The Prehensile Eye: Haptic Perception in the Works of Agnès Varda

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Abstract

In his 1901 work *Late Roman Art Industry,* the art historian Aloïs Riegl, distinguishes between the haptic and the optic modes of perception. He qualifies the optic as distant or long-ranged vision and the haptic as close or tactile vision. While Riegl devoted his work on the haptic to the domain of art history, in recent years, scholars such as Vivian Sobchack, Laura Marks and Martine Beugnet have given much attention to haptic perception in film theory. Their works resonate with the existential phenomenology developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose theories respond to Cartesian dualism and emphasize a direct and primitive contact between the lived body and the world. For Merleau-Ponty, perception does not lead to the truth. Rather, it is truth. Consequently, the body and the senses become primal to our experience of the world. Within this schema, he privileges the sense of touch as the point of first contact with our physical environment. Merleau-Ponty's writings and Riegl's notion of the haptic influenced a theoretical shift toward a phenomenological and haptic film criticism in the 1990s. Such an approach to cinema, through its emphasis on the sensing body, both of the viewer and the film, on materiality and on an intersubjective and embodied spectatorship, has been invaluable in deepening our understanding of film as a phenomenological experience and in forging new points of entry into works that may not easily lend themselves to unilateral theoretical approaches. In this dissertation, I maintain that Agnès Varda's extensive and varied artistic corpus, which includes her films and her installations, falls under the umbrella of such works.

Since her very first cinematic endeavor, *La Pointe Courte* (1954), Varda's films and art installations have exhibited a synesthetic and haptic quality, engaging the spectator bodily as multisensory events. Among the senses, touch is constantly privileged in works centered on the material presence of objects, on the textures and contours of the physical world and on the bodies that inhabit this world. My purpose is to shed light on a body of work that, since its

origins, has demanded to be read haptically, but which has largely been neglected by haptic scholarship. By bringing to the forefront Varda's haptic aesthetics and proposing an alternative way of reading her works that speaks directly to those aesthetics, I hope to widen our understanding and appreciation of a substantial oeuvre that is deeply concerned with portraying the *human* experience as linked to the material world and thus, has always existed as matter for a phenomenological approach. This dissertation examines the haptic, material and embodied manifestations of time, memory, mourning and death in a number of Varda's films, including but not limited to *Cléo de 5 à 7, Jacquot de Nantes*, *Les Plages d'Agnès, Les Cent et une nuits de Simon Cinéma, Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse, Ulysse,* and *Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier.* Additionally, by incorporating analyses of a number of Varda's installations, this project explores her larger artistic oeuvre as constituting an intratextual and rhizomatic body within which the body and the lived experience of the filmmaker/artist are implicated. I conclude with a inquiry into what a haptic and phenomenological study of Varda's corpus reveals about her work and how these revelations address the limitations posed by other approaches to an extensive creative project that exerts a presence in the world and is also firmly *present* to the world, as a body among others.

Acknowledgments

We often attribute a dissertation to one person, but in reality, we know that it is a culmination of the guidance and support of a number of individuals. I take a moment here to express my sincere gratitude to the people who contributed to the completion of this project. First, I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee for their time and for the expertise and rigor they brought to the project. To Alison Levine, my dissertation director and tireless mentor, I offer deep thanks and admiration. From the beginning, she has been my beacon of support, balancing her firm guidance with patience, humor and a constant enthusiasm for my topic. At every turn, she stood by me, always prepared to share her lucid insights and knowledge, always ready with the right words of encouragement. For her generosity and for all the constructive ways she challenged me, I am appreciative. I wish to thank Ari Blatt, whose involvement in this project shaped it in significant ways. His keen and timely comments, his knowledge of the field and his frank advice all contributed to a more cohesive dissertation. Equal thanks to Cheryl Krueger for sharing her expertise and passion for French film and to Kevin Everson, who so kindly agreed to sit on my committee as the Dean's Representative. Their range of professional experiences, academic backgrounds and perspectives on cinema has greatly enriched this project. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the French Department faculty and staff and extend heartfelt thanks to Janet Horne for her support this year as the Director of Graduate Studies and to all the inspiring professors in the who prepared me in significant ways over the years for the writing of this dissertation. A special thanks goes out to Maggie Stein and Kathy Halvorsen for their invaluable, efficient and friendly assistance in those tricky administrative matters. Finally, I want to thank my family, friends and those special others whose love and support never wavered. Freshta, Clare, Kelly, Brendan, Ravi, Michael, and Amelia—I cannot imagine my life without the joy you all bring to it. Adrien, merci pour tout, de tout mon cœur.

INTRODUCTION

"The eye that gathers impressions is no longer the eye that sees a depiction on a surface; it becomes a hand, the ray of light becomes a finger, and the imagination becomes a form of immediate touching."

—Johann Gottfried Herder[1]

Making Contact

A door swings open slowly. Behind it is a room divided in two by a wall. To the right of a wall is a sink above which a hangs a poster, the word *Rêve* framed inside concentric colored squares. To the left of the wall is a narrow space, tiled in white, sparsely furnished with a black chair and a set of crutches leaning against the wall. The fixed shot lingers for a few seconds as white feathers begin to rain down gently from the ceiling. A rapid cut leads the spectator to another part of the room, but this time, a dense coat of clumpy white down covers every surface, every cranny. Despite the long depth of field, the image is flattened by its texture. A subsequent shot takes us to a closer view of one of the walls—a small round mirror is the only exposed surface visible through the layer of feathers and it reflects an old woman's face. Another straight cut presents a medium shot of the woman in profile, sitting between two down-covered walls. As feathers shower down onto her naked torso, she looks up and smiles, running her fingers through her white hair, so similar in texture and color to the feathers surrounding her that she seems fused to the filmic environment.

With the next image, the camera executes a slow dolly shot to the left, filming at close range so that we can just barely make out the dividing walls of a series of stalls, each one containing a feathery mound in the form of a bathroom sink buried under masses of flocculent material. In the last stall we again encounter the mirror. The tracking motion stops and the

[1] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sculpture: Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion's Creative Dream* (1778), trans. Jason Gaiger (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 19.

naked old woman enters the frame, ambling toward the mirror until her face is visible in it. The image lingers briefly before cutting to a still shot of a nude baby lying on a plush bed of feathers. The last shot shows the same view of the room as the first, now transformed and made unrecognizable by the thick layer of feathers that cover every surface. The woman occupies the chair, facing the camera with her naked body, serene in the soft storm of plumage that falls around her. After a few seconds, the camera begins to recede, zooming out, exiting the room as the door closes and the screen fades to black.

Fig. 1

The sequence described above is one of a number of enigmatic vignettes that Agnès Varda presents in her 1984 short film *7 p., cuis., s. de b.,…à saisir* (1984) (figure 1). The work is a reverie that takes us through the rooms of an empty apartment, peopling it with past tenants shown in various, fragmented scenes, real or imaginary. As the still frames above illustrate, the film is a study in texture, using long, slow tracking shots to move the spectator's eye over a series of fantastical settings made up of a variety of materials and objects—grass, wood, rows of plaster busts, bales of hay and large silver vats, one brimming with a blue gelatinous substance and another containing pink fish darting about in murky water, to name a few. Each setting is carefully composed like a museum installation. With the help of the sensual and

embodying camera movements, the tracking shots down long hallways and the repeated images of opening and closing doors, the spectator wanders through the oniric space, advancing from "installation" to "installation" in a journey of discovery. Thus, the film ceases to be a passive viewing experience and beckons the spectator to engage with its textured surfaces and tactile landscapes. In the absence of a cohesive and clear narrative, and with the preponderance of haptic shots that focus on the body and the material, the film makes sense by appealing to the viewer's entire sensorium, by asking the eye to let go of its vision and touch the material in the film instead, to become tactile and even prehensile, in order to *grasp* the images it encounters.[2]

Confronting a sequence such as this, which implicates the body of the spectator by asserting simultaneously the materiality of the image, the body within the image and the body of the film itself, raises the pertinent question of how we as spectators experience film. The common conception is that film, as an audiovisual medium is "seen" and "heard," and that it is this experience that structures our reception of a work. Yet, as we sit before a screen, do we immobilize our feeling bodies as only our eyes and ears engage with the film? Or does a deeper, more visceral and sensory reaction occur within us? In the long tradition of the cinema as an audiovisual experience, and in the charged space between the spectator and the screen, is there the possibility for a more embodied, sensorial and intersubjective interaction with film? For example, when we hear the musical score in a work hit a crescendo that resonates in our bodies and elicits an affective response, are we not "feeling" the film? When we are moved to tears that blur our vision and moisten our cheeks, has the film not touched us? When a close-up draws us into such intimate proximity to an image that we no longer see a coherent form but rather brush against its texture, are we not engaging our sense of touch? Consider the gamut of

[2] This idea of *7p., cuis., s. de b.,…à saisir* presenting itself as a series of filmed installations is not surprising given that the work was inspired by a 1984 exhibition by Louis Bec that took place in the same building, the former Hospice St. Louis in Avignon. The exhibition, called *Le vivant et l'artificiel*, captivated Varda, who decided to use not only the setting, but actual material from the installations, as the background for her enigmatic film. For a more detailed description of the exhibition, Varda's reaction to it as well as analysis of the sensations and emotions evoked by the work, see Delphine Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda: Resistance and Eclecticism*, Directors' Cut Series (New York: Wallflower Press, 2014), 131-135.

physical reactions a film is capable of provoking: goose bumps on the flesh, the hair bristling on the body as if affected by a subtle breath from the screen, waves of nausea, a quickening of the pulse, itchy skin, laughter that hurts, a sudden recoil before an image. All of these reactions read as a long list of symptoms arising from a haptic and embodied contact with film, a concept that this introductory chapter presents in two parts in order to delineate the scope of this dissertation and situate it within a theoretical base.

The first section begins with a definition of the word haptic as proposed by the art historian Aloïs Riegl, then traces the evolution toward a haptic criticism in film theory. Relying on key works by scholars in the field, this section further nuances the definition of haptic by distinguishing between haptic perception and haptic visuality and introduces the notions of embodiment and embodied spectatorship as terms that are central to this study. In the second portion, I turn my focus to Agnès Varda, first by providing some necessary biographical background before briefly delving into her cinematic and artistic world to establish the ways in which her works appeal to a haptic analysis, despite the relative paucity of such an approach to her corpus.

Learning to Touch: Toward a Haptic Theory

In his 1901 work *Late Roman Art Industry,* the art historian Aloïs Riegl distinguishes between haptic and optic modes of perception, associating the former with ancient Egyptian Art and the latter with late Roman art. He qualifies the optic mode of perception as distant or long-ranged vision and the haptic as close or tactile vision. Riegl posits that the shift from the haptic to the optic occurred as a result of the move toward the ideal of abstraction in Western art during which the mode of representation that depicted material objects on a flat, tactile space gave way to a mode that abstracted space, hewing out the perspective plane so that the viewer is able to perceive depth, distance and consequently, figures in space. Laura Marks, drawing from Paolo Cherchi Usai, further observes that this shift in visual styles coincided

with a shift in religious thought. According to Marks, "The barbarian invasion of the Roman Empire precipitated a clash between the southern belief that the body could be the vehicle for grace and the northern belief that spirituality required transcending the physical body."[3] This idea is important for two reasons. First, it underscores the imbrication of world and art, of the real and the modes of its representation, the implication of which is that ideological or cultural changes necessitate new forms of expression. The second reason is that the move in representation from the haptic to the optic and the concurrent shift in ideology that devalued the importance of the lived, material body in favor of the transcendental spirit both signal the beginnings of a dualistic vision in Western thought that the discipline of phenomenology and the haptic theory that it inspired seek to counter.

While Riegl devoted his work on the haptic to the field of art history, in recent years much attention has been given to haptic perception in film theory by scholars such as Vivian Sobchack, Laura Marks, Martine Beugnet, Jenny Chamarette, Jennifer Barker and Kate Ince. Their works resonate with the existential phenomenology developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, which stands in contrast to both Cartesian dualism and Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and emphasizes "a direct and primitive contact with the world," a world that we affect and which affects us in a constant dynamic of intersubjectivity.[4]

The discipline of phenomenology, although appearing under various guises in earlier branches of philosophy, originated as a distinct philosophical movement through the writings of Edmund Husserl, notably in his 1913 publication *Ideas* I.[5] Phenomenology is concerned with how our experience *in* and awareness *of* the world is structured, how phenomena appear

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[3] Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Duke University Press, 2000), 166.

[4] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), trans. Colin Smith (London: Routeledge, 1962), vii.

[5] Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology.* Translated by W. R. Boyce Gibson. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1967.

to us and the meanings we can extract from this experience. Within the broader scope of phenomenology, time, memory, subjectivity, sensation and the body's role in our interaction with the material world figure as major themes and, as we will see later, align the discipline with a haptic theory and the principal concerns of this dissertation. According to Husserl, our experience in the world is directed by an "intentionality" toward the objects that surround us, that is to say, a consciousness of or about these things and our relationship to them. To direct this intentionality, he proposes the method of "bracketing" or isolating a phenomenon and suspending any a priori assumptions related to it in order to examine it in its purest form as it presents itself to our conscious experience. Despite early phenomenology's focus on bodily experience in the world, Husserl's theorizations still carry echoes of a Cartesian dualism in that they ultimately seek to purify phenomena as they are perceived by an idealized or *transcendental* consciousness.

A decade after the publication of *Ideas* I, Martin Heidegger took issue with Husserl's transcendental and epistemological phenomenology and posited a more existential and ontological approach. In *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger anchors our experience with the world exactly *within* that world.[6] For Heidegger, meaning comes not from reflecting on experience but rather from the experience itself, thus placing the emphasis more squarely on *Dasein,* a "being-there" or "being-in-the-world" through an intersubjective and perceptual engagement. Heidegger's rethinking of the phenomenological principles put forth by Husserl focuses not on a transcendental consciousness as the seat of knowledge, but rather on an embodied consciousness that allots a primacy to the lived body and its direct experience in the world as a body among others. As Chapter Three illustrates, Heidegger's concepts of "being-in-the world" and "being-toward-death" punctuate this dissertation's larger concern with a non-hierarchical, intersubjective and embodied film experience because they posit a mode of being

[6] Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time.* Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.

in which the divisions between subject and object are erased into a smoother, more integrated state of human existence wherein the material world and the beings inhabiting it are involved in a mutual subjectivity, or otherwise put, an intersubjectivity.

Merleau-Ponty, as the last in the line of classical continental phenomenologists, built on the works of Heidegger in the 1940s with the publication of *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), in which he theorizes in detail on the structures of our perception of the world. He postulates that the lived body as well as our *awareness* of it is central to human experience:

> Insofar as, when I reflect on the essence of subjectivity, I find it bound up with that of the body and that of the world, this is because my existence as subjectivity is merely one with my existence as a body and with the existence of the world, and because the subject that I am […] is inseparable from this body and this world.[7]

As with Heidegger, for Merleau-Ponty, world and body are caught up in a constant dynamic of intersubjectivity rather than hierarchically organized around a subject-object dichotomy. However, whereas Heidegger is concerned with an ontological existential phenomenology that explores modes of being in the world, Merleau-Ponty's focus is firmly existential in that it pertains specifically to the fundamental role of the body in our interactions with the world. Thus, he turns his attention to the ways in which our modes of perception configure our lived experience. According to Merleau-Ponty, perception does not lead us to the truth. Rather, it is truth. Consequently, the body and the senses are primal to our experience of the world. He privileges the sense of touch as the point of first contact with our physical environment. Unlike sight or hearing, the sense of touch is reciprocal and requires a close proximity to the object at hand. It is perception that acts on the skin and creates a thin seam that intersubjectively connects body and world.

In the last chapter of his posthumously published work *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty gives a more concrete form to his theorizations on subjectivity with his concept

[7] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 475.

of the chiasm, the structuring dynamic by which the body, through the flesh, is reciprocally intertwined with the world.[8] The notion of a chiasmic intersubjectivity or "intervolvement" between body and world largely informs the theoretical framework of the following four chapters.[9] Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology marks a significant shift in Western philosophy toward the importance of bodily experience, the senses and the body's kinetic *movement* within the physical world rather than (solely) privileging the consciousness as the site of knowledge about the world. It is not surprising then, that his works eventually influenced the emergence of a haptic film theory seeking a more embodied contact with the most kinetic of art forms.

Before looking at the ways in which phenomenology has shaped a recent trend toward a haptic theory in cinema, it is important to note that the development of modern phenomenological thought occurred contemporaneously with the rise of cinema. Both arose during an era of increasing industrialization in the West, of rapid technological progress and widespread urbanization within a quickly changing society, all of which demanded a reevaluation of the individual within this evermore material and faster *moving* world. Examining the concurrent forms of artistic expression that were developing at this time creates a more profound understanding of the relationship between phenomenology and film theory, not as causal, but rather as geminate products of the same historical and social contexts. Such an understanding can illuminate the ways in which film theory appeals to phenomenology largely because of their entangled concerns with offering a perspective on the world. Merleau-Ponty reflects on this notion by observing that the cinema is

> peculiarly suited to making manifest the union of mind and body, mind and world, and the expression of one in the other. That is why it is not surprising that a critic should

[8] Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Edited by Claude Lefort. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968.

[9] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 94.

> evoke philosophy in connection with a film […] Therefore, if philosophy is in harmony with the cinema, if thought and technical effort are heading in the same direction, it is because the philosopher and the moviemaker share a certain way of being, a certain view of the world which belongs to a generation.[10]

Similarly, in *The Movement-Image,* Gilles Deleuze defines cinema's resonance with phenomenology by highlighting film's ability to

> bring us close to things or take us away from them and revolve around them, and [to suppress] both the anchoring of the subject and the horizon of the world. Hence it *substitutes* an implicit knowledge and a second intentionality for the conditions of natural perception (italics in the original).[11]

Vivian Sobchack, building on Deleuze, also makes this connection and takes it one step further to posit that phenomenology, as a philosophy and a research procedure, is pertinent to film theory because of the "*embodied situation* of the spectator and of the film," both existing as bodies in the world (italics in the original).[12] She elaborates on this notion by stating that,

> Technology has provided the film with an *enabling body* that can be considered "lived" in its activity and commutation of perception and expression. Thus, it does not seem completely cavalier to draw parallels between the development of cinematic technology and the development of the human lived-body (italics in the orginal).[13]

Indeed, as we see below, a number of scholars have observed these parallels between cinema and phenomenology as a foundation for an embodied and haptic approach to film theory.

