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THE GAZE AND THE FEMALE SUBJECT IN AGNES VARDA FILMS

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The Gaze and The Female Subject in Agnes Varda Films

Bakış ve Agnes Varda Filmlerinde Kadın Özne

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to provide an alternative to the patriarchal tendencies in the production of the female subject on film through the work of Agnes Varda. The first chapter of the thesis focuses on defining the philosophical terminology necessary to conceptualize the ideas and theories in the realm of psychoanalysis, Foucauldian thought and at their intersection in subject formation. The second chapter consists of a survey and a literary report of the concepts in Lacanian Film Theory, put forward by Laura Mulvey in the 1980s. The concept of the 'male gaze' is studied in depth via Mulvey's essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, as well as John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* and other feminist literary works. In other words, the thesis first identifies the necessary terminology in the philosophical associations of the 'male gaze', then focuses on contemporary feminist thought in the context of film and the subject-object relationship between the active looker(men) and those being looked at(women). The final part of the thesis is an investigation with an aim to show how the ruling patriarchal ideology can be disarmed by employing techniques such as those used by Agnes Varda, who re-writes the structure of the female subject as a character, as the spectator and as the director/author of film by situating woman's desire and the Lacanian Real within the film narrative.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Male Gaze, Agnes Varda, Lacanian Film Theory, Desire

ÖZET

Bu tez, sinemada kadın öznenin ataerkil eğilimlere yaratılmasına Agnes Varda filmleri üzerinden bir alternatif sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Tezin ilk bölümü, psikanalizden ve Foucault düşüncesinden ve ikisinin kesiştiği yerde yani öznenin oluşum süreci ile ilgili bir takım fikirleri kavramsallaştırmak için gerekli olan felsefi terminolojiyi tanımlamaya odaklanmaktadır. İkinci bölüm, 1980'lerde Laura Mulvey tarafından ortaya atılan Lacancı Film Teorisindeki kavramların bir incelemesi ve edebiyat taramasından oluşmaktadır. 'Eril bakış' kavramı, Mulvey'in *Görsel Zevk ve Anlatı Sineması* adlı makalesinin yanı sıra, John Berger'in *Görme Biçimleri* ve diğer feminist eserler aracılığıyla derinlemesine incelenmiştir. Başka bir deyişle, tez önce 'erkek bakışı' nın anlaşılmasında gerekli olan felsefi terminolojiyi tanımlar, ardından film ve bakma-bakılma bağlamında çağdaş feminist düşünceye odaklanır ve son olarak, egemen ataerkil ideolojinin, 'erkek bakışı' nı kullanılarak nasıl dönüştürülebileceğini inceler. Bu son kısımda, Agnes Varda'nın kadının arzusunu ve Lacan'cı Gerçek konseptlerini filmin anlatısına dahil ederek, bu ataerkil ideolojiyi nasıl bertaraf ettiğinin üzerinde durulmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Psikanaliz, Eril Bakış, Agnes Varda, Lacan'cı Film Teorisi, Arzu

INTRODUCTION

The Western protocol of the Subject has been created, dissected and reconstructed in the past few centuries through the use of philosophy, psychoanalysis and critical theory. In the 20th century in particular, the subject was understood by power-knowledge dialectics through the work of great theoreticians who borrowed from the philosophical teachings of their predecessors ranging from Ancient Greece to the Enlightenment Era. The question at hand usually dealt with the forces behind the nature of the self as an autonomous subject. For generations, humans sought to understand whether our choices and behavior were determined by who were born to be or the rules and norms of societies we reside in. Feminists took a further step into the realm of the subject and investigated how women in particular, have been oppressed, regulated through their bodies and limited to certain valid positions in society. So, the case of being or becoming a subject for women has yet another layer added.

"The Gaze" or *Le Regard* (Lacan, 2004) has been discussed by many philosophers, artists and scholars in a plethora of contexts and time periods. This notion of looking and being looked at is particularly of interest here due to its effects on creating and perhaps re-creating the modern subject, in particular the modern female subject. As its meaning and value might change in different contexts, I will limit the meaning prescribed to it as a tool in the mentioned theories and scholars listed in each of the sections named below in this Introduction.

For the purpose of this thesis statement, I aim to survey and analyze how the female subject/self was produced in the modern age through the use of the Gaze and apply this analysis to the work of one of the most influential contemporaries of our times: Agnes Varda. Through out the research, I will aim to answer the questions: What is the role of the Gaze in creating the modern female subject on

the screen? How did Agnes Varda utilize another kind of Gaze and can examples like Varda's films produce an alternative, post-modern female subject?

In Part One, I will compile a survey of how the modern subject was created through the use of the Gaze by referencing theoretical framework from psychoanalysis, philosophy and critical theory. It will be necessary to define the role of the Gaze through the works of Freud, Lacan, Sartre and Foucault, the relevant terminology such as Oedipus complex (Freud, 1977), the mirror stage and the object of desire (Lacan, 1987), as well as Panopticism (Foucault, 1995) here.

In Part Two, I will pan-out how the notions of looking and being looked at connect to the construction of a gendered subject. The gendered female subject that is constructed within critical theory is without a doubt fragmented and affected largely by the zeitgeist of certain movements such as Marxism, feminism or real-world events such wars, shifts in political power structures, etc. However, at the very core, it is of interest to understand how the ideal image of femininity is created and re-injected into women as a self-regulatory tool in being or becoming objects rather than subjects in this context. In this section I will study the works of Laura Mulvey (1975), John Berger (2008), Evelyn Fox Keller and Christine Grontowski (1983), Luce Irigaray (1985), Ann Kaplan (1983) and Anneke Smelik (1998). The general idea of this section is to provide evidence of how masculinity is represented by 'looking' while femininity is represented by being 'looked at' and how the hierarchical relationship of the two prevails in film.

Visual arts, specifically cinema is a fundamental arena for illustrating these constructs outlined by the theorists named above. So as I finally will zoom into the realm of film in Part Three, I will investigate the possibility of a modern female subject in film through subverting the 'Male Gaze' and by illustrating an alternative route to recreating the narrative and the aesthetic surrounding the

female subject. In order to do this, I will turn the attention to one of the strongest directors and artists of the post-modern era: Agnes Varda. While discussing Varda's application of a truly non-male gaze I will go over her use of the apparatus outlined by Mulvey in the previous section: director's gaze, characters' gaze and the audiences' gaze, providing examples from her films including *Vagabond* (1985), *The Gleaners and I* (2000) and *Cleo From 5 to 7* (1962). This part of the text will also provide analyses of scholars like Phil Powrie, Sandy Flitterman Lewis, Todd McGowan and Hilary Neroni who have studied Varda in depth to reinforce the major claims of the possibility of a non-male gaze.

CHAPTER 1: THE GAZE AND THE GENDERED SUBJECT IN PHILOSOPHY

"Within cultural studies the argument that femininity and masculinity are malleable social constructions has taken its inspiration either from the work of Foucault or from psychoanalysis."

(Barker, 2012, p. 301)

1.1 The Gaze and Subject Formation in Psychoanalysis

1.1.1. Oedipus, Mirror Stage and the Symbolic Order

In the process of understanding how gendered subjects are formed from a psychoanalytic standpoint, we must first revisit some of the key concepts in psychoanalysis as they relate to this process. In one of his major works titled *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1977) Sigmund Freud outlines the human psyche as a total consisted of three parts: the Id- an unconscious source of drives and internal processes, the Superego- the learned rationale related to social rules and norms, and the Ego- the rational mind that balances these two areas. The Oedipus Complex is another one of Freud's key constructs as he believes it to be responsible for the successful formation of an individual by starting to form his Superego. Inspired by Sophocles' story *Oedipus the King*, the Oedipus Complex, in the psychoanalytic context, is known as child's sexual desire for the mother and unresolved anger driven out of competition toward the father (Freud, 1977). Through this process the law of the father, symbolized by the phallus, represents a threat of castration for the boy, as he is the one standing between him and the mother. Thus, the father becomes the enforcer of the incest taboo in the Symbolic order (Lacan) and represents for the boy a possible agent of castration. In girls on the other hand, castration complex happens in the form of 'penis envy'. In this process the girl sees that she is lacking the penis that the boy has and is already 'castrated' therefore identifies with the mother and hopes to later develop a phallus through bearing a child. This compulsory period for child's development of sexual role and identity, symbolizes the child's unconscious feelings, thoughts, impulses and fantasies into the ego.

Influenced largely by Freud, Jacques Lacan reorganizes the human psyche into three different categories: The Imaginary, The Symbolic and The Real. In his reading of Freud (1977), Lacan draws a parallel to this process as he states, "the resolution of the Oedipus Complex marks the formation of the unconscious as the realm of the repressed. It establishes the very possibility of gendered subjects through entry into the symbolic order" (Barker, 2012, p.98). In Lacanian theory, during what he calls the Mirror Stage the baby sees him/herself for the first time in the mirror and faces the uneasy enlightenment of being a subject separate from the mother. Up until this point the baby misrecognizes herself as a continuation of the mother rather than a free-standing structure. This self-identification process is extremely complex in that the baby realizes that she is not only not a part of the mother but also the image in the mirror looks more intact and orderly than what the toddler, up until that moment felt. This process provides a structure of image replacing the chaos. It creates a unified sense of self against the Other[1] (Fink, 2000, p.88-9).

In his book titled *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger[2] provides a very intelligible explanation of mirror stage and entry into the Symbolic order:

> "Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak but there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.
> …
> Soon after we can see, we are aware that we can also be seen. The eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of the visible world.
> …
> The reciprocal nature of vision is more fundamental than that of spoken dialogue. And often dialogue is an attempt to verbalize this- an attempt to explain how, either metaphorically or literally, 'you see things', an attempt to discover how 'he sees things…In this sense… all images are man-made" (Berger, 2008, p.7-9).

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[1] First the mother, but subsequently other reflective surfaces such as other family members, teachers, God etc.

[2] This will be revisited in the next chapter.

For both Lacan and Freud, the subject is fragmented at birth until the formation of the ego. It is through the Mirror Stage and through the fear of castration that the child is also introduced to its first understanding of a lack along with it not being a part of the outside world (Grosz, 2015, p.35). In Lacanian theory specifically, sexed subjects are defined in relation to the phallus: "Analytic experience attests precisely to the fact that everything revolves around phallic jouissance[3], in that woman is defined by a position that I have indicated as "not whole" with respect to phallic jouissance" (Lacan & Fink,1999, p.7). As the baby moves first into the Imaginary Order and subsequently into the Symbolic Order by the introduction of language, the sexed subjects are formed under these structures.[4]

We can think of castration and the loss or lack of the phallus as the symbolic object of the mother's desire. Accepting the paternal metaphor for both boys and girls means accepting that they do not have the phallus, that someone else has the desire of the mother. The difference between boys and girls "corresponds to the difference between a castration that has been carried out [the 'feminine' situation] and one that has merely been threatened [the 'masculine' situation]" (Freud, 1977, p. 341) Also, while the boy accepts this lack in him, he may identify with the father in hoping to one day be the bearer of the phallus. However, by renouncing the idea that she has the Phallus, the girl "can continue to identify with the mother… she may choose… to try to become the object of desire of the father…The girl's position after castration is therefore not of wanting to possess the Phallus (or fragments there of) but to attract someone who appears to have it" (Bailly, 2009, p.147).

