

Under Agnes Varda's Eyes - *Plaisir d'amour en Iran*

keywords: female gaze; musical; melodrama; orientalism

This presentation will juxtapose Agnes Varda's *Plaisir d'amour en Iran* and *L'une chante, l'autre pas* in order to explore some of the contradictions around the latter film with regards to its feminist politics.

Agnes Varda's *L'une chante, l'autre pas* occupies a controversial position in the filmmaker's oeuvre. Set against the backdrop of the Women's Liberation Movement in France, it revolves around the friendship of two women – Suzanne and Pommès – and their increasing feminist awareness as they get more and more involved in the struggle for women's reproductive rights (DeRoo 2009). Privileging female bonds over a heterosexual love story, the film has been praised for its progressive narrative. At the same time, *L'une chante, l'autre pas* has been accused of a conventional structure, borrowing from melodrama and musical – both rather problematic genres when it comes to feminist filmmaking.

DeRoo, however, has argued that this controversy is based on a misreading of Agnes Varda's filmic strategies, and that Varda's aesthetics strategies in this film subvert both, musical and melodrama. Following DeRoo, Varda's experiments on the basis of Brechtian alienation effects in fact advance feminist and avantgarde aesthetics (DeRoo 2009).

I will add another nuance to this controversy around Varda's aesthetic choices by paying attention to the short film *Plaisir d'amour en Iran*, which explores an episode in the life of one of the female protagonists of *L'une chante, l'autre pas*. In *Plaisir d'amour en Iran*, Pommès and her Iranian lover, Darious, tour a mosque in Isfahan and find that the architecture of the mosque mirrors their erotic love. Rather than simply dismissing this film as "orientalist", I will attempt to productively engage with the questions and contradictions that arise from Agnes Varda's/Pommès' gaze in *Plaisir d'amour en Iran*.

bibliography

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filmography

Plaisir d'amour en Iran [The Pleasure of Love in Iran] (Agnes Varda, 1976)

L'une chante, l'autre pas [One sings, the Other doesn't] (Agnes Varda, 1977)