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[10] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Film and the New Psychology," trans. Hubert L.Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus, in *Sense and Non-Sense* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1964), 58-59.

[11] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 57.

[12] Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 31.

[13] Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye,* 250.

Although the wave in scholarship that has been devoting increased attention to a haptic and phenomenological perspective on cinema since the late 1990s is a relatively recent trend, it is important to stress that film, whether analog or digital, has always been a multisensory and tactile medium capable of eliciting an embodied spectatorship. We need only imagine the audience's initial physical reaction to the train careening toward them on the screen in the Lumière brothers' *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de la Ciotat* (1895*),* or the spectator response to the slicing of the eye in Buñel and Dali's *Un chien andalou* (1928). Furthermore, it has also existed as a sentient medium, as a body that not only expresses, but also perceives and embodies, a notion first posited by Sobchack.[14]

The very language and apparatus of the cinema supports these ideas. It is true that words such as "focus" and "lens" evoke the mechanics of vision, but cinematic terms also provide a more complete anatomical nomenclature and "fleshing out" of the body of film. First and foremost, with the use of the word "film," cinema immediately offers us its skin, inviting contact. The word "cut" implies a surface onto which the cut is enacted, simultaneously splicing and cohering the body of the film. Additionally, the term "close-up" suggests (and achieves) a proximity to the material and bodies within the film. These cinematographic terms, as well as "zooming" and "tilting," replicate not the natural functions of the eye, but rather a physical movement, often towards or away from an object, and intimate the mobility of the head and body. Historically, in the use of analog technologies, the notion of film as body actualized itself in the very material onto which images were recorded. In French, the word for film is *pellicule*. As with the English word "film," it means both a photosensitive material and a thin skin or layer of a substance. *Pellicule* also means dandruff, the diffuse skin that signals epidermal renewal. Within the scope of this work, I propose that the development of film as body is a continual process of growth, material transformation and renewal, all of which

[14] Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye,* 8-14.

contribute to constantly evolving film aesthetics that supersede variations in directorial style and signal rather a body undergoing change.

Therefore, if we conceptualize film as a body, changing and dynamic, perceptive and expressive, the perceptual limitations of engaging with this body through a strictly audiovisual approach become evident. In response to these limitations, which hinder a more provocative and multivalent experience with film, film scholarship in the early 1990s began to favor a more haptic, embodied and synesthetic perspective on cinema and its potential to touch us beyond sight and sound. Sobchack's book *The Address of the Eye* stands out as a seminal work in this evolution of haptic film theory over the past two decades. Her work has influenced later scholars such as Barker, Marks, Beugnet and Ince. Without eschewing the importance of the Lacanian psychoanalytic and the neo-Marxist paradigms prevalent in the film theory of the 1980s, the first concerned with the "interior" and the other with the "exterior," Sobchack nonetheless moves away from such unilateral theoretical frameworks.[15] Rather, she approaches film from an existential phenomenological perspective built on the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to posit not only a more haptic and embodied approach to our experience with and analysis of cinema but also, as indicated above, to propose cinema *as a body.* Sobchack argues that film is a both a sensuous object and subject, a "medium realizing itself and its perceptual projects, and adapting its technology, its body, to accomplish those intentions."[16] It is both perception and expression, involving two simultaneous viewers, the spectator and the film, and thus, constitutes "a privileged form of communication."[17] Echoing a notion from Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible*, Sobchack proposes that "more than any other medium of human communication, the moving picture makes itself sensuously and sensibly

[15] Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye,* xiii.

[16] Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, 168.

[17] Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye,* 12.

manifest as the 'expression of experience by experience.'"[18] While she does not specifically employ the word haptic, her concept of "embodied vision" approximates the notion of the tactile visuality posited by later theorists. The crux of Sobchack's notions on the film's body is especially crucial to the last chapter of this project in which I delineate Varda's oeuvre as a *body* of work.

Sobchack's contribution to the field exploded contemporary film theory and since then, her ideas have influenced other scholars who, in their individual ways, refine their focus on the haptic, basing their works equally in the theories of Merleau-Ponty as well as on theorists such as Gilles Deleuze and Walter Benjamin. One such scholar is Laura Marks who, in *The Skin of the Film* explores intercultural cinema as embodied experience. She proposes that such films, through their haptic aesthetics, activate memories of the senses to represent the diasporic experience and thereby challenge Western ocularcentrism and its privileging of the visual over embodied knowledge in the realm of epistemology. Employing Aloïs Riegl's distinction between optic and haptic images in art, and relying on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, Marks presents the term "haptic visuality," defined as a tactile visioning that interacts with the surface texture of film images that defy a linear narrative and thus appeal to the senses to make sense.[19] According to Marks, haptic visuality creates an embodied spectatorship, a mimetic relationship between viewer and film. Anne Rutherford, relying on the work of Michael Taussig, defines mimesis in film as

> a mode of sensory, tactile perception that breaks down the distinction between the viewer and the object in an experience of contact with the image. Taussig argues that mimetic perception closes the gap between the spectator and image, and generates a

[18] Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye,* 3.

[19] Marks, *The Skin of the Film,* xi-xii.

bodily response in the viewer, a kind of "visceral experience" that is experienced as a "porousness" between one's own body and the image.[20]

In her second book, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media,* Marks expounds on her theory of haptic visuality and this time, embarks on a haptic criticism of experimental film and video.[21] She approaches the works discussed in her book as "tangible and beloved bodies" within which the "image is the connective tissue."[22] The book begins with an exploration of the nature of a haptic spectatorship whereby the viewer seeks not to visually master or dominate the image, but rather to acknowledge both the material presence and "unknowablity" of the other.[23] This leads to a "haptic subjectivity" that is more rhizomatic in nature than an idealized and hierarchical "unified" subjectivity.[24] In this dissertation, I use the term intersubjectivity rather than "haptic subjectivity" because, although the two are synonymous, the former, through its use of the prefix "inter," creates a more direct link with Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body's "intervolvement" with the world. However, in the following chapters, I rely heavily on Marks' distinction between "haptic perception" and "haptic visuality" to avoid a conflation of concepts.[25] The notion of haptic perception, or simply "the haptic," will serve as umbrella terms encompassing a number of ways of perceiving that are both external and internal to the body. It involves "the combination of tactile, kinesthetic, and proprioceptive functions" that regulate "the way we experience touch

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[20] Anne Rutherford, "The Poetics of a Potato Documentary That Gets Under the Skin," *MetroMagazine* 137 (Summer 2003): 127. See also Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (Routledge, NewYork & London: Routledge, 1993), 21 and 38.

[21] Marks, Laura U. *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

[22] Marks, *Touch*, xi.

[23] Marks, *Touch,* xvii.

[24] Marks, *Touch*, xix.

[25] Marks, *Touch*, 2-3.

both on the surface of and inside our bodies."[26] Thus, haptic perception occurs when the spectator is confronted with a tactile image that evokes the sense of touch through its *surface* texture and materiality, but it also applies to any image that "touches" the spectator affectively or elicits a physical response or sensation that reverberates *under* the skin and within the body. I reserve the term haptic visuality, which is included under the heading of haptic perception, but in which "the eyes themselves function like organs of touch," to describe the process of interacting up close with the textured surfaces and contours of the haptic images that the camera presents.[27] Finally, I use the word embodiment to refer to that which takes place on or in the body. Whether it is the film drawing attention to its own body or presenting corporeal images of its subjects, such *embodying* images activate a mimetic, embodied spectatorship. Otherwise put, they create an intersubjective relationship between the viewer and the film. It is important to note that haptic perception, which includes haptic visuality and embodiment, functions as a whole to elicit an intersubjective film experience that is not driven by the viewer's identification solely with the plot and the characters, but also with the film and the images themselves.

A further work on which I draw comes from Martine Beugnet. In *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression,* Beugnet offers a riveting analysis of film as the medium of the senses and a mode of embodied thought.[28] She focuses on a corpus of French films released between 1998 and 2006, known as *le cinéma du corps* (cinema of the body) or *le cinéma des sensations* (cinema of sensation). Beugnet characterizes this corpus as "transgressive" in their capacity to break from the conventional uses of dialogue, narrative structures and cinematographic techniques, in their accent on the body and the corporeality of

[26] Marks, *Touch*, 2.

[27] Marks, *Touch*, 2-3.

[28] Beugnet, Martine. *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

film and, consequently, in their denial of the Cartesian dualism that separates the mind and body and qualifies reason and knowledge as disembodied and transcendent. The films are also transgressive in their reliance on graphically violent and sexually explicit scenes that shock the spectator into reacting to the film. While Beugnet's work informs my own in many ways, I diverge from her in one specific aspect by positing that a film need not be transgressive in order to be susceptible to a haptic and sensorial reading. I treat this idea in more detail in the second half of this chapter.

In line with Marks and Beugnet, Jennifer Barker takes a tactile-visual approach to film through what she calls "eye contact." She expounds on the notion of a sensuous relationship and intimate exchange between film and spectator in a variety of genres ranging from feminist experimental cinema to horror, using the imagery of "getting under the skin" of the film into its viscera in order to posit an embodied and affective filmic experience.[29] Unlike Marks, Barker does not limit her analysis to the tactile surface of the film, but rather reaches deep beneath the skin to achieve a "total immersion" so that touch becomes a mode of being "through which the body—human or cinematic—presents and expresses itself to the world and through which it perceives that same world as sensible."[30] Echoing Sobchack's conceptualization of film's body, Barker also proposes that film is a material mode of perception and expression and, based on this notion, undertakes an exploration of the tactile structures of an embodied cinematic experience.[31]

Drawing equally on the works of Sobchack, Kate Ince presents an article that traces the shift in film criticism from a Lacanian psychoanalytical perspective to a phenomenological (and non-Lacanian psychoanalytical) approach. Ince maintains that beginning in the 1990s, our

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[29]Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 2.

[30] Barker, *The Tactile Eye*, 2.

[31] Barker, *The Tactile Eye*, 4.

experience with film has moved from eliciting a secondary identification with characters to activating a primary identification with the filmic material itself. For Ince, who takes a largely feminist phenomenological approach to film theory, this is especially crucial in the spectator's identification with culturally differentiated bodies that embody racial and sexual otherness.[32]

Yet another key scholar in the field of phenomenological and haptic film theory is Jenny Chamarette. Relying on the works of Merleau-Ponty, Sobchack, Beugnet and Marks, Chamarette uses phenomenology to think with and through the cinematic works and, in some cases, the art installations of four French avant-garde filmmakers, Chris Marker, Agnès Varda, Chantal Akerman and Philippe Grandrieux, with the purpose of demonstrating how such an approach can deepen our understanding of subjectivity and cinema, both on the silver screen and in the white cube of the museum space. She posits that these sites of experience and encounter with cinema constitute a liminal space between the spectator, the work and the filmmaker wherein the complexities of a "slippery" or shifting cinematic subjectivity can be illuminated. Chamarette's work is significant to this project's concern with an embodied and intersubjective film experience promoted by embodying, haptic images and the material presence of objects. Additionally, Chamarette, along with Kate Ince, are scholars who hold a two-fold importance for the concerns of my study—firstly due to their theoretical grounding and secondly, for being two haptic theorists who treat select works by Varda.

Finally, In *Senses of Touch,* Mark Paterson takes the discourse on the haptic in another direction.[33] Paterson's text is a philosophical inquiry into tactile perception, into the "manifold senses of touch, from the quotidian and everyday to the abstract and rarefied."[34] He remarks that despite the immediacy of touch in our experience with the world, there is a theoretical

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[32] Ince, Kate. "Bringing Bodies Back In: For a Phenomenological and Psychoanalytical Film Criticism of Embodied Cultural Identity." *Film-Philosophy Journal* 15, no. 1 (2011): 1-12.

[33] Mark Paterson, *Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2007), 2.

[34] Paterson, *Senses of Touch,* 2.

paucity on the topic. Paterson explores the relationship between touch and sight, examines the tendency of ocularcentrism in Western thought and cultural history, and looks at a haptic aesthetics, or "how the world touches us" through art and performance.[35] In the last two chapters of the book, Paterson discusses haptic technologies, tactile communication, and therapeutic touch. Going as far back as Aristotle and Plato and synthesizing the writings of Descartes, Bacon, Bachelard, Derrida, Deleuze, Benjamin, Merleau-Ponty, Diderot, Husserl and Herder, to name a few prominent philosophers, Paterson's book provides a richly detailed philosophical history of the sense of touch. It is a work of enormous importance to this project mainly because of its varied approaches to touch, one of which is to offer a clear presentation of its anatomical functions. Paterson demonstrates that touch is not limited only to an outwardly-oriented and cutaneous tactile sense, but that it also involves other somatosensory modalities such interoception, or inwardly-oriented perception, as well as proprioception, which include our kinesthetic and vestibular senses and aids in orienting the body in the world.[36] These terms appear frequently throughout this project and contribute to my discussions on an embodied and mimetic spectatorship.

The previous section detailed the lineage of phenomenological thought from Husserl to Merleau-Ponty and traced the evolution of a haptic theory in cinema that logically draws from that particular branch of philosophical thought. In the ensuing section, I enter the film and art world of Agnès Varda, an artist whose oeuvre, from its very beginnings, has demanded a haptic reading for reasons that I discuss shortly. As we will see, in the extensive scholarship on Varda, relatively scant attention has been devoted to the haptic, material and corporeal nature

[35] Paterson, *Senses of Touch,* 105.

[36] While touch is an exteroceptive sense in that it responds to external stimuli, the body's interoceptive sense allows it to feel internal pain as well as muscular and visceral sensations. In the glossary of his book, Paterson provides formal definitions of proprioception, kinaesthesia and vestibular perception: "proprioception: the perception of the position, state and movement of the body and limbs in space. Includes kinesthetic and vestibular sensations." "Kinesthesia: The sensation of movement of body and limbs. Relating to sensations originating in muscles, tendons and joints." "Vestibular: Pertaining to the perception of balance, head position, acceleration and deceleration. Information obtained from the semi-circular canals in the inner ear." Paterson, *Senses of Touch*, ix.

of her work and the meaningful ways in which it induces an intersubjective and embodied spectatorship, appealing to the viewer as a body unto its own.

The Phenomenal World of Agnès Varda

The shift toward a haptic film theory, which places an emphasis on the sensing body, on materiality and an embodied spectatorship, has been invaluable in deepening our understanding of cinema as a phenomenological experience and in forging new points of entry into works that may not easily lend themselves to unilateral theoretical approaches such as psychoanalytic, Marxist or feminist paradigms. I maintain that Agnès Varda's extensive and varied artistic corpus falls under the umbrella of such works. Her oeuvre has been thriving for six decades, yet film scholarship has touched on a mere fraction of it, focusing primarily on a handful of her better-known films. I propose that one major reason for this lack of attention to Varda's wider corpus is that her works, because they span a number of categories, require a broader, more multivalent lens to be fully understood and appreciated.[37] As I illustrate below and in the four chapters that follow, Varda integrates a number of recurring themes such as time, death and memory in her corpus, weaving them regularly into various works. She frequently engages subtly with social issues, political matters and a non-militant feminism, often within the same film. Furthermore, she blurs the lines between documentary and fiction,

[37] Delphine Bénézet makes a similar observation on the difficulty of classifying Varda's oeuvre in her recent book on the filmmaker. She writes, "Categorising [Varda's] body of work according to different modes as some have done […] is difficult due to the overlap between many of the works at hand. Adopting a specific terminology to interpret Varda's oeuvre as a whole is problematic given the frequent slippages of her work between fiction and non-fiction, film and other media." See: Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda*, 5. Bénézet also addresses the fact that Varda scholarship has largely neglected important, lesser-known works by the filmmaker and sees a potential for attaining a fuller understanding of her corpus by widening the scope of theoretical approaches to it: "Scholars who wrote about Varda frequently used selective clusters of her works to suit their purposes, and in focusing on a restricted corpus, they were missing important aspects of her cinema, such as her witty use of the polemical potential of the corporeal. Since the only comprehensive attempt to cover all her films (Smith 1998) Varda has made a series of art installations, and film theory has seen significant critical extensions *via* phenomenology, philosophy and ethics, offering potentially enriching 'critical openings '" (3). Bénézet therefore approaches a large portion of Varda's oeuvre in her monograph through a number of lenses including politics, the polemical potential of the corporeal, ethics, social and historical contexts as well as the production contexts around a number of individual works. She also approaches Varda's films through a haptic theory, but falls prey to her own criticism of Varda scholarship by only engaging with two of Varda's films to any great extent from this perspective. For more on this, see the literature review below.

art and cinema, the personal and the social. As a result, if there is one overarching characteristic that encompasses the breadth of Varda's corpus, it is that her works are deeply concerned with portraying the *human* experience as linked to the material world and thus, have always existed as matter for a phenomenological approach. Therefore, my focus in this dissertation is to shed light on a body of work that, since its origins, has demanded to be read haptically, but which has largely been neglected by haptic scholarship because it does not fall under the heading of an intercultural, experimental or transgressive cinema. By bringing to the forefront Varda's haptic aesthetics and proposing an alternative way of reading her works that speaks directly to those aesthetics, my purpose is to widen our understanding and appreciation of a substantial oeuvre that compellingly invites a phenomenological approach.

Since her very first cinematic endeavor, *La Pointe Courte* (1954), Varda's films and art installations have exhibited a synesthetic and haptic quality, engaging the spectator bodily as multisensory events. Among the senses, touch is constantly privileged in images centered on the material presence of objects, on the textures and contours of the physical world and on the bodies that inhabit this world. Her works thrive on the haptic image, materiality and the corporeal as vehicles for exploring abstract notions such as time and memory while repeatedly reflecting on the process of filmmaking itself. Consequently, her films and her art installations draw the haptic eye into worlds that contain rich material for the viewer to *feel* and thereby elicit a participatory spectatorship. Before presenting a fuller argument for the reasons why Varda's oeuvre commands a haptic approach, I offer some biographical information as a means of better understanding the development and evolution of her body of work.

