demy for Antoine, but ended up with Bourseiller, who had done voice-over work for her previously. This production is also important as evidence of the interpersonal and professional camaraderie of the New Wave era. The short "film within a film" boasts Sami Frey, Georges de Beauregard, Eddie Constantine, and Jean-Claude Brialy, in addition to Godard and Karina. According to Varda, "The light that day, and the general good humor remain a memory for me that symbolizes the New Wave as we lived it, with the power of imagination and friendship in action."⁶¹ Further, *Cleo from 5 to 7* was shot by Jean Rabier, Marin Karmitz was assistant director, and Aurore Paquiss (later Chabrol) provided continuity. Demy's friends and collaborators set designer Bernard Evein and composer Michel Legrand were key figures in the production, as well. It is also worth noting that Varda had taken the wedding photos a few months earlier for Godard and Karina's splashy wedding. *Cleo from 5 to 7* is a tribute to a close circle of New Wave-era friends.

Filming began on the longest day of the year, but was shot in chronological sequence, with great attention given to preserving time markers

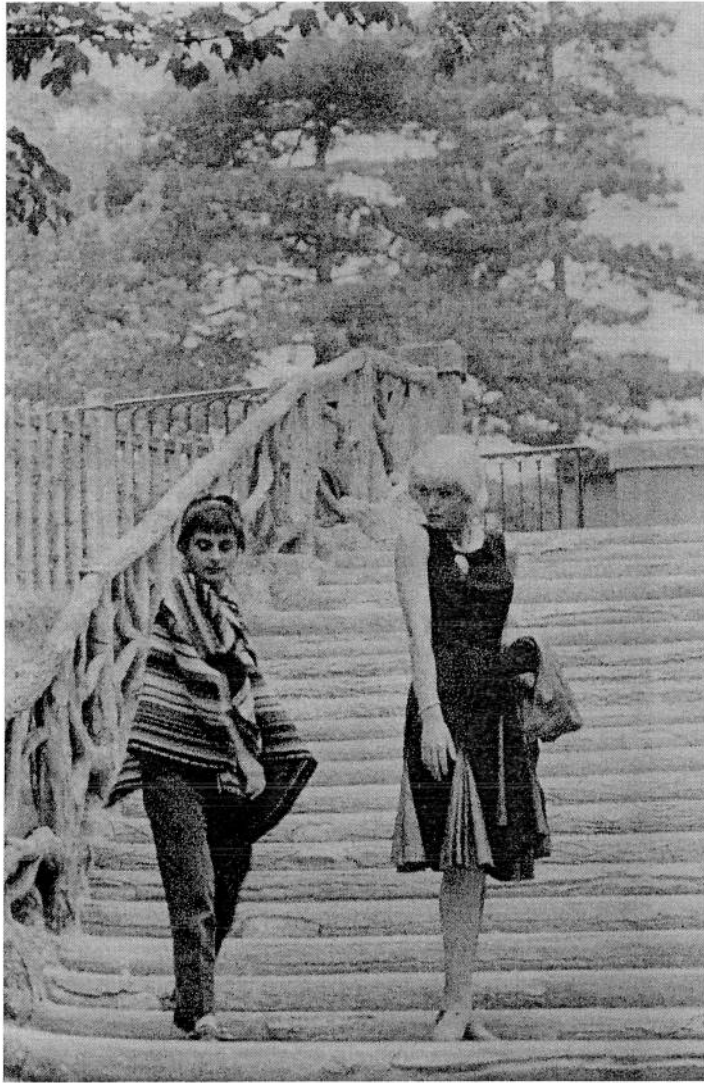


Figure 8.14. Varda rehearses with Marchand (courtesy of Agnès Varda)

and the appropriate daylight levels within the diegesis. The crew even changed some clocks along the streets as they filmed. While the principal shoot only lasted about five weeks, Marchand constantly lost weight, so that Cleo would look increasingly worried and even stricken, as the time of her potential death sentence ticks away around her. By the final day of

shooting, when Cleo and Antoine watch the doctor drive away and try to deal with the immensity of Cleo's impending cancer treatment, and Antoine's impending absence, the actors achieved a great, restrained intensity. However, upon reviewing the rushes, it was clear that the tracks for the camera were visible just over their shoulders. Two months later, Varda re-shot the sequence, but in finding that the actors lacked the emotion and bond she retained the original take and cut quickly to black, hoping the spectators would not as readily notice the rails. The sudden ending adds a succinct, ominous final punctuation mark.

