



CONTEMPORARY FILM DIRECTORS

Agnès Varda

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Cultivating the New Wave Spectator: *Cleo from 5 to 7*

In 1961, when Varda began to make her second feature-length fiction film, *Cleo from 5 to 7*, the conditions under which she worked were dif-

ferent from those of her first feature. This time, she shot her film three years into the New Wave, when producers were accustomed to funding low-budget features by the likes of Truffaut, Godard, and Resnais. In contrast to her first feature's production, this time she had financial backing from Georges de Beauregard, the producer of Godard's *Breathless* and Demy's *Lola*. She was also able to employ professional actors and had a larger, professional crew. Her budget was still small (\$64,000) but typical of a New Wave budget (Neupert 333). She shot on location, just as she had in Sète, but this time she shifted her setting to Paris, the center of French filmmaking. Like other New Wave filmmakers, Varda shot in apartments, streets, cafes, stores, and parks, combining formal experimentation with the texture of everyday life in the early 1960s.

Just as she had in the making of *La Pointe Courte*, Varda chose to write an original screenplay for *Cleo from 5 to 7* instead of adapting a novel or play. She also continued to experiment with form and style, but she developed some new storytelling strategies this time. Whereas her first feature wove together two disparate narratives, her second feature experimented with duration, creating the impression of real time in telling a story about one character. Moreover, in 1961, in con-



Varda shooting *Cleo from 5 to 7* (1962)
on location in Paris. © Ciné-Tamaris

trast to the mid-1950s, Varda was part of the filmmaking community and the partner of another important filmmaker, Jacques Demy. Still, in a 1961 interview, she spoke of having lost something in the move from first-time filmmaker to experienced director of both fiction and documentary films: “The fact that I didn’t know anyone [while making *La Pointe Courte*] meant that I worked in a spirit of total freedom. . . . I really had the impression that there was no other way to express what I wanted to express, but especially that that was how I needed to do it. I had a kind of security that I obviously lost upon seeing other films and now I am much more ill at ease in preparing a film” (Ledoux 59–60). If Varda had lost the newcomer’s freedom and naïveté by the time she made her second feature, she had nevertheless gained experience, a network of fellow filmmakers, and, notably, an engaged and educated art house audience. This section will focus on the rich film culture that existed in early 1960s Paris, a culture Varda learned to mobilize after making her first feature and that forcefully shaped the fortunes of *Cleo from 5 to 7*.

Cleo chronicles the movements through Paris of a beautiful, initially self-absorbed pop singer who anxiously awaits the results of a medical test that will reveal whether or not she has cancer. The film’s title, while evoking the traditional hour for extramarital trysts, implies that we will accompany Cleo from 5:00 to 7:00 PM, and indeed Varda uses many strategies to emphasize duration: the apparent elimination of ellipsis, the multiple shots of clocks, the lengthy journeys by taxi, car, and bus, and the long strolls through a park and the grounds of a hospital. The film’s logic is generally casual rather than wholly episodic; Cleo’s movements are narratively or spatially justified. She walks from the fortune teller’s apartment to a nearby café to meet her assistant; in another café, she hears someone mention her friend Dorothée’s name and then decides to pay Dorothée a visit; Dorothée mentions that she needs to pick up a film reel at the train station and so the two of them drive to the Gare Montparnasse. But the film has an episodic quality as well that relies upon coincidence and that moves it away from the classical narrative. Many incidents in *Cléo from 5 to 7* would have been shortened or even elided by a more classical film, such as the scene in which Cleo dreamily tries on hat after hat while the horses of the Republican Guard pass by in the street. Later, by chance, Cleo comes upon a street performer

whose act entails swallowing, then disgorging, live frogs. The street performer disgusts and fascinates her but has no obvious narrative function. Instead, the performance suggests obliquely the beginning of Cleo's shift in attention from herself to others and, perhaps, her growing association of the human body with abnormality, illness, or surgery. Most strikingly, her encounter with a soldier (Antoine Bourseiller) on leave from Algeria is generated by sheer coincidence. Upon leaving Dorothée, Cleo wanders in the park and strikes up a conversation with a soldier who accompanies her to the hospital to learn her diagnosis. The overall effect of the narrative construction creates the impression of Cleo wandering from one visually and culturally distinctive place to the next, feeling anxious about her health and looking for answers, distraction, and comfort among friends and strangers alike. This is very far indeed from the goal-driven classical plot.

The film's picaresque narrative reveals both the light causality and the episodic nature of Cleo's afternoon. After having her fortune read, she exits the voyante's apartment and stares at her image in a mirror, noting with obvious pleasure, via internal sound and her expression, that she retains her beauty despite her potential illness. After having coffee with her assistant, Angèle, and purchasing a hat, Cleo takes a lengthy taxi ride through the traffic-ridden Latin Quarter to her apartment in the 14th arrondissement. She exercises briefly and then chats with her lover, a much older, solicitous man. Next she rehearses songs with her lyricist, portrayed by the composer Michel Legrand, but is then overcome with emotion while singing a song about death. She abandons the rehearsal and stomps out of her apartment, frustrated at not being taken seriously by the musicians. While walking to a nearby café, she encounters the frog-swallowing busker. At the café, she plays one of her own songs on the jukebox and strolls around the café listening to people talk. She exits the café, walks down the sidewalk, and appears to contemplate the various people with whom she has been in contact that day. She sees another street performer, then visits her friend, Dorothée, who poses nude for artists. She accompanies Dorothée to the train station to pick up the film reels and then to the cinema where Dorothée's boyfriend works as a projectionist. They watch a comic short film from the projection booth (featuring New Wave compatriots Jean-Luc Godard and Anna Karina) and then take a taxi to the Parc Montsouris, where Dorothée goes her

