

Explaining Varda's *Lions Love*: a European director responds to an American cultural marketplace

J. Brandon Colvin

Department of Communication Arts, 6117 Vilas Hall, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 821 University Avenue
Madison, WI 53706, USA

ABSTRACT

From 1955 to 1966, Agnès Varda's French-language feature film output, entailing four films, was characterized by formal control and cool elegance. After her relocation to Los Angeles in 1968, however, Varda's work took a sharp turn, as evidenced in 1969's *Lions Love* – a bricolage of forms and themes, including Warholian long takes, documentary segments, surreal interludes and re-photographed new reports, all swirling around the ideas of celebrity, performance and self-reflexivity. This article explains this drastic formal and narrative departure as a result of Varda's response to a new taste culture, specifically, that of American underground cinema and experimental theatre. Using art historian Michael Baxandall's approach to discussing artistic influence and cultural marketplaces, the article traces a few key important aesthetic trends and concerns that Varda likely drew upon when crafting her first English-language film. Additionally, the article argues that Varda adapted the precedents established by filmmakers like Andy Warhol, Shirley Clarke and William Greaves to her own ends, injecting levity and playfulness into a relatively cynical cultural milieu.

KEYWORDS

Agnès Varda; American underground cinema; Andy Warhol; Euro-American cinema; Michael Baxandall

In her first four fiction feature films – *La Pointe Courte* (1955), *Cléo de 5 à 7/Cleo from 5 to 7* (1962), *Le Bonheur/Happiness* (1965) and *Les Créatures/The Creatures* (1966) – Agnès Varda developed what Richard Neupert has referred to as an aesthetic of 'elegant realism' (2007, 56).¹ The aesthetic markers of Varda's technique included, according to Neupert, 'an elegantly restless camera, deliberate character gesture and motion, crisp use of shadow, long shot durations [...] and evocative depth of field' (60–62). This coherent set of practices was elaborated throughout Varda's early work, with each film giving her an opportunity to explore new parameters and formal designs, always within the same general paradigm. Neupert notes that Varda's 'highly modern narrative structures' and 'formal rigor', especially in *La Pointe Courte*, anticipated many of the 'intellectual, formal narrative strategies of [Alain] Resnais', among others (61, 300).

Between *Les Créatures* and Varda's fifth feature film, *Lions Love* (1969), however, a significant event occurred in the filmmaker's career: she and Jacques Demy, her husband and fellow filmmaker, moved from Paris to Los Angeles, prompted by Demy's three-picture deal with



Figure 1. Viva, James Rado and Gerome Ragni in *Lions Love* (© Max Raab/Agnès Varda, courtesy of *Iris: The Online Magazine of The Getty*).

Columbia. Not coincidentally, *Lions Love* represents a substantial departure from Varda's previously established style. The film features American independent filmmaker Shirley Clarke, Andy Warhol superstar Viva, and *Hair* authors and stars James Rado and Gerome Ragni (all performing as versions of themselves; see Figure 1). *Lions Love's* narrative consists of Clarke attempting to get a film produced, while Viva, Rado and Ragni – Clarke's potential stars – lounge and dawdle in a sun-dappled Los Angeles home, living out a campy *ménage-à-trois*. The film employs a wide range of formal strategies including Warholian static long takes of conversations, re-photographed television footage, narrated documentary segments about Old Hollywood, surreal interludes, fourth-wall breaking interviews, and filmed performances of Michael McClure's (1967) comic play *The Beard*. As Varda explains in her description of the film:

It's a collage of what happened to me in Hollywood in 1968. I was in Hollywood when McClure's play opened. I was there when Kennedy's assassination happened. I watched it all on TV. There I met Viva. And the only movies I saw in Hollywood I liked were Andy's movies. (Kagan 1982, 129)

The sprawling, motley, collage-like nature of *Lions Love* is a stark contrast to the unified, controlled aesthetic of *La Pointe Courte* and *Le Bonheur*. Contrary to the 'elegant' films preceding it, *Lions Love's* breezy heterogeneity has led some critics to call it 'deliberately frivolous' (Harvey 2006, 68), with Vincent Canby noting that Varda captures 'the banal beauty of Los Angeles [...] without seeming to try very hard' (1969, 37). Other critics have found the film unsuccessful in this regard, referring to it as 'a mélange of incompatibilities' (JDuc [n.d.]) and a film in which Varda's style 'seems more derivative than her own' (Kent 1969, 57). As Matt Bailey observes:

Lions Love has much more in common with the late 1960s and early 1970s histrionic melodramas of George and Mike Kuchar, Curt McDowell, and Paul Morrissey, the Ronald Tavel-scripted films of Andy Warhol, or possibly John Waters than it does with anything that came from the French New Wave. (Bailey 2004)²

Bailey's comments suggest what might be an explanation for the drastic disparity between *Lions Love* and Varda's previous work: the move from a European cultural context to an American one, rooted in 'underground' filmmaking and the American avant-garde.

In *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*, art historian Michael Baxandall (1985) notes that every artist forms a loose and reciprocal relationship with his or her cultural marketplace – the set of specific institutional frameworks and consumption practices which artists gravitate toward and which, in turn, facilitate artists' development (47). As Baxandall elaborates, each cultural marketplace operates according to a system of 'barter, barter primarily of mental goods', in which artists (producers) interact with art appreciators, patrons and tastemakers (consumers) (48). Baxandall refers to this bartering system as *troc* and notes that it is governed by the taste-based elements of particular sub-markets (48, 56). Filmmakers, like other artists, are active participants in cultural marketplaces, sub-markets and *troc*, including Varda. In the USA, Varda's *troc* was modified as she shifted from the sub-market of European art cinema to the sub-market of underground American independent cinema. New ideas and aesthetic values surrounded Varda, and her 'collage' film reflects those elements, processed through her individual artistic filter. *Lions Love* demonstrates a very clear instance of an artist recalibrating in light of a transformed cultural marketplace.

In the remainder of this article, I will focus on three trends/concerns which characterized Varda's new cultural marketplace and which found expression in her film: self-reflexivity, Pirandellian performance and the nature of stardom/celebrity. Of course, this set of trends is not exhaustive; *Lions Love's* cluster of cultural concerns includes a number of other sexual, political and social currents. The three trends I have chosen to focus on, however, are all directly related to the reasons why *Lions Love* seems more chaotic than controlled. Each element contributes to a somewhat convoluted aesthetic of multiplicity by blurring boundaries, cross-pollinating sensibilities and adulterating any sense of unity. All three concepts are also closely imbricated and interwoven with one another in the late 1960s American underground taste culture and Varda's film, functioning interactively.

The best place to look for the *troc* elements activated in *Lions Love* is in the film's overt intertexts: American underground filmmaking (especially Warhol's work) and American experimental theatre (especially McClure's *The Beard*). Examining Varda's connections to these intertexts and their presence in *Lions Love* is a crucial first step in understanding how Varda positioned her film within its American cultural marketplace circa 1969. The web of such influences and inspirations is thickly spun in Varda's film. However, as Baxandall warns, it is important not to be deterministic in terms of influence when contextualizing an artwork; rather, it is necessary to illuminate how an artist *uses* available cultural resources for her own purposes, according to a work's specific logic (1985, 59). Throughout my analysis, therefore, I will concentrate not only on the sources *Lions Love* draws from and the currents it taps, but how Varda activates such intertexts and ideas in unique ways, differentiating her work from that of her peers.

Self-reflexivity

Unlike Varda's previous films, *Lions Love* constantly slips and slides between multiple diegetic levels. The film is definitively 'meta', recurrently interested in revealing and exploring the nature of its own construction and the intervening presence of the filmmaker. Vincent Canby claims that the film 'tries to suggest multiple levels of reality by posing as a movie within a

movie' (1969, 37), but this observation, while accurately pointing out the film's self-reflexivity, is somewhat simplistic. The film's self-reflexivity is not just vertical (nested layers with one level revealing the constructedness of another and containing it), but also horizontal (parallel layers and a variety of simultaneous levels which reveal one another's constructedness through disjunctive juxtaposition). *Lions Love* is about a filmmaker (Shirley Clarke) attempting to get a film produced on the fringes of Hollywood (in a film also produced in Los Angeles, on the fringes of Hollywood). It is also about Varda (the film's director) directing Shirley Clarke (also a director) to play the role of a director – a role which Varda assumes herself at one point in *Lions Love*, the film she is directing. The film features a trio of established underground stars trying to become bigger stars by playing versions of themselves who are also trying to become stars (and eventually talking directly to the camera, faux-documentary style, about the experience of playing themselves in *Lions Love*, performing the role of a performer performing the role of himself or herself).