In her prolific career as a filmmaker and artist over the span of 60 years, Varda has produced a vast array of films, television shows and, as of her *Patatutopia* exhibit at the 2003 Venice Biennial, an impressive number of art installations. She has made feature-length as well as short films across both the fiction and documentary genres. Her last two works, *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000) and the autobiographical *Les Plages d'Agnès (*2008) captured

the attention of cinema scholars and critics much in the same way that her first two feature films, *La Pointe Courte* and *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961) captivated the contributors to André Bazin's *Cahiers du cinéma* and ushered the filmmaker into the New Wave movement alongside François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard. Much has been written about Varda—that her early aesthetics resemble that of the Italian neorealists, that she is a feminist filmmaker, a political filmmaker, and a socially dedicated artist who can be polemical without being didactic. She has been called the "Grandmother of the New Wave," and also figures in the Rive Gauche group with Alain Resnais and Chris Marker due to her bohemian style and her engagement with social issues. She is known as a fiercely independent auteur with little tolerance for the restraints of the French cinema industry. Varda is all of these things and yet not any single one of them—she has remained to this day an artist whose work and career resist a clear-cut classification. Photographer, filmmaker and visual artist, her three professional avenues constantly intersect and communicate with one another, resulting in an original and recognizable style that is nonetheless extremely variegated in its content matter and aesthetics.

Varda's career path, always firmly grounded in the arts, began in the late 1940s. After studying Art History at the Ecole du Louvre in Paris, Varda traded her ambition of being a museum curator for a more creative profession. She enrolled in the École de Vaugirard for a vocational training certificate in photography. In 1951, she was hired as the official photographer for Jean Vilar's Théâtre national populaire (TNP), a position she maintained until 1961 in parellel with her initial cinematic pursuits. After receiving a small amount of seed money through an inheritance in 1954, Varda created a film cooperative under the name of Tamaris to fund the making of *La Pointe Courte,* a work edited by Alain Resnais, who also served as Varda's link to the New Wave and Rive Gauche scenes. In contrast to the key players involved in the New Wave, Truffaut, Godard, Claude Chabrol, Jacques Rivette and Éric Rohmer, all of whom were staunch cinephiles and prolific contributors to Bazin's *Cahiers du cinéma,* Varda claims to have had very little experience with cinema before making her first

film. Despite her inexperience, the *Cahiers* group responded positively to *La Pointe Courte,* touting its originality and its remarkable affinities with Italian neorealism, a movement that greatly influenced the New Wave aesthetic. In a short review of the film, in which he characterizes it as "miraculous", "free" and "pure" as much for its style as for its lack of dependence on the commercial film industry, Bazin himself compares *La Pointe Courte* to Roberto Rossellini's *Journey to Italy*, which came out that same year.[38]

Thus firmly established in the most revolutionary and innovative cinema movements of the time, Varda went on to make two commissioned documentary shorts, *Ô saisons, ô chateaux* (1957) and *Du Côté de la Côte* (1958), an independent documentary entitled *L'Opéra-Mouffe* (1958) and a fictional feature film, *Cléo de 5 à 7,* all before 1962. Varda's profuse career as a filmmaker was to continue along this vein for the next five decades during which she produced an extensive oeuvre covering a broad range of subject matter. She treats with equal creative attention the Cuban Revolution, women's reproductive rights in France, public murals in Los Angeles, the Black Panther movement in the San Francisco of the 1960s, the experience of a young singer in Paris confronted by death and the last days of a lonely drifter traveling the countryside in southern France, to name just a few of her film topics.

While her work is well-traveled, Varda has nonetheless kept a strong home base in the form of her independent production company, Ciné-Tamaris, a successful outgrowth of the Tamaris co-op that is still active today in the heart of the 14th arrondissement in Paris, next to Varda's home, the latter easily recognizable by its pink walls and green and purple striped gate. She has lived and worked on this stretch of the rue Daguerre for over six decades, her small company serving as the production, distribution, restoration and archival headquarters for her cinematic and artistic activities as well as for her late husband Jacques Demy's work. Like a

[38] See : Bazin, André. "*La Pointe Courte*: Un film libre et pur (1956)." In *Le Cinéma français de la libération à la Nouvelle vague,* edited by Jean Narboni, 194-195. Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1983.

local artisan, Varda edits her own work in the back of the Ciné-Tamaris boutique across the street from its offices. In this way, she exerts a distinct presence in her adopted city of Paris, where her work and her life continue to overlap.[39]

Given the breadth and variety of Varda's creative output over her long career, it is extremely difficult to provide an all-inclusive monograph of her corpus. Scholars have approached her oeuvre from many perspectives in individual articles, writing on an often-limited selection of films, yet only two among them have attempted to treat her production as a whole in larger works. The first of these, entitled *Agnès Varda* and authored by Alison Smith in 1998, provides the most comprehensive commentary on the filmmaker's life and oeuvre up through 1994.[40] Smith's book focuses closely on form and pays particular attention to Varda's characteristic concern for a co-constructive relationship among filmmaker, viewer and film subject in her unique process of *cinécriture*, a word invented by the director herself to describe her auteurist vision. Translated as "cine-writing," the concept entails all the ways in which a filmmaker constructs a work by making deliberate choices at every level of production, from writing the screenplay and dialogue to casting, from cinematography to the choice of filming locations and music, so as to create an intended effect on the viewer. Organized thematically around the larger ideas of space, the presence of art, women's images, self-images, performance, and the relationship between time and memory, Smith's work examines an extensive range of Varda's extant oeuvre at the date of the book's publication. For these reasons, the book regularly figures in the bibliographies of subsequent Varda scholars regardless of their approach.

However, because Smith's book predates a large portion of Varda's cinematic oeuvre and her recent art installations, and because it would require volumes to be able to adequately

[39] Varda was born in Ixelles, Belgium on May 30, 1928. Her family moved to France during World War II and she spent her adolescence in the southern town of Sète before moving to Paris. For more detailed biographical information on Varda, see Alison Smith (1998) and Delphine Bénézet (2014).

[40] Smith, Alison. *Agnès Varda*. French Film Directors Series. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998.

treat the entirety of her corpus then and now, it is necessarily incomplete as a monograph. Recognizing the need for a more current, comprehensive if not all-inclusive work on Varda's oeuvre, and one that engages with pertinent developments in film theory since the late 1990s, Delphine Bénézet released just such a work in 2014. In *The Cinema of Agnès Varda: Resistance and Eclecticism,* Bénézet offers Varda scholarship a beautifully orchestrated monograph that in a concise 144 pages synthesizes a majority of Varda's cinematic oeuvre, focusing specifically on the filmmaker's lesser-known works, and incorporates analyses of some of her key art installations.[41] She exhibits a thorough knowledge of existing Varda scholarship and engages in varying degrees with a number of strands of film criticism, including feminist thought and, to a lesser extent, haptic theory. Highlighting Varda's eclectic filmmaking and unorthodox subject matter, Bénézet also treats the notions of space, filmed portraits, Varda's collaborative filmmaking and authorship. Of special interest is Bénézet's analysis of the manner in which Varda both subverts and asserts her status as an auteur by a clever self-positioning with relation to her cinema, a tactic through which she "creates and recreates herself as an authoring subject in many of her films and in some of the material [associated] with her work."[42] Bénézet's discussion serves to illuminate Varda as a self-created filmmaker who openly and intentionally negotiates her place within French cinema and the *auteur* tradition in her films, thereby reinforcing the strong connection that exists between Agnès Varda the person and her corpus.

Furthermore, Bénézet, relying on Dominique Baqué's notion of the *cinéaste passeur* who acts as "a mediator not only between the filmed subjects and the spectators, but also between a specific space and time and the moment of screening," contextualizes Varda's

[41] Bénézet, Delphine. *The Cinema of Agnès Varda: Resistance and Eclecticism*. Directors' Cut Series. New York: Wallflower Press, 2014.

[42] Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda,* 64.

oeuvre within the historical, political and cultural currents that shaped it.[43] Moreover, she adeptly interweaves biographical information on Varda in her analyses and provides details regarding the production contexts of a number of her films in order to show how the filmmaker's resistance to the norms of representation and industrial diktats have resulted in a unique and multifarious aesthetic, thus adding a further dimension to Varda's corpus. In the ensuing four chapters of this project, I engage regularly with Bénézet's monograph precisely because of her diverse, comprehensive and current inquiry into Varda's work.

Many of the themes and perspectives explored by Smith and Bénézet have also been taken up individually or in combination by other scholars. For example, the notion of time in Varda's films has been widely treated both with regard to her early works, like *Cléo de 5 à 7* and her more recent films such as *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse.* Jean-Yves Bloch's discussion of time in *Cléo* makes use of Varda's own metaphor of the violin and metronome, each instrument respectively representing subjective and objective time, to emphasize the relationship between perceived time, real time and the third "Hegelian" time that arises from this dynamic.[44] Additionally, Yvette Birò and Catherine Portuges discuss temporality in Varda's films as it pertains not to the passage of time, but to its presence as a character and to the manner in which it regulates the rhythms of daily life.[45] These works pave the way for my discussion of the haptic representations of time in Varda's works that serve to create an intersubjective film experience.

Another well-treated notion in Varda's corpus is space, usually in conjunction with another theme. Jill Forbes offers a feminist reading of *Cléo de 5 à 7* in which she posits that the film shares elements of both fiction and documentary in its ethnographic representation of

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[43] Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda,* 5.

[44] Bloch, Jean-Yves. "*Cleo de 5 à 7*: Le violon et le métronome," *Lettres modernes*. *Etudes cinématographiques* (1991): 179–186.

[45] Bíró, Yvette and Catherine Portuges. "Caryatids of Time: Temporality in the Cinema of Agnès Varda," *Performing Arts Journal* 19, no. 3 (1997): 1–10.

Parisian spaces.[46] She further argues that Cléo, in her journey across Paris, becomes conflated with these spaces so that the city comes to embody Cléo and she the city. Philip Powrie, treating the same film along with three others, presents a discussion on the Foucauldian notion of heterotopic spaces, "contested and inverted," at once marginal and eccentric while being inscribed within "normal spaces" and serving as the loci for the deconstruction and refusal of binaries such as exterior versus interior.[47] Furthermore, Jenny Chamarette examines "temporalized" spaces, "layered with past and present," as places of memorial practice in Varda's art installations, both live and on film.[48] She posits that these simulacral spaces "enact mourning as an affective and intersubjective" experience.[49] Veering closer to applying a haptic and phenomenogical theory to Varda's works, this article will be especially useful to my discussion on materiality, mourning, and absence in Varda's films.

In a more recent article, Kate Ince examines materialized geographical spaces and the relationship of characters to their environment in "Feminist Phenomenology and the Film World of Agnès Varda."[50] As I discuss below, Ince's work has contributed to bridging the gap between Varda studies and haptic theory. Bénézet's treatment of space echoes that of Ince as she posits that Vardian space is neither "objective or topographic, and often it is invested by someone's presence and by his or her embodied subjectivity."[51] As an extension of this notion, she analyzes landscapes and beachscapes in Varda's films and installations and interprets them as "emotional geographies" and "creative opportunities to summon up a multiplicity of

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[46] Forbes, Jill. "Gender and Space in *Cléo de 5 à 7*," *Studies in French Cinema* 2, no. 2 (2002): 83–89.

[47] Powrie, Phil. "Heterotopic Spaces and Nomadic Gazes in Varda: From *Cléo de 5 à 7* to *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*." *L'Esprit Créateur* 51, no. 1 (2011): 68–82.

[48] Jenny Chamarette, "Spectral Bodies, Temporalised Spaces: Agnès Varda's Motile Gestures of Mourning and Memorial," *Image & Narrative* 12, no. 2 (October 5, 2011): 36.

[49] Chamarette, "Spectral Bodies," 34.

[50] Ince, Kate. "Feminist Phenomenology and the Film World of Agnès Varda," *Hypatia* 28, no.3 (2013): 602-617.

[51] Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda,*140.

connections, memories and experiences."[52] While I do not explicitly treat the notion of space, the works of Chamarette, Ince and Bénézet are invaluable to this project in that they open the door for a haptic reading of other aspects of Varda's oeuvre.

Moreover, given Varda's status as one of the few female French filmmakers, her films have been examined extensively from a feminist perspective. The most notable of these analyses appears in Sandy Flitterman-Lewis' book *To Desire Differently: Feminism and the French Cinema,* where she devotes three chapters to Varda.[53] Flitterman-Lewis presents the problematics and ambiguities that come with classifying Varda as a feminist filmmaker, discusses the context of film production in the New Wave era with a focus on Varda's complex relationship to the movement, and provides a critical examination of the constructions of femininity in *Cléo de 5 à 7*. Forbes responds to the canonical feminist readings of *Cléo* by arguing that the eponymous protagonist is not an empowered female subject but rather, in her identification with the city of Paris, is a "mapped-out object."[54] Basing her argument on Christopher Prendergast's notion of the city as whore in *Paris and the 19th Century* (1995), and citing the presence of the 19th century literary and artistic references or topoi that abound in the film, Forbes proposes an alternate vision of Cléo as whore rather than free agent. Finally, in her monograph, Bénézet examines the corporeal ways in which Varda rejects the notion of a singular female subjectivity in *L'Opéra-Mouffe* as well as the conflicting images of women in *Daguerréotypes* (1975).

Additionally, a number of scholars have commented on Varda's incorporation of the arts in her films. As Forbes remarks in her discussion on topoi in *Cléo de 5 à 7,* the presence of art, including photography, plays a large role in many of Varda's films. Given the filmmaker's

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[52] Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda,* 90 and 141.

[53] Flitterman-Lewis, Sandy. *To Desire Differently: Feminism and the French Cinema.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

[54] Forbes,"Gender and Space," 83.

formation as an artist and a photographer, it is natural that references to and representations of the visual arts regularly figure in her films. This tendency has also been noted by scholars such as Ruth Cruickshank who, in an article that echoes the title of Benjamin's 1936 essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,* analyzes the presence of art in Varda's *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse.*[55] In her interpretation of Varda's intertwined representations of social and artistic gleaning, Cruickshank illustrates how the film investigates "marginalization, waste and the critical potential of art in the age of global consumption," thereby countering Benjamin's more negative position on the modern work of art.[56] Taking a more epistemological approach, Ari Blatt analyzes Varda's *Ulysse* (1982) as a work that serves as a "vehicle for thinking" about photography while subverting the notion of the medium's indexical relationship to the world.[57] I pursue Varda's relationship to the other visual arts more closely in Chapter Four.

Another important motif that emerges in Varda's films is her preoccupation with the nature of memory and remembering. While many scholars such as Bloch, Forbes, Blatt and Emma Wilson have treated the notion of memory in the works of Varda, Smith's chapter "Time and Memory" in *Agnès Varda* is one of the few texts that treats the theme to any great extent with regard to her broader corpus.[58] Smith argues that time and memory have always been important to Varda's work, but that these themes are more prevalent in her work after the 1970s. She notes that Varda is generally preoccupied by the unreliability of memory over time and by our problematic relationship with the past. Building on Smith's observations, in

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[55] Cruickshank, Ruth. "The Work of Art in the Age of Global Consumption: Agnès Varda's *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*." *L'Esprit Créateur* 47, no. 3 (2007): 119–132.

[56] Cruickshank, "The Work of Art," article abstract.

[57] Ari J. Blatt, "Thinking Photography in Film, or The Suspended Cinema of Agnès Varda and Jean Eustache," *French Forum* 36, no. 2 (2011): 182.

[58] Wilson, Emma. "*Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*: Salvage and the Art of Forgetting." In *The Art of the Project: Projects and Experiments in Modern French Culture*, edited by Johnnie Gratton and Michael Sheringham, 96-110. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005. For more on Emma Wilson's discussion on memory and Varda's move to forget death, see Chapter Two.

Chapter Two I illustrate the ways in which Varda materializes the complexities of memory by inscribing the act of remembering on the body and in material objects.

Given the sociological grounding of Varda's films, her corpus has also attracted the attention of scholars such as Ben Tyrer and Bénézet for their political engagement. Tyrer views Varda primarily as a political filmmaker who has witnessed and represented political events throughout the long span of her career.[59] He analyzes *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* as a social documentary that stays true to her Left Bank roots and suggests that underlying the digressive and often ludic nature of the film is a "plurivocal configuration of the real that is neither didactic nor utopian."[60] Yet, he cautions that despite Varda's political engagement, *Les Glaneurs,* as well as other works by her, are wide-ranging and not limited to a single, dominant discourse, which is precisely what prevents her social documentaries from being interventionist, didactic or utopian.

Bénézet enriches the discussion on the political nature of Varda's films by offering a rare glimpse into the expatriate works made by the filmmaker in Los Angeles during her two sojourns in the United States, the first trip occurring between 1967 and 1969 and the second from 1980 to 1981.[61] Very justly, Bénézet maintains that since little scholarly attention has been devoted to these films, there is a gap in the appreciation and comprehension of Varda's cinematic corpus. She sees Varda's films as politically engaged, feminist works that focus on the marginalized and the invisible groups in society. Furthermore, Bénézet, who proposes that the filmmaker not only makes these groups visible, but also audible, studies the "soundscapes" of Varda's expatriate films in an effort to render "the director's political engagement more

[59] Tyrer, Ben. "Digression and Return: Aesthetics and Politics in Agnès Varda's *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000)," *Studies in French Cinema* 9, no. 2 (May 2009): 161-176.

[60] Tyrer, "Digression and Return," 174.

[61] Bénézet, Delphine. "Spatial Dialectic and Political Poetics in Agnès Varda's Expatriate Cinema." *Journal of Romance Studies* 9, no.2 (Summer 2009): 85–100.

tangible."[62] Here, we begin to see an inclination toward a discussion of a "haptic sound" in Varda's film, but Bénézet's earlier analyses remain mostly in the audiovisual realm. Her recent monograph engages again with the political aspects of Varda's films, this time with a specific focus on the "polemical potential of the corporeal on screen."[63] Her move toward an analysis of the corporeal in a handful of Varda's films certainly points to an increasingly haptic reading of the filmmaker's corpus. However, Bénézet maintains a distance from the images she describes and rarely touches on the materiality and tactile nature exhibited by Varda's works. In my project, I offer a fuller reading of Varda's remarkably haptic cinema that is centered not only on the bodies she depicts, but also on the very surface and texture of the world that they inhabit, all perceived and expressed by film's own body.

