

Media 101

LA NOU VELLE VAGUE

LEO from 5-7

A film by
AGNÈS VARDÀ

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Key Questions and Ideas

- **The look of cinema (specific movements of cinema)**
- **How does cinema negotiate the act of looking?**
- **How does a film make us look?**
- **How does the look define the cinema experience?**



Lecture Breakdown

Part 1) The French New Wave

- Background
- Directors
- Ideas and concepts
- Methods and techniques

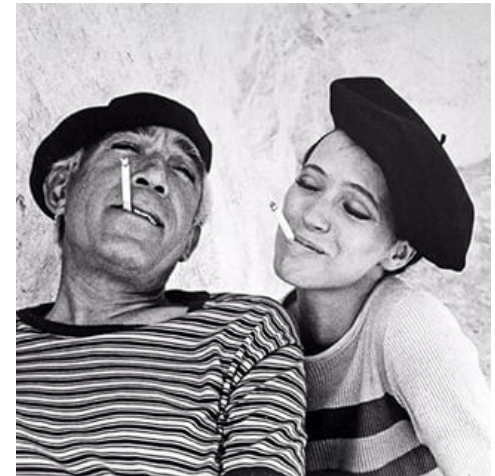
Part 2) Cleo from 5 to 7

- Formal Structure
- Time and Space
- Representation of Gender
- Political subtext
- Cinematic Self-reflexivity



The French New Wave

- cinema movement in Paris (1958-1962)
- a “new look” or “a new style” for a post-World War II France
- “explosion of cinematic energy and experimentation” (Sandy Flitterman-Lewis)
- crucial to how we understand cinema today
- formal innovation, personal expression and political commitment,



The Story

- self- made cinema and creative rebellion
- young cinema enthusiasts/ cinephiles discuss film in the late 50s in Paris

Ciné-clubs: organized film clubs develop detailed knowledge of film (esp. Hollywood film and experimental Soviet Cinema)

- Develop theoretical, historical and technical understanding of cinema
- French national cinema is lacking – stale, artificial, outdated

=> thinking about new ways of telling stories cinematically



A Series of Questions

- **What is cinema?**
- **What is a film?**
- **How does one narrate a film?**
- **How does the spectator come to understand the filmic image?**

=> Creating a new kind of cinema

=> Experimenting with the rules of storytelling

=> Rethinking conventional film budgets and production norms.

➤ Changing the face of cinema



Directors

The Young Turks: Jean Luc Godard; Francois Truffaut; Claude Charbroil, Jacques Rivette,

- *Cahiers du cinema*
- Preoccupation with the language of film, narrative organization, and strategies of cinematic discourse



Left Bank Group: Alain Resnais, Chris Marker and Agnes Varda

- more politicized
- arts beyond the cinema



Agnes Varda

“It’s not my fault I made a movie just before the New Wave”

- Credited by many with making the first authentic film of the New Wave *La Pointe Court (1955)*
- photographer – art historian – documentary filmmaker
- cinematic storytelling capable of expressing feminine realities (“feminine difference”)

“I wanted to learn how to look”

- cinema as an articulation of vision (personal and social)





Varda by Agnes





Ideas and Concepts



cinematic language that is at once both a unique vision (personal) and a new kind of cinema (cultural)

1. Cinema as writing/ Cinécriture

- A signature of authorship = visual, aural, imaginative conception and construction of a film.

Varda: *“something that comes from emotion, from visual emotion, sound emotion, feeling and finding a shape for that, and a shape which has to do with cinema and nothing else.”*

“What I do in the editing room is writing”

2. New Wave of Auteurs

- Modelled on American auteurs => speaking cinematically – integrating a social vision

3. New Wave of Spectators

- new viewing relations with the cinematic text
- highly politicized position of spectatorship = reflective analytic, and critically engaged

Methods and Techniques

Keeping it real

- Shot quickly and cheaply
- Small crews
- On location
- Nonprofessional actors
- Technical simplicity- (direct cinema, cinema vérité, handheld camera etc.)