Films containing a similarly complicated maelstrom of swirling diegeses and layered 'reality', specifically in relation to the act of filmmaking, thrived in mid- to late-1960s cinema both in the sub-market of international art films and, even more so, in the sub-market of American underground films, resulting in a robust cycle of films identified and explored by scholars such as William C. Siska (1979) and Alexander Horwath (2004). *Lions Love* certainly belongs to this tradition, which includes European films like *8½* (Federico Fellini, 1963), *Le Mépris/Contempt* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963), *Kärlek 65/Love '65* (Bo Widerberg, 1965), *Jag är nyfiken – en film i gult/I Am Curious (Yellow)* (Vilgot Sjöman, 1967) and *Jag är nyfiken – en film i blått/I Am Curious (Blue)* (Sjöman, 1968), as well as a number of independent American films, such as *David Holzman's Diary* (Jim McBride, 1967), *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One* (William Greaves, 1968), *Coming Apart* (Milton Moses Ginsberg, 1969), *Medium Cool* (Haskell Wexler, 1969), *Alex in Wonderland* (Paul Mazursky, 1970) and *Maidstone* (Norman Mailer, 1970). Though critics like Norman Kagan have pointed to Godard as the most proximate self-reflexive model for *Lions Love*'s meta-antics (1982, 142), it is in the American underground context that the most salient connections can be made.

One set of connections involves Norman Mailer, Rip Torn and *The Beard* (the last of which will be explored in more depth later in this article). Rip Torn, an actor and director, starred in two of the meta-cinematic works listed above: Ginsberg's *Coming Apart* and Mailer's *Maidstone*, both completed after, but in a similar vein to, *Lions Love*. Rip Torn also directed the Obie Award-winning production of *The Beard*, filmed and excerpted in *Lions Love*'s tone-setting opening scene (see Comenas 2011, 1). Additionally, Mailer wrote the glowing introduction to the published version of *The Beard*. While this constellation of individuals and films does not necessarily suggest a determinate influence or causal link, it does indicate a concrete intertextual overlap between the participants and flag-bearers of the self-reflexive trend in American underground cinema and American experimental theatre and the creators of *Lions Love*. Torn's proximity to the production and several related creative contexts represents the sort of elbow-rubbing mutual awareness and interaction that contributes to the formulation of norms and values in cultural marketplaces.

Lions Love shares a stronger personnel connection and self-reflexive similarity with another American underground film, the aforementioned *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm*. Actor and prolific documentary filmmaker William Greaves's complex experiment in psychodrama, documentary filmmaking and strategically instigated film crew mutiny is perhaps the only film of the era that matches *Lions Love* in terms of the blurring of the line between diegesis

and reality. The film is composed of a variety of footage, all shot concurrently, including various actors testing for roles in a fictional film by rehearsing a scene in Central Park (directed by Greaves); a film crew documenting the film crew that is filming the actors and Greaves's actions on set; and a third crew documenting everything else at a further remove and recording peripheral occurrences.

On set, Greaves plays the part of an irrational, disrespectful, inept, sexist filmmaker, pushing his actors and various crews to the point of total frustration. The crews begin meeting to discuss their grievances regarding Greaves and film their surreptitious gatherings. While plotting to take over the production from Greaves, they realize that he has been manipulating them into this position all along. They question his intentions and wonder who the 'real' Greaves is. They even speak to the camera and note that, for a viewer, it would be unclear whether their meetings are real or scripted, whether they are also merely performing. *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* thus investigates what directing a film entails – the psychological manipulation, the performative exertion of control – as well as what performance is, where it comes from and when it stops and starts, concerns which can all be found in *Lions Love*.