Indeed, when taking inventory of the vast and valuable array of scholarly studies on Varda, certain gaps emerge, especially as it pertains to a phenomenological study of her oeuvre. Although a number of the critical works outlined in the previous section veer toward a haptic approach to Varda's works, none of them in particular make full contact with her corpus to account more thoroughly for a body of work that thrives on materiality and the sensual depiction of living and inanimate bodies that are phenomenologically imbricated with the world. Consequently, the existing scholarship on Varda remains largely asymptotic in relation to a deeper understanding and appreciation of a body of work that pushes against the world and *appeals* to a haptic critique in order to express itself to the fuller extent.

Scholars such as Beugnet, Chamarette, Ince and more recently Bénézet have laid the groundwork for such an approach to Varda's oeuvre, yet they too stop short of a more profound contact with it.[64] In *Cinema of Sensation,* Beugnet evokes *Jacquot de Nantes* (1990)

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[62] Bénézet, "Spatial Dialectic," 92.

[63] Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda,* 31.

[64] The treatment of the questions of corporeality, embodiment and tactility in Varda's films also appear briefly in: Rutherford (2013). Rutherford analyzes Varda's *Les Glaneurs* as an affective, mimetic documentary that still manages to signify without submitting the sensory to the semantic, and, in this manner, leads to an embodied

and *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* in her discussion of body landscapes, wherein the body functions as a repository of visual memory. She turns to *Les Glaneurs* once more, alongside *L'Opéra-Mouffe,* to demonstrate the ways in which the body can become unknown and alien. It is odd to find mention of Varda's works nestled among the more graphic descriptions of the transgressive *cinéma du corps* genre with which Beugnet's study is concerned, yet the examples she takes from Varda serve her arguments well. I comment more on this below.

Ince, using Laura Marks "haptic visuality" as a theoretical frame, discusses Varda's *La Pointe Courte, L'Opéra-Mouffe, Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* and *Les Plages d'Agnès,* focusing her inquiry mainly on the relationship between Varda's "femaleness" and her filmmaking. She maintains that, "for Varda, female subjectivity is always 'lived,' that is, embodied and actively animated, even when it remains a viewed object."[65] She further posits that there exists in her cinema a constructed, mimetic relationship between the body of the film's subject, the body of the audience member and the wider body politic. Ince, through an examination of Varda's use of geographical places and her use of female embodiment, takes a feminist, existential phenomenological approach to Varda's films. Consequently, her 2013 article lies at the intersection of the ideas proposed by Flitterman-Lewis, Merleau-Ponty and Marks.

Chamarette devotes an entire chapter to Varda in *Phenomenology and the Future of Film,* exploring a number of Varda's films, such as *Sans toit ni loi* and *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse,* and a selection of the installations in Varda's 2006 *L'Île et elle* exhibition through an inquiry into the "uncanny affective power of objects" in order to posit a plurality of cinematic

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spectatorship and an embodied knowledge. Jake Wilson, "Trash and Treasure: *The Gleaners and I*." *Senses of Cinema*, no. 23 (December 12, 2002) Web: "Varda (or her videographer) pushes up close to a painting, a rain-spattered windscreen, a knobby potato or human skin. Such moments have the tactile quality of what Laura Marks calls 'haptic" imagery – using the camera as a probing instrument rather than the screen as a canvas, dwelling on surface textures rather than offering a totalising three-dimensional perspective.'"

[65] Ince, "Feminist Phenomenology and the Film World of Agnès Varda," 7.

subjectivity.[66] She maintains that there exists an "embodied relationality" between Varda's cinematic subjects, the filmmaker included therein, and the objects she presents, leading to shifting subjectivities that share in sense-making.[67] Finally, Bénézet, although weaving elements of a haptic criticism throughout her entire work on Varda, engages in a purely haptic manner with only two of Varda's films in her monograph. By purely haptic, I mean that she goes beyond an analysis of corporeality to touch on materiality, emotion and sensation in *Plaisirs d'amour en Iran* (1976) and in *7p., cuis., s. de b.,…à saisir.* In the first, film, Bénézet explores the "emotional geography" created by Varda as the backdrop for a conversation between two lovers, a geography that "takes on a life of its own and changes according to the content and intonations" of the dialogue.[68] In her analysis of the second film, Bénézet observes that even though the work demands an intellectual effort on the part of the spectator, its dreamlike aesthetic and meandering structure often only require "an openness to the immediacy of images and sounds."[69] Bénézet's haptic interpretations of these two films, both of which defy a linear narrative and pose challenges to the viewer's ability to negotiate intellectually the film worlds that they present, underscore the fact that many of Varda's works have been overlooked by existing scholarship because they appeal to a non-rational, intuitive reading and fall outside the scope of conventional theoretical paradigms that draw on the cerebral rather than on the sensorial. In this regard, Bénézet's work supports the primary purpose of this dissertation—to remain open to the immediacy of the haptic presence exerted by Varda's body of work in order to gain a novel and richer understanding of it.

While the four authors above provide rigorous analyses of a number of Varda's films through a haptic, embodied or phenomenological approach, their works still only treat a small

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[66] Jenny Chamarette, *Phenomenology and the Future of Film: Rethinking Subjectivity Beyond French Cinema* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hamphsire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 109.

[67] Chamarette, *Phenomenology and the Future of Film,* 115.

[68] Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda*, 93.

[69] Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda*, 134.

portion of the extensive film and art world of Agnès Varda and leave much room for a more comprehensive study of her corpus through a resolutely haptic lens. Without denying the extreme validity and importance of these scholars' perspectives, I propose to examine a significant number of Varda's films and installations using precisely such a lens in order to shed light on her deeply phenomenological project that is not just limited to the feminine or marginalized experience but to overall human existence.

It is important to ask why haptic theory has neglected to give more thorough attention to Varda's corpus. Perhaps this is because Varda's works fall outside of the scope of the scholars listed above: her films are not intercultural or openly and violently transgressive; she does not engage in experimental cinema nor does she deal in horror or other genre films. However, Varda's works, unique in their unconventionality and much noted for their blurring of fiction and documentary and for their feminist commentary, are deeply socio-cultural films that extend into the world with an often ludic, creative and aleatory slant and are conducive to a more phenomenological approach. Furthermore, as Cruickshank (2007) and Bénézet (2014) have also noted, they often highlight questions of alterity and marginalization through the material and the corporeal, issues that are in line with haptic criticism's concern for identification and intersubjectivity.

Previously, I raised the point that Beugnet's inclusion of Varda within her corpus of transgressive *cinéma du corps* films was peculiar given that Varda's films are so glaringly different from the sexually graphic and violent works by filmmakers such as Claire Denis, Bruno Dumont and Philippe Grandrieux.[70] However, the fact that Beugnet, even within the particular context of her book, is drawn to the films of Varda supports an argument that I put forth in this project. While Varda's corpus does not fall within the ever-expanding canon of the

[70] Among the films that Beugnet treats are: *Dans ma peau,* Marina de Van, 2002; *Flandres*, Bruno Dumont, 2006; *Sombre*, Philippe Grandrieux, 1999; *Trouble Every Day*, Claire Denis, 2002 and *Tiresia*, Bertrand Bonello, 2003.

cinéma du corps tendency and her films are not strictly experimental or transgressive, I argue that they still constitute a cinema of the body and furthermore, a body of cinema. Beugnet's attention to Varda's works bolsters my argument that a haptic and corporeal cinema need not belong to what James Quandt pejoratively labeled "The New French Extremity."[71] Without lending credence to Quandt's critique of the *cinéma du corps,* I propose a more optimistic and moderate approach which is founded on the idea that shock and ambiguity, both within form and content, is not a prerequisite for a corporeal and haptic cinema and that profound reflections on life, society and the world, on identification and subjectivity can be attained equally through ludic and lighthearted images that are tempered with the weight of the complexities of human existence. Therefore, Varda's oeuvre does not incite sensory overload but rather a sensory awakening in the spectator, who becomes what Sobchack calls "a cinesthetic subject." This neologism, combining the words cinema, synesthesia and coenaesthesia, describes a viewer who, "through an embodied vision informed by the knowledge of the other senses" both "touches and is touched by screen."[72] According to Sobchack, as a result of such an experience with film, the "cinesthetic" subject "subverts the prevalent objectification of vision that would reduce sensorial experience at the movies to an impoverished 'cinematic sight.'"[73]

Thus, with the view of positing the importance of a "cinesthetic" experience, this dissertation opens onto a relatively untouched horizon in the analysis of Varda's cinema. It

[71] Quandt, James. "Flesh & Blood: Sex and Violence in Recent French Cinema." *Artforum* 42, no. 6 (2004): 126-132.

[72] Vivian Sobchack, "What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject or Vision in the Flesh," in *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 70-71. Sobchack's concept of the "cinesthetic subject" posits that in a more embodied spectatorship, "meaning, and where it is made, does not have a discrete origin in either spectators' bodies or cinematic representation but emerges in their conjunction," thus forming a subversive body who exhibits both synesthetic and coenaesthetic tendancies. She defines synesthesia as the involuntary condition in which the stimulation of one sense leads to perception by another, and coenaesthesia as "the open sensual condition of a child at birth" or more generally, as the "prelogical and non-hierarchical unity of the sensorium that exists as the carnal foundations for the later hierarchical arrangement of the senses achieved through cultural immersion and practice" (67-69).

[73] Sobchack, "What My Fingers Knew," 70-71.

begins with an investigation of the material and embodied representations of time, memory and death in her films. Based in the theoretical framework detailed above, my project explores these themes by providing an analysis of the aspects of Varda's films that offer themselves to a haptic perception—in other words, to being touched by the eye and perceived by the sensorium as a material body. Furthermore, in response to the relative paucity of scholarly works on the dozens of films and exhibitions Varda has produced, this project also focuses on a number of Varda's lesser-known fiction and documentary works as well as on a number of her recent art installations, all of which merit analysis through a haptic and phenomenolgical lens.

My work is comprised of five parts, including four chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter is entitled "Embodied and Material Representations of Time and the Intersubjective Experience in *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* and *Cléo de 5 à 7.*"[74] As the title indicates, this chapter examines the ways in which the concept of time, both as a marker of human existence and as the basis of cinema, is represented as material, embodied and tangible in Varda's films, encouraging a more intersubjective viewing experience in which the space between film and spectator becomes blurred. The first half of the chapter treats *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* and explores the ways in which time is taken up by objects as wells as by Varda's own body. The second half focuses on *Cléo de 5 à 7* and offers an analysis of the representation of time as embodied by the protagonist, by the objects that surround her and by the film itself.

The second chapter, entitled " Material And Embodied Memory in *Ulysse, Les Plages d'Agnès,* and *Les Cent et une nuits de Simon Cinéma"* parallels Chapter One's treatment of material and embodied time by investigating the ways in which Varda's films anchor memory in material objects and in the body as mnemonic devices. The chapter begins with a discussion of Varda's problematic relationship to memory and follows with an analysis of her films wherein I maintain that through embodied and material representations of individual and

[74] When discussing Varda's works, I use the original French titles because a number of them lose their meaning in translation and because as the protagonist in *Les Cent et une nuits de Simon Cinéma* (1995), Monsieur Cinéma himself demands, it's important to use "les titres originaux" in order to stay authentic to the works.

collective memory, the filmmaker brings the act of remembering to the surface of lived experience and invites the spectator to intersubjectively co-construct the past. At the same time, she offers her films up as loci for a broader questioning of what it means to remember and the intrinsic fallibility of memory. A final point that I raise in this chapter is the skillful way in which Varda builds a collective co-memory of cinema, from its proto-history to its present through a reflection on photography, film history and her own career as a filmmaker.

In the third chapter, "Mourning Bodies: Varda's Haptic and Embodied Representations of the Cycle of Life and Death, Loss and Absence," I analyze the ways in which Varda treats these recurring motifs in three of her films: *L'Opéra-Mouffe, Jacquot de Nantes* and *Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier* (2006). The principal idea of this section will be to investigate the embodied and haptic ways in which Varda's cinema expresses the paradox of existence that lies in the fact that as we live, we are in the process of dying, a notion that Heidegger calls "being-toward-death." Specifically, the chapter will touch on Varda's representations of the tenuous balance between life and death and the palpable absence that death leaves in its wake. In *L'Opéra-Mouffe,* Varda presents an album of a humanity ceaselessly embroiled in the dynamic of "being-toward-death" while in *Jacquot de Nantes* and *Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier,* as works of personal and collective mourning, she marks absence materially and on the body. After presenting a haptic analysis of these films, the chapter will conclude with a discussion on my conceptualization of "cinema as a potato," as a rhizomatic being that is simultaneously dying and regenerating itself so that every filmic work is at once an act of mourning and a process of renewal within the larger life and body of the cinema.

In addition to analyzing the haptic, the material and the embodied in Varda's films, this project also explores her larger oeuvre as a collective organism in the fourth chapter, entitled "The Dimensions of a Body of Work: Varda's corpus as *corps*." This final chapter offers a reading of Varda's corpus as constituting a living, intratextual and rhizomatic body, within which the body and the lived experience of the filmmaker are implicated. To support such a

reading and to delineate Varda's body of work, I present biographical material, information on the production contexts of a number of her films as well as analyses of the intratextuality that exists across her oeuvre, including both her cinema and her installation art. My project concludes by investigating what a haptic and phenomenological study of Varda's corpus reveals about her work and how these revelations address the limitations posed by other approaches to her extensive creative project. From this inquiry, I observe that Varda's use of her camera as a "prosthetic hand" results in a body of work that not only exerts a presence in the world, but is also firmly *present* to the world as a body among others.

I end this introductory chapter with a small anecdote as a way of reconnecting this project to its broader phenomenological context and underlining the importance of approaching Varda's films from a haptic perspective. In my second-hand copy of Laura Marks' *The Skin of the Film,* a previous reader had scribbled in the margins, "WHY DO WE NEED TO TOUCH CINEMA?!" The comment, obviously written in a moment of frustration that often comes with negotiating new territory, made me chuckle, but at heart, it is a valid and necessary question. I take a step back from it to rephrase the query by asking what we gain from approaching Varda's corpus haptically. I maintain that when we seek contact with Varda's body of work and engage with it through a haptic perspective, we illuminate it as a deeply phenomenological body of artistic creation, we acknowledge its profound humanity and its potential for embodying the complexities of the human experience through the intersubjective medium of film, all of which contribute to a more vivid understanding of the filmmaker's oeuve. These factors also open up new avenues for appreciating Varda's works for the sake of simply taking pleasure in the ways that they reach out to us, in the ways they seek a connection with the spectator that supersedes a mere audiovisual experience and becomes a dispersed and intersubjective perceptual exchange that emanates from more than just the I/(eye).

CHAPTER ONE

"The Metronome and the Violin": Embodied and Material Representations of Time and the Intersubjective Experience *in Cléo de 5 à 7* and *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*

What is past or future for me is present in the world.

—Maurice Merleau-Ponty[1]

"*Ô temps! Suspends ton vol!*"[2] This ardent but futile apostrophe to time, gleaned from Lamartine and spoken in voice-over by Agnès Varda, punctuates her short film *Ulysses* (1982) and attests to the way in which the notion of temporality pervades her films with striking regularity. In her eclectic body of work, Varda frequently approaches time as a multifaceted phenomenon that modulates the patterns and rhythms of human existence. The broader topic of the relentless and irreversible passage of time is certainly a recurring theme in her films, but she often nuances this larger idea by coupling it with other motifs. Often in her works, time is inextricably linked with the erosion and distortion of memory.[3] Moreover, for Varda, time is also linked to the erosion of the body and ultimately, with death. For example, in *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961) and *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000), there is the often unsubtle intimation that with each beat of the body's pulse, which functions as a biological metronome that keeps the underlying tempo for the vastness of an intersubjective human existence, time leaves its mark and brings us closer to our inevitable end.[4]

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[1] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), trans. Colin Smith (London: Routeledge, 1962), 478.

[2] "O time! Suspend your flight!" Alphonse de Lamartine, "Le Lac" (1820), in *Méditations Poétiques* (Vienna: Charles Armbruster, 1828), 58-61. Tranlsations of citations from films are taken from the subtitles unless otherwise noted.

[3] For more on memory in the works of Varda, see Chapter Two.

[4] By intersubjective, I mean a shared human experience in which subjects perceive the Other as *other subjects* rather than as objects in what Laura Marks calls "a mutual relation of recognition." Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 183. For the purposes of this dissertation, an intersubjective relationship is understood as existing both between human

Furthermore, in creating her films, Varda continually attempts to balance a delicate dynamic between objective and subjective time through a process that she likens to the "orchestration of the metronome and the violin."[5] As objective time, analogous to the regulated rhythms of the metronome, continues to tick, one's subjective perception of its passage, represented here by the expressive musicality of the violin, renders it personally poetic within the realm of individual experience. This orchestration is at the core of Varda's body of work—giving it both its pulse and its heart, its rhythms and affective range. For anyone familiar with Varda's oeuvre, the metronome and violin figuration strikes a deep chord through its lucid and poetic articulation of the very material dimensions that time assumes in her films.

It is apt, then that Varda's preoccupation with time plays itself out through the medium of film, which is itself an orchestration of objective and subjective or distorted time. Whether the real time or running duration of a film is two hours or 25 minutes, the story time represented within it is virtually free of temporal limitations. In other words, it can be distorted in numerous ways—expanded or collapsed, sped up or slowed down as befits the narrative time.[6] Diegetic time within a film can stretch smoothly across centuries or wrap tightly around a mere afternoon.[7] Additionally, in film, whether analogue or digital, the most

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subjects as well as between the spectator and film. To further elucidate this, I borrow from Vivian Sobchack, who succinctly differentiates between "subjectivity" and "intersubjectivity" by defining the first as, "the emergence and distinction of self from other (of subject from object) within the realm of the intrapersonal" and the latter as "the emergence and distinction of myself from other selves (of subject from subject in the shared realm of the interpersonal)." Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 55.

[5] Agnès Varda, "Avant-propos," in *Cléo de 5 à 7* (scénario). (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1962), 9. Quoted in: Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *To Desire Differently: Feminism and the French Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 229.