This film by and about a woman, with its sensitive attention to Cleo's growing mental and physical crisis, has justifiably become one of the milestones of feminist cinema. Much of the theoretical interest in *Cleo from 5 to 7* centers on the title character's increasing independence, as she shifts from an objectified, repressed, and suffering body to a subjective, more cognizant being. Agnès Varda's own comments helped shape the critical perception of Cleo's character from the beginning. In often eloquent, always insightful interviews, Varda carefully explained that the objective time of the titles is contradicted by the internal, subjective time of Cleo's perception. But she also acknowledged that Cleo had a chance to change during these ninety minutes, gauge the egotism of those closest to her, and gradually become more aware and sensitive to others: "This struggle between coquettishness and anguish allows Cleo to be truthful for the first time in her life."⁶² From the director's perspective, Cleo is not so much a person as a formal problem in a narrative plot. As she explains, "I thought women were themselves victims of being defined by looks from others—father, lover, judge. . . . Women have to wake up, so right in the middle, Cleo does. . . . In the first half she is the princess all the time. . . . Even her lover, the maid, and musicians do not care about her or her fears. She is a doll to everyone. So, she changes to a black dress, like Edith Piaf, and decides to go out. Now *she* looks."⁶³

This sort of clarity of feminist purpose has unified many of the critical reactions to *Cleo from 5 to 7*, often condensing Cleo down to an uncomplicated psychoanalytic trajectory, maturing from passive object to an active subject position. As Flitterman-Lewis writes, "The film traces the process by which Cleo, the woman-as-spectacle, becomes transformed into an active social participant, rupturing the oppressive unity of identity and vision and appropriating the gaze for herself." Cleo undergoes a "profound transformation."⁶⁴ Alison Smith agrees, arguing that by the time Cleo arrives in Parc Montsouris she has a "confident knowledge" of her own

subjective identity.⁶⁵ Clearly, *Cleo from 5 to 7* addresses issues of women as image, yet it seems difficult to claim she is a completely different character by the end, much less that she is somehow more socially engaged and aware after forty minutes of wandering. Watching one man eat frogs and another demonstrate a hole in his arm has hardly given her a new respect for humanity or herself. Instead, she still seems afraid and disgusted by much around her. Her desperate glare at the people in the café ignoring or even complaining about her song on the jukebox reinforces her sense of panic. She never seems to find solace or understanding on the streets, though the short comic movie does briefly distract her.

The famous scene of Cleo walking down the sidewalk, intercut with shots of many of the film's characters seemingly looking at her, only reinforces her fragile mental state. Janice Mouton believes *Cleo from 5 to 7* is built on a complete transformation of subjectivity, but adds that Cleo's exit from the café and walk prove "Her first brave steps are only a start; she must continually summon up courage to proceed along her path."⁶⁶ Based on the flow of story information and resulting characterizations, Cleo's current crisis is active and ongoing. It is a process understood by the audience from a series of cues available from the start, full of ambiguity and ambivalence. These cues continue right up to the final moment outside the hospital. Cleo may feel a moment of calm at the end, as the doctor pulls away and she chats with the earnest, concerned Antoine. But, given Antoine's imminent departure, and her appointment to meet with the doctor the next day to begin treatment, Cleo's mental health can hardly be summarized as stable, empowering, or socially engaged. For instance, she never makes any connection between the cancer in her body and what the Algerian War is doing to France and young men such as Antoine. Varda's narrative may suggest a parallel, but Cleo never sees it. It is never proven that Cleo begins to see the world through clearer glasses, as the Godard character in the embedded short movie had.

Cleo's degree of self-awareness and maturation is further complicated by what seems to be an ambivalent narrator. In the opening scene, Cleo already believes she is gravely ill, and also suggests to the fortune-teller that her lover is a disappointment. Then, the fortune-teller secretly tells her husband that Cleo is doomed. Varda initially aligns us with Cleo and we feel great sympathy for her. However, as soon as she descends the stairs, in time to the music, and looks into the mirror, it is a disappointingly shallow, vain Cleo we hear in voice-over. Throughout the movie, Cleo alternates between spoiled child and independent woman, a dichotomy the nar-

rator never quite resolves. In parallel, the spectator alternates between sympathy and amusement toward her. Cleo is a contradictory character. Admittedly, she begins the movie in near hysterics, is babied by Angèle, and exploited physically by José, a man who hopes to spend Friday afternoon with her rather than the evening, which she prefers. She is also apparently regularly mocked by the musicians. There is no evidence that she is treated like a queen before leaving her apartment in anger, nor that life for Cleo has been perfect up until this awakening by disease.

