Delphine Seyrig made her name by incarnating, as she puts it, “a sophisticated, inaccessible woman, a dream who is not the true ideal because she doesn’t do the washing up.” The qualities that Alain Resnais brought out in Last Year in Marienbad have stood her in good stead. But Seyrig has become increasingly disenchanted with her screen image.

Her figure shrouded in layers of peasant skirts and her face pale and evanescent without makeup, it is only her curled auburn hair, feline movements, and husky female voice that identify her with her screen image. Outside her spacious living
room one can hear the laughter and chatter of the women who participate in her feminist activities. She launches into an explanation of feminism which, when she discovered it, was a catalyst that gave her the confidence to express all that she had intuited and bottled up:

“It starts off when you're a little girl. You are almost born angry. You notice the difference between little boys and girls. At school, you learn that everything has been created and invented by men. I knew I had to smile, be mischievous and pretty. People had a low opinion of my intelligence. When I tried to speak about things that were important to me I was told it was nonsense. So I became superficial in order to please. I saw a choice before me, although I couldn't formulate it: to rebel right from the start, or to say to myself, 'In order to survive I must become what others want me to be. Otherwise I will be crushed. It's evident that people aren't interested in me, so to be recognized I will exist for others. In myself I am nothing.' I chose the latter course and succeeded in giving the image that men wanted, always with a nagging feeling of disquiet.”

Seyrig feels that her role as an actress exemplifies all that is destructive in the relationship of women to men. “Actresses represent clearly what men want, and yet they also reveal the anguish of fulfilling this role, for the public know about the problems of our personal life. But we also oppress women by offering them an image which is impossible to live up to. We set up envy. But that, again, is typical of man's attempt to sow discord among women.”

Seyrig discusses the frustrations and constraints of being an actress and sees a direct comparison with the situation of women in general. “When I wanted to become an actress I thought I would have the chance to express myself. What did I do? I ended up learning texts by heart. After many years, I realized that I had never expressed myself. I had only expressed what would make me acceptable. But, on stage, I tried to get through to women, and I know they understood me, from their letters. Unlike men, they have a magical, indirect way of telling you their reactions. It is never explicit or explained. And I communicated with them in an indirect, underhand way. It was like
the Resistance movement, a sort of underground. What you say
has to come through surreptitiously because you're working
from set texts by men. That form of communication is particular
to women."

Because of her firm belief that film acting is essentially
dominated by male film directors, she is starting to work with
women directors, like Marguerite Duras and Chantal Ackerman.

"I was always bewitched by successful women and tried to fit
into the mould. I still try to fit in. Some women liberate
themselves completely. But the games and roles are so ancient
and complex that I can't find a satisfactory alternative. At the
moment, I am wondering if one has to become masculine in
order to give up being what men want. I'm sure there will be a
way of being neither masculine nor feminine. But I don't have
my own image of myself. And I don't expect to achieve authen-
ticity and heterogamy before I die. Old age does tend to
facilitate authority in women, but for an actress it is very difficult.
I'd prefer to be a coquette than an authoritarian replica of a
man. Some career women are like transvestites. They accept
and participate in male society and government. I fear all
structure, authority and power-wielding. I am frightened that
women will become men.

"And I'm not interested in explaining it to men. They make
no effort to understand our problems and they find it amusing.
Obviously, people are not going to give up their privileges with
joy. I don't care if men are deaf and blind to our movement.
I've exhausted myself trying to persuade them, but I now prefer
talking to women. Men can only change within themselves. We
can only state and define our position, but we can't discuss the
rights and wrongs of the issue with them."