[6] The notions of "real time," "narrative time" and "story time" are taken form Genette. See: Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method.* Translated by Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1980.

[7] A few examples follow: *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles 1941) explodes a short span of diegetic time in the present with a series of flashbacks and flashforwards that reconstruct the life of Charles Foster Kane over 60 years. Similarly, *Le Jour se lève* (Marcel Carné 1939), although based on the tortured last hours of a murderer

basic unit of perceptible time becomes the image, commonly lasting 1/24 of a second.[8] Thus, at the very core of the medium that Varda employs for her artistic expression is an inalterable third time that belongs solely to the medium itself. However, within this third time, within this medium composed of a chain of images, lie limitless possibilities for alternative, distorted or anachronic temporalities. In her films, Varda explores this range of possibilities not only by playing with the notion of time, but also by infusing her images with a material temporality that often manifests itself through the presence of physical objects or on and through the body, both human and of the film.

Time and temporality has long been a topic of interest for Varda scholars, some of whom have written extensively on the topic and others who have touched on it briefly when presenting background on her work. The analyses offered by these scholars are varied and provide discussions on time as a structuring device, on the tension between subjective and objective time, on temporalized spaces and on time as a character in Varda's films, as a presence that exerts a "gently pulsing rhythm."[9] In keeping with the comprehensive nature of her monograph on Varda, Alison Smith provides a detailed and invaluable analysis of the link between time and memory as a thematic that spans a large number of Varda's films.[10] In the chapter that she devotes to the topic, Smith focuses on timelines and the ways in which time and memory are conjugated in Varda's films. I revisit Smith's discussion later in this chapter

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hiding from the police, relies on flashbacks to construct the narrative. Other films like *La haine* (Mathieu Kassovitz 1995) span a day in the life of the characters. A number of films such as *Run Lola Run* (Tom Twyker 1998) and Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7* take place in real time. Yet other works distort temporality and defy a clear and coherent construction of diegetic time and a linear narrative. Examples of such works include *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (Alain Resnais 1961) and *Agatha et les lectures illimitées* (Marguerite Duras 1981).

[8] The common frame rate for film is 24 frames per second, but this can vary. For example, some formats such as television and IMAX use the rate of 30 frames per second.

[9] Yvette Bíró and Catherine Portuges, "Caryatids of Time: Temporality in the Cinema of Agnès Varda." *Performing Arts Journal* 19, no. 3 (1997): 1. See also Jenny Chamarette (2011) Valerie Orpen (2007) and Jill Forbes (2002) and Jean-Yves Bloch (1991). The literature review, as well as the analyses of the two films below engage more specifically with these various scholars.

[10] Smith, Alison. *Agnès Varda*. French Film Directors Series. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998.

as well as in Chapter Two as a grounding for my analysis of the haptic representations of memory in Varda's works.

However, as I discuss in more detail below, what is missing from current scholarship amounts to the following two points: first, despite the fact that Varda's films lend themselves to a haptic theory, there has been no thorough analysis of the filmic worlds in Varda's work with regard to the physical bodies and haptic images that occupy these spaces and how they pertain to the prevalent theme of time. Nor has there been any extensive study of the films themselves as sentient and expressive bodies. Consequently, there exists a lack of discourse around the implication of the spectator in an embodied film experience and the dynamic of intersubjectivity that results from the haptic nature of Varda's films, works that *ask* for such an analysis in order to be fully understood and *felt*. In an attempt to address simultaneously the importance of the notion of time in her works as well as this marked gap in Varda scholarship, this chapter offers a haptic analysis of two of Varda's works, *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* and *Cléo de 5 à 7*. Such an analysis investigates the ways in which temporality infuses her films in order to show how the universal concept of time that marks all of human existence and is the basis of cinema as an art form, becomes material, embodied and tangible in Varda's works and how this hapticity brings about a more intersubjective viewing experience in which the space between film and spectator becomes blurred. I focus on these two films in particular firstly because they engage intensively with time and temporality. A second reason lies in the fact that, in choosing two of her canonical and much-discussed films, I hope to demonstrate that a re-reading of such works through a haptic lens can provide us further and fresh insight into Varda's oeuvre as a deeply phenomenological project.

As part of this endeavor, a brief survey of the scholarly literature on the notion of time in Varda's works is important not only because it exposes a lack of a haptic study of her films, but also because it traces the subtle progression *toward* a haptic theory in Varda studies

built on years of earlier scholarship. The secondary works that I detail below have laid important groundwork from which a haptic analysis of time in her films grows organically. By linking the abstract notion of time to either physical space or to matter and the body, even if cursorily or metaphorically as in the case of Jean-Yves Bloch, these authors have primed the field for a more complete and cohesive examination of Varda's works as profoundly haptic, material and corporeal films that have continually challenged the conventions of the cinematic experience by inducing a sensorial spectatorship, inciting tactile associations and thus acting as vehicles for a richer, embodied thought on broader, more abstract themes such as time. A prime example of this proto-haptic scholarship comes from Bloch, whose discussion of time in *Cléo* makes use of Varda's own eloquent metaphor of the violin and metronome, each instrument respectively representing subjective and objective time, to emphasize the relationship among perceived time, real time and the third "Hegelian" time that arises from this dynamic, a notion that my analysis of *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* explores in fuller detail in the second part of this chapter.[11]

More recently, since the release of her last two films *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* and *Les Plages d'Agnès* (2009), scholars such as Jenny Chamarette and Homay King have approached time in Varda's works intermedially by exploring how her treatment of the topic functions within other expressive formats built around the use of virtual and digital technologies and interactive art installations. Chamarette characterizes the interactive installation spaces of Varda's artistic works that are devoted to mourning, both as projects in and of themselves as well as their re-presentations in her films, as "temporalised spaces" layered with past and present.[12] She pays particular attention to "Varda's complex structures

[11] Bloch, Jean-Yves. "*Cleo de 5 à 7*: Le violon et le métronome." *Lettres modernes*. *Etudes cinématographiques* (1991): 179–186.

[12] Jenny Chamarette, "Spectral Bodies, Temporalised Spaces: Agnès Varda's Motile Gestures of Mourning and Memorial." *Image & Narrative* 12, no. 2 (October 5, 2011): 36.

of cinematic and photographic images, text, concrete objects and projected surfaces," and their "potential to activate a space with affective layers of memorialisation."[13] Chamarette's article will be of more consequence in Chapter Three's discussions on mourning and loss, yet her observations on the potential of the material and the corporeal for creating an affective proximity between spectator and work of art resonates with the concerns of this chapter.

In "Matter, Time, and the Digital," King explores Varda's relationship to digital media to demonstrate that the filmmaker's insistence on the material and the time-bound function within the framework of the a-temporal and ephemeral digital format to counter "transcendence with immanence.[14] While the scope of King's article touches on issues that I raise in the conclusion of this project, and which address the notion of a digital materiality, the attention she devotes to the material and corporeal aspects of *Les Glaneuers et la glaneuse* are in pace with this chapter's exploration of haptic and embodied time in Varda's films. Other scholars, without relying on a haptic analysis of the material and embodying aspects of Varda's films, have linked the notion of time to subjectivity, particularly with reference to *Cléo de 5 à 7*. Three authors of interest in this regard are Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, Valerie Orpen and Jill Forbes, whose works I mention in more detail throughout my analysis of *Cléo* in the last segment of this chapter.

The pattern that materializes from the preceding overview pertaining to the scholarly treatment of time in Varda's oeuvre reveals that although the works cited above all revolve around the notion time, not one of them engages haptically and directly with this theme in Varda's films. For instance, the studies by Bloch, Forbes, Flitterman-Lewis and Orpen treat time as related to the subjective experience of Cléo, but with little mention of the haptic

[13] Chamarette, "Spectral Bodies," 37.

[14] King, Homay. "Matter, Time, and the Digital: Varda's *The Gleaners and I*." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 24, no. 5 (2007): 421–429.

qualities of Varda's film. Chamarette and Homay bring to light the material and corporeal aspects of Varda's works, but only as a means toward the exploration of other primary topics such as mourning or digital materiality. The analytical gaps that emerge when examining existing discussions of the notion of time across the vast body of Varda scholarship largely point to the lack of an in-depth analysis of the ways in which time manifests itself materially and corporeally, both on the body of the characters and the on the body of the film, and the ramifications such a reading holds for how we perceive her films and how they can touch us as spectators. Such an examination reveals that not only are Varda's works concerned with subjectivity, but that they also emerge as intersubjective experiences between the viewer, film and filmmaker. From the very beginning, her works have invited the spectator into close contact with the images and characters they proffer. Varda's concept of *cinécriture,* or the cinematic writing that is the basis by which she builds each film with the spectator firmly in mind, is at the heart of this invitation. Such a proximity to her films serves to smudge the line between the viewer and the filmic space.

Here, it is important to address the question of why this move toward intersubjectivity is important within the scope Varda studies. The answer lies at the cross section of the nature of cinema and the nature of Varda's oeuvre. With regard to the former, in this age of globalization, multiculturalism and pluralism when identities and subjectivities are fluid and boundaries even more so, film, as a highly mutable medium, has proven itself easily adaptable to these fluctuating demands. And, as films change so do the ways in which we watch them, or rather the ways in which we perceive them. The rise of the *cinéma du corps* tendency in France in the 1990s is exemplary of this notion. Eschewing conventional narrative techniques in favor of a more embodied and sensory expression, often through shocking, monstrous, intimate and unapologetic representations of the body, the *cinéma du corps* challenges not only what cinema *is,* but also how cinema can be perceived.

As I discuss in detail in the introduction chapter, Varda's films are not strictly experimental, nor are they transgressive. Yet it is this point, joined with the fact that more than half of her films predate the emergence of the *cinéma du corps* tendency, that proves that a haptic and corporal cinema need not belong to what James Quandt pejoratively labeled "The New French Extremity" in order to be conducive to a haptic film theory.[15] While the *cinéma du corps* films drastically contributed to our perception of film as a multisensory and intersubjective medium in response to a rapidly changing world that breeds alienation and challenges subjectivities, I want to stress that they have also equipped us with the tools to return to the history of cinema and revaluate how since its inception, film has manifested itself as a haptic medium. Varda's vast oeuvre, spanning six decades, continually present to the world and attuned to the rhythms of time and the vibrations between the violin and the metronome, attests to this.

Gleaning Time in *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*

The success of Varda's 2000 feature-length documentary *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* brought her to the widespread recognition of the general public, the film industry and cinema scholars. The film was well received in France and internationally, winning an impressive total of eleven awards. And, as Varda's 2002 short sequel *Deux ans après* illustrates, the work soon attracted a following of fans across the world, thus becoming her most well-known and beloved film. In the academic realm, it drew the attention of scholars for its self-reflexive tendencies, it material aesthetics and digressive structure, its representations of marginalized individuals in society and its poetic and subtly political commentary on a wasteful and consumerist culture that renders the opposing act of gleaning all the more poignant.[16] In the

[15] Quandt, James. "Flesh & Blood: Sex and Violence in Recent French Cinema." *Artforum* 42, no. 6 (2004): 126-132.

[16] Key works on these issues in the film include: Cruickshank, Ruth. "The Work of Art in the Age of Global Consumption: Agnès Varda's *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse.*" *L'Esprit Créateur* 47, no. 3 (2007): 119–132. Tyrer,

eclectic and winsome documentary, Varda turns the eye of her camera towards the gleaners of her society who, either because of economic necessity or for the pure joy of the search, sift through discarded items for salvageable goods. Traveling around France with her digital camera in hand, Varda depicts how the dying tradition of organized agricultural gleaning has been replaced by modern day varieties of gleaning that come in two main modes, survival and artistic.[17] The first feeds the body, while the second feeds creativity.

Early in the film, Varda deftly aligns herself with the gleaners she portrays by casting herself as a *glaneuse* of not only physical objects but of images and stories. In this carefully constructed work that offers a tapestry of meandering vignettes, Varda's commentary on the act of gleaning goes beyond mere documentation. Embedded in the narratives she provides on the lives of others is her self-portrait, one that allows her to define herself as an artist and to contemplate her life through her art within the self-reflexive act of what Varda describes in the film as "filmer d'une main mon autre main."[18] By juxtaposing survival gleaners with artistic gleaners, and placing these alongside the figure of herself as *la glaneuse*, she builds a solidarity of experience among the people in her film. In doing so, she suggests that gleaning for artistic purposes is also a necessary mode of *spiritual* survival. Paradoxically, in a film that celebrates renewal, survival and creativity, Varda also contemplates mortality and the

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Ben. "Digression and Return: Aesthetics and Politics in Agnès Varda's *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000)." *Studies in French Cinema* 9, no. 2 (May 2009): 161-176. Bonner, Virginia. "Beautiful Trash: Agnes Varda's *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*." *Senses of Cinema*, no. 45 (November 25, 2007). Fischer, Lucy. "Generic Gleaning: Agnès Varda, Documentary, and the Art of Salvage." In *Gender Meets Genre in Postwar Cinemas*, edited by Christine Gledhill, 111-122. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012.

[17] To read more on the production contexts and Varda's strategies for locating gleaners, see Bénézet, Delphine. *The Cinema of Agnès Varda: Resistance and Eclecticism*. Directors' Cut Series. New York: Wallflower Press, 2014. Bénézet also provides a discussion on the unorthodox structure of *Les Glaneurs* as well as on Varda's constant consideration of her audience in the making of the film.

[18] "filming my hand with my other hand" For more on portraiture and self-reflexivity in *Les Glaneurs,* refer to Calatayud, Agnès. *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* : Agnès Varda's Self-Portrait." *Dalhousie French Studies,* 61 (Winter 2002): 113-123 and Rosello, Mireille. "Agnes Varda's *Les Glaneurs et la Glaneuse*: Portrait of the Artist as an Old Lady," *Studies in French Cinema* 1, no. 1 (2001): 29–36.

passage of time as she turns her camera to her aging skin and graying hair. Marveling at the freedom that her handheld DV camera offers, Varda uses it to film herself at close range.

Fig. 1

In an almost unnervingly intimate shot, a still camera propped on a tripod captures the top of her head in close-up as she runs a comb through her hair (figure 1). Throughout the shot, Varda's face is never fully in view. Through this careful framing, she provides the spectator with only a fragmented portrait of herself. The focus in these images is her hair, which her hand and the comb part multiple times in order to reveal the silver roots hiding beneath her characteristic auburn dye job. The teeth of the comb sometimes glide unhindered through the bristly strands and other times, they get caught—in both cases, the action draws attention to its own materiality. The feeble light from a window barely penetrates an otherwise dim setting, but nonetheless it catches the white roots, drawing the spectator's haptic eye along the folds of her coarse hair. Behind her, a mirror framed in dark wood reflects Varda's back. Her doubled movements cause the filmic image to become layered with the motion of her arms and hands. As her fingers sift through her hair, the movement resonates with earlier images in the film by recalling the prehensile gestures of the potato gleaners' hands combing through the soil. Here, however, within the miniature topography of her hair, Varda is gleaning time, or more specifically, gleaning for meaning in time.

Confronted with this close range and kinetic scene, the spectator enters into a mimetic relationship with the film and forms with it a primary identification.[19] In contrast to a secondary identification that is made with the story or, more often, with the characters, a primary identification occurs between the spectator and the surface of the film itself, or as Sobchack phrases it, with the "sense and sensibility of materiality itself."[20] The use of the mirror in the background and its opaque and obstinate reflection of what is in the foreground encourage this primary identification with the surface material of the image by refusing any real depth of field. Furthermore, the dark wood of the wall panels and the chair rise up to the foreground to meld with Varda's chestnut hair and black comb. Within this darker plane, her white hands and silver hair roots stand out like metallic strands in a tapestry that catch the light and tease the senses. They are the punctum that jab at the viewer, the striking detail that draws the spectator in, or as Roland Barthes puts it, the "accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)."[21]

The scene is rendered even more poignant as the filmmaker's voice-over threads through the images, underlining her actions with a passage reappropriated from Pierre Corneille's *Le Cid*:

Non, non, ce n'est pas "Ô rage!" Non, ce n'est pas "Ô désespoir!" Ce n'est pas "Ô

[19] Anne Rutherford offers a succinct explanation of mimesis in film: "The concept of mimesis has two parts. The first, a copy, is familiar to a documentary thinking that would explain the documentary image as a mimetic copy of the world. The second, usually overlooked in discussions of documentary, does, however, offer a very productive conceptual framework for contemporary documentary theory. Michael Taussig describes this second aspect of mimesis as a kind of contact—a mode of sensory, tactile perception that breaks down the distinction between the viewer and the object in an experience of contact with the image. Taussig argues that mimetic perception closes the gap between the spectator and image, and generates a bodily response in the viewer, a kind of 'visceral experience' that is experienced as a 'porousness' between one's own body and the image." Anne Rutherford, "The Poetics of a Potato Documentary That Gets Under the Skin," *MetroMagazine* 137 (Summer 2003): 127. See also Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (Routledge, NewYork & London: Routledge, 1993), 21 and 38.

[20] Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye,* 65.

[21] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1981), 25.

> vieillesse ennemie!" Ce serait peut-être même "Ô vieillesse amie," mais tout de même, il y a mes cheveux et mes mains qui me disent que c'est bientôt la fin.[22]

As in the fervent apostrophe to time in *Ulysse*, this apostrophe to old age designates it as a personified presence in the plane of human experience, a character who is not only addressed but is also capable of speaking, of expressing itself through the body, through Varda's hair and hands, both of which embody the passage of time and articulate her mortal end.

The passage, which subverts the first two verses of Don Dièguе's soliloquy in *Le Cid*, demonstrates that Varda's attitude toward this mortality is ambiguous, a notion that is underscored by the lexical field of her utterances.[23] By building negative constructions into the first three sentences and turning the term "vieillesse ennemie" into "vieillesse amie," Varda rejects rage and despair with regard to old age and further suggests that she perceives it not as an inimical menace but rather as a friendly presence. However, these phrases are in turn undermined by the word "mais," which introduces the fact that, as her hair and hands attest, aging and its bodily manifestations constitute a persistent presence that signals the fleeting nature of time as well as our mortality, and therefore might not be such a welcome friend. In this way, Varda builds an equivocal relationship between herself and time by showing a wistful acceptance tinged with despair of the inevitable flight of time and of aging as a bittersweet process of life. Emma Wilson, engaging with haptic theory, briefly analyzes the same scene, remarking equally on its tactile and corporeal nature.[24] However, she concludes that Varda's focus on her aging body is a move to disavow the passage of time and death. Without invalidating Wilson's invaluable haptic approach to these images, I posit that Varda,

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[22] "No, no, it's not 'O rage!' No, it's not 'O despair!' It's not 'O old age, my enemy.' It might even be 'old age, my friend,' but still, my hair and my hands keep telling me that the end is near."

