

# 1968: A Global Perspective

<http://www.1968conf.org>

Claire Jones <clairejones@mail.utexas.edu>  
The University of Texas at Austin

## **From Besançon to the Bay: Marker, Varda, and the French Documentary in '68**

French filmmakers Agnès Varda and Chris Marker completed documentaries in 1968 which captured the optimism of their revolutionary subjects - the Black Panthers and striking factory workers - as well as the obstacles they faced. The films also exhibit the filmmakers' own enthusiasm for their respective projects, yet we know from their reception history that they also met with obstacles (censorship, criticism of production methods). Varda, temporarily in California with her husband, filmmaker Jacques Demy, filmed demonstrations in Oakland for the release of Huey Newton in "Black Panthers." Marker documented a strike at a textile plant in Besançon, France in "A Bientôt, j'espère."

Both films track their subjects' developing power in face of authority figures (police, plant management), and employ production and editorial techniques which were ultimately too radical for their distributors and critics. French television did not air Varda's film as planned and some questioned Marker's method of collective filmmaking. Was the French audience of 1968 ready for these depictions and processes? Varda and Marker were not newcomers to political cinema; Varda's "Salut les Cubains" (1963) captures early post-revolution Cuban life while Marker's "Le Joli mai" (1962) measures the French's engagement with political issues following the Algerian War. They also formed a collective with other filmmakers for "Loin du Vietnam" (1967), a reaction to U.S. involvement there. In my analysis, I will explain what is so provocative about "Black Panthers" and "A Bientôt, j'espère" for their time and assess the actual environment for French documentarians interested in filming political movements.