own way as Cleo continues her seemingly aimless stroll. A chatty, friendly soldier on leave from the Algerian war strikes up an acquaintance with Cleo and then accompanies her to the hospital, where she learns that she does indeed have cancer and must get treatment. The ending is ambiguous; it remains unclear whether Cleo is likely to survive, yet she is no longer afraid.

In terms of style, the film foregrounds spatial and temporal continuity and psychological realism, emphasizing both the geography of the 14th arrondissement, Varda's own neighborhood, and Cleo's shifting emotional state as she moves from fear to anger to serenity. Cleo travels from point A to point B over the course of the film's ninety minutes, from the fortune teller's to the hospital, during the hours from 5 to 7 PM. How she gets there and how she passes the time form the substance of *Cleo's* story, providing our only clues to Cleo's state of mind. More significantly, especially for feminist readings, the film shifts from how Cleo looks (i.e., what *we* see) to a subtle but pronounced emphasis on what *she* sees. The film is also an exemplary instance of European art cinema as defined by David Bordwell, with its refreshment of the codes of realism, authorial flourishes such as jump cuts and long takes, and its ambiguous ending. Also in line with European art cinema, Varda uses techniques such as location shooting and the creation of "dead time," choices associated with Italian Neorealism and celebrated by André Bazin. Varda combines her commitment to spatial and temporal realism with several of the visual flourishes Bordwell inventoried, including jump cuts (when Cleo descends the fortune teller's staircase), long takes (in the taxi and the art studio), and mobile framing (in the hat store and the rehearsal scenes). Cleo's subjectivity is emphasized through the soundtrack, both in the first café scene in which her attention shifts from her assistant's nonstop prattle to the couple's dispute at the neighboring table. During the second café scene, Cleo's aural perception and her isolation are again emphasized when she monitors the conversations of those around her, their individual voices rising above the din to comment upon art, literature, and their relationships. Later still, when Cleo walks down the street after exiting the café on her way to find Dorothee, realistic sound drops out altogether and she hears only the tick-tock of a clock while imagining a stylized series of images of friends and café patrons. Such strategies were noticed and appreciated at the time by French critics,

who lauded the film for its psychological and documentary realism, its rigorous treatment of temporality, and its fresh way of representing the city of Paris.

Georges Charensol called *Cleo from 5 to 7* a “true modern film, profoundly of our era” and saw it as a kind of snapshot of the year 1961: “Ninety minutes in the life of a Parisian woman can contain the anguish and the preoccupations of a nation” (“Le Coeur révélateur”). Pierre Billard praised the film’s “psychological depth,” its combination of realism and stylization, and its lack of an obvious “message.” Jean-Louis Bory celebrated the film’s emphasis on duration, its “chronological rigor,” and its “subjective time.” For Claude Beylie, “*Cleo* is (among other things) the most beautiful film ever shot in and about Paris.” Roger Tailleur wrote, “*Cleo* is . . . both the freest of films and the film that is the greater prisoner of constraints, the most natural and the most formal, the most realistic and the most precious, the most moving to see and the most pleasant to watch.” The film would eventually enjoy significant domestic and international success. It attracted a respectable 559,012 viewers in France upon its initial release in 1962 (Simsi 152) and was selected for competition at the Cannes Film Festival. The film was also selected for the “Information Section” of the Venice Film Festival, which runs parallel to the main competition and is designed to inform the public of new impulses in world cinema (Bastide, “Genèse,” 312). The film did not win prizes at Cannes or Venice, but it won the Prix Méliès in 1962, an award given by the Syndicat Français de la Critique de Cinéma, the French film critic union, for the best French film or French coproduction (Bastide, “Genèse,” 314).

Two novelizations of *Cleo from 5 to 7* were published in 1962; Varda participated in the preparation of both of them. In August 1962 a publisher called Festival Films published a photo-novelization of *Cleo from 5 to 7* aimed at the mass market. The forty-eight-page text combined dialogue from the film, plot description, and 265 production stills taken by Liliane de Kermadec, the photographer hired by the production company Rome Paris Films (Bastide, Diss, 272).