When Cleo runs to her old friend Dorothée, it is to tell her troubles to someone who will treat her kindly and sympathetically. Nonetheless, she does not come to some new understanding. We have no evidence that Cleo will now feel more comfortable in her beautiful, if sick, body. She ends up in a state of shock, standing next to a man she has only known for twenty minutes, facing an uncertain fate. Even Varda is not sure what will become of Cleo, though she admits, "I don't think it is good." Varda constructed Cleo from a number of stereotypes, including spoiled pop stars of the 1950s and '60s, but also the nineteenth century's notorious Cléo de Mérode, who "tempted our grandfathers," as Antoine explains. Varda also includes touches from Edith Piaf's persona and Varda's own mother, who loved hats and was highly superstitious, like Angèle and Cleo, all of which helps reinforce the film's inconclusive mix of exasperation and sympathy for Cleo.

Visually, Varda builds upon her observing, restless camera work and poignantly framed shots from her earlier films, but she pushes the punctuating editing style a bit further to reflect the occasional shocks to Cleo's mental state. While the overall average shot length is just over twelve seconds, some chapters are composed of scores of shots, while others average shot lengths of fifty seconds and beyond. Even the choice of lenses is linked to emotional effect: A short 35mm, the "lens of reality" to Varda, is used on Angèle and a longer 90mm on José to reinforce his smoothness. Varda also films the fortune-teller in very sharp focus, to show Cleo's fear, and the saturated color on the Tarot cards is meant to prove how important and memorable the images are to Cleo. Among the most representative long takes are the arcing camera movements in the hat shop, when the camera seemingly takes off on its own but constantly comes to rest on significant reflections and fragmented glimpses of Cleo, the other women, and the military procession outside. Another case involves her initial inquiries at the hospital with Antoine, where the camera shifts from the couple to the staff and back to Cleo and Antoine framed in a window. Locations function like carefully constructed sets, so when Cleo passes a poster for *Don Juan*



Figure 8.15. Cleo and Antoine, carefully framed at the hospital (*Cleo from 5 to 7*)

in the café we are reminded that José said he was too busy to accompany her to its premiere. When a distraught Cleo sits with Antoine on a bench in the hospital's garden, the lawn in the background is overexposed, appearing almost snow-like, once more isolating her from the real world. Varda blurs reality and fiction visually.

The most famous scenes in *Cleo from 5 to 7* prove Varda's versatile mix of styles. When Cleo sings the devastatingly sad "Cry of Love," the 150-second shot begins with an establishing shot of Bob to the left, Angèle in depth, Cleo, dressed all in white behind the black piano, and the lyricist to the right. The blocking and framing gradually obscure Angèle, to concentrate on Cleo and the men. The camera dollies in, arcing to isolate Cleo, changing her backdrop from the pure white walls and beams to a black curtain. After sixty seconds, nondiegetic strings join the piano and Cleo. Isolated and backlit against black, she grows increasingly intense and turns to the camera; suddenly tears stream from her eyes. The quality of her singing voice increasingly changes to a studio mix. At the end, the camera quickly dollies back out while Cleo weeps on the piano. As Claudia Gorbman writes, the everyday world temporarily disappears: "What prevails until the song ends is a deliberately glossy studio effect as in television variety shows: one performer, dramatically illuminated out of any spatio-temporal context, interprets with unmitigated feeling a contempo-

rary tune accompanied by an hidden orchestra."⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the reality of Cleo's foreboding intensifies her performance as well as her emotions and those of the audience. This scene, which clearly depends upon Evein's art direction, Legrand's music, and Varda's lyrics, demonstrates Varda's mastery of the graphic potential of black and white, but also a mix of narrative styles, where fantasy seems to sneak into the reality of a rehearsal session filmed in stunning long takes. Moreover, the audience empathizes with Cleo's torment over the beautifully sad song, while her three friends just see it as more evidence of her as a temperamental diva.

