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In the French films *Le Bonheur* (1965) and *Cleo 5 à 7* (1961), director Agnes Varda identifies and critiques many aspects of femininity including the inequality between men and women, women as interchangeable commodities, the influence of the print media, and the parallels of cleanliness, change and virginity. Scenes from both films highlight these issues of femininity.

The contrasts between the male and female leads in both films are clear. In *Le Bonheur*, we see both the husband and the wife having pleasant times together, and we see them both working. The husband, however, is depicted as having free time to do what he wants, including having a mistress. The wife does not appear to have any free time, as any time she is not spending with her husband or her business is taken up with housekeeping and raising the children. Both the husband and his mistress work with other adults during the day. The wife spends most of her time with the children, with only occasional periods working with other adults.

In *Cleo 5 à 7*, Cleo meets up with a soldier in the park. The contrasts between their two lives are even greater than those of the couple in *Le Bonheur*. The soldier is on leave from the Algerian War. In the war, "torture became... a daily and almost banal practice" (Ross, 1995; 119). He has likely seen torture as described in Ross' essay, if not actually taken part in such atrocities. The serious nature of his life contrasts sharply with the vain nature of Cleo's life. Her frustration that no one in the café is paying attention to her song when she plays it on the jukebox appears childish compared with the life the soldier is facing. It is, however, just as vital in the scope of Cleo's life. It is as serious to her, as the war is to him. They are both facing potential death, he when he returns to the war, and Cleo while awaiting the results of her cancer test. "The counter posing of a life under threat from within, and one under threat from without, figures the interplay of the personal and the political" (Powrie & Reader, 2002; 26).

Both female leads are commodities, not unlike cars or appliances in their roles. Noted by Ross, this is a common theme during the time period immediately following the war. "Women captivated by the immediacy of the commodity world being transformed into commodities themselves" (Ross, 1995; 95). The wife in *Le Bonheur* is very much a commodity. She is depicted as being nearly interchangeable with her husband's mistress, and is easily replaced by the mistress when she dies. Cleo, as a pop star, is more obviously a commodity. As far as her managers are concerned, if she cannot be 'sold' to the public, she is not worthwhile.

"The couple becomes the site of a remarkable new degree of anxiety surrounding issues of interchangeability and standardization" (Ross, 1995; 134). The formal elements in the *Le Bonheur* that highlight this include the scenes where the director cuts between tight shots of vases being dusted, plants being watered, and other housework being done. These images were used both at the beginning of the film to show the wife's life at home, as well as late in the film when the mistress has 'replaced' her in the home. The repetition of these shots drives home the idea of the women as commodities, as replaceable items in the husband's life.

Magazines make appearances in both films. "Magazine reading... emerges as the chief contributing factor to the "derealization," the sentiment of reproducibility" (Ross, 1995; 142). His wife is reproduced by the mistress, another pop star can come along to reproduce Cleo if she falls from popularity, or dies. The husband and the mistress in *Le Bonheur* both have photos from magazines hung around them, to decorate, inspire or arouse. The wife is asked to reproduce a dress her client saw in a magazine, her young client hoping to appear just as chic as the fashion models. Cleo picks up a magazine in a shop, and as a pop star, is likely featured in magazines. With the limited availability of television, the glossy colors of a magazine were the best and easiest glimpse into a world of perfection. In *Le Bonheur*, the first time the husband and his mistress make love, it is shot in still frames, like a magazine layout. This formal element links thematically the idea of the women as a commodity, something you'd see being 'sold' in a magazine. The shots of signs and words throughout both films also link to the thematic idea of repetition.

Virginity, and the idea of "newness" comes up in both films. Ross quotes Barthes discussing new terms coming up in advertising for cars. "The desire for the car's shine, according to Barthes, is the desire "to remake the virginity of the object over and over again"" (Ross, 1995; 105). The wife in *Le Bonheur* is showing sewing a wedding dress, a classical symbol of virginity. Her husband finds a new mistress, a new love and lover in his life. Cleo changes her clothes, her hair, buys a new hat. All new things, changing things to help remove her from her current path of her life.

The pivotal scenes in both films do not take place at home. "To be "at home"... is to have an identity, one based on security and permanence that state-produced anxiety and the state-produced compensation for that anxiety have gone a long way in helping create" (Ross, 1995; 107). As formal elements, the major scenes in both films are shot outdoors. In *Le Bonheur*, the family is out for a picnic in the country when the husband reveals his mistress, and the wife drowns. In *Cleo 5 à 7*, Cleo spends a great deal of her time thinking, coming to terms with herself, meeting the soldier and finally confronts her doctor about the cancer test outdoors.

Agnes Varda has used her role as a female film director to highlight and question the roles of women in France in the late fifties and early sixties. The 'art film' techniques she uses throughout both films keep us at arms length from the characters, but work as a subconscious mind, making us aware of their situations. Both films force us to consider our own behavior, and ask ourselves how we seek happiness in our own lives, or how we see ourselves and our priorities. Her powerful but subtle messages motivate the viewer to think about, and be aware of femininity in a patriarchal culture. As a feminist scholar, one would like to see these two films become dated, but in reality, they are as relevant now as they were when she made them.

Powrie, Phillip & Reader, Keith. French Cinema: A Student's Guide. London: Hodder & Stoughton Educational. 2002.

Ross, Kristen. Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 1995.