Cleo was the first New Wave film to be chosen by Festival Films for such a treatment. Then in September 1962, the prestigious publisher Éditions Gallimard published a screenplay of the film that included dialogue, plot information, shot scale, and camera movement. Since the

ROME PARIS ROME FILMS PRÉSENTE

CLÉO de 5 à 7

Scénario adaptation dialogues et réalisation
d'Agnès Varda

Musique de Michel LEGRAND
Chansons d'Agnès Varda et
Michel Legrand

INTERPRÉTATION		
Corinne MARCIANO	Cléo	Dominique DAYVAY
Antoine BOURSELLER	Antoine le calet	José-Luis de VILALLONGA
Bertrude BLANK	Bertrude	Serge KORBÈR
Michel LEGRAND	Bob le pianiste	Angèle
		L'Amant
		Piumitif

avec la participation de Jean-Luc EDOUARD, Anna KARINA, Emile CONSTANTINE,
Sami FREY, Daniel DUBOIS, Yves ARMAND, Jean-Claude BODAT et Alain SCOTT

UNE PRODUCTION CARLO PONTI ET GEORGES DE BEAUREGARD

UN GRAVE SOUCI A CONDUIT LA JEUNE ET BELLE CLÉO, À CINQ HEURES, CHEZ MADAME IRMA, CARTOMANCIENNE, QUI VA, POUR ELLE, CONSULTER LES TAROTS. DE LA MAIN GAUCHE, CLÉO A COUPÉ, PUIS CHOISI NEUF CARTES : TROIS POUR LE PASSÉ, TROIS POUR LE PRÉSENT ET TROIS POUR L'AVENIR. ELLE NE QUITTERA PLUS DU REGARD CES CARTES AUX COULEURS VIVES, QU'ELLE CONNAÎT UN PEU, ET QUI VONT, PENSE-T-ELLE, LUI RÉVÉLER L'INCONNAISSABLE, ET DONNER UNE RÉPONSE À SON ANGOISSE. SÎTôt SORTIE LA CARTE DE LA CONSULTANTE, MADAME IRMA PARLE :



Vous avez eu un jeune amoureux... très adroit. Il vous a influencée peut-être pour votre carrière, ou après votre métier. Votre mère était veuve ?



Non.



Alors, vous avez près de vous une veuve qui vous tient compagnie. Peut-être pas très scrupuleuse pour la conduite de votre vie, mais très dévouée...

Oui, c'est vrai.



Elle vous a fait quitter votre ville natale, pour une vie plus libre... Ainsi, vous avez pu rencontrer un homme de cœur, très généreux, qui vous aide à vous consacrer à l'art...

One of two novelizations published
after the release of *Cleo from 5 to 7* (1962).

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1920s, Gallimard had published a great deal of material on cinema, both theoretical texts as well as film novelizations. As Bastide notes, Gallimard had already published the screenplay for *Hiroshima mon amour*, written by *nouveau roman* proponent Marguerite Duras, but the publication of a Gallimard edition of *Cleo from 5 to 7* was unusual given that Varda was the first person without ties to the literary world to have her script published in this prestigious collection (“Genèse,” 284).

Such glowing praise for a film that departed from classical French cinema can be explained in part by the immediate context of the French New Wave, which had defined itself in opposition to mainstream cinema, but also by the unusually effervescent film culture in France that had developed during the twenty years following World War II. Neupert writes of a new journalistic environment that valued both high and low culture and supported the growth of film criticism (Neupert 13). De Baecque highlights the strong and varied intellectual commitments of critics such as André Bazin, Georges Sadoul, Roger Tailleur, and François Truffaut, who engaged in lively disputes over French “quality” cinema, neorealism, and Hollywood cinema in the pages of *Cahiers du cinéma*, *Revue du cinéma*, *Positif*, and many other journals throughout the 1950s and beyond (de Baecque, *La cinéphilie*). One result of this critical fermentation was the creation of an environment in which filmmakers felt called upon to experiment, knowing that an alert and sophisticated audience existed for their work. Burnett characterizes this period as one in which “risky” narrative cinema was encouraged because there was a “cultural market for auteur cinema” that promoted a cluster of “social dynamics” between the auteur and the cinephile. These “direct and indirect forms of contact, cooperation and address” proved to auteurs that their works could fruitfully “engage specific communities of supporters, their discourses and their practices” (Burnett).

While de Baecque focuses on the interventions of individual critics in 1950s French film culture and Burnett excavates the specific “feedback loop” between Robert Bresson and his critical community, my focus in this section is on *ciné-clubs*, more and less formal film societies through which people came together to watch and discuss films. One such club, the Ciné-club des Avant-Premières, chose *Cleo* for its inaugural screening and—fortunately for us—left concrete evidence of the richness of the French cultural marketplace for cinema in the form of a postscreen-

ing audience questionnaire now held in Ciné-Tamaris's archive. Before examining that rich treasure trove, however, it will be helpful to outline the history and structure of these French film societies.

The *ciné-club* was central to French film culture starting in the immediate postwar period. André Bazin, François Truffaut, and Henri Langlois, founder of the Cinémathèque française in the mid-1930s, were all active in the leadership of *ciné-clubs*, but so were thousands of ordinary viewers all over France. Fifteen years of intensive *ciné-club* activity undoubtedly played a role in the formation of what Alain Resnais identified in 1962 as a "new wave of spectators." When asked about the causes and the consequences of the French New Wave, Resnais responded, "It is less a new wave of directors of which we should speak and more a new wave of spectators. The film culture of the public is infinitely more elevated than it was ten years ago. The young generation of spectators has less prejudice and is more demanding than before. If there really exists a renewal in the current French cinema, we owe it, in large part, to this young generation of spectators" (Chevalier 248). The critical success and broader cultural visibility of *Cleo* is due in part to the *ciné-club* and to Varda's understanding of the need to cultivate viewers for her films.