A second scene demonstrating Varda's radical approach to time and space can be seen in Chapter 8 ("5:45–5:52"), when Cleo is disappointed by the café response to her song on the jukebox and walks down the street. In contrast to the "Cry of Love" long take, this fifty-second stroll is broken into twenty-seven shots of Cleo and passersby, but also ten inserts of posed characters from elsewhere in the film, including the fortune-teller, José, the frog swallower, and even her abandoned wig. Whether these inserts are signs of Cleo's precise mental perspective, or a summary of the general forces weighing on her mind, or pure intervention of a narrator reminding the audience of the cast of characters Cleo has recently encountered, the scene acts as a highly punctuated representation of the life and concerns



Figure 8.16. Cleo isolated by the camera (*Cleo from 5 to 7*)

Cleo is trying to walk away from and ignore. Objective reality and subjectivity are blurred once again. But the real strength of Varda's *cinécriture* approach can be seen in how she interrelates striking combinations of image, sound, and editing into complex signifying structures. As Claudia Gorbman points out, music in *Cleo from 5 to 7* does not just function to support the visuals, but actually motivates editing rhythms and reinforces the continuity and discontinuity of filmed events, whether it be Cleo descending the stairs from the fortune-teller's apartment in a fragmented series of shots, or Cleo stomping out of her apartment, passing a child in the street banging out notes from "Cry of Love" on a toy piano. Claudine Delvaux summarizes this rich synthesis well: "Simply to be a spectator of Agnès Varda's films is a great pleasure for me—a pleasure of the image and pleasure of the text. It is as if she fills the screen with images, just as a writer fills a page with poetry."⁶⁸

Cleo from 5 to 7 received great critical attention from those interested in the new French cinema. The fact that Varda was not a *Cahiers* director allowed those more suspicious of the New Wave proper to praise it, as well. A 1962 review in *Positif* celebrated Varda's lucidity, intelligence, and instinct, declaring that she might just be "the most complete auteur," while *Cleo from 5 to 7* was considered the best French film since *Hiroshima, mon amour*.⁶⁹ Surprisingly, while Varda's gender was often acknowledged in reviews, the fact that she was perhaps the only successful female art film director in the world was largely ignored at the time. Though *Cleo from 5 to 7*'s fame and significance have continually increased since 1962, its initial box office performance was rather uneven. In Paris, its first run sold a respectable 111,000 tickets, more than Resnais' *Muriel*, but less than *Hiroshima, mon amour*. However, in New York, where Bosley Crowther's review in the *New York Times* dismissed it as another in a string of shallow new French films that stress visual style over story,⁷⁰ *Cleo from 5 to 7* sold only 22,000 tickets. Today, *Cleo from 5 to 7* is accepted as one of the most important French films of the 1960s, and one of the most significant films in the history of women filmmakers. During the 1980s, Madonna, whose mother had died of cancer in 1963, approached Varda, wanting to star in an American remake of *Cleo from 5 to 7*, though that project eventually fell through.

Varda's next feature, *Le bonheur*, toned down the experimentation in a more subtle, and for many critics, more troubling film. *Le bonheur* was also something of a surprise for Varda. She and producer Mag Bodard had initially planned to make *Les Créatures* (*The Creatures*, 1966) next. However,

the CNC commission granting advances on receipts turned down that proposal. Angry, Varda set about writing a new movie for the final CNC deadline, which was only four days away: "I still ask myself where this simple tale of a carpenter came from. . . . Are there stories inside us, waiting in hidden corners?" Jacques Demy helped Varda transcribe her hurried script and they managed to get the new project typed up and the thirty required copies mimeographed just in time.⁷¹ The CNC approved the scenario, and Varda set about choosing actors. For the family, Varda selected a popular television actor, Jean-Claude Drouot, who had just been featured on the cover of *Marie-Claire* magazine, with his beautiful wife Claire and their two children. Varda convinced them all to be in the film, and then hired another blonde, Marie-France Boyer, to play Emilie, the tempting postal worker.

