



THE INTERACTION OF AND PLACES AND FEMININE CHARACTERS IN AGNÈS VARDA' S CLÉO FROM 5 TO 7 AND VAGABOND: IMAGES OF WOMEN TRANSFORMED BY SPATIAL EXPERIENCES

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Abstract

I believe that people are made not only of the places where they were brought up, but of those that they love, I believe that the environment (le décor) lives in us, directs us [...] By understanding people you understand places better, by understanding places you understand people better.

Agnès Varda

The interaction of people and places is a critical stance of Agnès Varda's films. Varda explores the influence of environment on its inhabitants while mutually her characters' identities can be traced back in architectural surroundings that are the expansions of social and cultural practices. Varda's involvement in both feminist discourses and the New Wave is reflected on her films through her inquires about the construction of the image vis-à-vis social and cultural structures as well as the cinematic language. Varda's in-depth perception of the construction process of images through the film form by questioning the problematics of vision and furthermore her comprehensive approach to reveal complex social and cultural formations in life that produce such fixed images of women make her a seminal figure in feminist cinema. Varda embodies feminine characters in *Cléo from 5 to 7* (*Cléo de 5 à 7*) and *Vagabond* (*Sans toit ni loi*) as they are shaped spatially within film and exposes places as the settings of life situations concerning characters' experiences. Filmic spaces are represented as the expansions of complicated structures in a society that constitute and transform Cléo and Mona's images both in characters' minds and in spectators' minds. Architecture as a cultural phenomenon that has an impact on the formation of social and cultural structures on the one hand and is shaped by them on the other is used in Varda's films to delineate characters in relation to situations they encounter within space. Architecture gains meaning both through the experiences of people and through their reactions to places as well as interactions and encounters with the lived world. However, architecture is used neither as a metaphor that assign unchangeable meanings nor as a means to outline determined characters. On the contrary it is an active participant that both shapes them through alterations in life and is shaped by them reciprocally during screening dependent on its



capability to evoke diverse emotions and ideas as a result of the dialogue between the individual and her environment.

Characters and places are not evaluated as separate issues. They complement one another within filmic context and this interaction can be grasped by interrogating the images of people and places reciprocally. However following the traces of characters' experiences spatially does not expose predetermined personalities for the viewer. It is a process of questioning that makes one contemplate on happenings and creates the desire to see profoundly. The formation of films associates the viewer with image and gives significance to interrelations between places and people.

Varda deconstructs the illusory, fixed image of woman in patriarchal societies through her female characters' mental and physical itineraries. It is the search of a woman living in a man-made environment in order to discover and create her own territory and space. However Varda reveals the construction process of femininity by displaying the complicated structures in a community. Furthermore film language is scrutinized profoundly within film form as a prevailing means to influence cultural formations. Architectural forms reflect characters' feelings by intervening as an interface on the one hand, and interact with people by emerging the meaning of film due to the encountering of characters with the lived world on the other. Personal trajectories lead the protagonists whether to self-reflection as in the example of Cleo or to self-isolation as in Mona. Agnès Varda's *Cléo from 5 to 7* and *Vagabond* display the spatial experiences of feminine characters while demonstrating the impact of environment on the formation of identities. Varda transforms the constituted image of femininity through inquiring patriarchal gazes and traditional structures that produce it. Placing characters within a social milieu that reflect life situations results in nonidentification and furthermore the critical distancing of the spectator. We are able to understand Cléo and Mona in relation to their environment within this framework.

Keywords: Film, Architectural Surroundings, Woman's Image, Agnès Varda