Ciné-clubs had already played a key role in French film culture in the 1920s, when, as historian Richard Abel notes, they helped elevate film to the status of art, encouraged an awareness of film history through their organization of retrospectives and lectures, and promoted avant-garde, censored, and other noncommercial films (251–57). In the 1930s, after the coming of sound put a damper on the production of avant-garde film, the *ciné-club* became a kind of sanctuary for the silent classics (Jeander 385). During the Occupation, *ciné-clubs* were banned, but they experienced a renaissance in the immediate postwar period. As early as March 1945, the Fédération française des ciné-clubs (FFCC) re-emerged with six clubs, and within one year eighty-three clubs were in operation, with more than fifty thousand members (Pinel 36). By 1962, the year *Cleo* was released, there were approximately five hundred clubs in metropolitan France alone, with an estimated membership of two hundred thousand. The number of films shown is startling: in 1961 alone, approximately six thousand feature films and ten thousand short films were screened in French *ciné-clubs* ("La FFCC à la rue").

Just as notable as the quantitative rejuvenation of the French *ciné-club* in the postwar era is the shift in its goals. The recast postwar *ciné-club* showed a broader range of films and attracted members from a wider socioeconomic spectrum of viewers than had its 1920s predecessors. The goals of the postwar *ciné-club* were succinctly laid out in the title of an article written by film critic and director Pierre Kast in 1945: “Develop Film Taste, Introduce Masterpieces, Educate the Public: That Is the Task of *Ciné-clubs*” (46). The goal of the revived *ciné-club* movement is “to form spectators both fully aware and passionate who will continue to frequent commercial cinemas, more often, if possible, but with another regard and a refined sensibility, more lucid and more acute” (Pinel 41). The *ciné-club* attempted to cultivate “refined” sensibilities in specific ways: through its diverse programming, through film education workshops, and, above all, through *le débat*, the discussion that took place following the screening.

Ciné-club programming in the postwar era was quite diverse. It favored certain directors and national cinemas, certainly, but it included both documentary and fiction films, shorts and features, experimental and genre films, and French and foreign titles. Not surprisingly, films by established *auteurs*, such as Orson Welles, Sergei Eisenstein, Carl Theodor Dreyer, Ingmar Bergman, Luis Buñuel, Jean Cocteau, and Satyajit Ray, were a mainstay of the *ciné-club*. The clubs’ programmers also showed a preference for Italian Neorealism, American genre films, French avant-garde short films, and short documentaries. Far from serving as a tool of a French national cinema alone, as one might expect, the *ciné-club* actively promoted films from a variety of countries, including the United States, Italy, Germany, Denmark, India, Russia, and Japan.

Careful programming went hand in hand with the purposeful presentation of the film at the *ciné-club* screenings. For the task of introducing the film to *ciné-club* members and instigating a lively discussion about it, *ciné-clubs* had trained *animateurs* (facilitators). Film history’s most famous *animateur* was André Bazin. In the latter half of the 1940s, Bazin was not only publishing his hugely influential articles on Italian Neorealism, Orson Welles, and William Wyler, but he was also making the rounds of schools, factories, union meetings, and *ciné-clubs*, facilitating discussions of films such as Carné’s *Le Jour se lève* and Renoir’s *Le Crime de M. Lange* (1936) (de Baecque, *La Cinéphilie*, 33–36). The

typical *animateur*, however, especially in the provinces, was more likely to be a local schoolteacher with a passion for cinema.

Directors of *ciné-clubs* had at their disposal in the early 1960s several primers on how to create a successful *débat*. One such primer was written by Max Egly, a specialist in adult education. Egly advises the *animateur* to begin by soliciting club members' first impressions of the film, then move toward isolating its narrative elements and situating it in its historical framework (256). He warns that viewers should take special care to avoid the reduction of a film to its subject matter alone (261). The viewers should also be encouraged to discuss the film's relationship to the director's biography and oeuvre and, finally, its connections to related films, literature, and other art forms. Egly's essay was published in a book called *Regards neufs sur le cinéma* (*New Perspectives on the Cinema*), part of a series of works devoted to topics such as photography, sport, literature, and the French song. The series was a joint venture of the publisher Editions du Seuil and the organization "Peuple et Culture" (People and Culture), which emerged near the end of the Occupation and was developed by resistance figures contemplating the shape of postwar French culture. The basic goal of Peuple et Culture was to strengthen French culture by building a culture common to all people and specifically to "elevate the cultural level of those from all social milieus, particularly the working class" ("Peuple et culture" 314). Supported by France's Ministry of National Education, Peuple et Culture trained people through courses, workshops, and publications to "animate" cultural organizations such as *ciné-clubs*, book clubs, or music appreciation groups. The *ciné-club*, then, was part of an extensive, well-organized postwar initiative aimed at democratizing culture.

The goals of the postwar *ciné-club* were consequently myriad and ambitious: to reach out to viewers from a wide socioeconomic spectrum, expose them to a range of worthy films from a variety of national traditions, genres, and *auteurs*, and teach them to formulate and express publicly their opinions about the films' narrative, style, and historical context. The *ciné-club* did not aspire to replace the commercial cinema in its members' lives or to promote a renaissance in experimental filmmaking, as had the 1920s *ciné-clubs*. Instead, the postwar *ciné-club* invested in the formation of an active, educated viewer who was not necessarily a writer or an artist. The traces left by the premier of *Cleo from 5 to 7* at the Ciné-club des

Avant-Premières provide evidence that the *ciné-clubs* achieved that goal and also that Varda understood the importance of the clubs in promoting films that departed from the norm.