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[3] Jouissance: n. in the theory of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, enjoyment or pleasure that goes beyond mere satisfaction of an instinct. Such pleasure is seen as a subversive and destabilizing force. (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2021)

[4] Further reading involving these processes can be found in Lacan's *Seminars: Book I and Book IV*, as well as *Ecrits*.

1.1.2 Other/other/ objet petit a

What's important about the mirror stage is the alienating force that declares to the baby that there is an outside, ideal image and that although it is a subject it is also an object defined in this extraneous scopic field in which he/she is gazed upon. In going through the mirror stage, the subject is introduced to both other(s) and the (Big)Other as sources of desire. In decoding the formation of the subject through desire in Lacanian theory we must look further at the terms *Other/other* and *objet petit a* as they play a significant role in forming the ego in the Symbolic order.

> "…the lower-case-o other designates the Imaginary ego and its accompanying alter-egos. By speaking of the ego itself as an "other," Lacan further underscores its alien and alienating status… Additionally, when relating to others as alter-egos, one does so on the basis of what one "imagines" about them (often imagining them to be "like me," to share a set of lowest-common-denominator thoughts, feelings, and inclinations making them comprehensible to me). These transference-style imaginings are fictions taming and domesticating the mysterious, unsettling foreignness of one's conspecifics, thereby rendering social life tolerable and navigable.
>
> ….
>
> The capital-O Other refers to two additional types of otherness corresponding to the registers of the Symbolic and the Real. The first type of Other is Lacan's "big Other" qua symbolic order, namely, the overarching "objective spirit" of trans-individual socio-linguistic structures configuring the fields of inter-subjective interactions. Relatedly, the Symbolic big Other also can refer to (often fantasmatic/fictional) ideas of anonymous authoritative power and/or knowledge (whether that of God, Nature, History, Society, State, Party, Science, or the analyst)"(Johnston, 2018).

In its simplest form Lacan's use of the small o-other refers to the alter-egos or all the internal others that the subject lives to satisfy within itself. The big Other on the other hand, is represented by the mother subsequently the father and peers and representations of all other external forces (subjects) in relation to the subject in the real world (Grosz, 2015, p.44-48). Both in the Freudian Oedipal stage and in the Lacanian father metaphors, the mother and the father can be placed as big Others who are in direct relation with the phallus or the lack there of (Johnston,

2018). In this sense, the Big Other represents the social aspect of psychoanalysis as it relates to the effects of external figures on the subject.[5]

> The *objet a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but in so far as it is lacking.' (Lacan,1998, p.103)

'*Objet petit a'* is first mentioned and redefined by Lacan over the course of a few different seminars in the 1950s. It can be translated as 'the small object of other' as the 'a' stands for 'autre' in French. It can be perceived as the desirable quality of objects in the real world. In its simplest form, it can be defined as "the object cause of desire which we seek in the other. It denotes the object which can never be attained, which is really the cause of desire rather than that towards which desire tends… it is any object which sets desire in motion… the drives do not seek to attain the objet petit a, but rather circle around it" (Evans, 1996, p. 125). The small o-other(s) are imaginary object relations as they represent how the desires of the child are met. For example, real world objects like money or the breast all have connotations in the Symbolic order, as there are demands to be made or rules to be followed in attaining these desired objects. The child can only aim to satisfy the desire by following the necessary otherness related to the objects but never truly do so as illustrated in the following passage:

> "The *objet petit a* may be seen as a fragment of the Phallus, which arises from castration, when the child understands that the Phallus is possessed neither by itself nor its father, nor yet any living person. However, the lost Phallus cannot be forgotten… the Phallus leaves traces of itself everywhere… these phallic fragments are the objet petit a- the object cause of desire…" (Bailly, 2009, p.130)

As defined by Lacan and discussed by many psychoanalysts, the small other, the Big Other as well as the objet petit a are all components that limit or cause desire in the human psyche. After defining the relevant terminology in psychoanalysis regarding subject formation, we must now turn our attention to the significance of the gaze in this process.

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[5] Foucault's ideas involving the Panopticon can be perceived as parallel to this notion of the Big Other .

1.1.3 Lacan on the Gaze

Lacan's utilization of the term 'gaze' (le regarde) was influenced largely by Jean Paul Sartre's definition in *Being and Nothingness* (1956). Sartre first talks of the gaze as a force that directs us as subjects by reflecting an uneasy sense of being observed by the other. This suspicion created by another human observing us is never proven nor disproven yet it largely influences the image we present through our bodies, appearance and our behavior in that we fear or become ashamed of the expectation in relation to the rest of the world. According to Sartre, the process of seeing is also not reciprocal; meaning the feeling of "being observed by the other is not returned to the gazer in that same sense but rather it encompasses the subject of the gaze as an ever-present source of anxiety" (Groys, 2012). Sartre's views on the gaze of the other also embody an implication of the power dynamics that it entails. In *Being and Nothingness* he states, "insofar as I am the object of values which come to qualify me without my being able to act on this qualification or even to know it, I am enslaved" (Sartre, 1956, p.110). His views suggest that when we are confronted with the gaze of the other we become aware of our self as objects and this robs us of our power as a subject (Reinhardt, 2008). Lacan visits the concept of the gaze a few times in different contexts. He first tells an anecdote in the *Four Fundamental Concepts* of a day when he is out on a fishing trip and sees a piece of tin can floating on the ocean, reflecting a beam of light (Lacan, 1998, p. 95). One of the fishermen he is with tells him that even though Lacan can see this tin can; the tin can does not see him. It is here that Lacan finds meaning in the concept of the ever-present sense of being seen, being gazed at and that it leaves no man behind. Perhaps combining this experience with Sartre's ideas of which he was greatly influenced by, he claims "the gaze I encounter is not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other" (*ibid*, p.84). By this he not only suggests that the gaze is an imagined notion but also that it belongs to the outside realm; the world out there projects it onto the object.

Holbein, 1553

In analyzing Hans Holbein's painting, *The Ambassadors*, Lacan suggests that the gaze is present in the distorted shape in the foreground of the painting. Lacan claims that this blot is "there to catch in its trap the observer...we are litterally called into the picture, and represented here as caught" (*ibid*,p.92). This cut or split by the blot in this painting allows Lacan to formulize a kind of alienating property for the subject as it turns it into an object of the drives (specifically the scopic drive), more specifically the 'objet petit a' (Scott, 2015) .

When we look at the role of the gaze in forming the gendered subject, we can see in both Lacan and Sarte's writing that the lack of the phallus or the fear of losing it is ever present in the gaze. "The gaze is presented to us only in the form of a strange contingency, symbolic of what we find on the horizon, as the thrust of our experience, namely, the lack that constitutes castration anxiety" (Lacan, 2004, p.72). According to Sartre "…the gaze of the specter causes not only shame within us but also a feeling of unconditional responsibility with regard to what is absent, because what is absent refuses to enter into negotiations with us" (Groys, 2012, p.66). Perhaps through this understanding, Lacan presents to the world this

all-encompassing, imaginary notion of the gaze with symbolic functions, which solidify the uncanny feeling of the lack within us. The evolution of Lacan's ideas about the gaze eventually position it into the realm of the Real after the Imaginary and the Symbolic, which as we will see in Chapter 3, makes the gaze's effects on subjectivity more complex.

1. 2 The Foulcauldian View

1. 2. 1 The Gendered Subject as a Discursive Construct

Michel Foucault was interested in understanding subjectivity through studying the social history of different populations. His genealogy of the modern subject lies on a detailed study of power/knowledge relations amongst discursive structures. By studying sexual practices within their historical contexts, treatment and behavior concerning marginalized groups like the mentally ill, the incarcerated and disciplinary models of unified organisms such as schools and military, Foucault aims to understand the social being, what we have previously discussed as the subject or the self. He uses a genealogical form of study in which he tries to "investigate[s] the complex and shifting network of relations between power, knowledge and the body which produce historically specific forms of subjectivity" (Armstrong). In doing so, Foucault finds that for the most part "subjectivity is a discursive production" (Barker, 2012, p.301) rather than biologically determined.

Foucault's deconstructionist view on how the modern subject is produced through knowledge stripped away the notion that there were drives and desires that made man who he is, but rather a product of the societal practices, norms and power structures. Foucault studied gender in depth as he found sexuality to be a "focal point for the exercise of power and the production of subjectivity in western societies. He believed that sex was put into discourse through the church, the schools and demography" (*ibid*, p. 302). In *The History of Sexuality* (1978) he discussed in depth, how in the 17th century the sovereign ruled society by fear and how in the 18th century the power apparatus was designed more around norms and

self-regulatory tools, specifically on the human body. In this text, instead of perceiving this bio-power as an oppressive force against the human self, Foucault contests that in modern society power produces the human subject through two tools: the use of regulations on the population as a whole through the "management of the life processes of the social body... such as birth, death, sickness, disease, health, sexual relations" and through "disciplinary power which targets the human body as an object to be manipulated and trained" and through the use of disciplinary power on an individualized level (Armstrong).

1.2.2 The Gaze in Foucauldian Theory

Foucault's use of the notion of the gaze is apparent in many of his texts. He clearly points to the use of the medical gaze in the *Birth of the Clinic* (1973) and in the *History of Sexuality* (1978) indirectly, by explaining how the government produced tools for injecting its omnipotent surveillance through regulating sexuality and the bodily and psychological practices relating to sexuality. Foucault scholar Paul Rabinow (1984) classifies the three major areas Foucault claims humans are made into subjects as:

1. "dividing practices" separating the sane from the insane, guilty from the innocent etc.
2. the "scientific classification" through discourse
3. "subjectification", a process of self formation in which the subject is active although still mediated by external authority

For the purpose of this thesis, the third category is of interest in the parallels it draws to the psychoanalytic subject formation as discussed thus far in this chapter. In this context, two specific mentions of the gaze in Foucauldian theory will be covered: Panopticism and the subject/object notion of the gaze in Foucault's analysis of the painting *Las Meninas*.

1.2.2.1 Panopticism

The goal of disciplinary power, as Foucault demonstrates in *Discipline and*

Punish, is to "subject bodily activities to a process of constant surveillance and examination that enables a continuous and pervasive control of individual conduct. The aim of these practices is to simultaneously optimize the body's capacities, skills and productivity and to foster its usefulness and docility" (Armstrong???). Foucault claims that through the disciplinary technologies utilized by variety of institutions like prisons, hospitals, asylums and schools 'docile bodies' are produced and that these docile bodies could be "subjected, used, transformed and improved" (1977, p.198).