[23] The original verses read "Ô rage! Ô désespoir! Ô vieillesse ennemie! /N'ai-je donc tant vécu que pour cette infamie?" Pierre Corneille, *Le Cid* (1637), Act I, Scene 4. "O rage! O despair! O inimical old age!/Have I then lived so long only for this disgrace?" Pierre Corneille, *The Cid* (1637), Act I, Scene 5.

[24] Wilson, Emma. "*Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse:* Salvage and the Art of Forgetting." In *The Art of the Project: Projects and Experiments in Modern French Culture*, edited by Johnnie Gratton and Michael Sheringham, 96-110. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005.

precisely because she places such intense focus on the body, wherein the signs of aging are confronted at the forefront of the image, is not refusing, but rather coming to terms with the passage of time, the process of aging and the inevitability of death. She does not seek to forget time, but to instead call up its presence in her lived experience, regardless of her ambivalence toward this presence.

This ambiguous relationship with time is also colored by a certain fascination that Varda exhibits regarding the alienating effects of time on the body and on the memory. Later in *Les Glaneurs*, Varda sifts through a collection of mementos and souvenirs from her trip to Japan, among which figure textiles, pottery, small ornamental boxes and postcards of Rembrandt and his lover Saskia that she surprisingly acquired in Tokyo. The dense materiality this scene is striking as she submits her acquisitions to scrutiny by the camera. In this segment, filmed in tight close-up shots that include only the filmmaker's hands and the memorabilia they are sorting through, Varda, her camera and the spectator do more than just *look* at her mementos. The array of objects, textures and materials in the images, filmed at close range in long and deliberate tracking shots, coupled with the motion of Varda's hands caressing each item, invite the viewer's haptic eye to mimic her gestures, to trace the contours of each object and to brush against the various textures. The first and most salient significance of the scene is that the spread of items through which Varda sorts represents a material remembering of her trip, a way of anchoring fleeting memories in the solidity of things that can be revisited, held and touched, things which create a haptic link to a past experience. As the words "souvenir," "memorabilia" and "memento" suggest, these objects function as collateral against forgetting. In essence, they are a commentary on the eroding effects of time on memory, a notion that is further explored in the second chapter.

In addition to provoking this meditation on memory, the souvenir sequence also illustrates how time can bring about a shocking alienation from one's lived body. As Varda

handles these objects, her hand, her tactile tool and haptic link to the world, incites a moment of terror and self-estrangement in her. Bringing the spectator close into the image with a gentle forward zoom, Varda scatters her postcards across the table, places her hand over the one depicting Rembrandt's self-portrait then glides it over one showing Saskia. In a haptic shot, the camera moves ever closer to Varda's hand, now unrecognizable as such and resembling more and more an alien landscape, furrowed and worn by time, until we are confronted with what Jenny Chamarette calls its "abject plasticity."[25] The camera tracks painstakingly over her hand in a smooth, caressing gesture that is in contrast with the wrinkled texture of her skin (figures 2 and 3). The spectator mimetically touches along with the camera and along with Varda's hand. Once again, the filmmaker's voiceover narrates:

> Saskia en détail. Et puis, et puis ma main en détail. C'est à dire c'est ça mon projet—filmer d'une main mon autre main. Rentrer dans l'horreur. Je trouve ça extraordinaire. J'ai l'impression que je suis une bête. C'est pire. Je suis une bête que je ne connais pas. Et voilà l'autoportrait de Rembrandt. Mais c'est la même chose, en fait. C'est toujours un autoportrait.[26]

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

[25] Jenny Chamarette, *Phenomenology and the Future of Film: Rethinking Subjectivity Beyond French Cinema* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 118.

[26] "Saskia up close. And then, and then my hand up close, I mean, this is my project: to film with one hand my other hand. To enter into the horror of it. I find it extraordinary. I feel as if I am an animal, worse, I am an animal I don't know. And here's Rembrandt's self-portrait, but it's just the same in fact, always a self-portrait."

In the tactile intimacy offered by this sequence, Varda's hand, in addition to being an implement of touch, comes to embody the passage of time and the process of aging, a process that renders her unrecognizable and alien to herself even within the purported endeavor to provide her self-portrait in the film. Her commentary raises a stringent paradox—how to portray a self that one no longer recognizes, a self that is undergoing a transformation even as it is being memorialized? The answer remains ambiguous, but Varda mitigates the paradox by resorting to the part of herself that remains unchanged, to the self that is defined by her art, to the self that is still recognizable as a gleaner of images.[27] Chamarette notes that the "self-representation of Varda's ageing body, and the embodied modes by which the image moves close to, and is shaped by, Varda's body, both pertain to the representation of bodiliness, and a mode of embodied filmmaking."[28] Thus, it is through this embodied filmmaking and through the action of "filmer d'une main mon autre main" that the paradox is resolved. One hand, as the synecdochal figuration for the aging human body, represents the passage of time that renders this body an unrecognizable animal. However, the other hand embodies the artist's creative tool that gathers images, a notion that Varda explicitly and playfully underlines by using her fist as a camera aperture that closes in like an iris shot around the commercial trucks zooming by her car on the highway (figure 4). In this way, the creative hand becomes a metonymy for her work as filmmaker. In brief, as the creative hand films the aging hand, it creates a space not only for self-exploration and self-discovery, but also for a self-reflexive living discourse on these processes and on the practice of filmmaking itself.

[27] Martine Beugnet also offers a brief haptic analysis of this sequence. See: Beugnet, Martine. *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007. While she does not link the close-up of Varda's hand directly to time, she does focus on the alienation of the flesh and the relationship these images have to Varda's identity of filmmaker. She remarks that the sequence demonstrates "the sensual, reflexive bond of subjective body to objective world" (32) and that "the evocation of the body as alien is part of the director's on-going reflection on subjectivity, authorship and ageing" (102). She in turn posits that these haptic shots in *Les Glaneurs* serve to counter a consumer culture and challenge cinematic representations of the female body: "Varda links these unusual images of the female body to a whole economy of consumption and refuse (throwing away the old and misshapen and replacing with the new) where images of ageing are systematically excluded from the cinema screen in particular" (102-103).

[28] Chamarette, *Phenomenology and the Future of Film*, 118.

Fig. 4

By filming one hand with the other and the resulting metonymical implications of this gesture with relation to the cinema and filmmaking, Varda superimposes subjective time onto the objective passage of time, once again orchestrating the dynamic between the metronome and the violin, from which arises what Bloch refers to as "a third, Hegelian time."[29] This third time is neither objective nor subjective and is best represented by the image-per-second time that regulates the medium of film. It is Hegelian because it is time as the concept, that is, time as cinema and cinema as time and thus, for Varda, it becomes both the medium of experience and its expression. Moreover, this third, chiasmic time proves to be an intersubjective time. The viewer is implicated not only as one who receives this mediated expression, but also as one who actively and physically perceives it by virtue of possessing a human body undergoing the same physiological processes as Varda's. Thus, the filmmaker meets the spectator on the common planes of the human body and the body of the film as they enter into what Jennifer Barker calls "a relationship of intersubjectivity" that escapes the subject-object paradigm.[30] Within this relationship, the viewer and filmmaker are both gleaners of images and gleaners of meaning, working together intimately within and through the medium of the film to make sense of the human experience represented within (and outside) its frames. This

[29] Bloch, "Le violon et le metronome," 120.

[30] Jennifer Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*. (University of California Press, 2009), 13.

intense focus on the body and the skin also recalls Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the flesh, which posits a chiasmic relationship between body and world. However, it reminds us that this relationship does not presuppose an unwavering harmony with the world, that such a dynamic is not immune to feelings of alienation. Chamarette expresses this notion aptly by proposing that in the haptic images of Varda's hand, "the camera and her body form a liminal bond" and that this "contact and non-recognition forms an interesting parallel to Merleau-Ponty's notions of the chiasm [because] the dual contact of the 'touching touched' seems in some ways to be exceeded by the violent horror of affective non-recognition."[31]

Within Varda's oeuvre, such a relationship of intersubjectivity is not unique to *Les Glaneurs.* In fact, in her work, Varda intentionally and strategically constructs a shared plane between film, filmmaker and viewer. Such a creative co-construction forms the basis of Varda's *cinécriture,* a term that she coined to describe the philosophy and practice that is at the heart of her artistic creation. In *Varda par Agnès,* she defines the term as follows:

> J'en ai tellement assez d'entendre: *C'est un film bien écrit,* sachant que le compliment est pour le scénario et pour les dialogues. Un film bien écrit est également bien tourné, les acteurs sont bien choisis, les lieux aussi. Le découpage, les mouvements, les points de vue, le rythme du tournage et du montage ont été sentis et pensés comme les choix d'un écrivain, phrases denses ou pas, type de mots, fréquence des adverbes, alinéas, parenthèses, chapitres continuant le sens du récit ou le contrariant, etc. En écriture, c'estle style. Au cinéma, le style, c'est la cinécriture (italics in the original).[32]

This concept varies from Astruc's *caméra-stylo* and the auteur theory of the New Wave in that it surpasses the directorial "authorship" and "signature" that infuses a filmmaker's given style to encompass the notion that the cineaste "constructs a film […] as a writer constructs a

[31] Chamarette, *Phenomenology and the Future of Film*, 118-119.

[32] Agnès Varda, *Varda par Agnès.* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1994), 14.

text" during an integrated creative process.[33] *Cinécriture* implies a strategic bricolage and an intentional artistic choice, both of which build Varda's films as intersubjective spaces where the utmost meaning can be gleaned. It is on this shared plane that we meet the "*cinécrivaine"* Varda and where her films offer the "*cinélecteur"* a place to experience the pleasure of a multidimensional interpretation and exploration of cinema.[34] In an interview with Marie-Claire Barnet and Shirley Jordan, Varda underlines this idea by stating, "We know as filmmakers, writers, and artists that when we have finished something it doesn't belong to us at all, it belongs to the people who see it and enjoy it or not."[35] Given Varda's haptic aesthetics, along this shared plane that she offers to the spectator, meaning often converges in material objects and the body—the bodies *within* the film, the body *of* the film and the body of what Vivian Sobchack calls the "cinesthetic subject," who through an embodied vision that informs the other senses, "both touches and is touched by the [images on the] screen."[36] Consequently, the space between the viewer and the film becomes a charged network of co-constructed meaning whose currents flow through sensory channels from body to body.

Cléo de 5 à 7: Embodied Time and the Intersubjective Film Experience

[33] Alison Smith, *Agnès Varda,* French Film Directors Series (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 14.

[34] Varda does not use the words *cinécrivaine* and *cinélecteur* in her discussions on *cinécriture,* but they flow naturally from her term and I use them here as my own constructions as far as I am aware.

[35] Agnès Varda, "Interviews with Agnès Varda and Valérie Mréjen," interview by Marie-Claire Barnet and Shirley Jordan, *L'Esprit Créateur* 51, no.1 (2011): 184.

[36] Vivian Sobchack, "What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject or Vision in the Flesh," in *Carnal Thought: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 71. In "What My Fingers Knew," Sobchack presents the cinesthetic subject as follows: "We might name this subversive body in the film experience the *cinesthetic subject*–a neologism which derives not only from *cinema*, but also from two scientific terms, *synaesthesia* and *coenaesthesia*, that designate particular structures and conditions of the human sensorium. Both of these structures and conditions foreground the complexity and richness of the more general bodily experience that grounds our particular experience of cinema and both, as well, point to ways in which the cinema uses our dominant senses of vision and hearing to speak comprehensibly to our other senses" (67, italics in the original). Therefore, the cinesthetic subject's experience with film is based in a "pre-logical and non-hierarchical unity of the sensorium" (69). For more on this topic, see note 72 in the introduction chapter.

In the film world of *Cléo de 5 à 7*, Varda's practice of *cinécriture,* and her acute awareness of the "cinesthetic" being for whom it is intended, is evident in the filmmaker's precise attention to the material and embodied representation of time. Throughout the film, she plants an array of references to time, from the numerous images of clocks to more indirect allusions like the taxi as a chronometric device and the pendulum shape of the necklace that Cléo chooses to wear. As Phil Powrie notes, objects in *Cléo* function, "like *le hasard objectif* of the surrealists [to] reveal the traces of hidden subjectivities."[37] This notion aligns itself with Merleau-Ponty's conceptualization of time not as a succession of events but rather as a phenomenon that "rises from [our] relation to things. Within things themselves, the future and the past are in a kind of eternal state of pre-existence and survival."[38] Thus, phenomenologically, time is anchored in the present, anchored in the material word and the bodies therein. Varda's embodied and material representations of time in the film reinforce Cléo's preoccupation with time under the menace of imminent death, but they also bring to light the tension between objective and subjective time that resounds within the filmic space of *Cléo de 5 à 7* and within Cléo's existential experience *in the present.*[39] This apparent and intended tension pervades the fabric of the film. During a recent group dialogue with the filmmaker in Paris, Varda affirmed this notion by stating that in her conception of the film, she wished to construct a work in that would submerge us "in time as if it were a material."[40]

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[37] Phil Powrie, "Heterotopic Spaces and Nomadic Gazes in Varda: From *Cléo de 5 à 7* to *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse,*" *L'Esprit Créateur* 51, no.1 (2011): 68.

[38] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 478.

[39] Varda's intentions in making a film that is in the present are very clear. In the introduction to the screenplay for *Cléo de 5 à 7*, Varda's very first line reads, "Ce film se déroule 'au temps present' ("This film takes place in 'present time'"). Agnès Varda, *Cléo de 5 à 7* screenplay, (Cinémathèque française Archives, Paris, 1961), 1.

[40] "Je voulais qu'on soit dans le temps comme si c'était une matière" (my translation above). Agnès Varda in discussion with students and guests at the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) in Paris, March 24, 2015.

Indeed, the entire work is meticulously structured around time. As the title indicates, the 90-minute feature frames the protagonist within a specific period of time just short of two hours between five and seven one evening as she awaits the results of her biopsy. The entire work is shot in real time—the narration time closely matches the projection time virtually without ellipses as it follows Cléo during her 90-minute trajectory around Paris. The numerous clocks in the background of the images correspond to the exact time in the narrative and reinforce the continuity in the action. Furthermore, Varda chose to film on June 21, on the summer solstice and the longest day of year, and she makes pointed references to this fact at the end of *Cléo*, further underscoring the film's concern with the balance between light and darkness, between the objective and the subjective. She also emphasizes in the film that the story transpires on a Tuesday. These specificities solidly anchor the film in a precise period of time during which the filmmaker invites the spectator's presence. To underscore this effect, Varda presents each chapter by providing the time frame within which it unfolds.

Scholars such Sandy Flitterman-Lewis and Valerie Orpen have "mapped" the manner in which time structures the larger themes of *Cléo de 5 à 7.* For instance, Flitterman-Lewis details the chapter titles and their corresponding time intervals in the film as a means of tracking Cleo's shifting emotional state and pinpointing the exact moment of Cléo's transformation from self-reflective narcissism as an objectified being to self-recognition as a thinking subject. In her comprehensive guide to *Cléo,* Valerie Orpen offers an intricate technical and analytical discussion on Varda's use of real time. She distinguishes *Cléo* from other films shot in real time such as Alfred Hitchcock's *The Rope* (1948) and Fred Zinneman's *High Noon* (1952) by writing that, "no film has been as exact […] in its match of narration time and projection time."[41] Orpen also points out the "literariness" of the timed chapters that structure the film and how this format, as well as the general "omnipresence of

[41] Valerie Orpen, *Cléo de 5 à 7* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 22.

time, highlight the characters' subjective states, something that is paramount to Varda."[42] Building on these works by Powrie, Flitterman-Lewis and Orpen, I propose that the film's temporal framework and the material and embodied references to time serve not only to highlight Cléo's subjective experience, but also to create a dynamic of intersubjectivity between the "cinesthetic" spectator and the film.

The omnipresent allusions to time in *Cléo de 5 à 7* are not merely visual. Rather, they are multisensory, embedded in the image, in the soundtrack as well as taken up by the sentient camera movements, all of which constantly remind the viewer of the passage time. Again, Varda's *cinécriture* comes into play as she executes what Richard Neupert describes as "interrelating striking combinations of image, sound, and editing into complex signifying structures."[43] However, a tension arises when the allusions to the steady march of objective time are juxtaposed or superposed with the more abstract representations of the subjective time that Cléo experiences, resulting in what Varda calls "a very contradictory film."[44] She elaborates on this point in a 2006 interview:

> *Cléo from 5 to 7* was really about 2 times—objective time […] and subjective time […] I wanted to give the feeling of objective time but also another sense of time with Cléo's meetings and impressions. At the end of the film, she meets a soldier on leave from the Algerian War. He's afraid of his life there and I wanted to show a different experience of time. I remember doing a close-up of them and then withdrawing, far from them in the garden, so that they look suddenly very small in the garden, followed by a further close-up on them. As if we could sometimes express, at the same time,

[42] Orpen, *Cléo de 5 à 7,* 30.

[43] Richard Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema* (Chicago: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 344.

[44] Barbara Quart, "Agnès Varda: A Conversation," *Film Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (1986): 9.