The Club des Avant-Premières was founded in 1962 in Paris by film critic Jean-Louis Bory and André Parinaud, director and editor of *Arts*, respectively. *Arts* was a respected weekly arts and culture magazine for which both Truffaut and Godard wrote in the 1950s and which would play an important role in *Cleo's* launch by drawing attention to the club's activities. The Club des Avant-Premières was founded with the idea of showing sneak previews of new films to its members several days or weeks before the films' general release. In contrast to other *ciné-clubs*, which tended to focus on repertory programming, the Club des Avant-Premières wanted to encourage viewers to see certain films "at the very instant when the film is beginning its career." In the initial announcement of the club's launch, Bory clarified its goal of supporting new films as well as its conception of the *ciné-club* audience: "[T]hanks to *ciné-clubs*, specialized journals, the Cinémathèque and certain Parisian cinemas, there [is an] audience that respects the cinema, considers it a major art and recognizes its right to freedom, to boldness. An audience that accepts a 'difficult,' I mean, 'unusual,' cinema. Our dream is to facilitate the relationship between this cinema and that audience. Establish contact" ("Pourquoi").

The club's initial selection committee consisted of Bory and Parinaud as well as Jean Le Duc, director of programming at Radio-Luxembourg, film critics Pierre Marcabru and Roger Boussinot, novelist Christiane de Rochefort, and film distributor Sam Sirtzky ("Comment adhérer").⁵ The club chose *Cleo* for its inaugural sessions not only because its leadership admired the film, but also because it perceived *Cleo* as potentially "disconcerting" due to "its construction, its rhythm and its themes" (Bory, "Pourquoi"). The club wanted to have an impact on the film's reception by the general public: "Here is the perfect example of a film that could have a dazzling career or could just as easily be a terrible flop. In our own small way, we will attempt to assure that *Cleo* is a success rather than a flop" (Bory, "Pourquoi"). Bory and Parinaud also demonstrate a refined sense of Varda's place in French film culture in 1962. Although she had only one feature and three short documentaries to her credit, they see her as an important filmmaker of the contemporary moment

and as a filmmaker invested in cinematic specificity: “Agnès Varda finds herself today at the head of an oeuvre that some would consider thin, but that we consider important. For Agnès Varda, the cinema is something other than the systematic exploitation of novelistic fiction: the cinema gives us things, beings and problems to see that really exist and that exist today. And in showing these things, Agnès Varda works to find forms of expression that are associated exclusively with the means of expression particular to cinema” (“Pourquoi”).

The film was screened three times for club members on April 2 and 3 in three different cinemas scattered around Paris: the Studio Publicis on the Champs-Élysées, the Vendôme (Opéra), and the Gaumont (rue de Grenelle). Six other cities in France were also chosen to show *Cleo* as part of the Ciné-club des Avant-Premières’s inaugural venture: Nancy, Bordeaux, Marseille, Lyon, and Nice (“Deuxième spectacle”). In Paris, more than two thousand viewers joined the Club des Avant-Premières and attended one of the three screenings. The traditional *ciné-club* format was used, which included an introduction, a projection, and a discussion.

But the Ciné-club des Avant-Premières also used a tool that was not typical in France: a questionnaire designed to assess viewers’ understanding of, appreciation for, and objections to *Cleo from 5 to 7*. The questionnaire consisted of eight questions written by Varda herself:

- (1) Did you like this film? Why? If you didn’t like it, also say why.
- (2) Were you more responsive to
 - the subject?
 - the directing?
 - the characters?
- (3) What moment (or scene) of the film is your favorite?
- (4) Did the film seem to have slow moments? When? Conversely, does the film lack a scene (or a line or an image) that would have provided for better comprehension of the storyline or the characters?
- (5) In your opinion, will the young woman, Cléo, die?
- (6) What do you think of the roles played by the male characters in this story?
- (7) Do you see a greater meaning in this film that goes beyond the storyline itself?
- (8) Will you recommend this film to your friends and family?

More than a thousand viewers returned the questionnaire to the offices of *Arts* within the required eight-day period. *Arts* tabulated the responses and reported the results in its April 18–24 issue. The questionnaires were then sent to Agnès Varda, who read and retained a selection of them (eighty-six, to be precise) in the company's records.

These questionnaires serve as a glimpse at the response to a film perceived as worthy, but potentially “difficult.” On the whole, the viewers provided detailed and sophisticated responses, analyzing both the film's style and narrative and often placing the film in the contexts of the New Wave and international film history. The questionnaires provide valuable information about art cinema spectatorship during the French New Wave and suggest that Resnais was correct in asserting that a “new wave of spectators” had emerged.