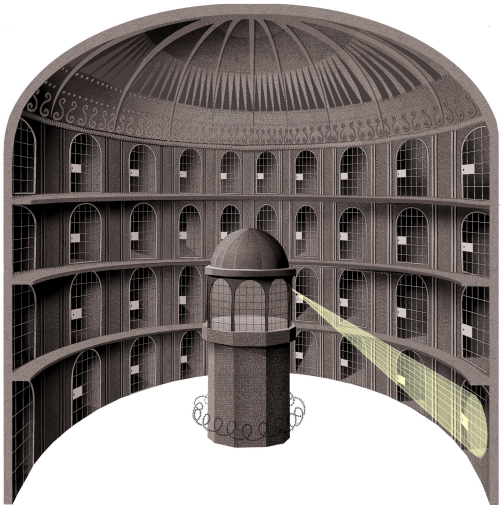
In studying the genealogy of clinics and prisons, Foucault came across a design for a prison created by Jeremy Bentham in the 18th Century. The Panopticon is essentially an idealized form of a prison with a central tower of observation for the guards and officials, "overlooking the surrounding buildings and cells which have a window facing the tower. The inmates of the cells are visible to the observer in the tower but the onlooker is not seen by the prisoners" (Barker, 2012, p.92). He claimed that Bentham created a design in which "there was a central observation-point which served as the focus of the exercise of power and, simultaneously, for the registration of knowledge" (1980, p. 148).

> "The major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers" (Foucault, 1995, p.205).

What was so important to Foucault about the panoptic gaze was it "inscribed on docile bodies its domination" (Morin, p. 323). This round-the-clock and anonymous surveillance did not only discipline the body but also created a

psychological sense of "conscious and permanent visibility" (Foucault 1977, p. 201). Therefore, as mentioned earlier, there is a norm that is created in which the object is 'subjectified' through a disciplinary technology. In other words, the modern subject internalizes the panoptic gaze as a self-regulatory tool. A certain truth is produced in this effort to 'normalize' the subject by propagating the correct norms, classifications and behavior under the guise of giving the subject agency in forming its identity.

Dubois, 2002



Simpson, 2013

Another important point (one that helps us decode his views on the discursively gendered subject) Foucault underlines regarding the Panoptic gaze is its applicability beyond the purpose it was originally designed for. He states "this movement that stretches from the enclosed disciplines… to an indefinitely generalizable mechanism of Panopticsm" (Foucault, 1984, p. 206). He speaks about the Panopticon in awe, holding it as a metaphor for the disciplinary power he initially elaborates on in all possible environments. The individual or the subject in this sense is "not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike, and in so doing subdues or crushes individuals. The individual… is not the vis-à-vis of power; it is … one of its prime effects" (Foucault, 1980, p. 98). So we can think of the examples he talks about that

regulate women's bodies for example through the discourse created by the power/knowledge systems. In Foucauldian terms, the self-produced, gendered subjects are results of the discursive and disciplinary (panoptic gaze) tools amplified by the norms and categories created by the very environment and conditions they live in. We can see a different use of the gaze by Foucault in terms of positioning the subject in the next section.

1.2.2.2 Las Meninas

Velazquez, 1599

Diego Velasquez's famous painting titled *Las Meninas* has been revered as one of the most significant works of art in Western society. Due to its perplexing elements it has been dissected and analyzed by philosophers, scholars and critics alike since it has been painted. The unique setup of the painting pokes the viewer to question who the subject of the painting is, who the spectator is and whether or not we as the viewer are in the space of the painting or if we are simply viewing the artist painting a portrait of the central figure. Because of the positioning of the figures, the gazes of three of the central figures looking directly at the

spectator, “the spectator himself becomes the subject of the painting, captured by the gaze of the painter insofar as he remains a spectator gazing at the painting” (Reinhardt, 2008).

Foucault devoted the whole first chapter of his book *The Order of Things* (1970) to analyzing the painting and investigating the function of the gaze in it. He gives detailed explanations about the placement of the painter, use of the linear space, the use of space and subjects, but most importantly of the gaze(s) of the specter, the model(s), the painter. What he found noteworthy was how the “observer and the observed take part in a ceaseless exchange. No gaze is stable…subject and object, spectator and model reverse their roles into infinity” (Foucault, 1970, p. 5).

Similar to Lacan’s interpretation of the use of gaze in Holbein’s *The Ambassadors* Foucault’s views suggest that “depending on the position of the spectator...as the site of the gaze, or the point in the painting at which the object looks back at the spectator and invites participation” (Reinhardt, 2008) plays with the subject/object dichotomy in a sense that the artwork brings about an uneasy feeling of surveillance which only exists is the space of the gaze of the Other. The object is subjectified, the subject is objectified depending on the placement and the agent of the gaze.

1.3 Summary: Between Lacanian Psychoanalysis and Foucault

This chapter attests to the role of the gaze in creating the gendered subject through psychoanalysis and Foucauldian critical theory. As discussed above, the gaze plays a significant role in the symbolic order through the formation of the ego and the successful resolution of the castration anxiety in the psychoanalytic field as well as the construction of a gendered subject as a discursive practice from a Foucauldian perspective.

Although Lacan and Foucault come from different academic backgrounds and study different areas, we can observe the undeniable parallels in terms of

their views on the role of the gaze in creating the subject. Just like how "Jean Paul Sartre saw the gaze as the battleground for the self to define and redefine itself" (Reinhardt, 2008) the Lacanian (in the field of the Other) and Foucauldian (Panoptic) gazes converge in this very idea.

Foucault analyzes the effects of the gaze "by exposing its operations...in the power/knowledge matrix" while Lacan studies the function of the gaze in forming the identity through "focusing on the importance of the reciprocity implicit in le regard for the subject-text[object] relationship" (Morin, 2001. P. 326). Similar to the Lacanian view, in the Panopticism theory, "order exists submission of everyone to an omnipresent and impenetrable gaze; we are seen yet cannot see" (Reinhardt, 2008).

Despite the common belief that that the first is more interested in the internal and libidinal processes of the human psyche, while the latter is more so on the power and knowledge production of societies and norms, in the works of both Lacan and Foucault, we see the following similar ideas:

> -"We become aware of our self as subject only when confronted with the gaze of the Other and become aware of our self as object. (*ibid)*
>
> -"The gaze of the Other is outside our immediate control and the way the gaze objectifies us robs us of our freedom as a subject"
> (*ibid*)
>
> -"…the gaze is not the vehicle through which the subject masters the object, but a point in the Other that resists the mastery of vision." (McGowan, 2008, pp.11)
>
> -"…the gaze may operate to captivate us by means of its elusiveness; [which] may ultimately be maddening enough to force us to renounce our search for it and symbolize our failure." (Scott,2015)

There has been much debate about the convergence and divergence on the two theoretical frameworks. More specifically, feminism and film theory have been the grounds in which the parallels and the differences of the role of the gaze and its scopic implications have been discussed in depth in the last four or five decades. As the following chapter will demonstrate, whether the use of gaze

in theories of Lacan and Foucault were taken as the truths through which other theories in feminism and film theory were established around or strongly rejected untruths, they were without a doubt, greatly influential.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEMPORARY THEORY: THE FEMALE SUBJECT AND THE MALE GAZE

2.1 Phallocentrism and Occulocentrism: The Feminist Take on the Subject

The previous chapter highlights the processes in which the gendered subject is created in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis as well as Foucauldian theory. In this chapter, I will aim to discuss the ways in which not only the theoreticians named above, but how Western thought in general have been criticized from a feminist point of view. Feminism is a meta-theory with a designated utopia in which there is an equality of the sexes in terms of rights and power. It takes its agency as a political means to fight oppression through historical investigation and appropriation of adding updated, alternative values and routes to achieve them in the real world. It is by no means a single, proposed truth but rather a vast philosophy and movement, so it is important to limit the scope of this chapter to feminist film theory. However, we must first understand feminist opposition to the views we have summarized in the preceding chapter regarding the role of the gaze in forming the gendered subject.

This chapter aims to provide a survey of feminist thought across works of Luce Irigaray and Grontowski and Keller, regarding women's subjective position in relation to men in society and what role the act of 'being looked at' plays in this sense. It is designed to provide an introduction into feminist film theory by directing the attention to the signification of the visual process with regards to sex.

2.1.1 The Female Subject

In studying the formation of the subject across different ideologies (specifically psychoanalysis and Foucault) we can see that the common thread lies in the idea that the subject is neither a whole consisted of its interior forces or drives, nor a simple machine put together by the outside world; it is rather a combination of the two. In fact, the "unified narrative of the self is something we acquire over time through entry into the symbolic order of language and culture… through

processes of identification with social discourses we create an identity that embodies an illusion of wholeness" (Barker, 2012, p.227). In feminist theory, we can see an over-arching theme of accepting the 'outside' truths as regulatory power structures similar to the views of Foucault. However, feminists like Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler make use of psychoanalysis in trying to understand how these "regulatory norms form a sexed subject in terms that establish the indistinguishability of psychic and bodily formation" (Butler, 1993, p. 22).

Within the realm of feminism much debate has taken place between sexual difference and biological determinism. Post-modern and post-structural feminists have discredited the views that cannot be explained in terms of biology (Barker, 2012, p.292). Rather than an essentialist view of possessing certain set of genitalia determining one's gender, a combination of the discursive (production) and the psychoanalytic (identification) models brings a common understanding of how "anatomy is to be destiny not because of genetic determination but because bodily differences are signifiers of sexual and social differentiation" (*ibid*, p. 304). It is here that we must look deeper into the problems of phallocentrism and occulocentrism specifically through the works of psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray as well as feminist writers Evelyn Fox Keller and Christine Grontkowski.

In her reading of Freud in *The Sex Which is Not One* (1985), Irigaray finds that that Freud classifies the clitoris as a "truncated penis" and that preceding the castration phase "The little girl is… indeed a little man, and all her sexual drives and pleasures, the masturbatory ones in particular, are in fact 'masculine'" (p.35). The problem begins in the fact that despite the girls' masturbatory and pleasure instincts are the same, her organ, unlike the phallus of the boy, is not visible; hence, she argues that femininity is completely conceptualized in relation to masculinity, or lack there of, specifically in the process of the castration complex. She further elaborates on this in her book *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985a):

> "The gaze is at stake from the outset ... Now the little girl, the woman, supposedly has nothing you can see…she shows nothing that is penis-shaped or could substitute for a penis ... This nothing, which actually cannot well be mastered in the twinkling of an eye, might equally

> well have acted as an inducement to perform castration upon an age-old oculocentrism
>
> It might have been interpreted as the intervention of a difference, of a deferent, as a challenge to an imaginary…improperly regulated in terms of sight ... Woman's castration is defined as her having nothing you can see, as her having nothing. In her having nothing penile… That is to say, no sex/organ that can be seen in a form capable of founding its reality, reproducing its truth. Nothing to be seen is equivalent to having no thing. No being and no truth. The contract, the collusion, between one sex/organ and the victory won by visual dominance therefore leaves woman with her sexual void" (p.47).

Irigaray's main concern lies in the fact that as long as there is only one referent (the male phallus) there is not a system of sexual difference, but merely a system of opposition: male and non-male. Therefore, "a focus on sight or the gaze is inadequate for formulating any useful account of the little girl's sexuality: that the little girl's difference from the boy requires a different, non- visual approach" (Storr, p.20). By putting sight first as men have been doing for centuries, Irigaray argues that the source of pleasure for women have been put aside:

> "Woman's desire has doubtless been submerged by the logic that has dominated the West since the time of the Greeks. Within this logic, the predominance of the visual, and of the discrimination and individualization of form, is particularly foreign to female eroticism.
>
> Woman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking, and her entry into a dominant scopic economy signifies, again, her confinement to passivity: she is to be the beautiful object of contemplation" (1985, p.25).

