



Wanda and Beyond: The World of Barbara Loden

Vagabond

Vagabond Sans toit ni loi

Directed by: Agnès Varda

©: Agnès Varda, Ciné-Tamaris, Films A2

Production Companies: Ciné-Tamaris, Films A2

With the participation of:

Ministère Français de la Culture,

Film 4 International (London), C.M.C.C. (Vitrolles)

Presented by: Ciné-Tamaris

Production Managers: Michèle Cretel,

Oury Milshtein

Administration: Michèle Cretel

Production Assistant: Christian Lambert

Assistant Directors: Jacques Royer,

Jacques Deschamps

Assistant to the Director: Christian Lambert

Script Supervisor: Chantal Desanges

Written by: Agnès Varda

Director of Photography: Patrick Blossier

Lighting: Dominique Testud, Michel Le Borgne

Grip: Bernard Largemains

Editors: Agnès Varda, Patricia Mazuy

Assistant Editors: Arnaud Boland, Catherine Tissier,

Maurice Dubroca, Caroline Gindre

Set Decorators: Jean Bauer, Anne Violet

Make-up: Brigitte Parquet

Music: Joanna Bruzdowicz

Sound Recordist: Jean-Paul Mugel

Sound Mixer: Jean-François Auger

Sound Effects: Gilbert Nottin

Cast:

Sandrine Bonnaire (*Mona Bergeron*, 'sans toit ni loi')

Macha Méril (*Madame Landier*)

Stéphane Freiss (*Jean-Pierre*)

Yolande Moreau (*Yolande*)

Patrick Lepczynski (*David*)

Yahiaoui Assouna (*Assoun*)

Joël Fosse (*Paulo*)

Marthe Jarnias (*Aunt Lydie*)

Laurence Cortadellas (*Eliane*)

Setti Ramdane (*Moroccan*)

Francis Baichère (*policeman*)

Jean-Louis Perletti (*another policeman*)

Urbain Causse, Christophe Alcazar (*peasants*)

Dominique Durand (*1st motorcyclist*)

Patrick Schmit (*truck driver*)

Daniel Bos (*demolition man*)

Katy Champaud (*young girl with pump*)

Raymond Rouille (*old man with matches*)

Henri Fridiani (*man digging ditches*)

Patrick Sokol (*young man with sandwich*)

Pierre Imbert (*garage owner*)

Richard Imbert (*garage owner's son*)

Gabriel Mariani (*Uncle Aimé Bionnet*)

Sylvain, Sabine (*shepherds*)

Michèle Doumèche (*prostitute*)

Pierrette Soler (*woman talking to her husband*)

Pierre Emonnot (*annoyed manager*)

Emmanuel Protopopoff (*blood donor*)

Vincent Sanchez (*male nurse*)

Garibaldi Fernandez (*bricklayer*)

Michel Constantial (*cash desk manager*)

Alain Roussel (*violent tree-man*)

Aimé Chisci (*farmhouse manager*)

Marguerite Chisci (*farmhouse manager's wife*)

Geneviève Bonfils (*suspicious traveller*)

Christian Chessa (*pimp vagrant*)

Setina Arhab (*vagrant girl*)

Jacques Berthier (*well-dressed man*)

Olivier Jongerlinck (*photo-booth racketeer*)

Rémi Leboucq (*photo-booth customer*)

Jean Dambrin (*acid sniffer*)

Bébert Samcir (*harmonica player*)

Most animals do not walk on their hind legs; humans are anomalous, unwieldy columns. Maybe because of this, we experience an existential loss of footing when we fall over. What made us so sure of our standing? Walking is a kind of falling too. Launching forward with the trust that our feet will find us, losing and gaining ground with each step, we relocate our place in the world – thinking on our feet.

The walker stalks through histories of philosophy, literature and visual culture. The walker's gait signals his (for usually it is his, not her) attitude to contemporary life. Whether walking on a pilgrim trail or wandering as a mystic, whether a *flâneur* leading a tortoise through Paris or a Romantic poet striding alone through the Lake District, whether carrying a campaign banner or photographing the street, the walker shapes and is shaped by the surrounding environment.

Films about walking move between several modalities: the physical walk, what it can symbolise politically, and ambulatory manners in which walking can be filmed. In their sequential nature, walks and films create narratives – as the cultural theorist Giuliana Bruno says, they transport us between scenes as voyeurs and voyagers. History comprises stories, Godard reminds us. But what about histories that go untold, walks that transgress or are curtailed, and walkers who are not male, white, heterosexual, able-bodied, affluent or on home turf? To take to the streets for fun is quite different to needing them to live in. While people might speculate about the birth, education or finances of a 'man about town', the term 'streetwalking' signals the more immediate association between a woman's presence in public and her sexual debasement.