Immediately notable is the diversity of the respondents' professions, especially compared to the 1920s *ciné-club* gatherings, which tended to attract writers and artists. While a significant number of the respondents were, predictably, university students (27 out of 86) or educators (6 out of 86), a wide range of occupations is represented. Respondents included five secretaries, three doctors, two assistant film directors, two accountants, two administrators, two pharmacists, two artists, two journalists, two civil servants, two shopkeepers and one each of the following: librarian, publisher, bank employee, insurance inspector, silk painter, restaurateur, psychologist, engineer, nurse, dry cleaner, interior decorator, writer of radio plays, architect, editor, and translator. One respondent identified herself as a “college graduate in English.” Twelve respondents did not have a profession or chose not to divulge it. Three respondents listed “cinéphile” as their profession. Some of the respondents later became important members of the film community. Serge Daney, who would become an influential film critic in the 1970s and 1980s, filled out a questionnaire, as did Roger Diamantis, then a restaurateur who later became an important art house exhibitor with the cinema St. André des Arts.⁶ If the socioeconomic makeup of this particular club did not fully reflect the utopian goal of *Peuple et Culture* to bring the arts to the proletariat, it hints, at least, at the existence of a diverse audience for unconventional films.

The general response to *Cleo* was positive. Many respondents filled out the questionnaire and then added several pages to it, sometimes

in the form of a written or typed letter to Varda. Some respondents answered each and every question, while others left some questions unanswered or dispensed with the questionnaire altogether and simply wrote a long analysis of the film. Viewers expressed a surprising familiarity with Varda and her work. Several asked to meet with her, and one viewer even invited her to dinner. Specific scenes frequently singled out for praise in the questionnaires include the hat shop episode, the long taxi ride through Paris, Cleo's rehearsal with her composers, the silent film within the film, and the encounter between Cleo and Antoine near the end. When asked whether they were more sensitive to the film's subject, direction, or characters, viewers frequently refused to separate these elements and instead expressed appreciation for each category or for the film as a whole. Here we can assume that the respondents had successfully absorbed the warning in the *ciné-club* primers about reducing a film to its subject matter or to its themes alone. Likewise, respondents tended not to object to the plot's relatively open ending. Most respondents believed Cleo has a terminal illness but viewed the process of her transformation throughout the film as more important than her specific prognosis.

In keeping with the advice given in the *ciné-club* primers, the viewers of *Cleo* tended to comment at length on both narrative and film style. One student from Paris commented on the contrast between color and black-and-white stock at the beginning of the film, the play of mirrors and windows in the hat shop scene, and the shift in the background from white to black when Cleo begins to sing her song. Another viewer, a law student from Bordeaux, established links between style and narrative. "The film's technique is very adapted to the characters and especially to the spirit of the author: the excellent camera movements around the piano with the bizarre musicians . . . the very good scenes in the interior of the hat shop where the apparent disorganization of the camera only shows Cleo's disarray."

Some caution is prudent in assessing the extent to which viewers felt positively about *Cleo*. Because of its affiliation with Club des Avant-Premières, *Arts* had an interest in the success of the film. Moreover, it is possible that the people who filled out the questionnaires knew that Agnès Varda would likely be reading their responses, so perhaps some viewers expressed an inflated degree of enthusiasm for the film. Yet

not all the respondents provided positive and lengthy comments on the film. Many were content to fill out the form in a cursory fashion, and a few were quite critical of the film. One particularly disgruntled viewer, who identified herself as a “bilingual stenographer,” wrote that the film was “idiotic” and that she wanted to be reimbursed. Another viewer, a university student in Paris, was “bored” by the film, finding Cleo “egotistical” and the soldier “ugly” and “without charm.” Yet, surprisingly, even viewers who disliked *Cleo* provide subtle comments about the film’s style, discussing individual scenes and shots in detail. For example, one viewer who objected to many things in the film observed, “The film is a kind of photographic reportage with sound, a *cinéma-vérité* on a star, in the streets of Paris. . . . in a hat store, the singing star’s ‘studio,’ and a sculpture studio. It is a visual magazine, a kind of filmic *Elle* or *Marie France* that one flips through, [seeing] a model trying on hats [and] a female taxi driver recounting an attack.”

Here it is as if the viewer is heeding the advice of *animateur* Max Egly to find connections between films and other kinds of texts: *cinéma vérité* documentary, photojournalism, and women’s magazines. This viewer even suggests that the film’s style invites a particular viewing mode: one “flips through” the film. Surprisingly, the viewer’s denigration of *Cleo from 5 to 7*—he links it, after all, to a lowbrow cultural object, the woman’s magazine—coexists with his admiration of the film’s settings and cinematography. Cleo’s strolls through Paris, he notes, evoke those of Jeanne Moreau in Louis Malle’s *Ascenseur pour l’échafaud* (*Elevator to the Gallows*, 1958), and the film’s cinematography is “remarkable.” Another viewer compares *Cleo* unfavorably to Truffaut’s *Jules et Jim* (*Jules and Jim*, 1962), but comments on Varda’s use of color stock in the film’s prologue and on specific edits. He complains that the scene in the hat shop is “too much like a romance novel” and even speculates that the peignoir worn by Cleo was previously used in Resnais’s *L’Année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year at Marienbad*, 1961). This viewer disliked *Cleo from 5 to 7*, yet he takes the film seriously enough to watch it carefully and to dissect its visual style.