In their essay "The Mind's Eye*"* (2004), Keller and Grontowski take the truth as proposed by Iragaray et al. specifically that "vision is a phallic sense" (Keller and Grontowski, p. 207) and survey the notion of looking above all the other senses over the history of science. They provide details as to how vision has proven to have two major roles (different than the rest of the senses) from the time of Plato to the theories of Descartes and Newton: "the "objectifying" function of vision, and the corresponding relegation of its communicative – one might even say erotic – function" (*ibid*, p.220). They suggest that the sexual bias that has entered

this system lies in the communicative function and state that in the earlier Western philosophy, predominantly Platonic Greek philosophy, the "functions of the visual can be discerned in its metaphoric uses – a connective and a dissociative. Vision connects us to truth as it distances us from the corporeal" (*ibid,* p.209). To open a parenthesis, as time and science have progressed there was a "splitting, finally, into functions of two different eyes, the body's eye and the mind's eye. This split is paralleled by the division of the functions of science into the objectifiability and knowability of nature." (*ibid,* p.209)

Within the realm of scientific objectifiability two things are necessary:

1. The separation of object from subject[6]
2. Dematerialization of knowledge (prejudice, perception)

Through their archeological survey of the role of sight in the context of science and philosophy, Keller and Grontkowski draw-up the idea that the very methods and self-evident truths which we take for granted are in fact products of the ideas embedded very deeply in these disciplines. Throughout the text, their main concerns are to question how these truths came about and whether a different way of shaping vision is different in the sciences. As knowledge is equated with vision and thus is a phallic notion, both in their lexicon as well as in those they take as references, they separate how desire is then left out in these methods. They conclude that:

> "The net result of such disembodiment is the same as that implied in the radical division between subject and object assumed to be necessary for scientific knowledge: Once again, knowledge is safe- guarded from desire. That the desire from which knowledge is so safeguarded is so intimately associated with the female (for social as well as psychological reasons) suggests an important impetus which our patriarchal culture provides for such disembodiment" (p.220).

[6] It is interesting to look at this like the mirror stage in Lacanian psychoanalysis as well as the enunciation techniques used by Varda, mentioned in Chapter 3. These are focused on engaging the spectator through questioning the plot and character through a contemplative dialectic process rather than identifying with the protagonist as suggested by Mulvey.

To conclude, a combination of the preceding ideas of sight being a phallic sense, and the sense of sight being at the forefront over the other senses proves the problematic utilization of the gaze in a phallocentric, patriarchal society in which women only exist as the object. Laura Mulvey takes these ideas as reference points and elaborates further on the male gaze through the use of psychoanalysis, as we will see in the following section.

2.2 The Male Gaze

In her groundbreaking essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, first published in 1975 in *Screen* magazine, Laura Mulvey defined the structure of psychoanalytic film theory from a feminist perspective. Parallel to this, John Berger's book titled *Ways of Seeing*, originally published in 1972, outlined theories of gaze throughout the visual arts including painting, advertisement and film. In examining both of these prominent texts, we can see the commonalities of psychoanalytic and contemporary feminist theories reflected in the examples they both provide under the roof of the coined term 'the male gaze'. This section of this thesis is where the previous theoretical works mentioned come together for us to let us have a wholesome understanding of "the function of woman in forming the patriarchal unconscious" and how this "has structured film form" (Mulvey, 2006, p. 342).

The term 'scopophilia' is used by Mulvey repeatedly through her essay. Originally created by Freud, this term is defined as follows in the American Psychological Association's dictionary:

> *n.* sexual pleasure derived from watching others in a state of nudity, undressing, or engaging in sexual activity. If scopophilia is persistent, the condition is essentially voyeurism. Also called 'scoptophilia.'

Although this drive, according to Mulvey, "continues to exist as the erotic basis

for pleasure in looking at another person as object" (*ibid,* p.344) it is by no means reciprocal in nature, between men and women. So far as to say: "going far beyond highlighting a woman's 'to-be-looked-at-ness', cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself" (*ibid*, p.351). Berger is of the same opinion here as he states "women are depicted in a quite different way from men… because the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him" (2008, p. 64).

Mulvey discusses that the function of the woman in forming the manifestation of phallocentric scopophillia happens in two stages: the symbolization of the castration threat by her absence of a penis and the child she bears into the Symbolic. In her view, in the patriarchal culture, woman can only exist as the male other and "in relation to castration and cannot transcend it" (Mulvey, 2016, p.342).

As discussed in Chapter 1, the Mirror Stage holds significance in the identification process of the subject. As Mulvey revisits the Mirror Stage, she draws a parallel between how the baby recognizes "his mirror image to be more complete, more perfect than he experiences his own body" and how then, this superior image which is "re-introjected as an ego ideal, gives rise to the future generation of identification with others" with the experience the spectator has of identifying with the world on the cinema screen (*ibid*, p.345). She claims that the fascination the spectator feels towards the characters in film represents a "temporary loss of ego while simultaneously reinforcing the ego… (I forgot who I am and where I was) is nostalgically reminiscent of that pre-subjective moment of image recognition" (*ibid*). Therefore, cinema, through the construction of its characters creates ego ideals for the spectator to identify with in the imaginary world. By identifying with the fictional characters, who are idealized versions of active protagonists in the case of male main characters the spectators feel whole, or like the image the baby sees in the mirror, more perfect and powerful than their

real world selves.

As described above the first function of cinema, according to Mulvey, is a scopophilic one as it basically stems from "pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight" while the second function is a narcissistic one as it relates to the constitution of the ego and comes from identification with the images (characters) that are seen on the screen. Like Keller and Grontkowski, Mulvey comes to the idea that, like science, film disembodies the subject from object and through its different processes (mostly through language) disembodies desire from knowledge. According to her, both functions of cinema, mentioned above, are pivotal as they help in "creating the imagized, eroticized image of the world that forms the perception of the subject and makes a mockery of empirical objectivity" (*ibid*, p.346).

To dig a little deeper, the role of desire should be noted in this context. The following passages show the point where Mulvey and Berger's ideas converge in this topic:

> "Desire, [is] born with language, but its point of reference…the traumatic moment of its birth: the castration complex. Hence the look, pleasurable in form, can be threatening in content, and it is woman as representation/image that crystallizes this paradox. In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly… so that they can connote *to-be-looked-atness*... she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire" (*ibid*, p.346).

***

> "M*en act and women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. The surveyor of woman is herself as male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object- and most particularly an object of vision: a sight" (Berger, 2008, p. 47).

The undeniable commonality in all of the texts mentioned thus far in terms of the active/passive, subject/object roles come together quite clearly here: the psychoanalytic gaze beginning with the Oedipal stage, castration anxiety and the

mirror stage creates a gendered subject in which the self is formed through an identification process by seeing. This initial gaze(s) then becomes the tool to repress desire as mentioned by Irigaray and Keller and Grontkowski, and attain order through language in the Symbolic order both by creating the docile body that Foucault talks of and creating the ideal image the female is to identify with as a subject. As woman is representative of desire (ie. the mother, objet petit a) the gaze becomes oriented towards her as the object of desire. As her image connotes and reminds of a lack, the castrated phallus, she poses a constant threat. Discursive and normative powers then become a part of this formation in a Panoptic society where women are even more succumbed to the gaze of the other as something they internalize and carry within them as described quite explicitly by Berger as follows:

> To be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men…at the cost of a woman's self being split into two. A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost accompanied by her own image of herself…. From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually.
>
> And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another. (*ibid*,p. 46)

Much like Foucault's ideas on a Panoptic prison, the metaphoric Panoptic gaze becomes a tool for the normative patriarchal society in which women are gazed at both by men and by themselves from their imagined vantage point of men and re-create themselves accordingly, on an ongoing basis. As Berger discusses in *Ways of Seeing* this becomes a cyclic process in which the power structure produces what it means to be a woman through surveillance and self-surveillance. Mainstream cinema, according to Mulvey, does this on a larger scale, through narrative and in combination with the Lacanian gaze in the field of the Other on a gendered dichotomy.

2.2.1 The Three-Fold Look

Mulvey's theory, in addition to the phallocentric scopophillia that cinema bares, consists of a male gaze that is three-fold: the look of the spectator watching the film (presumed to be male), that of the characters within the film, and that of the director/camera as it records the film. The female characters in the film function as "erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium" (*ibid,* P.347).

Through what she calls the "active/passive heterosexual division of labour" Mulvey describes the male in film, a representation of the ruling ideology and portrays the "man's role as the active one of forwarding the story, making things happen" (*ibid*). By creating leading, active, controlling male characters with whom the audience can identify with, directors and filmmakers make sure these main characters also become the surrogate of the spectator as the bearer of the look. In doing so, Mulvey contests that the "male movie star's glamorous characteristics…more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror. The character in the story can make things happen and control events better than the subject/spectator, just as the image in the mirror was more in control of motor coordination" (*ibid*).

Berger shares similar ideas that in art and representation, "man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies…but the pretense is always towards a power which he exercises on others" (2008, P. 45). To underline this notion, he points out that for example in the European nude art-form, "the painters and spectator/owners were usually men and the persons treated as objects, usually women" (*ibid*, p.63).

The female character/object on the other hand, "is isolated, glamorous, on display, sexualized" but the woman also signifies something much more uncanny: the lack of a phallus "implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure" (*ibid*). This

threat, this anxiety of castration that she evokes is reminiscent of what is essential for the entrance into the Symbolic order and the Law of the Father, yet it needs to be resolved for the spectator to escape from this anxiety. Through the examples she provides, Mulvey claims that the male unconscious (the character in the narrative, as the surrogate of the spectator) has two ways of escaping this anxiety:

1. "Demystifying the mystery of the female by either investigating, undoing her followed by a punishment or saving of the guilty object"

To apply this in film, the narrative usually directs the female character to fall in love with the male protagonist, "become his property, losing her outward glamorous characteristics, her generalized sexuality, her showgirl connotations; her eroticism is subjected to the male star alone." By possessing the now unraveled, disarmed threat the male protagonist can ease this anxiety and "by means of identification with him, through participation in his power, the spectator can indirectly possess her too" (*ibid*).

2. "complete disavowal of castration" is made possible by turning the object into a fetish so that "it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (hence overvaluation, the cult of the female star). This second avenue, fetishistic scopophilia, builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself" (*ibid*, p.348).

Whether it is to sadistically subject them to power or voyeuristically to the gaze and fetishize them, both these routes, as Mulvey describes them, ultimately turn the woman to the object by overcoming her threat.

Furthermore, specifically in some of the Alfred Hitchcock movies that are referenced in the text, there is a patriarchal, phallocentric "shallow mask of ideological correctness – the man is on the right side of the law, the woman on the wrong…he also sees her as a guilty intruder exposed by a dangerous man threatening her with punishment, and thus finally saves her" (*ibid*, p.350)

According to Mulvey, "The Hitchcock hero has… all the attributes of the patriarchal superego... he can have his cake and eat it."