Part of *Le bonheur*'s initial impact was due to its reworking of the "other woman" romantic drama formula, but Varda's version is far from a generic love triangle. François and his loving wife, Thérèse, live with their two small children, Pierrot and Gisou, in the calm town of Fontanay-sur-Rose just outside Paris. He is a carpenter, working in his uncle's friendly shop; Thérèse is a seamstress, making dresses out of their home, and caring for the children. They spend Sundays in the park or at old-fashioned family gatherings and picnics. Their life is ideal, and all are happy and devoted to one another: They have *le bonheur*. However, when François spends several days working in nearby Vincennes, he meets a pretty postal clerk, Emilie. She is about to move to his town, so he offers to help build some shelves when she arrives. On that day, François lies to his wife and goes to meet Emilie, and they begin an affair. François is now doubly happy, which he explains to Emilie; he is always honest with her about loving his wife and family. One clever shot captures this period of his life: During a street festival the camera tracks back and forth as various couples dance and exchange partners. A tree in the foreground occasionally blocks the action. Emilie begins dancing with some friend while an oblivious Thérèse dances with François. During the one hundred-second shot everyone changes partners several times, with François and Emilie eventually dancing happily not far from Thérèse and her new partner. Soon after, Emilie and François share an intimate conversation in her apartment, which is shot in one long take of nearly five minutes. He explains again his double happiness, telling the slightly jealous Emilie that she makes love better than his wife: Thérèse is more like a tender plant, while Emilie is an animal set free. He loves them both.

But this male dream-come-true soon unravels. On their next Sunday outing in the woods, Thérèse carefully puts the children down for a nap in



Figure 8.17. François and wife Thérèse (*Le bonheur*)

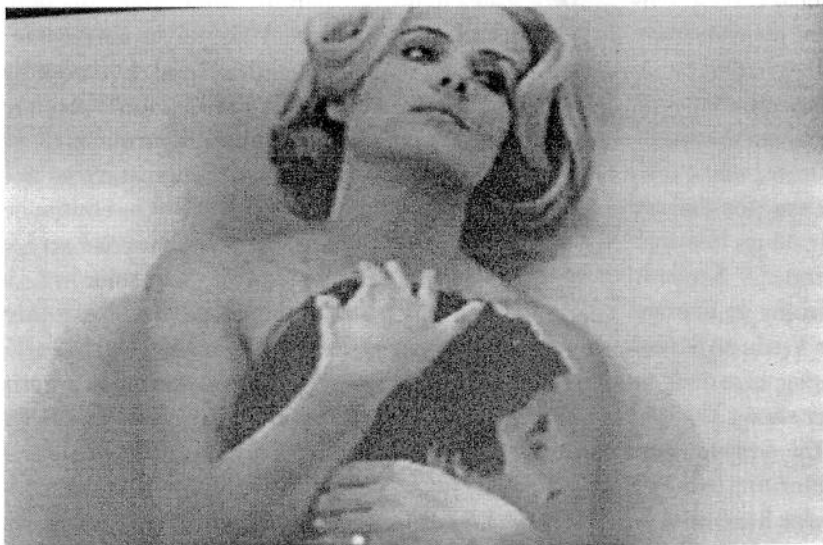


Figure 8.18. François and lover Emilie (*Le bonheur*)

a homemade tent, then settles down on a blanket with François, exclaiming that he seems particularly happy this summer. He is glad it shows, and Emilie's earlier, smiling acceptance of the love triangle motivates him to reveal the situation to his wife so that she too can be happy for him! During a daring long take that parallels the earlier five-minute shot with Emilie, François explains that there is "another tree" in their family orchard now. He does not want to miss out on "more life" and hopes Thérèse might be able to love him even more now, but, "If you ask me to do without her, I will." Thérèse tells him she may be able to share him, and the two make love under their blanket in the meadow. However, upon waking up, the family cannot find Thérèse. With Pierrot and the whimpering Gisou in tow, François runs off to discover that Thérèse has drowned in a nearby pond, the same pond where the family picnicked in the opening scene. After the funeral, the children go briefly to live with François' brother, then they share a family vacation with the sad François, before he returns to Emilie, who is a bit hesitant to "take another woman's place." Nonetheless, she quickly moves in with François, takes over the children, and the story ends with the four of them enjoying a lovely, sunny fall Sunday in the country. In a shot that reverses the opening title shot, the four of them walk away from the camera into the trees. The film fades to orange, and ends.