The *ciné-club* members’ ability to discuss both style and narrative is notable, but equally remarkable is their ability to place the film in the context of film history. Sometimes this comparative activity works in a negative sense. Viewers specify what the film *is* by saying what it *is not*.

For example, a university student from Paris distinguished *Cleo* from Hollywood cinema, noting the film's lack of a concluding kiss:

Everyone was waiting . . . with a sort of conditioned reflex, for a kiss, like in all American films, which resemble each other. . . . and then, no. Three little notes and it was over! Ha! If you had seen the theater, in which we behaved exactly like Pavlov's dog. [It was as if one had] conducted an experiment on conditioned reflex. . . . The audience let out a little cry as if it was disappointed that one had not flattered and exploited its sexual urges!! This was good; you brought us out of our routine.

A student from Valence distinguished *Cleo* from "traditional cinema" for its relative de-dramatization: "The film pulls the spectator out of his comfort. If someone asked us what we just saw, we would easily respond: nothing. There is no dramatic event, no theatrical coup. . . . We are offered insignificant, unoriginal, unlinked facts. And yet we are moved, touched, troubled."

Others linked *Cleo* in a positive manner to specific films. To the question "Would you encourage your friends to see this film?" a medical student replied, "That depends. To love this film, it is necessary, I believe, to have loved *Pickpocket* [Bresson, 1959], for example, and perhaps also *Lola* [Demy, 1961]." The student from Valence revealed her familiarity with other eras and traditions of filmmaking in her response to the same question. "As for me, I know that I can place *Cleo from 5 to 7* in my imaginary *cinémathèque* next to *Night and Fog* and *A Day in the Country*." A law student living in Bordeaux wrote that the tracking shots in the hospital garden reminded him of the tracking shots in Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* and that the character of Cleo recalled Lola in Demy's film. The depth of field used in Cleo's apartment reminded him of *Citizen Kane*, no less. Another viewer disliked the film's visual style, but argued that Cleo is a new kind of heroine with links to other New Wave female protagonists: "This is a delicious painting of a woman. Corinne Marchand is, I believe, the most 'true' of the modern heroines. These last months have been full of them! Bardot in *Vie privée*, Moreau in *Jules et Jim*, Karina in *Une femme est une femme* and not long ago, Anouk Aimée in *Lola*. Cleo adds a character to the New Wave's gallery of 'modern heroines.'"

Viewers also placed the film in the context of Varda's own work, citing her first feature, *La Pointe Courte*, and the three short films she made

in the late 1950s. One viewer observed that Varda's *L'Opéra-Mouffe* helped him understand *Cleo from 5 to 7*, since both allow us to "enter into the psychological world of [a] woman." Viewers were thus able to place *Cleo* in several contexts: Varda's oeuvre, the French New Wave, and film history more generally.

The questionnaires on *Cleo* in the Club des Avant-Premières suggest that the pedagogical goals of the *ciné-club* had indeed been achieved. First, the club chose to celebrate the work of a marginalized filmmaker whose works were understood as "difficult" and thus adhered to the long-standing *ciné-club* tradition of exposing viewers to unconventional films. The respondents write of Varda as an *auteur*, linking *Cleo* to her earlier films and characterizing Varda's thematic and stylistic preoccupations. Not only do the viewers possess a context for Varda's films, they have a broader understanding of film history, reflected in references to Antonioni, Renoir, and Welles. Above all, the respondents are sensitive to film narrative and style; they write of the overall arc of the film's narrative and its unconventional conclusion and provide detailed commentary on lighting, camera movement, and set design. The *Cleo* questionnaires thus suggest the existence of a cultivated and confident art house spectator keenly attuned to matters of film form, style, and narrative.

The questionnaires are also interesting for what they reveal about Varda's conception of her viewers. It was not common practice to organize test screenings of films in 1960s France, so Varda stands out for her desire to test the effect of her film on the spectators. The questionnaires confirmed for Varda that viewers could tolerate ambiguity. "I understood that one should never underestimate the intelligence and comprehension of the audience, despite what professional distributors and the purveyors of big spectacles say" (Varda, interview with the author, 2003). In her subsequent filmmaking practice, Varda would continue to solicit her viewers' opinions in both formal and informal ways.

Thanks to the insight provided by these questionnaires, a more detailed profile of the "demanding" viewer intuited by Alain Resnais in 1962 now emerges. Spectators nurtured in the context of post-World War II efforts at cultural democratization likely believed they had a right to access the arts, to experience all kinds of cinema, music, theater, and literature, no matter their socioeconomic origins. Such viewers

tended not to make a living in the arts or have links to the film industry but nevertheless wanted to view and discuss films on a regular basis. Such spectators understood that noncommercial cinema required the support of viewers and perceived themselves as actors in the cultural scene, capable of shifting the fortunes of individual films and of having an impact on the broader film culture. *Ciné-club* viewers had a nuanced understanding of the New Wave and some understanding of world film history, were open to new storytelling strategies, had developed a vocabulary for describing film style, and were sensitive to the relationship between film style and narrative.