Berger claims that these patriarchal, unequal dynamics of the gaze are "so deeply embedded in our culture that [they] still structure the consciousness of many women and [women] do to themselves what men do to them. They survey, like men, their own femininity…today the attitudes and values, which informed that tradition, are expressed through other more widely diffused media." (p. 63).
Mulvey's writing provides a deeper understanding of this through how the cinema plays on this notion, through using the mechanisms and formations of the scopophilic instinct (voyeurism) and the ego libido (identification). Her work is significant for it draws on Lacan's framework yet diverges from it on a number of points. As I will elaborate on below, a purely psychoanalytic criticism of Mulvey's essay can be drawn from two major factors: the correct positioning of desire and the lack of the mention of the Real while associating the gaze with only the Imaginary and the Symbolic orders.

2.3 Questioning the Male Gaze

Many film theorists, feminists and critics have questioned the validity and depth of the Lacanian Film Theory put forward by Mulvey in the last few decades. One of the major problems of this "theoretical universality" due to the breadth of its claims, was that it was "effectively insulated from sustained logical and empirical analysis by a cloak of political correctness" (Carroll, 2003, p.367). Theorists like Carroll critiqued Lacanian Film Theory because it lacked empirical data to verify its claims, and rather produced a hypothetical spectator that existed only in theory.

Although the empirical implications and shortcomings of the Lacanian Film Theory may be of importance, many scholars have been discussing the true political/ideological construction of the narrative of a truly feminist cinema[7]. In the last few decades, feminists have taken on the prospect of a less phallocentric,

[7] Some of which are Smelik, Kaplan, Studlar etc.

less patriarchal cinema which creates meaning through the use of different tools, rather than recreating a previously formulated, embedded image of the female subject. In other words, they have been discussing how to create a 'mind's eye' rather than a corporeal one when reformulating the woman in film through the gaze of the spectator, the filmmaker and the characters in film. In this deconstruction and rebuilding process psychoanalysis can be and is still utilized but it is hardly the only tool.

Mulvey's preposition in achieving a feminist cinema was for women to create a counter-male gaze, by flipping the features of the patriarchal system. In her book *Women and Film* (1983), Director and author E. Ann Kaplan argued that film has taken a crucial role in creating a history for our capitalist social and interpersonal structures. She claimed that both psychoanalysis and film "support the status quo; … they are inserted in history, linked to the particular moment of bourgeouis capitalism that gave both their birth" (p.24). Because of this, Kaplan digests that it is "extremely important for women to use psychoanalysis as a tool, since it will unlock the secrets of our socialization within patriarchy" (*ibid*). In this text, she carefully aims to answer the following questions with the use of a psychoanalytic framework:

- Is the gaze necessarily Male?
- Could we structure things so that women own the gaze?
- Would women want to own the gaze?
- What does it mean to be a female spectator?

Kaplan draws attention to certain genres like family melodramas being designed towards the identification of women more than others. She agrees with Mulvey that, in this form, the objectification and surrender of women are almost always prominent under the veil of heteronormative family structure and questions why women then find this objectification and surrender pleasurable. She identifies that much like the male view of the Oedipal process, the woman also knows that she is

the "recipient of male desire, passively appearing, rather than acting. Her sexual pleasure in this position can thus be constructed only around her objectification… given the male structuring around sadism, the girl may adopt a corresponding masochism" (*ibid*, p.26).

Through research done on women's fantasies, Kaplan suggests that it is not only the male gaze that embodies the active/passive, subject/object positioning but also that "the woman places herself as either passive recipient of male desire or, as watching a woman who is passive recipient of male desires and sexual actions" (*ibid*). In other words, she confers that in western civilization, the dominance-submission patterns are a part of both male and female fantasies rather than just male. She finds it problematic that even in films where the female characters are dominant and male characters are the object of the woman's gaze (where the roles are reversed per say), the woman than "loses her traditionally feminine characteristics in so doing- not those of attractiveness but rather of kindness, humaneness, motherliness. She is now often cold, driving, ambitious, manipulating, just like men whose position she has usurped" (*ibid*, p.29). This flipping of the sort then, is not a revolt but rather a way of keeping the structure intact; even when women gaze at men, they do not possess the gaze, meaning that the female gaze is not objectifying.

So then, if it is possible to create a remedy of a truly female cinema or the female gaze, it is not enough to subvert the roles in the narrative. A real feminist cinema needs to step away from the stereotypical male and female roles, or stay clear of creating a counter-cinema in which the same structures remain even if flipped. However, she is perplexed by the idea of taking away the pleasure aspect when reformulating a politically/ideologically even cinema.

2.3.1 Desire, the Real and the Gaze

Since it first surfaced in the writings of Mulvey et al. in the 1970s, Lacanian Film Theory has been criticized for the "its conceptual arrogance…the very breadth of

its claims- its theoretical universality." (McGowan, 2007, p.5) However, certain theorists such as Todd McGowan, who has written extensively on this topic, criticized Mulvey's theory from a different point of view. In this view, the problem is not that Lacanian psychoanalysis is an invalid frame when studying film form and its proclivities in terms of gender inequality but rather that Mulvey, et al's ideas have proven to divert from original Lacanian thought on the gaze. The solution is not to disengage from psychoanalysis to understand the political/ideological apparatus of film but to stay loyal to the original Lacanian theory and to stay away from the "Foucaldinization" of Lacan's gaze (Copjec, 1994, p.19). He elaborates, in agreement with Copjec, that in Mulvey's theory "the filmic experience is an experience of power over the object and when we desire in the cinema, we desire to dominate" and finds this concept closer to the understanding of desire through power which is closer to the ideas of Foucault and Nietzsche rather than those of Lacan. To return to Foucault: let us note once again that his main theory circled around the idea of subject formation by using discourse as a power tool to produce docile bodies. However, some of Foucault's ideas mentioned in Chapter 1 such as the Panoptic gaze and the lack of reciprocity, the interchangeability of subject and object depending on the position of the gaze as he discusses regarding *Las Meninas* are examples that are parallel to the Big Other in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Here, we must avoid getting confused by these two positions as binary opposites, but rather look at where they converge: namely the role of the gaze in subject formation. Thus it is important to note that while we borrow from Foucault's work, what we are trying to stay loyal to as our main framework of criticism and for providing an alternative, more politically correct gaze in film is Lacanian psychoanalysis, perhaps even more so than Mulvey is able to do in her essay.

McGowan's analysis of the gaze in accordance with film theory is a comprehensive one which includes the basis of the philosophical work behind it (ie. Lacan, Foucault, Freud, Sartre), the actual writings of the authors of Screen in the 1970s (Mulvey et al.) as well as the critics who have been trying to change

this theory who came afterwards (ie. Kaplan, Copjec, Studler). The evidence he provides suggests two major problems with this theory above all: the correct positioning of desire and the lack of the mention of the Real while associating the gaze with only the Imaginary and the Symbolic orders.

Similar to McGowan, Clifford Manlove's reading indicates that in Lacanian theory, there is a split between the unconscious and the conscious. This split "reveals the existence of a register prior to the symbolic and imaginary registers: the real… [it] is the result of a primary trauma or loss: castration anxiety is secondary, a result of a fear of the return of the real" (2007, p.91). Manlove claims that in films like *Vertigo* the gaze offers a brush-up, an encounter with the Real as it signifies getting too close to this uncanny feeling.

When we discuss the role of film as a tool for imposing ideology, we must understand that "film here had a precise role: to provide the imaginary lure necessary for subjects to accept their subjection. Hence, film became the handmaiden of ideology, its imaginary supplement."(McGowan, 2010, xvi) In doing so, the signifier in the film becomes the tool for the subjects to relate to (in Mulvey's theory, identify with). The problem with this lies in two major points; each spectator relates to the signifier differently and there is a major blank space between the ideology (signifier) and subject (signified). According to McGowan, the "symbolic order continually comes up against a barrier that disrupts its smooth functioning- a barrier that Lacan calls the Real….[this is] the role that failure plays in the effective functioning of the signifier"(*ibid*).

To elaborate further, the point in which the signifier fails to impose the ideology- through narrative- onto the subjects (the spectator) is the very point, the very void that Lacan calls the Real. The Real, as defined in Chapter 1, is the "indication of incompleteness of the symbolic order…a gap in social structure…language's inability to say it all, to speak the whole truth" (McGowan, 2007, p.3). This point of failure is the point through the subject can enter his/her desire, it is the only place for true subjectivity. Without these cracks in the system, ideology,

language or the symbolic order cannot function, improve or have any interaction with its objects. As we will see in the following chapter, or as Manlove describes films like Vertigo, an encounter with the Real in the narrative of film can help the spectator truly question the ideology or break it.

McGowan's biggest criticism of Lacanian Film theory lies in this non-mention of the Real as it relates to the gaze. He believes that Lacan's views on the gaze are not those he initially mentions when defining the mirror stage but those he later develops in his writings such as the sardine can anecdote and Holbein's skull in *The Ambassadors* (Lacan 1977, 1998). He contends that because Lacan sees the gaze as something that is in the field of the object rather than the subject, it is not an active process but rather a glitch in the visual field; "but as an object the gaze acts to trigger our desire visually and as such it what Lacan calls an *objet petit a* or an object-cause of desire. There is, according to Lacan, a form of the objet petit a that corresponds to each of the drives. The gaze is the objet petit a of the scopic drive" (*ibid*, p.6). What is critical in this concept is that the objet petit a only exists as a lack, because it is the cause of desire. So in a filmic sense, the gaze of the spectator only exists insofar as the signifier is out of reach. The following passage summarizes quite well, what McGowan means by this:

> "As the objet petit a in the visual field, the gaze is the point around which the gaze organizes itself…The gaze compels our look because it appears to offer access to the unseen, to the reverse side of the visible. It promises the subject the secret of the Other, but this secret exists only insofar as it remains hidden. The subject cannot uncover the secret of the gaze, yet it marks the point at which the visual field takes the subject's desire into account" (*ibid*).[8]

When the subject (the spectator) is exposed to the Real in cinema, he or she is traumatized. However, because it is the failure of the symbolic order to explain everything, the subject is also freed from the constraints of ideology and finds a space to enter his/her objet petit a and truly manifest a subjectivity.

[8] This is exactly the type of film-making Agnes Varda propogates as I will demonstrate in Chapter 3.

2.4 Summary

While Chapter 1 defined the role of the gaze in the formation of the subject and its relation to the object, Chapter 2 was an overview of the utilization of the gaze in film theory and its implications. Lacanian Film Theory has become politically problematic with the subject-object relationship becoming oppressive, as roles are assigned to gendered subjects. Critics who came after Mulvey protested the use of psychoanalysis, the breadth and the arrogance of the theory, its lack of empirical data about the spectator but for the purpose of the thesis, I have focused specifically on the criticisms of this theory relating to the feminist and psychoanalytic shortcomings of it.