> space, duration and feeling, which it is our job to express with shots and lenses, by filming. For the people watching the film I always hope they'll get the feeling.[45]

Here, we see Varda's intentional consideration of the viewer in her artistic creation. In her construction of the film, she integrates overlapping references to time into the sound and image of the work for the audience to discover. Each new reference that the viewer gleans becomes a precious *trouvaille.* The more one finds, the more one looks for them, the pleasure of seeking, discovery and interpretation propelling the participant-spectator through the film. Partly for the thrill of the search, the ensuing section approaches this very "contradictory" film first by examining the numerous and often clever ways in which time is represented materially through objects and places. However, the crux of the analysis moves beyond such an inventory to trace how time is embodied in *Cléo de 5 à 7*, how it manifests itself on and through the body of the characters, the film and ultimately, the spectator. This enquiry demonstrates that as Cléo moves from sexual object to thinking subject, with the shift occurring in the middle of the film in the charged space of her home, she also enters into a relationship of intersubjecivity with the world in the last third of the film when she ventures into Paris again. Finally, I propose that given the manner in which the film engages with the spectator's haptic perception through embodying and material images, this relationship of intersubjectivity arises equally between the film and the viewer.

In the first chapter of *Cléo,* there is a startling confrontation between objective and subjective time that manifests itself on the material body of the film itself. After her session with the fortuneteller, Cléo descends the stairs to the lobby of the building. Her footsteps, regular and measured like the ticking of a clock, are very audible as she walks down the steps, framed in a medium shot. During this sequence, the steady frontal medium shots of Cléo are alternated with views of her from behind, with unstable subjective point-of-view shots as well

[45] Varda and Barnet, "Inteview with Agnès Varda," 185.

as with close-ups of Cléo's face. Towards the end of this series of shots, Varda presents us with three short identical close-up shots of Cléo in succession. As Orpen notes, these rapid shots, taken from the same angle and "merely repeated, in time with the beat of the music and Cléo's footsteps" cause a certain tension by breaking the 30º rule of cinematography.[46] In film editing, the 30º rule stipulates that in order to create a smooth continuity between successive shots of the same subject, the camera should ideally move somewhere between 25 and 30° between each shot. In the absence of this angle change, the resulting jump cuts disrupt the coherence between the shots, jar the continuity of the sequence and consequently breach the temporality of narrative.

Orpen provides a detailed analysis of this scene, noting that it takes Cléo a plausible 37 seconds to walk down the stairs, but that this sense of objective time is distorted by the POV shots and the rapid sequence of identical close-ups. She concludes by proposing that "even though temporally this scene seems very objective, Varda has already inserted a brief moment of *subjective* perception that aligns us with Cléo from the outset (italics in the original)."[47] This overlap of measured and perceived time recalls Deleuze's description of the time-image in which "objective and subjective images lose their distinction, but also their identification, in favour of a new circuit where they are wholly replaced, or contaminate each other, or are decomposed and recomposed."[48] The three quick shots of Cléo's face, transgressive in their divergence from the cinematographic norm of the 30º rule, take on the dimensions of an object, of a sharp blade that in three quick consecutive motions cuts through the objective time and contaminates it with the protagonist's subjective perception. In this scene, Varda explodes the lines between objective and subjective time by embedding one

[46] Orpen, *Cléo de 5 à 7,* 25.

[47] Orpen, *Cléo de 5 à 7,* 25.

[48] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 149.

within the other so that the three jagged close-up shots become an implement that enacts a destabilizing violence by unexpectedly "cutting" the body of the film. For the viewer, it is this implement that is gleaned on the way to constructing a deeper meaning from the images Varda offers. Furthermore, given that these shots break with a cinematic convention that is taken for granted in traditional spectatorship, they "cut" the audience as well by jarring viewer expectations.

As we accompany Cléo around Paris, other references to time litter our path, some marking objective time, others aligning us with Cléo's subjective perception of time. Many of these occur in the first taxi ride, which takes her across the Pont Neuf into the Left Bank. The radio gives us periodic updates on the time in between snatches of news that deal with death, war or illness. This alternation between concrete and abstract references to the passage of time underscore the fluctuations in Cléo's moods as she goes from being playfully self-effacing after hearing one of her upbeat songs on the radio to growing somber and morbid as she glimpses a frightening mask in a shop window. The taxi itself becomes at once a time vessel and a chronometric device. It measures the objective time while careening through a landscape that plays on Cléo's subjective fears about the future and death. However, the next stop is not the hospital where she will have to confront her illness, but rather her home at 6 rue Huyghens. Her physical address is a carefully planted symbolic reference to time and Varda calls attention to it twice in the film, hanging it like a shiny object in front of viewers and encouraging them to glean for meaning, a *glanage* that proves to be fruitful.

The address is significant for two reasons, both of which Jill Forbes presents in her discussion of gender in *Cléo de 5 à 7*.[49] The first reason centers around the number 6, which figures into this discussion as the digit that marks the midpoint of an hour on a clock. Thus, it is not by accident that the turning point of the film, one which centers on Cléo moving away

[49] Jill Forbes, "Gender and Space in *Cléo de 5 à 7*," *Studies in French Cinema* 2, no. 2 (2002): 88.

from the objectified image of her constructed by others, as a sex symbol and capricious doll, towards a more subjective vision of herself and the world, takes place in the exact middle of the film at her symbolically charged home address. The second significance lies in the other hidden allusion to time that Cléo's address contains, an allusion that has a connection to both time and film. The street is named after the 17th century Dutch astronomer, mathematician and horologist Christiaan Huyghens, who "worked on the production of instruments of vision: lenses and telescopes, and the application of the pendulum to regulate the movement of clocks."[50] Thus, with this subtle but powerful reference, time is cleverly encompassed within a space with a quick wink to proto-cinematic devices.

Forbes describes the moment when Cléo undergoes her existential crisis in her studio as "the point of stasis before the pendulum begins to swing in the other direction," before she reenters Paris to be reborn as Florence, her given name, in the Parc Montsouris.[51] While I agree that the instance of Cleo's tirade exactly halfway through the film is a turning point, suspended in the balance between Cléo's two opposing subjective experiences, the events that lead up to it are anything but static. The scene that transpires in Cléo's apartment is one of neither inactivity nor equilibrium. Instead, the dynamic play between objective and subjective time still continues, manifesting itself in very kinetic and embodied ways as Cléo begins to sense her own subjectivity and confront her mortality. The many clocks in the apartment mark objective time, as do the references to time in the dialogue. Against this background, as Cléo's deeply subjective drama plays itself out, she herself begins to embody time. As the scene progresses, time saturates the environment within the film as well as the space between film and spectator. The sequence slowly and systematically elicits an embodied response from the spectator, from which is born an intersubjective understanding of Cléo's subjective crisis.

[50] Forbes, "Gender and Space," 88.

[51] Forbes, "Gender and Space," 88.

Upon arriving at her apartment, an airy studio with high ceilings and furnished with ornate furniture including a large bed, a rocking chair, a piano, a multitude of mirrors and clocks and a swing suspended from the ceiling, Cléo goes through what appears to be her exercise ritual. She sets a loud timer and suspends herself from a pull-up bar (figure 5). As her body, shown in an oblique angle, begins to swing from side to side like Huyghen's pendulum, Cléo starts to embody time, a notion that is underlined by the ticking of the timer that we hear in the background and the slew of clocks that surround her. Through a subtle mimetic response, in the process of following the movements of her swaying body with a tactile eye, the spectator's proprioception, defined by Paterson as the sense of bodily position, movement and balance," is both activated and destabilized.[52] Here, it is not through narrative but rather through engaged bodily sensations that the viewer perceives the film. This seemingly innocent image creates a certain tension and not just because of Cléo's somewhat awkward movements. The greater tension arises from the discord between Cléo performing an action that is meant to promote her health and vigor but which is overlaid by references to passing time and her imminent death.

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Later in the sequence, the sense of destabilization intensifies as the embodiment of time begins to affect not just Cléo's body but also the filmic environment around her. After a short visit from her lover, the singer sits on the swing that is suspended in her apartment

[52] Mark Paterson, *Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2007), 4.

(figure 6). Again, she sways, but this time, it is a more pronounced movement layered with the sound of the squeaking swing that noisily marks each passing second and accompanied by two other oscillating motions. The first is executed by her faithful assistant Angèle. In this carefully composed shot, Cléo swings towards and away from the audience in the center of the frame as Angèle, seated in a rocking chair on the right side, moves back and forth in a movement that is perpendicular to Cléo's motion (figure 7). In the background, Angèle's rocking chair is reflected and doubled in a mirror hanging in the window. The environment becomes charged with these vacillations, the constant motion reminding us kinetically that time is passing and punctuating the women's tense conversation about Cléo's possible illness.

Fig. 7

As the sequence continues, the embodiment of time again intensifies as it progresses from Cléo's body through the filmic environment and into the space between the viewer and the image. In doing so, the film begins to implicate the spectator to a higher degree through a more dynamic and engaging use of camera movements.[53] During the rehearsal sequence in her apartment, Cléo's musicians play her a sample of a song entitled "La Menteuse" ("The Liar") in allegro tempo. In response to her protests that the song is too difficult to sing, Bob the pianist slows the tempo down and at this very moment, the camera begins to sway from left to right in time with the music. It closes in and arcs from character to character, each of

[53] In the script for *Cléo de 5 à 7*, at the beginning of each chapter, frequently Varda provides specific directions for the camera movements, often using a vocabulary that endows the camera with an animate sensibility or a sensuality proper to the mood of the particular scene. For example, in Chapter V, for the scene with Cléo's lover, Varda calls for "les mouvements d'appareil sinueux" ("sinuous camera movements"). In the Rivoli sequence, as Angèle is leading Cléo to a taxi, Varda envisions forward tracking shots because "Angèle voit les choses de face" ("Angèle sees things head on"). (my translation)

whom is swaying in the opposite direction with relation to the camera movements. In the background, Angèle moves back and forth on the swing in a perpendicular motion to the one executed by the camera. The entire shot becomes kinetic, lurching from side to side, backward and forward, catching the spectator in its dizzying movements. The camera's pulling forward and away again activates a proprioceptive response in the viewer, who perceives a subtle discord between the gaiety of the song and the trenchant pendulum motion that signifies the passage of time. Thus, the spectator and the film again enter into a "relationship of intersubjectivity and co-constitution, rather than subject and object positioned on opposite sides of the screen."[54]

This current of intersubjectivity, of film *affecting* audience and audience *effecting* film, is generated the moment the camera begins to sway. As it moves, the camera makes itself known to the spectator while simultaneously acknowledging the spectator, whose co-presence has in effect influenced the film. Such intersubjectivity between film, spectator and the filmmaker who orchestrates this dynamic, breaks the subject-object paradigm. In this relationship, the film senses its sentient viewer as they engage in "a system of communication based on bodily perception as a vehicle of conscious expression. It entails the visible, the audible, [and] kinetic aspects of sensible experience to make sense visibly, audibly and haptically."[55] The dizzying shot described above acts as a nexus for various subjective movements executed by the characters and the camera and felt (and maybe even mimicked) by the spectator. It serves as a point of contact for an intersubjective experience with film in which the viewer becomes a "cinesthetic subject" who refuses a strictly visual mastery of a

[54] Barker, *The Tactile Eye,* 13.

[55] Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye, 9*.

system of representation and consequently upsets the "hierarchical arrangement of the senses achieved through cultural immersion and practice."[56]

What this intersubjective experience allows for, in addition to a primary, bodily identification with the film itself, is a secondary yet profound identification with Cléo's existential crisis as constituting a common human condition. As she makes the transition from object to subject and confronts her mortality, the subject-object paradigm further breaks down, a process that is aided by the sentient body of the film. Soon, after the relatively lighthearted singing scene, the feel of the sequence begins to change. Bob and his songwriting partner Plumitif offer Cléo one more playful tune to sing and they enjoy a moment of riding along on its whimsical melody. During her rendition of "La Joueuse" ("The Player"), Cléo swings her hips and gives Bob a coquettish kiss that causes him to scatter his sheet music and fall off the piano bench. One last time, she plays her role as goddess, as the dangerous and intoxicating object of sexual desire who sways men with her hips and lips. This idea of her as an alluring, fetishized goddess is underlined when, in the transition into the next song, Bob sings, still rather playfully, "Cléopâtre, je vous idolâtre."[57] However, with the first notes of third song "Le Cri d'amour" ("Cry of Love"), the mood of the scene quickly darkens. The slow, deep, resonating tones of the piano immediately cast a shadow over the room, as if storm clouds were gathering on the horizon. The overall diegetic sound becomes muted as Cléo begins to sing the lugubrious song. The tempo of the piece is significantly slower than that of the previous two and this change forces time to slow down and become protracted, both for the spectator and for Cléo. As she performs the song, whose lyrics speak of being alone, ugly and pale, of being a corpse enclosed in a crystal bier, of decay and wasted beauty, of being naked, exposed and eaten up by despair, Cléo undergoes a veritable physical reaction to the morbid images it evokes. Paradoxically, as the morose words leave her lips, she appears

[56] Sobchack, "What My Fingers Knew," 67-69.

[57] "Cleopatra, I worship you."

to be re-incorporating them, poisoning herself with each verse. Her body tenses, her expression turns mournful, tears stream on her cheeks and her pain becomes corporeally manifest. Slowly, she begins to embody the song and the camera becomes complicit in this embodiment.

When Cléo emits the first word of the song, she is framed against a white wall in the center of another meticulously composed shot. The piano and the musicians, who are shown in profile, dominate the foreground. Cléo stands behind the far edge of the piano and faces the camera. Concurrent with the sound of her voice, the camera begins to move in a smooth, slow clockwise arc that goes from the half hour to the top of the hour, represented by Cléo's position. Plumitif, who is in right frame, drops from view as the camera glides ever so subtly to the left. As it moves, it gradually spirals closer to Cléo. The curving motion reveals more of the singer's background where Angèle sits on an ornate love seat. As it continues along this arc, Bob, the piano and Angèle all fall out of the frame. Eventually, with the continual circular tracking and the simultaneous zooming in of the camera, Cléo's background in the shot changes from the white wall to an entirely black surface, which we later realize is a heavy curtain that separates her dressing area from the rest of the studio (figures 8 and 9). The singer is framed in a near shot against this background and thus isolated from the others in the room in a tight space where only the spectator has privileged access. In effect, the camera guides the spectator into this tense space and into closer proximity to Cléo as she undergoes her existential awakening.

Fig. 8

Fig. 9

In the moment when Cléo and the spectator are engulfed by the black background, the sound also changes. The low tones of Bob's piano that filled the diegetic space melt away and are replaced by orchestral music as Cléo's voice takes on a recorded studio quality. There is a brief, almost imperceptible snag in the sound during this transition, a scrape in the soundtrack before the jarring, knife-like sounds of the orchestral violins begin to tear into the fabric of the scene. The music heightens to an intense, almost unbearable pitch, nearly drowning out Cléo's voice. Indeed, this entire portion of the long take creates a sense of being submerged, of being washed over with affect and pain. The song ends with Cléo's final repetition of the words "*sans toi"* ("without you") barely emerging through the choked sob that racks her body. The camera finally offers relief by pulling away in a backward zoom, releasing the spectator from its hold and reestablishing a comfortable distance from which the audience can witness Cléo's dramatic transformation.

During this famous scene in which Cléo rejects the roles of "capricious doll" and spoiled child imposed on her by those around her, the distressed singer physically sheds the signs of her objectified identity with a disturbing violence. In the last phase of this physical transformation, the singer tears off her carefully arranged wig to reveal her simple, cropped natural locks and voices the wish that she could pull her head off along with it. Janice Mouton notes, "Paradoxically, Cléo is caught between a fear of death and a death wish."[58] This is a viable interpretation of Cléo's violent utterance; however, it is also plausible that what Cléo wishes for is a symbolic death of the narcissistic, empty persona that she has cultivated up until then. The beautiful face she had admired in the mirror in the fortuneteller's entryway is no longer enough in warding off death—time would take its cruel toll on her body, too. Thus, it is not so much a "death wish" that is expressed by Cléo's outburst, as it is a desire to *erase* her former self, which she does with the help of Varda's deft camerawork and mise en scène.

[58] Janice Mouton, "From Feminine Masquerade to Flâneuse: Agnès Varda's Cléo in the City," *Cinema Journal* 40, no. 2 (2001): 5.

In the middle of her rant against Angèle and her musicians, whom she accuses of treating her like a helpless doll, Cléo disappears behind the black curtain that had served as the background during her performance of *Le Cri d'amour.* She pulls the curtain shut, cutting herself off from the others in the room and from the viewer. Her sweeping movement of closing the drapes, whose dense black opacity comes to fill the entire frame, is synonymous here with the cinematic wipe, an editing technique that typically signals a change in scene. The spectator is left with a silent black screen for a full five seconds before Cléo draws the curtain open, emerging from behind it wearing a stark, black dress in place of her elaborate feathered peignoir (figures 10 and 11). The simple lines of this new garment are in direct contrast with the flouncy frock she wore at the beginning of the film.

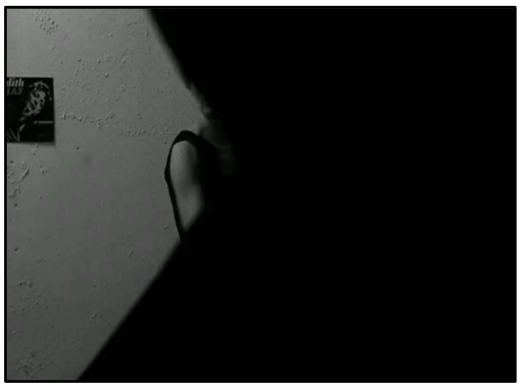

Fig. 10

Fig. 11

Fig. 12

By using the black curtain to physically emulate a wipe, Varda plays with the spectator's expectations of cinematic time and rhythm and hyperbolizes the materiality of the medium of film. Confronted by a black screen for an unusually long time, the viewer anticipates a change in scene that does not come. Instead, it is a change in the character that

manifests itself when the black screen is wiped away by Cléo's hand, a movement that links the filmic subject with the process of film creation and endows the protagonist with a certain agency. In this very material image, Cléo "edits" her own story; she wipes away her former objectified self in order to emerge reborn as a subjective being. Thus, she undergoes a somewhat rude existential awakening and in doing so, takes her place on the imminent plane of human existence. This long and significant sequence in Cléo's apartment is capped beautifully with Cléo putting on a necklace before leaving the apartment. From the large selection of jewelry hanging on her wall, Cléo picks a round, flat metal pendant, its form reminiscent of a pendulum (figure 12). It is this symbolic allusion to time that Cléo chooses to hang around her neck like a noose, its weight resting on her chest as a material reminder that her body is marked by time. Our prehensile eye grabs its metallic brilliance and traces its shape as Cléo fingers fasten it at her nape of her neck.