Methods and Techniques



Style

- improvisational
- Fragmentation of narrative cohesion
- Innovative fictional forms
- **Disruptive jolting kind of editing**
- chance occurrence





Methods and Techniques

Self-Reflexivity

- Demystification
- Reflexive use of sound and narration
- Emphasis on camera
- Breaking the fourth wall
- Emphatic use of jump cuts and elliptical editing



New look of film - new ways of looking at film

Editing: “Just cut to it”

Aimed to fracture classical editing’s illusion of realism

“Through logic and pacing, the editing does more than just link images in space and time, it also generates emotions and thoughts.” (Film Experience, p. 161)

- **Russian Montage**: disjunctive styles
- **Sergei Eisenstein** – Montage
- **Lev Kuleshov** and **Dziga Vertov** advanced montage and disruptive editing (politically engaged filmmaking/ ideological function of editing)

Exploring spatial and temporal relations

- visibly disrupted continuity: radically condensing or expanding time
- emotional intensity





Bridging time and space

Breathless (Godard, 1960)



Elliptical Editing



Duration

- length of time used to present an event or action in plot
- Manipulating narrative duration (contract or expand the story line)
- **Ellipses:** (temporal abridgement): Omits part of the event causing an ellipses in plot and story duration
- **Longtakes:** shot that continues for an unusually lengthy time before the transition to the next shot.

Both can work reflexively to:

- express the character's mental state
- produce meaning in shots
- guide viewers perception
- convey multiple perspectives



Legacy



What's in the Cards?

A film about learning to look and about what the passing of time feels like

- **Formal structure**
- **Temporality**
- **Space**
- **Representation and Production of Femininity**
- **Political Critique**
- **A Film about film**

“a complete transformation of being”





Formal Structure



2 parts (Cleo as spectacle/ to-be-looked-at-ness and Cleo as subject who looks)

13 chapters

I	Cleo from 5:05 to 5:08
II	Angèle from 5:08 to 5:13
III	Cleo from 5:13 to 5:18
IV	Angèle from 5:018 to 5:25
V	Cleo from 5:25 to 5:31
VI	Bob from 5:31 to 5:38
VII	Cleo from 5:38 to 5:45
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VIII	Some Others from 5:45 to 5:52
IX	Dorothée from 5:52 to 6:00
X	Raoul from 6:00 to 6:04
XI	Cleo from 6:04 to 6:12
XII	Antoine from 6:12 to 6:15
XIII	Cleo and Antoine from 6:15 to 6:30

- Camera and editing style vary according to the person at the centre of the chapter

=> from self-absorbed and narcissistic isolation to intersubjective relation.



Temporality



- anxiety of waiting
- objective time vs. subjective time
- plot time – what is actually shown - and Screen time - the time of watching a movie – coincide
- Reflexive editing – reminding us that we are watching a movie and reflecting the mental (often disoriented) state of Cleo

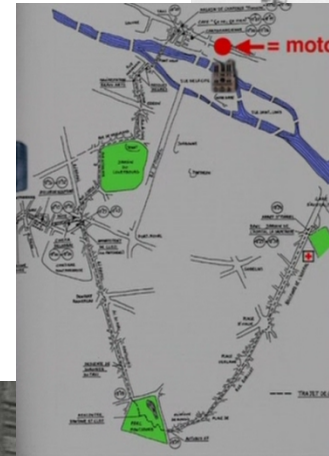
=> Creates an experience of time which contracts or expands depending on how one feels.

A study of time and how to capture it on screen.



Space

- Cleo is the female walker – *Flaneuse* - self-reflexive exploration of the city is directly connected to her inner transformation
- she is blind to her city (Paris!) surroundings, gradually learns to open her eyes
- shift from woman as spectacle to the spectacle of everyday life
- a document of Paris/ documentary sequence of pedestrians





(Wo)Man with a Movie Camera (Dziga Vertov, 1929)



Representation of Femininity

- Traces the process by which Cléo the woman as spectacle, becomes transformed into an active social participant
- Cleo undergoes a “profound transformation of her entire being”
 1. Self- reflection as narcissistic self-absorption
 2. Self- reflection as self –recognition
- From the object of the gaze to the subject who look



Object of the Gaze

Cleo as the object of the gaze

Cleo as feminist nightmare

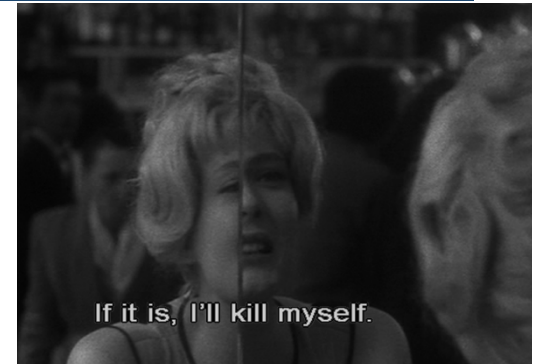
- infantilized, narcissistic and self absorbed
- sees herself only through the eyes of others
- no solidarity with other women

Cleo as a spectacle

- dress style / stylized by the camera
- prominence of mirrors

Cleo-as-image

- mirrors provide a unified image
- image equates to being (alive)





Cléo from 5 to 7



Mirror Mirror on the Wall...