Through understanding the missing or wrong parts of Lacanian Film Theory while still staying within this framework, we can seek to answer the question of providing a better alternative: a Female Gaze in which the preconditioned formulas are reformulated and ideology that the narrative provides can be interactive, updated and politically correct. To do this, as we have seen in Feminist writers' like Kaplan's as well as McGowan's psychoanalytic analyses, we must redirect our attention to how to place the female in the narrative to ensure subjectivity, how to encircle the Lacanian Real through the placement of desire and to provide a different model for the spectator to enter the realm of subjectivity instead of identification and voyeurism. The next chapter will be an investigation into this possibility through a study of female filmmaker Agnes Varda's highly influential and revered cinema.

CHAPTER 3: FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY IN VARDA

It is said that analyzing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it. That is the intention of this article. The alternative is the thrill that comes from leaving the past behind without rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms, or daring to break with normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive a new language of desire.

(Mulvey, 2006, P.344)

I wish to put the framework mentioned in the previous chapters to work in this final chapter of this thesis. I begin by asking questions like: How does Varda subvert the male gaze, if at all? How can Varda's films be read from the perspective of feminist film theory that draws on Lacan? How does Varda position the Real in her films? The ultimate aim is to answer the following question with evidence: 'Can a truly female gaze like that of Varda's disarm a patriarchal ideology through film?' As we have seen in the previous chapter, the use of psychoanalysis, more specifically of Lacanian thought, was at the basis of a feminist criticism of mainstream cinema. Instead of ignoring or discrediting it as a tool, we must adhere to the same framework in finding the answer to this question. Certain directors and filmmakers have taken various positions in terms of subverting this male gaze in search of finding a better alternative for a more ideologically just cinema. Agnes Varda is, without a question, one of the pioneers of this movement.

Agnes Varda can be identified by many words: feminist, filmmaker, artist, surrealist, photographer, documentarian, pioneer and one of the founding members of the French film movement, the 'nouvelle vague'. Varda has received many awards, including the Honorary Palm D'Or and Honorary Academy Award and has been a ubiquitously influential figure in the sphere of cinema. Her style, her narrative and her use of a unique gaze have been discussed by many theorists and critics. Most of her films have been studied and dissected to provide a new theory of film. In this section, I will focus mostly on three of her most profound

films: *Vagabond* (1985), *The Gleaners and I* (2000) and *Cleo from 5 to 7* (1962) in trying to decipher the possibility of a truly female gaze and the features it may carry. My aim is to examine whether Varda's creation of a female subjectivity through a female gaze(three-fold, as mentioned in the previous chapter) can provide modern filmmakers an example of a truly feminist cinema, not by denying the structures and tools of the existing system, but by re-appropriating them. The point is not only to flip the existing structure or to oppose it, but to create alternative form, style and approach to the existing order.

The three films mentioned above are essentially road movies of women in search of their identities. In *Cleo from 5 to 7*, we follow along the path of a singer/actor Cleo through Paris, in search of finding her true identity in the midst of an anxious two hours as she awaits the results for tests from her doctor to let her know if she has cancer. The film opens with an iconic tarot-reading scene in which we are introduced to the anxiety of the main character, the tarot reader tells Cleo she will go through a great transformation. This is the only color shot in the otherwise black-white movie[9].

We subsequently follow along Cleo's tour of Paris, encountering different characters such as her assistant Angele, her boyfriend Jose, her composer and lyricist friends, her friend Dorothee, Dorothee's lover Raoul and finally a soldier named Antoine visiting Paris and is about to return to the war front shortly. Almost each of these encounters takes place in a different setting including a café, a theater, a boutique, Cleo's apartment, the park, an art gallery and the hospital and they are all embedded with elements of the transformation that is taking place in Cleo from an object into a subject. The film is divided into chapters that are boldly highlighted via text headings at the beginning of each chapter and they are named after the characters involved and the minutes out of the 1 hour and 30 minutes the narrative is supposed to fit into.

In *Vagabond*, we witness the last few days of a young nomad named Mona

[9] The reason behind this will be further mentioned in the last section of this chapter.

roaming freely, through the French countryside, not running from anything specific, nor running toward anything specific but eventually she is found dead in a ditch. The characters she encounters are as influenced by her as she is by them. This film is also divided into chapters with encounters of different residents of the countryside as well as static interview shots of those who came in contact with her. There is a series of tracking shots on the road, Mona walking that interrupts the sequences with other characters. Phil Powrie points out that Varda wanted the film to "focus on Mona's journey, and that the journey should be punctuated by meetings. In other words, social interaction had to be subordinate to a relentless drift" (2011, p. 72). Through this drift, we meet the characters and events that brush up on Mona's life in the final weeks leading up to her death.

On the road, she finds odd jobs working at a car wash, a goat farm, she meets house squatters, stays with an Algerian farm-worker, meets a professor trying to save dying trees in the area, enjoys drinks with an elderly lady while being envied by her house maid and is offered to act in a porn film by a group of nomads and thugs under the influence. We never discover Mona's whole truth; only that she is a vagrant woman who refuses to confine herself to living in a social or symbolic order. We don't know what happened to her, why she left home or even what caused her death. This is true for Varda as the narrator of the story and the interviewer of her encounters. "Mona eludes Varda just as she eludes everyone, yet the desire to know, and to tell, is deeply felt by all…Varda simultaneously foregrounds and disturbs the invisible enunciation of the patriarchal narrative" (Flitterman-Lewis, 1996, p.289). [10]

Finally, in *Gleaners and I*, we join various types of 'collectors' through Paris and the French countryside constantly comparing them to the gleaners from the previous centuries who collected crops in large fields. This documentary also

[10] Mona is a unique character because her character represents what happens when one totally disengages from the Panoptic gaze. She is not concerned with consequences or threats, she does not self-regulate based on norms or relations she has with others, whether positive or negative.

includes Agnes Varda herself first as a gleaner collecting materials in search for her own identity, then eventually collecting stories through filming, as she does. Inspired by a 19th century painting by Jean-Francois Millet, Varda creates this documentary in awe of those who collect crops from the agricultural fields due to poverty, or urban scavengers including a teacher with a Master's degree who teaches immigrants how to read, artists who scout the streets for materials they can use and a restaurant-owner whose ancestors were gleaners in the past. Varda's own persona as a gleaner is integrated into the documentary as she portrays herself as a collector of random memorabilia; heart-shaped potatoes she comes across while filming the gleaners on the field, an accidental shot of nature as she leaves her camera lens open as well as intentional narrative construction such as filming glimpses of different parts of her body and home while narrating memories about her life. Like the other two films, the film is structured into episodes and subjects. Varda, interviews collectors of all sorts and comes into the shot from time to time, exposing herself as a collector too.

What follows is an analysis of how Varda reappropriates female subjectivity through a female gaze through the three areas Mulvey defines, with a unique use of time and space and a correct positioning of desire and the Lacanian Real.

3.1 The Gaze Recreated

In analyzing the scholars and theorists who study filmmakers like Varda, and trying to decipher the makings of a truly feminist cinema, it is evident that we must understand the dichotomist positions of subject and object embedded in a patriarchal, phallocentric cinema and steer away from them. According to Phil Powrie, Varda does exactly this, by utilizing a "nomadic gaze" which "...undermines the binary rather than confirming it…her cinema crosses boundaries between the object and subject to create the space of the imaginary."

Powrie suggests that instead of fixating the spectator into identification with the protagonist, Varda employs a non-stationary gaze, which wanders back and forth

between object and subject, between contrasting figures, colors or even forms/genres within each film. For example her use of black and white in *Cleo*, her collage or drama and documentary in the *Gleaners and I* and the characters encountered in both *Vagabond* and the *Gleaners and I* are all great examples of the 'nomadic gaze'.

The spectator is set up to enjoy questioning and participating by actively engaging in the narrative rather than identifying with the protagonist. Varda's use of stark binaries such as "woman seen to woman seeing, enclosed and open space, still and moving images" (Powrie, 2011, p.71) are all elements of her authorial gaze that is nomadic. Powrie's ideas will be further investigated in the next section.

Varda's cinema, is a true testament of the subversion of the three-fold look coined by Mulvey, as mentioned in Chapter Two. Her films are created and shot through her authorship and view, the lead characters are all women yet not just objects but subjects as well and the spectator is never presumed to be male or identify with the divisive forces of activity/passivity embedded in prescribed gender roles. She defies the traditional narrative rules firstly by placing women at the center of each of these films yet, although they are central characters in the story, none of these women are fetishized or saved/defeated as threats by sadistic power structures as Mulvey suggests. They are designed to spark interest, decipher and even get disliked at times by the spectator. Also, secondary characters are designed this way as well, regardless of their sex.

3.1.1 Directorship and Narrative

At the very beginning of *Vagabond*, after the spectator is introduced to Mona's body in the ditch, Varda's narration of the story begins with questions like "I wonder, do those who knew her as a child still think about her?" followed by statements like "She impressed those she met last: they spoke of her as if she wasn't dead, or they didn't know she had died. I know little about her myself, but

it almost seems to me that she came from the sea."

By positioning herself some where far from the ultimate source of truth as the filmmaker, Varda "marks herself as distributor of the visions we are about to see, but yet retains no power over those visions—she simply offers them to us for our own active judgment. This is a process that renders enunciation dialectical, calls into question the text's controlling force"(Flitterman-Lewis, 1996, p.244) As we can see in the following quote by Varda herself, this authorial stance is designed to be dialectical and investigative rather than authoritative, intentionally:

> The artist is one who shows you the feeling without telling you what you have to feel. I love films that allow the filmmakers not to decide what is good and bad, not to make statements. (Harkness, 1986)

By establishing herself as the 'auteur' filmmaker Varda plays with the gaze in all aspects of film. The characters, the narrative and the room the gaze leaves for the spectator to place his or her desire into the film as the gaze moves around nomadically all help with this cause equally.

As we have discussed the role of discourse in creating the subject from a Foulcauldian perspective, the discourse (narrative in this case) that Varda creates in her films produces a female alternative to the prevailing patriarchal ideology.

From a Lacanian perspective on the other hand, "the gaze is understood as an omnipresent space external to the subject. Men do not own the gaze any more than women do, but in Hollywood film the male look transfers its own lack to the female subject, and attempts to pass itself off as the gaze"(Smelik, 1998, p.86). This is not true in any of the mentioned films of Varda's. In *Vagabond*, the story of Mona is not at all created and dispersed through voyeuristic sadism or narcissistic identification, but rather as a quest for truth in the midst of a culturally constructed femininity. The things that happen to Mona, the characters she encounters are all representative of different functions. The narrative is a mixture of documentary truths of the French countryside and fictional situations that show

possibilities. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis describes this quite well:

> "This manner of "filming as a woman" is precisely what Varda powerfully achieves with her remarkable 1985 feature film. *Sans toil ni loi* (Vagabond), for it is here that she brings to bear a distinctly feminine authorial voice in exploring the social articulation of vision and (feminine) identity… it resumes all of the issues and discursive strategies associated with Varda's work: The basic sense of dialectics that informs her films; the interest in narrational processes that blend documentary and fictional modes; the narrative fragmentation and temporal dislocation of episodically structured texts; the production of a critically engaged spectator; the redirection of the gaze into a dispersed erotics of looking; the sociological investigation of a cultural milieu; the concern with women's issues and the representation of the female body. And precisely because of this, it is here in Vagabond that we see most clearly what has arguably been Varda's central concern all along: constructions of "the feminine" as they are visually and culturally inscribed" (1996, p.243)

A similar case is apparent in *Cleo* where although the protagonist can be perceived as a fetishized object of desire, the plot and the narrative are designed to deconstruct this character as she unravels to find her true subjectivity. Varda's auteurship in this film, creates, shatters, recreates a stance where the spectator is to witness and participate in the formation of an autonomous female subject with her very own desires and questions in the face of death.