Each in its own way, the films *Wanda* (Barbara Loden, 1970), *Vagabond* (Agnès Varda, 1985), *Blessed* (Takashi Toshiko, 2001) and *News from Home* (Chantal Akerman, 1976) are about female pedestrians. They present women's experiences walking and occupying public space as ambivalent modulations of vulnerability and liberation, necessity and personal expression. Despite their geographic and historical spread, the films centralise walking (and perambulatory methods of filming and editing) as a physical and metaphorical approach to place. Their protagonists and makers wander in defiance of social convention.

Marginalised by gender and economic status, the eponymous wanderer in actress Barbara Loden's only feature film as director, *Wanda*, is one of the most memorable women walkers in cinema. Loden wrote and acted in *Wanda*, drawing on autobiographical elements and a newspaper story of a mother who thanked a judge for the jail sentence that relieved her from her marital and maternal duties. *Wanda* is literally on the side of the road, hitchhiking around a coal-mining region of Pennsylvania. Picked up (in both senses) by a series of unsuitable men, she occupies roadsides, rest-stops, diners and motels, assisting in a robbery and narrowly escaping rape. *Wanda* debunks the glamour of outlaw road movies, demonstrating women's vulnerability on the open road.

Unlike the expressive, well-lit facial close-ups afforded us by Hollywood, Loden's performance clears for *Wanda* a subversive space of indeterminacy –

inhabitants of the village of Bellegarde, Boulbon, St Etienne-Du-Grès, Générac, Jonquières-St Vincent, Uchaud, Moncalm, Tresques people of Mas Laval, Mas Tamerlet, André-La-Côte France-UK 1985
107 mins
Digital

Read more in Elena Gorfinkel's new BFI Film Classic on *Wanda*, available at the BFI Shop and online



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she refuses to wear her heart on her sleeve, to show her feelings on her face, and instead oscillates between frustration, amusement, naivety and world-weariness. Wanda makes us wonder: this is politically refreshing, and demonstrates Loden's commitment to witnessing the complexity of real life.

Ambivalent performances and a preponderance of non-professional actors and true stories also feature in *Vagabond*, Agnès Varda's semi-fictional drama based on interviews with French vagrants. *Vagabond*'s French title, *Sans toit ni loi* ('Without roof or law'), situates Mona, its wandering protagonist, outside domesticated, lawful society. *Vagabond*'s tagline reads 'She's cute, she stinks, and she won't say thank you. Would you offer her a lift?' With charm, abjection, strength and vulnerability, Mona hitchhikes near Nîmes. Except, when we first meet her, she is already dead. Lying muddy and frozen in a roadside ditch, she opens the film with her own ending. This reversal of the order of events disrupts the one-directionality of walking and jolts us into a realisation: opportunities to help Mona have been missed. Such opportunities feature throughout the film, in flashbacks to before her death and testimonials of those who gave her a lift, a sandwich or a bed – but, ultimately, failed her. The film's working title was *A saisir*, a term that means both to seize a property and to understand or grasp something – an ironically fitting title for Mona, who refuses simple understanding. The camera does not attempt to grasp Mona either, often tracking across a roadside before Mona enters the frame, and continuing after she leaves it. This framing allows Mona space to exit; it also poses a moral dilemma, suggesting that we are driving past Mona and that we exacerbate her vulnerability by not picking her up. The similarity between *sans toit* ('without a roof') and *sans toi* ('without you') adds to the suggestion that our refusal of responsibility seals Mona's fate.

As Mona hitchhikes through the countryside, a truck-driver explains 'It's not the season. No one is here' – to which she replies, 'I am.' Varda writes a minor story into history by having Mona stand her ground in places that reject her. Until her death, Mona gleans scraps of food and fuel, like the people who scavenge the countryside in Varda's 2000 documentary *The Gleaners and I*. The gleaner is a dirty body who cleans what society casts aside. 'Matter out of place' is how anthropologist Mary Douglas defines dirt (she was thinking in particular about urbanisation's control and exclusion of dirt from cities). A homeless body is abject in a society that values neatness and, in a wandering or dead state, it further spreads and pollutes.

Literal signposts in *Vagabond* signal that the seemingly idyllic French landscape is hostile to a woman pedestrian. In a scene that resembles one in which Wanda is abandoned at a rest stop, Mona thumbs for a lift and is duped. A car slows, only to speed away as Mona gathers her bags. In the background are a red stop sign and a question mark painted on a gable. To borrow Deleuze's term for images that can be read as text, these are 'lectosigns' for written law and felt frustration. Like the passing tracking-shots and Mona's ambivalent expressions, the signs refuse simple reading – Mona is both freed and curtailed, her travels invigorating and exhausting.

Becca Voelcker, *Sight and Sound*, April 2018