- Observing herself as perceived by others
 - A reassuring image of coherence (a sense of her own being)
 - Identity and mirror image are firmly united
 - Mirrors and clothing as symbols
 - Mirrors dominate the mise-en-scène first part of the film and totally absent from then on.
- => conception of female characters as image





Dress up Doll



- clothing as a form of caricature and costume
- feathers and furs, wig and jewels

“She is a female clown.” (Roy Nelson)

- Caricature of the sex kitten

=> Cleo as child, a kitten, and a toy





Turning Point



- Cléo refuses to be a cliché
- “cri d’amour,” epitomizes the musical number of woman-as-spectacle
- she no longer wants to be looked at; she wants to do the looking herself
- She changes her optics and goes out into the street

moving from object of the gaze to the subject who looks





The Subject Who Looks



- Cléo's image is inserted into a social context
- E.g. at the café (contrast to earlier)
- The anonymity she craves is facilitated when she puts on dark glasses (instrument of insight)
- in seeing others, she begins to understand herself
- Through Cléo's point of view the spectator now takes Cleo's position as subject rather than object of vision

=>transforms the viewer's position into active contemplation - no longer objectifies Cleo as a fixed image





Subjectivity



Subjectivity

- Power and vision: Cleo assumes power over her own image
- The formation of subjectivity is linked to the recognition of others (e.g. Dorothee, Antoine)
=> reciprocal caring
- self- recognition is bound up with recognition of others
=> political connotations



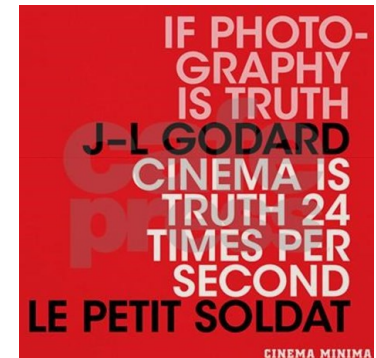
Political Subtext

- Algerian War of Independence (1954 to 1962)
- 17 October 1961 300 Algerian anti-war protesters were massacred by French police in Paris

=> censorship

e.g. Jean Luc Godard's *The Little Soldier*
(banned until 1963 after the war)

New Wave directors often applied subtext to address violent neo-colonial tensions underneath the surface of French middle class life.



Algeria

- racialized violence beneath the surface/ hidden in plain view
=> analogy between the objectification of gender and the objectification of culture
- ruptures of neo-colonial iconography

Algeria in Cleo from 5-7:

- ✧ news on the radio
 - ✧ people talking in the café
 - ✧ Graffiti “Peace with free Algeria”
 - ✧ Antoine
- Analogy between Cléo’s cancer and the Algerian War
 - Cinema’s complicity in creating and blocking ways of seeing



The Newlyweds of the Macdonald Bridge
or
Beware of the Glasses





Self-Reflexive Critique



Ideology and film:

- maintaining illusion / ignorance vs. producing an active spectator
- Truth is associated with a change in perception

Performance of blackness

- e.g. black face
- difference turns out to be a reflection of the lens through which one looks (ideologically/ culturally conditioned)
- The objectifying image has to be shattered in order to see

=> Cinema works as a mirror for the audience/ shapes perceptions of the world



A New Wave Film



Cléo from 5 to 7 and the New Wave

- narrative fragmentation
- temporal dislocation
- production of a critically engaged spectator
- redirection of the gaze into a subjective look
- sociological investigation of a milieu
- personal vision of the author
- political subtext (cultural inscription)
- cinematic self reflexivity

The film plays on the tension between film as controlling time (editing, narrative) and film as controlling space (changes in distance, editing), and helps us to understand cinematic form create a way of looking at the world.



Au Revoir