More than this, however, there are connections between the two films in relation to their personnel, as they share a cinematographer. Before working on *Lions Love*, cinematographer Stevan Larner had experience as a documentary cameraman, working on a couple of television films based on American youth counterculture, including *The Teenage Revolution* (Kent MacKenzie, 1965) and *San Francisco Summer 1967* (Donald Shebib, 1967). This last film was made for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation during the time when Greaves worked at the National Film Board of Canada, which might explain how the two connected for *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm*. It is then reasonable to speculate that Larner was hired for *Lions Love* based on his work shooting *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm*. However, regardless of whether Varda had seen the film or not (it was not widely available at the time *Lions Love* was produced, but was shot a year earlier), there are obvious affinities between Greaves's work and Varda's project that make Larner an ideal choice. Indeed, for *Lions Love* Larner was probably hired for his experience shooting with available light (much of *Lions Love* is shot in this manner), his documentary experience (the film contains many documentary elements) and his connection to the counterculture in which *Lions Love* is obviously invested. What is certain is that in choosing Larner as her cinematographer, Varda was in close creative contact with an individual who had played a crucial role in the production of *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm*, collaborating with a prominent developer of the self-reflexive trend within the American underground cultural marketplace.

In spite of their shared themes and self-reflexive commitments, however, *Lions Love* bears little specific resemblance to *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm*. Indeed, the way *Lions Love* uses its self-reflexivity is different from *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* in its focus and inflection. Whereas *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* is concerned with tensions between director and crew, with the actual director as the ostensible star of the film, *Lions Love* is much more concerned with its actors as stars, with the actual director (Varda) playing a much smaller role. Varda only steps into the film when interacting with the actors, specifically with Clarke, the actor (who is playing the director). *Lions Love*'s most 'meta' scene involves Clarke's character attempting to commit suicide by overdosing on pills. In the middle of the scene, Clarke, the actress, refuses to continue performing because of the melodramatic nature of the scene. She breaks the fourth wall and tells Varda (who is behind the camera) that she cannot do it. After this brief outburst, Varda switches places with Clarke, even exchanging shirts with her, before

stepping in front of the camera and performing the scene herself, as Clarke's character. The scene invites a number of thoughts and questions: Is the role of 'director' merely one of many *performed* roles on a set? What is the level of autobiography in the film? Is this Clarke's genuine reaction or a scripted event? Even though the scene involves two directors, in the end it remains more about acting and performing than directing and filmmaking, which is perhaps entirely normal given the slightly different emphasis of Varda's film.

Pirandellian performance

In concert with this self-reflexivity, *Lions Love* demonstrates a deep interest in performance and its tenuous relationship to reality. The presence of Shirley Clarke, as well as Viva (and, by proxy, Warhol), points to this second major *troc* element: the Pirandellian blurring of performer and performance, actor and role. This concept is named after Italian novelist and playwright Luigi Pirandello, famous for crafting plays in which the illusion of performance is deliberately ruptured, unraveling the layers of fictive representation and crafted personality inherent in all social behavior, including theatrical interaction. Writing of the aforementioned failed suicide scene, Kagan claims that Varda takes 'self-consciousness itself to its final Pirandellian limits', invoking this cultural current and placing *Lions Love* firmly within it (1982, 143). This sort of performative slippage is a primary concern in the films of Clarke and Warhol, films which exist as overt intertexts and models in the cultural marketplace for Varda's film.

'Pirandellian', in this case, is more a shorthand term for recursive self-consciousness – especially the slippage between performer and role – than a carefully parsed or specific designation.³ Both Clarke and Warhol were closely linked to the American avant-garde theatre during the 60s and were well aware of its tendency toward what was understood to be 'Pirandellian'. Clarke's *The Connection* (1961), a self-reflexive film about a documentarian attempting to make a film about jazz-playing heroin addicts in New York City, for example, was based on the Jack Gelber play of the same name, which gained notoriety in 1959 through performances by New York's Living Theater. Critic and filmmaker Jonas Mekas made note of what he called the film's 'Pirandelloisms', acknowledging its theatrical debt and its ability to confuse reality and representation by making it unclear whether or not performers were actual heroin addicts or just actors ([1962] 2000, 96). Likewise, Clarke's *The Cool World* (1964) was also based on material that previously succeeded as a play (Robert Rossen's 1960 adaptation of Warren Miller's 1959 novel). Detailing the drama of inner city African-American gang culture, the film was produced by Frederick Wiseman, who saw to it that the like-minded Clarke brought an ambiguous pseudo-documentary feel to the film, a tone which would make fiction and reality harder to parse. Clarke demonstrated a desire in both films to interrogate the assumptions of factuality in documentary representation (specifically that of American 'direct cinema') by complicating and undermining the status of performance and self-representation, *à la* Pirandello. *Portrait of Jason* (1967), the last film Clarke completed as a director before appearing in *Lions Love*, points to Warhol. The film is a feature-length interview with a homosexual black man in which Clarke aggressively interrogates him (similar to a Warhol 'screen test', many of which Clarke had no doubt seen). The film is a difficult and at times brutal deconstruction of personality and persona. It is also Clarke's most powerful investigation of performance.

