

“One of the Gods”¹ of cinema — Agnes Varda. She has shown pioneering potential as a female director and is respected for her long career as an active director. She is also a highly recognized director in Hollywood being one of the only directors of The French New Wave generation who has settled in Hollywood with Jacques Demy. As an aspiring director who cannot escape the criticism of being female but grew up with Hollywood, it’s almost dangerous not to study Agnes Varda’s life devoted to cinema and reevaluate the practicality and sustainability of pursuing what you truly love. What are the values that I can bring with me to further contribute to her legacy?

Varda received international acclaim from her film *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962). The film follows a young singer Florence "Cléo" Victoire, as she waits to hear the results of a medical test that will possibly confirm diagnosis of cancer, wandering around Paris to soothe the fear of death from 5 p.m. to (basically) 7 p.m. Varda brings Cléo and the audience together in a rare way that almost coincides with the time within the film and the running time. Varda creates a very dense experience of cinematic excitement of 90 minutes, depicting Cléo’s reactions to the sights, strangers, and friends she meets in Paris. This dramatic effect achieved by reviving the time that would have been omitted from conventionally narrative films is unorthodox and unique, essentially what set Varda apart from other directors are the artistic approaches to sensibility and sensuality. It was the fear of that supported the story of Cléo who was hanging on to her impending fate in *Cléo from 5 to 7*. Whether the feeling of fear is subjective or objective, it has become a character, the time itself for the film. This film refocuses the desire to make a film that doesn’t follow the “conventional” story telling narrative of cinema in an unapologetically feminine way — to steal someone’s time with undistributed conversations and thoughts that fill up a woman’s complex mind. To depict the female psyche in a delicate, yet radical way (but how?). Compassion and empathy is strongly suggested, but hard to acquire, so not necessary. Michael Haneke said “The pessimists are those who treat the audience as stupid”² — there are no desires to be a pessimist director, but how much trust should be put on the audience?

Agnes Varda’s first color film *Le Bonheur* (“*Happiness*”) (1965) is a fascinating work with delicate structure and provocative themes. At the end of each scene, the screen darkens and then lights up again and moves on to the next scene, and before the screen darkens, it is deeply colored with yellow or red depending on the subtle psychological changes of the main characters. Resembling a color

¹ <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/telluride-martin-scorsese-calls-agnes-varda-one-gods-at-fest-tribute-1235935/>

² <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/film/the-pessimists-are-those-who-treat-the-audience-as-stupid-1.551660>

palette and dominant in her visual aesthetics, her attention to detail on the characters are sophisticated yet sensible.

As the title suggests, *Le Bonheur* (“*Happiness*”) asks for the true meaning of happiness. It follows a man, François who is faithful to his needs, unfaithful to his duties, and sincerely believes and justifies his extramarital affairs as another form of happiness — bizarre and idiotic, Varda’s witty directing seems to be aimed at aggressively satirizing his faith. As a man, François’ happiness is distinctly different from his wife’s; one could view the autonomy behind him and his lover’s affair as a pure, beautiful exchange of the soul and the body because it’s based under the idiom of ‘love’ — at least in the married protagonist’s head. However his wife Thérèse is under the circumstances of never being able to understand his perspective, therefore she kills herself in despair, but even before doing so, she still asks him if he’s happy and dies when she is still François’ only wife. “*Happiness*” flows along a more subtle emotional rhythm through the eyes of a woman director, directly capturing the love François feels for his two women. Time also flows and outdoor picnics still happen — all that is changed is that Thérèse is not there, and the lover has taken over the wife. But the world is still colorful, ‘happy’. As Gary Mairs said after the screening, “Absolutely diabolical film”. While Agnes Varda’s gaze as a female director is blatantly felt, a deep contemplation of happiness and the evaluation of relationships are grasping as a universal meditation. Questions about artificial happiness paradoxical to true happiness arise, revealing themselves through solid relationships such as marriage or family, throwing in complex concerns about their solidarity within and without. Even though it was only following the surface of the situation very precisely like a novel, it had the power to universally understand the psychology of the character and the context of the surrounding environment by digging into the essence of happiness and the feeling of happiness according to the principles of nature.

The content is simple. But the emotions are complicated and subtle. It's cold and warm. Agnes Varda's delicate gaze blends seamlessly with Mozart's music. There are personal challenges in fictionalizing a metaphysical concept, psychological deceptions and changes into a scene or a story (for instead formatting), but Agnes Varda does it so well. She has boldly broken down the existing system of film language and proudly confronted changes in modern society summarized with contradictions and disconnections.

There are emotions that I want to evoke. I don’t want to entertain but I want to amuse. As mentioned in the proposal, the film script I have handed in as my final project is geared toward artistic fulfillment, rather than academic success. It aspires to explore the dynamics of damaging relationships and how individuals trapped in them struggle to break free whilst trying to hold onto love and dignity.

Resembling Varda's approach to arise the meaning of 'happiness' and the uneasy feeling that comes with it, this film asks about love. Told through nonlinear narrative structure interspersed with powerful performances, symbolic imagery, and dreamlike sequences. Examining themes of coercion, obsession, fear, guilt, denial, rejection, abuse, jealousy, dependence, neglect, isolation, forgiveness, recovery, healing, resilience, vulnerability, courage, strength, self-discovery, self-awareness, personal growth, transformation and second chances. I can't help but to wonder what the critical value of this film will be, but for now I desire to let my voice be heard and let the audience see through my eyes.

Notes:

I'd prefer not to share my project/script in the final drive, if possible. As I want to keep it discreet until the actual production! Thank you so much.