Figure 8.19. François clutches the drowned Thérèse (*Le bonheur*)

Le bonheur initially garnered more international attention than *Cleo from 5 to 7*, winning the Louis Delluc Award, the Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival, and the David O. Selznick Award in the United States. Nonetheless, in Paris *Le bonheur* only attracted 86,000 people. By contrast, it played for eight “splendid” weeks in New York, earning \$101,600, despite Bosley Crowther’s *New York Times* review in which he complained that it “landed like a cinder in the eye.” He found it memorable and exasperating, though “perhaps tongue in cheek.”⁷² Its critical reception has been just as contradictory. Even Alison Smith dismisses the film as atypical of Varda and based on cliché: “I find it hard to like.”⁷³ Yet *Le bonheur* delivers a surprisingly interesting narrative, full of ambivalence and ambiguity, all built on very rigorous and modern formal structures. Part of the critical confusion may owe a debt to Varda’s comments and interviews upon the film’s release. She often defended François, and reinforced the themes of happiness. She refused to condemn François or adultery during interviews, and even called him wise: He loved his wife, she died, and François will always love her, just as he does his late father. Varda avoided making large moralizing social statements about the movie or its characters. For her, the film expressed a sort of idyllic freedom in love, a world with “no conscience.” It may have also reflected some of the nonconformity in her own personal life.

It should be no surprise that *Le bonheur* puzzled many reviewers. Often, they were looking for a more obviously ironic tone, or harsher narrative judgment of the naively happy François or even Thérèse, who quietly abandons her children and dies, seemingly to make way for the new woman. Georges Sadoul explains that it “would have stirred up less argument or indignation if it had been titled *A Great Misfortune*.”⁷⁴ Similarly, Alan Williams argues that in *Le bonheur*, life and patriarchy go unexamined. As he points out, the audience is likely to ask “Has Varda no feelings about the dead woman? . . . It is probably dangerous to antagonize one’s audience to this extent with unmarked irony.”⁷⁵ Varda never shows Thérèse’s pain. Rather, the narration concentrates on François, the sensitive man who suffers briefly, losing part of his happiness, before returning to his initial state of bliss, now with Emilie. Feminists in particular have been divided over how best to deal with this narrative that does not fit at all what some wanted to see from the world’s most interesting woman director. Most extreme may be Claire Johnston’s attack on *Le bonheur* as replicating the “facile day-dreams perpetuated by advertising. . . . There is no doubt that Varda’s work is reactionary: in her rejection of culture and her placement

of woman outside history her films mark a retrograde step in women’s cinema.”⁷⁶ Flitterman-Lewis admits that *Le bonheur* upset many women, but she defends it as “profoundly feminist”: “When people left the film they were asking themselves—and each other—questions concerning the nature of happiness, of sexual relations, of social constructs.”⁷⁷ Moreover, those looking for Varda’s authorial commentary on the action believed they found it: “As François makes love to his mistress, shots of his wife shopping with the children provide an ironic commentary on his idea of happiness.”⁷⁸

France’s influential *Le film français* praised *Le bonheur* and Varda highly: “Agnès Varda does not shy away from the most difficult subjects—she already proved this with *Cleo*—but she also demonstrates an originality and an inspired richness that have no equivalent in French cinema today. The theme developed here—a man’s love split equally, purely even, between his wife and his mistress—has never been treated with such directness on the screen. It will surprise and even shock some spectators despite its subtle style.” They even labeled it a “hymn to life.”⁷⁹ Interestingly, Varda’s ending, in which François all too contentedly enjoys a new family arrangement made possible by the death of the wife/mother, anticipates many of Chabrol’s later bourgeois fictions, from *La femme infidèle* (*The Unfaithful Wife*, 1969) to *La Cérémonie* (1995) and *La fleur du mal* (*Flower of Evil*, 2003), which present flawed but endearingly naive families who seem unable to conceive of any other way of behaving. Nonetheless, Varda’s *Cleo from 5 to 7* and *Sans toit ni loi* (*Vagabond*, 1985) earn much more praise and attention from historians and cultural critics today than does *Le bonheur*, which also deserves continued consideration and analysis.