Warhol's influence on *Portrait of Jason* is crucial and his links to a particularly Pirandellian avant-garde theatre tradition are just as tight as Clarke's. Many of Warhol's performers and

collaborators in his hundreds of Factory films were participants in a number of theatrical collectives: the Living Theater, Judson Poet's Theater, Judson Dance Theater and the Theatre/Playhouse of the Ridiculous. The last of these was the brainchild of Warhol's frequent collaborator, Ronald Tavel, and fused absurdist and hyper-Pirandellian sensibilities.⁴ In this vein, Warhol's observational, long-take method of filmmaking was explicitly designed to break down performance and reality, to unravel the theatrical and the put-on. As Warhol explains:

With film you just turn on the camera and photograph something. I leave the camera running until it runs out of film because that way I can catch people being themselves. It's better to act naturally than to set up a scene and act like someone else. You get a better picture out of people being themselves instead of trying to act like they're themselves. (In Mekas 1989, 33–34)

This philosophy was on display in what J. J. Murphy calls Warhol's 'sexploitation' films, which played in Los Angeles in 1968 – the works Varda would have seen and had in mind when creating her 'collage' of that year in her life (Murphy 2012, 191–228). Warhol's *I, A Man* (1967), *Bike Boy* (1967–1968), *Lonesome Cowboys* (1968) and *Nude Restaurant* (1967) (the latter three starring Viva) all played LA's Cinematheque 16 in 1968.⁵ As *Los Angeles Times* critic Kevin Thomas observed of the films' unpredictable balance of fictive scripting and 'real', generally improvised, digressions, Warhol 'makes you wonder what – if anything at all – is going to happen next' (Thomas 1968a, 16). Varda would take the seemingly off-the-cuff improvisational methodology of those films, complete with long takes, and apply it to *Lions Love* in the hope of exploring the slippage between performance and performer, fiction and actuality.

Varda herself claims that, in *Lions Love*, Viva, Rado, Ragni and Clarke are 'playing themselves', in that their characters exhibit aspects of their actual personalities and have the same goals (becoming bigger stars, making a movie). Varda even encouraged the performers to bring their actual belongings to the sets in the films, imbuing it with diegesis-blurring, verisimilar traces (see Thomas 1969). The 110-minute film's sketchy 28-page script indicates the degree of looseness and intentional room for improvisation built into the project, with the first page of the script explicitly stating: 'This film will be more improvised than written (on the basis of the structured outline given to the actors)' (Varda 1969). Indeed, Varda claims to have cast the film with improvisational skill in mind (Viennale 2006). She elaborates on her scripting process, which gave the performers great leeway to insert their 'actual' personalities, noting: 'So they would freak out, improvise, say stupidities. We would tape record it. We would go in the corner, listen, take the best and type it. I didn't give them the script to read to learn, just for them to see once before shooting' (Thomas 1969, 63).

What separates Varda's work from that of her contemporaries, however, is the tone of her interrogation of performance. Kevin Thomas writes: 'What Warhol wants is for people to strip their souls (and often their clothes, too) for his camera, so that he may in turn project his unique, darkly apocalyptic vision of mankind', systematically moving 'beyond camp to tragedy' in his dismantling of performance (1968b, G11). Whereas Clarke's *Portrait of Jason* and many of Warhol's films put forth a cynical, frequently unsettling perspective regarding the falseness and fragility of personality and personae, couched in an aesthetically confrontational and deliberately abrasive style, Varda treats the issue with considerable levity, seeming to view it as a pleasurable playground of identity and artifice. This is one distinction a handful of critics have acknowledged. As Vincent Canby wrote of the film: 'Varda has taken Viva, Warhol's most valuable found object, and lit and framed her in a way that brings out the gentle pre-Raphaelite beauty suggested but never realized in [Warhol's films]' (1969, 37). Dennis Harvey has echoed Canby's distinction between Warhol and Varda, stating that