Themes of physical beauty and fear of the lack of identity are omnipresent throughout the visual and narrative structures of the whole film. The scene in Cleo's bedroom including the encounters with her assistant, her boyfriend and the musicians who have composed songs for her musical career, or the scene in the boutique when Cleo is purchasing a hat are great examples of the type of superficial narrative Varda sets out to decipher. The sequence in the apartment "investigates the expectations that others have of Cleo and reveal that everyone considers her through her lens of attractiveness" (Neroni, 2016, p.106). The props and the demeanor she puts on here are deemed meaningless to her as she has the urge to leave it all behind abruptly and wander off onto the streets of Paris, in what we later find out to be a path to her self-discovery. Therefore, as discussed in the previous section, this scene marks a "turning point in Cleo's ability to see how

the markers of beauty that provide social status also erase her subjectivity" (*ibid*).

Similarly, Varda's use of mirrors throughout the film symbolizes the phases of Cleo's discovery of identity. In the very beginning, right after the fortuneteller and through the first half of the movie Cleo encounters mirrors in various settings. With each encounter the mirrors are positioned differently or are distorted by certain obstacles such as the Chinese Letters of a restaurant in the street, or the shattered pieces of a mirror that Cleo's friend Dorothee accidentally breaks right after they go to the cinema. Each of these scenes are important to point out in the over all theme of equating beauty with femininity as Varda "employs mirrors…because they are metaphorically at the center of the feminist question about ideal female beauty and its relationship to individual women…[she] contends that our relationship to mirrors can change"(*ibid*, 122). Strategic tools like this are examples of the many tools Varda employs to design the visual and the discursive narrative, the point of view of the spectator trying to find a sense of belonging along with the protagonist.

Varda also actively retains different "styles of filmmaking often within a single film…she often combines narrative conventions with documentary conventions or with performance art tropes, and the effect is that she confounds genre expectations"(Neroni, 2016, p.94). By doing this, she designs her films for "…privileging spectator engagement over identification. Varda is not as interested in the spectator's identifying with a character in a particular way as she is intent on the spectator engaging in actively seeing the links between the contradictions or the mixed styles and shots"(*ibid*). The film-within-the-film sequence in Cleo is a great example of a dark, absurd comedy popping up in the middle of an otherwise gloom melodrama. Another example is Agnes' own story of collecting stories and objects such as the clock without the hands or flashes of images of her aging hands and her whitening hair embedded in a more dramatic set of sequences throughout the otherwise objective, documentary nature of *The Gleaners and I.*

Through juxtapositions like this, "this cinema creates form that is subservient

to content… the spectator learns as much from the form as from the movement of the plot"; in Cleo, in particular, "these formal juxtapositions continually highlight the tension within ideal beauty, between looking and being looked at" (*ibid*, p.127). Varda's use of the gaze and her empowerment of the spectator as well as the characters to engage in different types of looking are what set her work opposite that of the mainstream, patriarchal ideology in cinema. Each of these techniques and plays in aesthetic, form, plot are evidence of an auteur cinema in which feminist values are embedded by subverting the pre-existing male gaze of the director. The other routes, as suggested by Mulvey of course, are the main characters of the films and the spectator assumed to identify with these protagonists who are the active ones moving the story forward.

3.1.2 Female Characters as Subjects

In each of the above mentioned films, "the woman in the mobile and eccentric center is Varda herself, or versions of her, and each of these films is structured around the gaze of a woman, and the roaming of that woman as she gazes" (Powrie, 2011, p.78). Varda uses female characters as the central figure in most of her films. In these three films, Mona, Cleo and Agnes herself are all women in search of their subjectivity.

Since "feminist cinema either avoids fetishization of the female subject, or critically deconstructs it" (Smelik,1998, p.84) Varda's sense of feminism is apparent in her refusal to establish these characters as objects to be looked at. This type of stance in filmmaking calls "for 'realist' images of women, but it mostly follows from making the female character in the film subject of both story and narration. When the female character takes up the position of subject, or struggles to establish her agency and desire, she can no longer be represented as fetishized image" (*ibid*). Varda's characters therefore, represent a feminist type of filmmaking and by placing these characters in her narrative as the representation of female subjectivity she establishes a way of communicating the questions that women face, their desire and their journeys. All three of these characters are

ambivalent, insecure and on a quest, which represents the very idea of 'woman' in a patriarchal society. Posing these puzzling(ed) central characters "who remain an enigma, she offers us, and her characters, the possibility of engaging in the process of meaning construction… We see [them] from a variety of perspectives, each discourse constructing another vision of [them]" (Flitterman-Lewis, 1996, p.245). The woman is represented in the center, yet from an eclectic point of view of others, she lets the spectator question rather than accept a prescribed truth.

The secondary characters employed in all three of these films (maybe a little less in *Cleo*) are a mixture of real people and professional actors. They are all affected differently with each encounter and the spectator can find something to identify with in each of these characters. In *Vagabond* "these characters (both actors and professionals) remember their impressions, the plurality of discourses – documentary, direct testimonial, fictional construct- creates what Varda calls an "impossible portrait" of Mona. At the same time, the complex interweaving of their testimonies constructs a social vision of French culture as well. Varda refuses to offer us the security of a fixed identity for her character; rather, through her careful orchestration of meaning- of this woman, of her situation, of the necessary social context for all human activity" (Flitterman-Lewis, 1996, p.243). *Gleaners and I* is identical in this sense; a mixture of interviews of collectors of all kinds, interwoven with Varda's story as she reflects back on her life and herself as a collector of mementos, stories and people create the same exact effect. *Cleo,* although a more fictional, less documentary film than the other two, still has the same elements visible through the different chapters created with the various encounters Cleo has with the other characters.

3.1.3 Spectatorship

Mulvey's thoughts suggest that, within the paradigm of the 'male gaze' prevalent in mainstream cinema, the spectator is to identify with the male characters active position and the female characters are to be gazed upon voyeuristically or fetishized to become satisfying rather than threatening. Ann Kaplan's view as

mentioned in the previous chapter, take this notion further and claim that even the female spectators fantasize about being the passive object with a sense of being desired by the other. Varda's work is pioneering in this sense as it dismantles the previously discussed gendered roles (i.e., Berger, Mulvey) of who is meant to look and who is meant to be looked upon. Flitterman-Lewis defines "The logic of enunciation- a logic that describes how the filmic vision is both organized for, and activated by, the spectator- traverses all three categories of author, viewer and text, combining production and reception in a perpetual play of psychic and social forces"(1996 p.319).

In an interview in 1986 regarding *Vagabond*, Varda states "I want spectators to define themselves vis-a-vis Mona. For example, would you give Mona a ride? Would you let her sleep in your car? Would you give her money? It's not the question, but the questioning that matters" (Insdorf, 1986). In Varda's work, the spectator is not considered female rather than male, but genderless. Varda designs her films so that the viewer gets pleasure from the process of looking, regardless of his/her gender, rather than voyeuristically looking at a fetish object or identifying with the 'doer'. This process is summarized well by Flitterman-Lewis as follows:

> "In a move that combines techniques of critical distanciation[11] with a conception of cinema-viewing as the assumption of a point of view, Varda has constructed all of her characters in terms of broad social outlines, thereby replacing psychological depth with social complexity. The resulting activity of judgment on the part of the spectator involves a renunciation of emotional identification in the name of critical reflection and evaluation" (Flitterman-Lewis, 1996, p.243*)*.

The spectator is constantly trying to figure out the perplexed main character who is not male in any of these films. By participating in these journeys of Cleo, Mona or Agnes, the spectator contemplates reality and questions the ruling ideology. The spectator is not meant to simply identify with the character as the protagonist as Mulvey describes, but rather move alongside her in a dialectical process.

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[11] This is similar to Keller and Grontkowski's first rule established in the *Mind's Eye*, mentioaned in Chapter 2.

Varda does this by establishing the distance between the spectator and the screen, particularly in *The Gleaners and I*; therefore allows for room for identification with the character not as the object that is desired like Mulvey suggests, but as the primary source of the gaze that is inquisitive. Varda invites the viewer to think with her, to feel what she feels and follow her footsteps in her inquiry into the patriarchal structure as the main character of this film.

When comparing Mona and Cleo, we can see that "Mona's progress is the inverse of Cleo's, whose trajectory through Paris leads to self-knowledge and acceptance of others. Mona in fact, moves farther and farther away from self-discovery as she travels…" (*ibid*, p. 298). We can compare this to Agnes' journey in *The Gleaners and I,* as she reflects on her own life, the objects she collected and the people she has encountered. Although they may differ in order or personality traits, the construction of all three of these characters "yields the social meaning: There is an undeniable social network of human culture in which we must exist"(*ibid*, p.303). This relationship these characters build with this social network are what makes them question the truth of their existence, their true power as subjects.

3.2 Time and Space

In her essay, Mulvey states "the first blow against the monolithic accumulation of traditional film conventions (already undertaken by radical filmmakers) is to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment" (2016, P.352). Varda's cinema is a direct testament to this call. Therefore in studying these three films, it is important to take note of Varda's use of time and space as discussed by Phil Powrie through what he calls "Varda's Nomadic Gaze" (2011). In his article *Heterotopic Spaces and Nomadic Gazes in Varda*, Powrie outlines the different tools, utilized by Varda in a groundbreaking manner. He uses the Foucauldian term 'heterotopic spaces' to describe the "utopian spaces… that contest and invert everyday space" and claims that these spaces in Varda films can be characterized as "marginal, imaginary, sacred and festive"(*ibid*). He also uses this term for

certain moments in each of the mentioned films as such. The heterotopic spaces and moments he uses as examples are in no way in opposition to normal moments or spaces, but rather "'in normal space, as well as eccentric to it"(*ibid*).

Powrie identifies the series of 12 tracking road shots[12] in *Vagabond* and the painting theme embedded in the *Gleaners and I* as these spaces and moments in each film which "subvert binaries and create a moment of radical self-questioning for the spectator"(*ibid*). Along with Powrie, according to other critics including Neroni, Flitterman-Lewis, in *Cleo*, there are two major turning points in the plot as per these heterotopic moments and spaces. The first turning point, which takes place approximately halfway through the plot, is the song Cleo sings with her colleagues in her apartment and the second is the film-within-the-film she watches with Dorothee and Raoul, who is a projectionist at the movie theater. This short-film that Cleo is invited to watch is a silent-film starring Jean-Luc Goddard and Anna Karina in which two lovers are to unite on a bridge when the man puts on dark glasses and sees his lover dies, and then takes off the glasses and saves her from being carried into a hearse by the paramedics and they reunite. "The theme of the glasses, is clearly linked to Cleo's world view, as she sees everything figuratively in black as result of her cancer, and starts seeing others rather than just herself once she wears the dark glasses" (*ibid*, p.74). It is not only the content of the story within the story but also the placement of the short film within the time structure of the plot in which things take a completely different turn after the movie-viewing process. For example, everything from the color of the taxi to the dress Cleo wears before this moving from black to white as Cleo's views start changing.