During a time when most European art films were still shot in less expensive black and white, the lush color in *Le bonheur*, with its obvious references to Jean Renoir as well as his father and French Impressionist paintings, seemed like a comment on the artifice of the characters to some critics, but also a suspicious attempt at entering the mainstream to others. However, *Le bonheur* also alternates the soft, sunny impressionist color with bright, bold, flat compositions that mimic modern poster art. Varda does not regress to classical realism. For instance, Varda cuts from François and Emilie’s first embrace in her barren new apartment to an idyllic family picnic in a beautiful, sun-drenched shot, with sunflowers clustered in the background around the festive François as he opens the champagne. A few moments later François and the happy Thérèse, in her bright flowery dress, lie beneath a willow tree and discuss having more children. There is a natural, rich beauty that contrasts with the previous scene’s limited palette of

flesh and white as well as the next scene of François in bed with Thérèse. Occasionally Varda also works with bold, flat colors, as in the transition after François agrees to help Emilie move. Varda cuts from Emilie in blue to François sitting silhouetted against a blue wall featuring the word "azur," then cuts on a blue truck passing, which acts as a blue wipe to the next shot of a bright yellow truck and wall, then a jump cut on two red trucks passing, then back to the yellow truck as François pulls up in his little truck with the yellow sign. The next scene opens with him painting a blue square. Varda's set design alternates the nostalgic impressionist nature scenes with a flat poster style and primary colors that one might expect to find in a Godard film. Further, she also includes color fades between scenes, including fades to yellow, blue, and white that seem to mimic 1950s Hollywood romantic comedies such as *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* Perhaps by this point her color style was being influenced by her relationship with the bold colorist Jacques Demy as much as her own love of visual arts.

Varda's staging in *Le bonheur* incorporates both flashy discontinuous montages and subtly elegant long takes. The most daring sequences show off her penchant for reflexive techniques in editing, shot scale, and even focus. The film opens with a haltingly edited montage of sunflowers framed in various positions of the frame, while François and his family slowly approach, out of focus, in the distance. In retrospect, it is unclear which blonde woman is with him. This sequence is jarring, with an average shot length of barely two seconds, while the film's overall ASL is over thirteen seconds. Twice Varda also offers montages of the woman's domestic work, including shots of the woman kneading dough, watering flowers, ironing, and putting the kids to bed. This montage, which is repeated near the end with Emilie having taken over Thérèse's routines, is often cited by critics as commentary on the value and place of women in the home, that pretty women, who can also clean, cook, and take care of the children, are exchangeable.

However, during its first appearance, this montage also provides an excellent glimpse into the subtleties of Varda's *cinécriture*. Immediately after the eleven-shot household montage, Varda continues with a twelve-shot montage of François driving to Vincennes. The gold sign "Porte Dorée" (Golden Gate) is followed by two gold statues, then the sign again and shots of François speeding along in his truck with the yellow sign, as if perhaps he is in some golden chariot. Next, several shots of lions are intercut with images of François driving past the zoo. A shot of a male and female lion snuggling is followed by some startled birds, and we hear "What a lovely



Figure 8.20. *Le bonheur* title sequence

bird," then cut to a bird stamp being handled by Emilie in the post office. The twelve shots move him from home to Emilie in twenty seconds. The domestic female-centered housework montage is thus followed with the male "on the hunt" montage, which acts as a clever transition between François' two worlds. That the scene continues with Emilie smiling at a postage stamp of a bride and groom also adds a bit of ironic foreshadowing.

With *Le bonheur*, Varda continues to explore a number of her earlier techniques and strategies. Beyond the long takes and montages, there are several subjective inserts. While François and Emilie sit at a café and discuss possibly visiting the nearby castle, there are inserts of them smiling at the camera, out of focus, as each seems to imagine their happy visit. During the scene when François discovers the drowned Thérèse, there are repeated shots of him lifting and hugging her limp body. The lack of sound reinforces the nightmarish effect of her death. Brief inserts reveal her in the water, clinging to a branch, but it is unclear whether these are reliable flashbacks or François' imagination. Varda then eliminates any inquiry into the death by quickly cutting to a pile of dirt at the funeral. This shift from an intricately busy scene to a minimalist one-shot funeral is typical of the unusual pacing of *Le bonheur*. Even the August vacation that François takes is reduced to a single, still photograph of his smiling extended family. Varda claims this sort of image was at the root of her film

project: Many family photos reveal happy faces, but she wonders whether happiness is merely a representation or something real.