while 'Varda duly tips her hat to Warhol [...] her filmmaking is far more playful, alive with visual, editorial, and musical jokes' (2006, 68). The unabashed prettiness, gentle dabbling and lighthearted rambling of *Lions Love* differentiate it from its peers, allowing the 'real' selves of Viva, Rado, Ragni and Clarke to pierce through their performances in the same way an elementary school play might dissolve into confused giggling and half-remembered dialogue, not through confrontation and conflict but through a sort of silliness and rambunctiousness.

Stardom and celebrity

While Varda's acting aesthetic in *Lions Love* certainly separates her from Warhol in significant ways, the connections between them are deeper than their shared interest in Pirandellian performance. Varda and Warhol also share a profound concern with stardom and celebrity of all sorts, a concern that attracted both of them to Michael McClure's *The Beard*, perhaps the most significant intertext shared by *Lions Love* and Warhol's films. Varda claims that *Lions Love* 'is mainly a film about stars [...] stars to be, political stars, how to be a star, stars of old Hollywood' (in Brockway 1969). The film's concentration on three established stars within Varda's cultural marketplace – Viva, Rado and Ragni – as well as the Kennedys (tragic television icons, viewed by the characters on the news), Andy Warhol (another assassination victim, though a survivor, glimpsed in re-photographed news reports) and the stars of the American studio system (whose names are visible in a street sign montage, whose fans are shown combing through memorabilia shops and whose studios are glimpsed) verify Varda's claim. As is evident in the numerous types of stardom/celebrity presented in *Lions Love*, the film's position on the matter is complex and idiosyncratic.

Warhol had been creatively mining the concept of stardom through a number of films (as well as his pop art paintings and screen prints featuring Marilyn Monroe, Elizabeth Taylor, Elvis Presley and the Kennedys, among others) in the years preceding *Lions Love*. In addition to his 'everyone will have 15 minutes of fame' dictum, Warhol developed the idea of the 'superstar', a regular person possessing enough on-screen magnetism to attract viewers even when seemingly doing nothing. Earning this designation were Warhol regulars like Edie Sedgwick, Gerard Malanga, Mario Montez, Taylor Mead and, of course, Viva. These superstars were exploited by Warhol, sometimes in morally questionable, personally damaging ways, as he made films often about another group of stars: classical Hollywood icons.⁶ As David James writes of the Warhol star system and its relation to Hollywood's star system: 'The disparity between fantasy and reality, set in motion in the early appropriations of Hollywood iconography [in Warhol's films], was bridged as stardom became a habitation rather than a pretense, an actuality rather than an artifice' (1989, 82). Warhol's 'actual' stars, though, spent plenty of time inhabiting and alluding to the old-fashioned 'artificial' stars, often those with tragic, gossip-filled private lives. Montez played Hedy Lamar in *Hedy* (1966), Jean Harlow in *Harlot* (1964) and Lana Turner in *More Milk*, *Yvette* (1965). Sedgwick portrayed Lupe Velez in *Lupe* (1965) and Paul Swan alluded to his own faded stardom in *Paul Swan* (1965). Warhol's handling of these star images was often ironic and derisively curious, portraying the figures as alternately tragic and absurd.

In 1969, shortly before production on *Lions Love* began, Warhol even attempted to make a feature film adaptation of John Hallowell's celebrity gossip-based, non-fiction book *The Truth Game* for Columbia Pictures, during which time he met Varda and Demy (see Haber 1969; Pile 2002). Both parties were also acquainted with another star, one of the 'rock' variety:

Jim Morrison. A close friend of Varda and the man originally intended to play the part James Rado played in *Lions Love* (instead, he only makes a cameo appearance), Morrison was also supposed to play the lead in Warhol's *I, A Man*, before dropping out and recommending his friend Tom Baker instead (see Varda 1969; Watson 2003, 338–339). Amazingly, Morrison was also originally tapped to play the role of Billy the Kid (the only other role being Jean Harlow, a Warhol favorite) in McClure's *The Beard*; McClure even contemplated filming a version of his play starring Morrison, though it never came to pass (see Comenas 2011, 2–3). Warhol, on the other hand, *did* make a film of *The Beard*, a play he adored when he saw it in late 1965 and reportedly wished all of his films to resemble (see Comenas 2011, 2). Reva Wolf (1997, 46–47) has thoroughly documented Warhol's connection to *The Beard*, a sexually provocative, campy, humorous and stylized farce with two false-bearded celebrities (the Kid and Harlow) as its sole interlocutors. Warhol regulars (and then lovers) Gerard Malanga and Mary Woronov played the two roles in Warhol's adaptation, filmed in 1966 without McClure's permission. When McClure saw the film, he was reportedly indignant and removed it from circulation.

Varda's relationship to *The Beard* was considerably more amiable. As Norman Kagan writes, Varda was impressed by the play 'because it was performed in Hollywood, the movie capital where the real Harlow lived, worked, and died. It inspired her to make her American film about film stars, living and dead, the great actors past whose presence is still felt, and the very different new generation' (1982, 129). The film even seems to derive its title from the play's promotional materials, including posters which feature the words 'love', 'lion' and 'lioness', all in capital letters across the top (Figure 2). *The Beard* recurs in *Lions Love* multiple times: during its opening scene, in which the main characters attend a performance of the play; during the scene immediately following the opening in which Viva, Rado and Ragni re-enact parts of it while stoned; and a much later scene in which a bit of the play is re-enacted in an empty swimming pool for an audience of children. Varda explains the reason she chose to open the film with McClure's play, linking it to her interests in self-reflexivity and Pirandellian performance:

The excerpt from *The Beard* at the outset of the picture is like an operatic overture or a theatrical prologue. We are aware that we are on stage, among actors performing, perspiring, overacting (by film standards) and fighting it out to be famous. Then, gradually, the film moves on to an even larger stage, where everyone is also performing. Actors are mere exaggerations of ourselves.⁷

Varda's use of *The Beard* and its ability to raise the questions of stardom and celebrity promotes self-awareness in the same way Warhol's films might, but, once again, Varda's tone is quite different.

Varda presents her 'new generation' of superstars not as playthings to be exploited, but rather as inspiring and admirable individuals, full of charisma, inventiveness and life. She refrains from mocking old Hollywood stars, instead offering a sincere lament for a lost era and genuine respect. Instead of highlighting the deaths of politicians and public figures for shock value, she uses them to emphasize the genuine pain felt by those connected to them through television and the media. Her perspective on stardom/celebrity is almost utopian in its positivity, especially when compared to Warhol's cynicism. It is understandable, then, how McClure might find more to appreciate in Varda's use of his play than Warhol's, and why he granted her permission to use portions of the play in her film. This is not to say that *Lions Love* lacks qualms regarding the nature of celebrity; the emotional authority of the television set and the sometimes catty disputes between the film's competing stars suggest the potential dangers of stardom. However, like her take on Pirandellian performance, Varda's exploration



Figure 2. Poster for *The Beard* (ginsbergblog.blogspot.co.uk/).

of stardom/celebrity is decidedly more playful, innocent and upbeat than Warhol's, while still demonstrating a common interest.

The three *troc* elements addressed in this article clarify, to some extent, what ideas and currents were active in Varda's American cultural marketplace. My examination provides a better understanding of how those ideas and currents guided Varda's creative drive toward certain institutional norms, while also reciprocally providing an outlet for her existing interests, inspired by her Los Angeles experience. Self-reflexivity, Pirandellian performance and the nature of stardom/celebrity are interwoven in *Lions Love*, forming a tapestry of concerns which activates a number of connected cultural resources from *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* to the films of Shirley Clarke and Andy Warhol to avant-garde American theatre. Varda did not merely mimic these intertexts and influences, however; she brought them to bear on her specific project and spun them into a unique work, one which gleefully acknowledges its own construction, treats performance as a slippery playground of the real and the fictive, and presents a new type of stardom/celebrity viewed as both progressively utopian and potentially problematic.