Another pattern we can see across all three of these movies is the use of episodes or chapters in different settings and with different secondary characters. Flitterman-Lewis discusses this issue in depth in *To Desire Differently,* stating that "the episodic narration that fragments linear causality into a series of

[12] Which he states, were later named 'Grande Series' by the crew of the film

situations-each with a demonstrable social lesson, and each with an invitation to the spectator's critical judgment" (p.298). This is true in each of the three films we have discussed. However, more specifically, "time is expanded in Vagabond through the delayed testimonies of characters who have perhaps been forgotten: it is condensed through unexpected ellipses that compress events into nothingness…each account of Mona is an account of the self as well" (*ibid*, p.299). By using these interrupted sequences in structure which Varda creates "moments of narrative suspension that generate our own reflection on the events" (*ibid*). These chapters, interviews or encounters and the division between them makes us, the spectators, reflect upon the lesson or the message in each sequence and how it relates to the story as a whole, all the while questioning where we would stand.

3.3 Objet Petit A and The Real

As mentioned above, if desire is the tool for the spectator to identify with the characters on the screen, we must identify different kinds of desire rather than just that of the phallus (in one way or another). As discussed in the previous chapter, in Lacan's original thought desire is very closely related to the Real or the void in the Symbolic order of which we can glide into with the ever eliding objet petit a (the subject cause of desire).

In his book *The Real Gaze,* Todd McGowan classifies the nouvelle vague or the French New Wave movement as an "aesthetic that produces desire through a depiction of the gaze as an impossible object within the filmic image" (2007, p.83). He elaborates that in Lacanian theory, desire (the objet petit a) is about what can never be attained or reached where as fantasy is an imagined ideal of enjoyment if this acquisition or grasp were possible. Because of its "fidelity…to the path of desire" the nouvelle vague "joins the project of struggling against the role that fantasy has in supplementing ideology…by constantly emphasizing the impossibility of the gaze as objet petit a" (*ibid*). In simpler terms, McGowan claims that the nouvelle vague puts desire over ideology by focusing the narrative

on the impossibility of attaining the objet petit a rather than imposing a symbolic order through the story.

Drawing a parallel to this, Flitterman-Lewis claims that in *Vagabond*, "it is the desire to know (rather than to possess the woman)" that structures the vision, allowing the viewer to identify with the process itself. The spectator's power of vision is not over the female character, a woman constructed as the object of desire, but over all of the images and their interrelation; it is a power of questioning rather than one of possession" (1996, p.313). The object cause of desire in this film becomes the truth about Mona that evades us. The "contemplative gaze of meaning (what it means to be a woman, how being female defines Mona's situation) redefines our fascination- redefines it as a process which does not objectify the woman in the traditional way"(*ibid*) as Mulvey's theory suggests. As the spectator, we are distanced from[13], even appalled by the character, just as we are in Cleo, yet drawn to her and fascinated by this notion of wanting to understand her.

As mentioned earlier, one of the most attention-grabbing feature of *Cleo From 5-7* is the opening tarot scene that is the sole color image in the whole movie. McGowan anlayzes this choice by Varda as:

> "The cards shot in color represent the gaze: unlike the actual characters of the film they see the truth in Cleo's being- her impending complete transformation. By opposing the tarot cards to the Other through the opposition of black and white to color film, Varda points toward the irreducibility of the gaze to the Other. The subject cannot find a fantasmic resolution for desire because the Other cannot embody the gaze" (2007, p.87).

Much like this scene, the final scene makes apparent the impossibility of Cleo satisfying her desire through finding out the results of her tests from her doctor.

[13] This distancing is once again similar to the distancing in the *Mind's Eye* by Grontkowski and Fox Keller

Through a very brief encounter with the doctor in the courtyard of the hospital, all she gets is a sentence or two from the doctor stating that she will be fine after a few months of treatment. Once again she fails to receive the recognition she seeks throughout the whole movie, and cannot find in the Other. By emphasizing the impossibility of the gaze in the field of the Other, "Varda shows Cleo freed from the seductions of power…Cleo has not discovered the gaze but she has now embraced its absence. This …is not a form of self-empowerment but a realization of the failure of power" (*ibid,* p.88)

The mirrors in *Cleo*, as well as the dark sunglasses she puts on after changing from her white outfit into her black one, "objects placed iconically at the end of each segment of the 'grande série'; and, …in *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*, the many objects gleaned and transformed by painters, or by nature itself in the case of the potato in the form of a heart" (Powrie, 2011, p. 80) are signifiers of the gaze that changes from object to subject are distortions in the visual field. They are what Powrie calls "anamorphic objects" that can be perceived as intentionally placed unlikely images which for the simple purpose of distortion of the "narrative surface" (*ibid*). Similar to the death's head or the skull in the Holbein painting from which Lacan drew a finalized theory of his construct of the gaze, these objects are there to remind us of our nothingess and the possibility of death (both in the metaphorical and literal senses).

Death as a concept is a repeated pattern across these three films. In Vagabond, we know that Mona is dead from the beginning, in Cleo there is a tension created by the possibility of her having cancer and in the *Gleaners and I*, Varda's age and her getting closer to the end is reminded to her and to the spectator with flashes of images like her white hair, and the wrinkles on her hands. Perhaps this presence of death is one of the best ways that Varda is in touch with the Lacanian Real as Mulvey was criticized for leaving out from her theory. The rotting collection of potatoes in *The Gleaners and I*, the "lyrics evoking absence, lack and death" (Flitterman-Lewis, 1996, p.270) of the song that Cleo sings in her apartment

which ends up brining her into a new social awareness at the turning point of the plot are great examples of this encounter with the Real.

McGowan puts much emphasis on film's role in exposing the real in its traumatic nature. He states, "when the subject experiences the traumatic real, it recognizes symbolic authority's failure to account for everything. Though the encounter with the gaze traumatizes the subject, it also provides the basis for the subject's freedom- freedom from the constraints of the big Other" (2007*,* p.16). The gaze, in this way, can be perceived as the petit objet a and a traumatizing encounter with the Real at the same time. By placing this encounter in the realm of film, filmmakers like Varda open up spaces for us to question ideology and the symbolic order in order to create something new.

CONCLUSION

Anneke Smelik states: “The position of the female subject is an impossible one: 'woman' finds herself in a meaningless nowhere where women cannot represent themselves, caught between masculine representation and the specular image of femininity it produces” (1998, p.16).

Throughout this thesis, my aim was to understand if a feminine subjectivity could be created in film; if it could, could it be used to disarm an otherwise patriarchal, phallocentric ideology? Agnes Varda’s cinema has proven that this is not only possible but eminent. Varda’s ‘nomadic’ gaze has replaced the male gaze in film and her use of time and space and integration of the Real have made female subjectivity and desire possible. This has given us an opportunity to gain access to a more just art form, in which the spectator can participate in the production of meaning and truth rather than accepting a pre-formulated version imposed onto him/her.

In *Cleo*, we participate in the discovery of a woman’s journey from an object of visual desire to a subject with her own desires. In this participation, we are exposed to the strong sub-topics of the ruling ideology such as ideal beauty, fear of aging or losing vitality and the insincerity of pseudo-popularity. In *Vagabond*, we are contemplating our possible positions in accordance with mini-stories and subjects in relation to a nomadic figure who is truly cleansed of the Panoptic gaze. We watch a woman who is far from the idealized, fetishized object; Mona is truly a subject, operating freely, yet her demise comes from her inability to find her place in the social order. *In The Gleaners and I*, we are exposed to stories of subjects with different personalities, socio-economic statuses and habits who converge over one act: collecting. Agnes’ integration of herself into the narrative of the documentary lets us, as the spectators, roam back and forth between the emotional, raw and dramatic side and the objective truth of those documented. Each of these films introduce a truly unique use of the gaze. The nomadic female gaze that Varda employs proves that the director, the characters and the spectators

of a film can meet in the middle rather than participate in the active/passive roles of identification and fetishization as decribed by Mulvey. The use of time and space including the episodic form of the plots, the use of anamorphic objects and heterotopic spaces create the distancing and contemplation which would otherwise not have been a part of the viewing process. And finally, Varda's integration of the Lacanian Real and the objet petit a in all of these films make them more vulnerable, more open to the possibility of disrupting the perfectness of the patriarchal world that is imposed upon us. These become the blots, the stains like that of the skull in *The Ambassadors*, the uneasiness of the ceaseless exchange which lets us question our subjectivity in *Las Meninas*.

In her reading of Teresa de Lauretis' views, Smelik emphasizes that "subjectivity is not a fixed entity but a constant process of self-production"(*ibid*, p.16). In this process the quest for truth becomes the ultimate desire however, women are seduced by the narrative into femininity. Varda shatters this order by creating a world in which this questioning journey is the narrative itself and it does not discriminate but rather integrates the author, the characters and the spectator into dialectic. "Varda's films have continually represented efforts to elaborate a feminine discourse through modernist techniques of narrative and address.

Hilary Neroni suggests that instead of disparaging patriarchal or ideological techniques of film making, "the feminist film theorist must examine the relationship between form and content" (2016, p. 152). By loading both of these tools for change the French New Wave and Varda create a revolutionary process in changing the preconceived notions of subjectivity. Her films "not only recreate a character experiencing the gaze but also work to stage the experience at the level of form" (Neroni, 2010, p.183). In her attempt to subvert the dominant masculine position-as viewer of the woman-spectacle and as controller of the narrative events- Varda has literally invented deconstructive textual strategies that rework processes of vision and narration, and in doing so she has conceived a new form of 'feminine text'" (Flitterman-Lewis, 1996, p.318). To underline this point I

have also made previously, the 'subversion' of the male gaze is not the only thing that makes Varda's work influential; it is also her putting forward an alternative route that is more just, more realistic and more fruitful. She does not simply create art form that is oppositional, but rather explores tools in form, aesthetics and narrative, which offer an alternative. Her world is neither utopic nor dystrophic; it is open to endless possibilities.

Throughout her career, Agnes Varda has proven that the female subject can be created on the screen, and by example off the screen, through creating an inquisitive form of identification (rather than an objectified one) with female characters with which the spectator can engage with, contextual truth production within the time and space matrix and the inclusion of desire, death and other elements of the Real. Her work set precedents as art form and is a testament to her efforts to diminish the patriarchal, phallocentric ideology film was accustomed to. To answer my initial question: I believe the evidence and analyses provided in this thesis clearly show that Agnes Varda has verified that this patriarchal ideology can and will be disarmed by engaging in production of a new truth by recreating the female subject in film.

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