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AGNES VARDA

I planned *Cleo de 5 à 7* long before managing to get it set up. The story springs from my own reactions to city life after a childhood spent remotely on a houseboat in the Sète district of Provence. There was a lot about Paris that I didn't like at all when I first arrived—the traffic, the atmosphere, the crowds of people. I felt a part of the crowds, I always do feel this, but the very participation gave me a sense of responsibility towards them, as if all their problems were my concern.

The people observed in the streets during *L'Opéra-Mouffe* and *Cleo* reflect this sense of involvement. They are not seen with hostility either by Dorothee Blanck (the pregnant girl in *L'Opéra-Mouffe*) who regards them as equivalents of the child she is bearing, or by Cleo, who sees in them the images of her own loneliness. There is, of course, a certain self-consciousness in both cases—a pregnant girl and a pop singer both arouse some attention—but the main attitude is one of sympathy. The streets in any city today seem crammed with faces not so much sad or uneasy as just plain empty, and I believe this is the result of lack of communication. My conviction is entirely opposite to that of Antonioni who states (vide *The Eclipse*) that communication, even in the narrow sense applied to romantic relationships, is unattainable. I think communication is difficult but essential and not just in love, but in work, in the relationship with one's children, in one's general attitude.

When Cleo begins her significant hour and a half (the title is deceptive 'de cinq à sept' is a French phrase with a kind of 'free time' meaning), she is completely out of contact with reality and this is partly why the preliminary sequence is heightened by being in colour, but she is forced by her fear of death to overcome her fear of people. So the claustrophobic early scenes, including the dominating whiteness (Cleo associates white with death) of her room—the furniture is isolated in patches on the blank sea of the floor to emphasise this blazing whiteness—give way to the sequences in natural surroundings when Cleo in longshot is much more a part of her environment.

It has been said there is a certain alienation about the shot in the doctor's car which shows Cleo and the soldier receding very fast. What I intended here was to make the same point as made earlier in the film by the radio broadcast Cleo's problem is small, personal, not of world-shattering importance. Yet while the egocentricity of Cleo is thus kept in perspective, the broadcast, in underlining her depression with its pessimistic news items, establishes her as a clearly-defined detail in a civilisation which itself suffers from a form of cancer.

All the business with mirrors in the early sequences, particularly while Cleo is buying

a hat, when the camera floats around the shop, is intended to give the feeling as of an aquarium, through which she floats like a single exotic specimen of fish. The aquatic idea has two implications; one is this kind of drifting, drowning, undercurrent; the other is the connection between water and mirror reflections both symbolic of narcissism. It is fascinating that mirrors are just glass with silver backing, and when you scrape the silver away you can see through to something more than just an image. When Cleo reaches the stage of looking through for instance, the bullet-shattered window (why is it there?—unimportant), she is at last beginning to break away the silver that has previously encrusted her vision and kept her face to face with herself. She goes, as it were, through the looking-glass, and her reward is a relaxation of the tension which has been choking her.

I believe very strongly in this form of psychological metamorphosis induced by change in one's environment or by other external influences. In my first film, *La Pointe-Courte*, the married couple who have been drifting apart re-establish communication between each other during their return to the man's home-town Sète. In one of my next projects (assuming it doesn't fall through at the last minute, like my setback with *La Mélangeite*), called at the moment *Les Amours de Valentin*, a young man discovers point in his existence during a visit to Venice. Cleo's awakening is, you might say, at the heart of all my work in the cinema.

Philip Strick