Of course, more work needs to be done to completely understand the *troc* value and intellectual marketplace for all of the other components of Varda's freewheeling collage film. The countercultural concepts in and the context surrounding *Hair*, for example, would undoubtedly illuminate what marketplace values Varda might have been invoking and interacting with by casting Rado and Ragni. More thorough research into how *Lions Love* was distributed and what the response was in each exhibition situation might also provide insight into how much of the film's look and feel was the result of gearing it toward a particular marketplace, and why that positioning might have succeeded or failed. Additionally, investigating how Varda's concerns in *Lions Love* might have been expressed, transformed or omitted in her subsequent works would clarify the lasting impact Varda's experience in American underground cinema's cultural marketplace might have made on her aesthetic sensibility.

Notes

1. It should be noted that Varda's short films complicate this discussion, though they are outside the purview of this paper.
2. Indeed, Varda had confirmed that she had met and was familiar with many members of the American underground and avant-garde filmmaking scenes, including Warhol, Michael Snow, Robert Breer, Ed Emshwiller and Stan Brakhage (Béar 2009).
3. As with the commonly used – if problematic – descriptors 'Brechtian', 'Kafkaesque' and 'Chekhovian', 'Pirandellian' seems to have been treated by critics and some practitioners in this milieu as a catchall term for a general aesthetic approach, centered on the broad cultural uptake of a particular author.
4. For more information on Warhol's connection to avant-garde theatre, see Watson (2003).
5. For reviews of these screenings, see Thomas (1968a, 1968b, 1969c, 1969d).
6. Many of Warhol's films involve placing his performers in emotionally and psychologically compromising situations. In *Screen Test #2*, for instance, screenwriter Ronald Tavel interviews Mario Montez, throwing barbs about Montez's appearance, sexuality and religion. Montez is visibly shaken, embarrassed and shamed by Tavel's attacks, while Warhol's camera observes remorselessly.
7. Agnès Varda, untitled, unpublished interview, Ciné-Tamaris Archives, 4.

Notes on contributor

J. Brandon Colvin is a PhD candidate in Film at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His research interests include performance styles, micro- and low-budget American cinema, and European art cinema. His work has been published in *Film History*. He is also an independent filmmaker, having written and directed two feature films, *Frames* (2012) and *Sabbatical* (2014).

Filmography

8½, 1963, Federico Fellini, Italy.
Alex in Wonderland, 1970, Paul Mazursky, USA.
Beard, The, 1966, Andy Warhol, USA.
Bike Boy, 1967–1968, Andy Warhol, USA.
Bonheur, Le, 1965, Agnès Varda, France.
Cléo de 5 à 7, 1962, Agnès Varda, France.
Coming Apart, 1969, Milton Moses Ginsberg, USA.
Connection, The, 1961, Shirley Clarke, USA.
Cool World, The, 1964, Shirley Clarke, USA.

Créatures, Les, 1966, Agnès Varda, France.
David Holzman's Diary, 1967, Jim McBride, USA.
I, A Man, 1967, Andy Warhol, USA.
Harlot, 1964, Andy Warhol, USA.
Hedy, 1966, Andy Warhol, USA.
Jag är nyfiken – en film i blått, 1968, Vilgot Sjöman, Sweden.
Jag är nyfiken – en film i gult, 1967, Vilgot Sjöman, Sweden.
Kärlek 65, 1965, Bo Widerberg, Sweden.
Pointe Courte, La, 1955, Agnès Varda, France.
Lions Love, 1969, Agnès Varda, USA.
Lonesome Cowboys, 1968, Andy Warhol, USA.
Lupe, 1965, Andy Warhol, USA.
Maidstone, 1970, Norman Mailer, USA.
Medium Cool, 1969, Haskell Wexler, USA.
Mépris, Le, 1963, Jean-Luc Godard, France.
More Milk, Yvette, 1965, Andy Warhol, USA.
Nude Restaurant, 1967, Andy Warhol, USA.
Paul Swan, 1965, Andy Warhol, USA.
Portrait of Jason, 1967, Shirley Clarke, USA.
San Francisco Summer 1967, 1967, Donald Shebib, USA
Screen Test #2, 1965, Andy Warhol, USA.
Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One, 1968, William Greaves, USA.
Teenage Revolution, The, 1965, Kent MacKenzie, USA.

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