One of the most functional methods of staging action in *Le bonheur*, however, involves carefully choreographed camera movements that arc and track, following characters from point to point. Varda frames an action in a medium-long shot, then as the characters move, the camera suddenly begins to track with them, then they stop at the other end of the track where the camera may tilt or zoom in on them. The scene where François and Thérèse wander off from the picnic to lie beneath the willow provides an excellent example, as does their final conversation, when the camera observes Thérèse arrange the mosquito netting over the children then follows her back to François, constantly reframing in their medium-close up on the blanket. During this shot Varda often shifts the actors' bodies so that they turn to and away from the camera, creating the equivalent of shot/reverse shots and isolated close-ups, all without editing, until the camera delicately pulls away as the couple undresses and begins making love. This technique allows Varda to begin casually, but by the end it becomes clear this was a carefully conceived set-up, with intricate pacing and blocking. Varda's productive camera movements and the long takes do not generate the same sort of deep space as in the staging of Jean Renoir or Louis Malle, but she guides our attention in creative ways while simultaneously reminding us there is a narrator organizing our view of this world, sometimes with long, subtle takes, and other times with jump cuts and jarring inserts. The result is a very personal and dramatic sort of narrative space.

Varda is adamant in maintaining personal control over the entire production process, and owning her own production company, Ciné-Tamaris, guarantees great independence while providing a small team of pleasant, devoted employees and colleagues who often function as her extended family. She engages actively in the management of every aspect of filmmaking, from finding funding to writing song lyrics and editing the final cut. Importantly, unlike other New Wave directors who gave up on documentaries after moving into fiction, she has continued to work in both fiction and documentary throughout her career. Two of her most successful films, the narrative *Vagabond* and personal documentary *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (*The Gleaners and I*, 2000), have kept her at the top rung of French film directors. Varda has also fought to preserve high quality prints of her films, and those of Jacques Demy, and she personally prepares and distributes new DVD release versions and bonus materials. In 2005 she was accorded the honor of serving on the jury at Cannes. Thus, she has re-

mained the most enduring and productive woman filmmaker in the world, fifty years after *La Pointe Courte*. Importantly, her fiction films refuse to simplify or explain psychologically "realistic" characters and her narrative strategies further complicate our identification with their decisions. The spectator's perception and recognition of character traits is thus impeded by the distancing narrative tactics that seem to come from contradictory cinematic traditions. The endings remain open, if not puzzling, in many regards. To conclude, we should return to the praise given *La Pointe Courte* by Bazin and recognize this unique experimental style for what it is able to accomplish: It is an evocative cinema that is realistic and dreamlike at the same time, obeying nothing but the desires of its auteur. Across her career, Varda's cinema is the freest sort because it recognizes no boundaries and bows to no producer's whims. Agnès Varda is unique, but she is also a product of that rich cultural moment that was New Wave-era France.

If Resnais and Varda remain less known than Truffaut, Godard, and Rohmer, it is due in part to the differences in their personalities. Since the *Cahiers* directors all began as critics, and brash critics at that, they were much more used to marketing themselves and their films. Resnais, Varda, and other directors associated with the Left Bank Group tended to be more contemplative, more akin to visual artists than high profile members of the culture industry. Additionally, the label "Left Bank" was used to distinguish certain aspects of this one trend among young French filmmakers from the New Wave at large. Jean-Michel Frodon points out that *rive gauche* really stands for the entire intellectual, philosophical environment centered around St. German des Près in Paris from 1945 up to May 1968. This milieu was very different from that of the *Cahiers* filmmakers who were an internal cinema group, unified around specifically cinematic concerns.⁸⁰ But as Sandy Flitterman-Lewis notes, "the preoccupation with modes of cinematic discourse" united the New Wave with the Left Bank Group.⁸¹ Varda and Resnais, as well as their colleagues Chris Marker, Henri Colpi, and Jacques Demy, were products of, and key participants in, the new French cinema.

Already in 1960, *Cinéma* named as "beneficiaries" of the New Wave those directors, such as Resnais, Varda, and Demy, who had made successful short films during the 1950s but needed the excitement brought on by Truffaut, Chabrol, and Godard in order to find producers willing to give them a chance to continue with feature films.⁸² Yet, as we have seen, the revitalization of French production depended as much on *La Pointe Courte*, *Night and Fog*, *Hiroshima, mon amour*, *Last Year at Marienbad*, and *Cleo*