

One Sings, The Other Doesn't (1968)

Happy endings can be joyfully pursued when we feel empowered together with others, although as we surely should know by now, such endings can never be said to have finally arrived.

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This year in Cannes, a 2K digital restoration of *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* (1977) was presented in the Cinema de la Plage series, possibly the most Vardian screening context for the film. For Varda beaches are her Belgium childhood and adolescent memories, the West Coast locations for her documentary work on the social and political movements of the 1960s, and her cherished island of Noirmoutier, west of Nantes, featuring so often in her films, particularly the tender opening scene of *Jacquot de Nantes* (1991); yet beaches also bring contemplation and regeneration. "If we opened people up, we'd find landscapes", she said on the release of *The Beaches of Agnes* (2001), "If we opened me up, we'd find beaches".

One Sings, the Other Doesn't is a film that also features beaches of contemplation and regeneration and although perhaps not taking centre stage on this occasion, the coast is never too far away as we travel across landscapes both global and local including Paris, Amsterdam and Tehran as well as the French localities of Bobigny, Hyères and Soissonnais. Set against the rise of the French women's liberation movement, this self-consciously Brechtian musical melodrama explores the political, social and physical landscapes of everyday women campaigning and collectively working together to gain agency over their bodies. Charting the personal and political changes in two women's lives from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s, the film is a joyful, celebratory and entertaining feminist opus that centers a long-term female friendship at its core. Made when abortion was only two years legal in France, the film follows the lives and friendship circles of Pomme and Suzanne, a middle-class artist and a working-class mother who unite over women's reproductive rights. On the film's release in France, it was seen as a minor Varda film, a retreat from her more experimental work, and activists in the Movement Liberation de Femmes (MLF) claimed it to be far from a 'proper' feminist film; in fact Françoise Outkrate notoriously described the film as 'Walt Disney does the MLF'. Yet on reflection how incongruous this appears as Varda places feminist politics right at the heart of her film as she carefully reconstructs the struggle for reproductive rights and explores how class is a central dimension of the abortion issue. From feminist demonstrations and the setting up of family planning clinics to a reconstruction of the protest outside the real life Bobigny abortion trial in 1972, featuring a cameo from Tunisian lawyer Gisèle Halimi who was the legal defense for the 14 year old girl in the case, as well as for the women who publicly admitted to having an abortion and who added their names to Simone de Beauvoir's 1971 Manifeste des 343, (signed by 343 women, including Varda, Marguerite Duras, Catherine Deneuve and Delphine Seyrig).

This summer Club des Femmes remembers this radical decade so passionately captured on film by Varda and others, a decade that witnessed the rising up of a global Women's Liberation Movement. 2018 also marks one hundred years since the first women got the vote in the UK, and fifty years since the protests of May '68. In a UK wide film tour entitled [Revolt, She Said: Women and Film after '68](#), we reflect on the volcanic change following the events of May '68 and honour the women, like Varda, who took up cameras as they took to the streets to instigate further personal and political revolutions. Varda has often been described as the "mother" of the French New Wave however most of her work was produced outside the early 1960s, the peak of the New Wave as well as the theoretical and aesthetic debates of *Cahiers du Cinéma*.

One Sings, the Other Doesn't is a defiantly feminist film with a happy ending, a film about the joyful collective work of feminist activism, about difference (Pomme sings, Suzanne doesn't) and about resistance. Finally, it is about the transformational power of friendship found through a shared political imaginings, the role of the collective, the gains and the losses, the solidarity and of course the singing, the laughing and the dancing.

– Selina Robertson

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¹ Lynne Segal *Radical Happiness: Moments of Collective Joy* (London New York, Verso, 2017) p. 268