The *ciné-club* played a central role in supporting Varda's work, but no less important was the role of the press. In addition to helping launch the *Ciné-club des Premières*, *Arts* further supported *Cleo* by publishing positive reviews of the film in its April 18–24 issue. Bory's review, titled "Cleo from 5 to 7 Is a Masterpiece," dubbed Varda "the Virginia Woolf of modern cinema" due to the film's "extremely rigorous chronological frame" evocative of that of *Mrs. Dalloway* (Bory, "Cléo"). In that same issue was an article reporting on the questionnaire, which asserted that 97 percent of the respondents liked the film and that the club would now expand to the provinces.⁷ In the May 9–15 issue of *Arts*, it was reported that the film was enjoying a positive reception in the provinces. The club went so far as to claim responsibility for the film's success: "The demonstration that we just made in Paris and that we are pursuing in the provinces, with *Cleo*, proves it. Unusual film, a film *hors série*, an *auteur* film, a difficult film in the context of traditional exhibition, *Cleo from 5 to 7* found its audience thanks to the Club" ("Le Club"). In the May 16–22 issue of *Arts*, it was reported that the film received an excellent reception in Marseille and Bordeaux and that it would soon be shown in *ciné-clubs* in Grenoble, Lyon, Strasbourg, Nevers, Tours, Clermont-Ferrand, Saint-Etienne, and Pau ("Cléo a conquis"). In that same issue, Pierre Marcabru, member of the selection committee of *Ciné-club des Avant-Premières*, reported as a special envoy to the Cannes Film Festival that *Cleo* was the "only truly original film" showing at the festival. Finally, in the June 20–26 issue of *Arts*, Bory published an essay titled "What Has Changed in Cinema in the Last Ten Years," in which he discusses all the ways in which *Cleo* was the epitome of the "modern" film.⁸

Arts was not the only publication to contribute to the launch of *Cleo from 5 to 7*. As Bastide points out in his astute analysis of the *Cleo* launch, many journalists visited the set of the film and reported on the production (“Genèse”). As early as August 1961, articles about the production of *Cleo* began appearing in publications such as *Le Figaro littéraire*, *Télérama*, *L’Express*, and *Heures claires* (Bastide, “Genèse,” 234). Over a period of eighteen months, between April 1961 and winter 1962, seven different publicity inserts were purchased and placed in trade publications such as *Cinématographie française* and *Film français* (Bastide, “Genèse,” 235). Printed in the film’s marketing material were brief, adulatory phrases from celebrities including Alain Resnais, Jacques Prévert, Michelangelo Antonioni, André Cayatte (then president of the “Commission of Quality” at the Centre National de la Cinématographie and member of the selection committee of the Cannes Film Festival), Michèle Morgan, Monica Vitti, Annie Girardot, Brigitte Bardot, and Françoise Sagan (Bastide, “Genèse,” 243).

Upon the film’s initial release, Varda contributed directly to the enthusiastic reception of the film and its interpretation by giving more than twenty lengthy interviews to the French press alone and many more to regional and international publications. Varda contributed to the creation of positive word of mouth about the film among the Paris intelligentsia in other ways, as well. Her notebooks from late October and early November 1961 reveal that she created lists of guests to be invited to the press screenings of the film. On the list, as expected, were the important film critics of the day (Georges Charensol, Jean de Baroncelli, Georges Sadoul, among many others) and fellow film directors (Godard, Marker, Rivette, Truffaut, Resnais, Chabrol, Melville, etc.), but also curators and programmers such as Jacques Ledoux and Mary Meerson, and the novelists Nathalie Sarraute and Raymond Queneau.

Other facets of *Cleo*’s distribution contributed to its success. The film was distributed by Athos Films, a company active since the 1930s in Paris and headed by Russian émigrés Sam and Jo Sirtitzky. Athos was known for its support of European art cinema; it premiered Chabrol’s *Le Beau Serge* (1958) and Antonioni’s *L’Avventura* at the Studio Publicis. Athos’s strategy was to place films strategically in first-run, medium-sized

cinemas containing only five to six hundred seats (Bastide, “Genèse,” 231). The theatrical premier of *Cleo* took place on April 11, 1962, in three cinemas in different neighborhoods of Paris: the Gaumont-Rive Gauche in Montparnasse, the Studio Publicis on the Champs-Élysées, and the Vendôme near the Opera. *Cleo* played for seven weeks in Paris before moving to other cities in France and to Monaco, Corsica, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. The film was seen by 263,911 viewers in Paris, far fewer than the Paris viewership for mainstream films released in France in 1961 and 1962, such as *West Side Story* (seen by 2,492,814) and *The Longest Day*, a Hollywood film about the D-day invasion (seen by 1,611,513 in Paris), but close to the viewership for *Lola* (236,185) and Billy Wilder’s *The Apartment* (352,295) (Simsi 27).

The successful launch of *Cleo* from 5 to 7 was the result of many cultural forces, including *ciné-club* culture, film criticism, innovative distributors, and fellow filmmakers and actors willing to lend their charisma to an unusual film. Varda understood, in 1962 and throughout the subsequent decades, that films require much more than their inherent qualities to remain visible, even in the culture of art house cinema. The unusual longevity of *Cleo*’s visibility in film culture through the decades is due in no small part to Varda’s willingness to accompany the film to countless festivals and retrospectives, her skill at speaking intelligently with journalists and scholars about her work, and her ability to attract attention to her film through its successive releases on VHS and DVD.