It is important to note here that Cléo's subjective awakening does not occur at the end of the film, a fact that suggests that her evolution continues beyond this scene. I posit that as she leaves her apartment to wander the streets of Paris, she moves beyond a realization of her subjective self and falls into a relationship of intersubjectivity with her environment. Having shed the physical accouterments that defined her as an object—her lavish wig and her alluring dress—she penetrates the space of her city, one subject among others. In her trajectory across Paris in the second half of the film, Cléo embarks on the last phase of her existential journey. Having shed her objectified status through a subjective awakening, Cléo reenters the city as an intersubjective entity "being-in-the-world" through a chiasmic interaction with her environment, rather than just floating through it isolated from other beings.

One of the most provocative interpretations of Cléo's transformation in the film comes from Mouton, for whom the "central focus of Varda's film [is] Cléo's move from a position

of [feminine] masquerade and nonidentity to subjectivity."[59] In Mouton's analysis, Cléo moves from being a gazed-*at* object to a gazing female *flâneur*, whose fear of the city is gradually replaced by curiosity, by a desire to know herself and the world around her.[60] For Mouton as well, this transformation goes beyond subjectivity:

> In becoming flâneuse, Cléo does not assume the power of a gazing subject entrapping a different other as object. Rather, she breaks out of this structure. The city street thus becomes a new structuring presence that enables her and those around her to participate in an alternative model of spectatorship not defined by a strict subject-object dichotomy. As flâneuse, she joins and becomes a part of the world in which she rambles and observes.[61]

While Mouton focuses primarily on the sense of sight and *looking* as the means through which Cléo experiences and engages with the world around her, the focus of the ensuing paragraphs lies in an analysis of a more embodied and haptic perception of the world by Varda's meandering protagonist. That is, Cléo not only *looks at* but also senses the world as the initial alienation she feels upon leaving her apartment dissipates. It is clear that as the singer steps into the street after her moment of crisis, she perceives the world differently, and through Varda's skillful and perceptive filmmaking, the spectator too senses a change in the tone of Cléo's environment. Compared with the earlier sequence showing the protagonist leaving her fortuneteller's building and strolling down the rue de Rivoli, there is a marked difference in mood that manifests itself in the early part of Cléo's second trajectory around the city. The images in this segment of the film are colder, draftier and darker as if the Parisian evening had experienced the sudden drop in temperature that signals a storm. The ambient sound of the bustling, nonchalant city is replaced with a soundtrack that eerily echoes

[59] Mouton, "From Feminine Masquerade to Flâneuse," 5.

[60] Mouton, "From Feminine Masquerade to Flâneuse," 8.

[61] Mouton, "From Feminine Masquerade to Flâneuse," 9.

notes from *Cri d'amour,* underlining Cléo's lingering preoccupation with the events of the preceding scene. Furthermore, the camera itself becomes complicit in creating this somber atmosphere. In the Rivoli sequence, the camera mostly films Cléo from a distanced, high angle. She is noticeable in the crowded street, a polka-dotted confection that draws the desiring gaze of the men around her. From such a perspective, the audience is able to see both Cléo and the people looking at her, but the faces of the latter are never shown from her subjective point of view. This suggests that she does not look back—rather, she floats unseeingly through the world, the object of the continual gaze of others that takes the place of touch when touch is forbidden. It is a gaze that follows the curve of her hips and the contours of her neck, but Cléo does not "touch" back. She is a walking display, aloof and detached.

In the latter half of the film, however, as Cléo navigates the streets of Paris, she pushes back against the world and the camerawork supports this idea. Soon after leaving her apartment, Cléo is shown once again walking down the street. This time, however, the camera is level with her rather than filming her from above. Already, an element of distance has been removed, distance between Cléo and her environment, but also between the spectator and the film, leading once more to a relationship of intersubjectivity in these interactions. Additionally, in contrast to the Rivoli walking sequence in which Cléo does not return the gaze of those around her, in this segment, the camera, using shot-reverse shot and shaky POV shots, often focuses on Cléo's anxious face as well as on the faces of those whom she encounters on the street. Thus, rather than just presenting Cléo's subjective journey through the city, the camera shows both sides of an intersubjective interaction with the world, all the while drawing the spectator onto the same plane of immanence as the film and its protagonist. Flitterman-Lewis observes that in the final half of the film, Cléo "ceases to be an object, constructed by the looks of men, and assumes the power of vision, a subjective vision of her

own."[62] Although Cléo's vision is important to her new encounter with the world, I argue that she assumes not only the power of vision, but more holistically, the power of *perception* through all her senses. She does not just gaze at the world, but is chiasmically and physically present to it.

Later on in the scene, Varda uses a second cinematographic technique that implicates the spectator in Cléo's intersubjective experience with the world. Certain shots in this walking sequence go beyond being mere POV shots from Cléo's perspective and imply the presence of the viewer, thus eliciting an embodied spectatorship centered on a mimetic relationship between the film and the "cinesthetic" viewer. For example, her entrance into the Dôme café is shown from Cléo's perspective in a jumpy forward tracking shot that pans left and right to emulate the movements of Cléo's head as she walks and scans the space around her. However, in another shot in the café, the camera is behind Cléo. In this instance, it is more than a camera; it is a third presence that walks behind Cléo, making itself known through the same unstable forward tracking. In the absence of an actual third diegetic presence, the spectator, whose kinetic sense and proprioception is once again activated, fills the role in order to account for these *intersubjective* camera movements.

In other shots, the intersubjective camera movements are more subtle. Shortly after leaving her apartment, Cléo checks her reflection in the mirrored panel of a restaurant window. This appears to be a POV shot from Cléo's perspective since the spectator sees only the singer in the mirror. However, as Cléo contemplates her image and muses in voice-over about her status as the object of the gaze of others, the camera executes a smooth, slow zoom forward, which suggests that the shot is not from her perspective. This idea is further supported when Cléo, whose attention is drawn by a crowd of people to her right, turns her head and torso to look. Her action is reflected in the mirror but as she begins to walk toward

[62] Flitterman-Lewis, *To Desire Differently*, 269.

the crowd, the camera executes a fast pan in the same direction, following her. With this movement, it becomes evident that the entire shot does not portray the protagonist's point of view, but rather from the spectator's. Such instances emphasize the idea that Cléo is moving through a subjective experience into a deeper intersubjective relationship with her surroundings. She is not simply observing her environment from the singular perspective of one being but rather interacting with it as one subject among many.

From this point on, after undergoing a subjective awakening in her apartment, Cléo begins to undergo an intersubjective enlightenment, a process that is at first fraught with tension. It is very clear that Cléo is initially frightened and anxious during this walking sequence. She encounters sinister characters lurking in doorways, cold and indifferent stares from passersby, a street performer eating live frogs and another who is piercing his arm with a long spoke. The use of shot-reverse shot underscores Cléo's intense awareness of the presence of these individuals. Additionally, confronted with the shocking spectacles of the street performers, she has a physical response as she recoils from them in disgust—they repel her and she literally runs from these disturbing sights. There is a sense here that her environment is physically rejecting Cléo, that her presence there is as unnatural as swallowing a handful of live frogs or mutilating oneself with a sharp object. Just as the skin of the arm piercer resists the spoke, the city resists Cléo and she resists back before they ultimately give in to each other. This surrender comes when the initial shock of Cléo's confrontation with the world begins to wear off and her experience starts to take a swing towards the positive, towards an acceptance of herself within the city of Paris and among its people. She enters into what Merleau-Ponty calls "the world as flesh." He describes the concept in the following way: "The flesh we are speaking of is not matter. It is the coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible upon the touching body."[63] As a result, the world and the body exist in a

[63] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 146.

chiasmic relationship of reversibility or reciprocity that can be compared to one hand touching the other: "When one of my hands touches the other, the world of each opens upon that of the other because the operation is reversible at will […] And yet each of them has its own tactile experience."[64] In this relationship, Cléo is neither detached object nor isolated subject, but rather, an intersubjective being in touch with her world. Her experience with the world first begins to shift when she visits her friend Dorothée in the sculptor's studio where the latter is posing as a nude model, unashamed of exposing her bare skin. She communicates this fact to Cléo and her comment points to the singer's evolving chiasmic relationship to the "world as flesh." Dorothée's lighthearted attitude and easy confidence as she moves through Paris with her friend appear to affect Cléo's mood and assuage her fears. After the two women part near the end of the film, Cléo's existential journey continues to unfold in the quiet space of the Parc Montsouris.

The preceding section details Cléo's emotional trajectory through the film as she goes through the transition from object of the gaze, to thinking subject and finally, to an intersubjective being who pushes against the "flesh" of her world. The following section explores the ramifications of this evolution as it pertains to Cléo's relationship to time. As the protagonist's sense of alienation from her environment is mitigated by her intersubjective experiences with the world, the notion of time and its associations also change for her. This shift manifests itself in the film through a change in the way time is represented materially. First, the omnipresence of clocks is phased out as Cléo moves from the city into the natural space of the Parc Montsouris. This assuages the tension that arose from the relentless march of objective time earlier in the film. Subjective time is also erased as Cléo enters the park—she no longer embodies time and the camera no longer orchestrates dizzying maneuvers to accentuate Cléo's hypersensitivity to the passage of time. In fact, in the natural space of the

[64] Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* 141.

park, temporality seems to be suspended and the camera underlines this impression by moving subtly and slowly. Aside from the lush foliage and the sunlight that tells us it is a summer's day, the space is time-neutral. Cléo enters the park in a taxi (the last reliable measuring device of objective time we see) under the full weight of her subjective perception of the time that is running out on her. However, from the moment she enters the soothing calm of the park until her visit to the hospital at the end of the film, we perceive a shift in Cléo's attitude toward time and consequently, toward her illness. Much of this is due to her encounter with the soldier Antoine.

On his last day of leave from the Algerian war, Antoine is also in a certain manner condemned to death, yet his attitude toward this is very different from Cléo's. Time seems not to matter to him and on multiple occasions, he foils Cléo's obsession with it and (indirectly) with death. For example, he cannot satisfy her request for the time because he does not wear a watch. Unlike Cléo and her symbolic pendant, he does not carry any markers of time on his body. However, he knows that it is the first day of summer and the longest day of year, which suggests that he lives by a more natural rhythm than that stipulated by a clock. He relies more on the freer harmonies of the "violin" rather than on the measured tempo kept by the "metronome," and his subjective perception of time is not regulated by fear. Later at the hospital, when Cléo learns that her doctor has left earlier than exptected, she becomes agitated. In respone, Antoine comments that on the longest day of the year, "comment savoir l'heure vraiment?" indicating that even the sun has become an unreliable marker of time.[65]

Perhaps the subtlest way in which Antoine denies Cléo's morbid obsession is by refusing to play out the drama of their mythical counterparts, Anthony and Cleopatra. When she tells him that her given name is Florence, he states his preference for this name, claiming that he prefers flora to fauna. He affirms the aspect of her persona that suggests rebirth and

[65] "How can we really know the time?"

rejects the one that associates her with a woman who takes her own life. By accepting her as Florence, he refuses to cast them into the same morbid fate as their Ancient namesakes and instead, places her at the center of a renaissance. These glimpses into Antoine's subjective vision of the world result in the notion of time becoming ambiguous for Cléo. At the end of the film, her perception of time vacillates as we hear her say, "Il nous reste si peu de temps," and then a minute later, "On a tout le temps."[66] She begins to see the truly subjective nature of time and the variety that can exist in a shared intersubjective human experience as she looks outside herself at Antoine. It is only then that she can say, "Il me semble que je n'ai plus peur. Il me semble que je suis heureuse."[67]

As the above analyses attempt to illustrate, in her films Varda achieves what Deleuze describes as the act of "uniting image, thought and camera."[68] This feat serves to create a plane of intersubjectivity between the filmmaker, the film itself, the world it represents and the spectator, all of whom become "engaged as participants in dynamically and directionally reversible acts that reflexively and reflectively constitute the perception of expression and the expression of perception" and "provide the intersubjective basis of objective cinematic communication."[69] Through embodying, haptic images and camera movements that are both expressive and perceptive, Varda touches her audience and incites a corporeal and sensorial spectatorship. As a result, she creates an exchange of embodied thought on the universal notion of time that flows between the viewer and the medium of the film and enfolds them in the same flesh. As we see in the ensuing chapter, Varda skillfully accomplishes a similar feat in the treatment of memory in her films.

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[66] "We have so little time." "We have all the time."

[67] "It seems that I am no longer afraid. It seems I am happy."

[68] Deleuze, *The Time-Image,* 55.

[69] Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye,* 5.

CHAPTER TWO

Material And Embodied Memory in *Ulysse, Les Plages d'Agnès,* and *Les Cent et une nuits de Simon Cinéma*

"Touch has a memory."
—John Keats[1]

Varda's (Bad) Relationship to Memory

"Memory is like sand in my hand."[2] Quoted in Richard Williams' 2009 review of the film *Les Plages d'Agnès* (2008)*,* this seemingly simple utterance by Agnès Varda, upon closer examination, reveals itself to be packed with significance. First and foremost, it speaks to the filmmaker's self-professed bad relationship with her unreliable memory.[3] More generally, the statement captures Varda's overall attitude about memory as an elusive phenomenon whose fugacious nature prevents us from truly holding on to the past. As Alison Smith remarks, "memory and its unreliable but deeply evocative power, and acceptable ways to deal with memory without relapsing into nostalgia, are preoccupations which have characterized Varda's most recent films."[4] Although this move *away* from a nostalgic or romanticized approach to remembering is a tendency in her later films, the treatment of memory, whether it pertains to a personal or collective past, is as prevalent a presence in Varda's broader oeuvre as that of time. This is not surprising given the interrelation between time and memory and the effects of the former on the latter. In the statement above, Varda links time to memory in two important ways, the first playing on the prevalent association of time with sand as

[1] John Keats, "What Can I Do To Drive Away," Stanza 1, Line 3.

[2] Richard Williams, "'Memory is like sand in my hand,'" *The Guardian,* (Thursday 24 September 2009). http://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/sep/24/agnes-varda-beaches-of-agnes.

[3] See quote on page 85.

[4] Alison Smith, *Agnès Varda,* French Film Directors Series (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 143.

encompassed by the hourglass (*sablier* in French, derived from the word *sable,* meaning sand), and the second recalling the ageing hand, which for Varda very discernibly embodies the passage of time with each new wrinkle and fold, with each arthritic joint. Thus, the evocative image of sand coursing through her fingers creates a poetic and very "Vardian" connection between time and memory by enacting the movement of memory *through time.*

The filmmaker's comment also underscores her tendency to focus on the material and on the body in her cinema, particularly on hands as a metonymy for broader notions. By re-appropriating the clichéd metaphor of "the sands of time," Varda represents *memory* as the granules that slip through her fingers, at once endowing the process of remembering with a material presence and inscribing it within the embodied and prehensile action of grasping. The image clearly articulates the idea that the more we try to "hold on" to the past, the more it slips away from us. Furthermore, the material representation of sand as memory creates a direct and personal connection to the filmmaker herself—in *Les Plages d'Agnès,* a film organized loosely by the various "beaches," both literal and metaphoric, that have been important to Varda's life, she asserts that, "si on ouvrait les gens on trouverait des paysages. Moi si on m'ouvrait moi, on trouverait des plages."[5] Given that her internal *paysage* resonates with the beaches from her past, the metaphor of sand filtering through her hands, disappearing through the gaps between her fingers, reflects precisely the loss of memory that happens over time, and along with it the loss of a certain aspect of one's very own *self.*

Finally, the image of sand slipping through Varda's hand not only gives memory a paradoxically tangible albeit fugitive character, it also situates it directly within the scope of her filmmaking. As I discuss in Chapter One, Varda's hand imitating a camera lens closing around the commercial trucks on the highway in *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000) serves as a metonymy for her work as a filmmaker wherein her hand represents a creative tool that

[5] "If you opened people up you would find landscapes. Me, if you opened me up, you would find beaches." For more on this notion, see Chapter Three.

gathers images. However, as Varda's statement indicates, her creative hand equally enables her to touch on memory in her films, to explore it and dig through it, all the while acknowledging that such an endeavor is an unreliable, if not entirely futile means of accessing the past. In ways that parallel the material and embodied representations of time in the works I detail in Chapter One, Varda's representations of memory similarly stress the material and the embodied in order to anchor and stabilize the tenuous process of remembering. She repeatedly represents memory materially in physical objects such as old photographs and rocks taken from a beach and frequently inscribes the process of remembering on the body, both human and filmic, as a perceptive site where memory is felt and enacted.

The preceding chapter on time touches briefly on the representation of memory through objects with an analysis of Varda's material revisiting of her time in Japan as she pores over the souvenirs gleaned during her trip. This chapter explores memory in more depth through an analysis of *Ulysse* (1982)*, Les Plages d'Agnès* (2008)*,* and *Les Cent et une nuits de Simon Cinéma* (1995)*.* In each of these films, there is an overlap of material and embodied memory, of memory represented by objects and enacted on and through the body, of memory creatively depicted by Varda in remarkable and often very subtle and sensual ways. What results is a *material-based* film aesthetic that invites the spectator to rearrange and co-construct the pieces of the past along with the subjects in the film, to feel the fragile texture of a memory stretched thin over time and fraught with lacunae, fissures and ambiguity. I posit that this intersubjective co-construction, which begins materially and on the body, builds a crucial primary identification between the spectator and the film as an expressive medium, an identification through which the viewer gleans a richer and more poignant understanding of the subjective and unstable nature of memory and remembering.

Additionally, I propose that the study of memory in Varda's work, and particularly in the three films named above, is crucial to understanding the filmmaker's evolving attitude

about memory as she moves from a desire for nostalgia to an impulse for commemoration. Added to this, the three films in question and their representation of memory are significant works that exquisitely reflect Varda's relationship to her oeuvre, to filmmaking and to the history of cinema as whole. *Ulysse* is a reflection on the proto-cinematic medium of photography, the root of Varda's career from which her art as a filmmaker flourished. *Les Plages d'Agnès* spans the whole of Varda's life as a photographer, filmmaker and visual artist and recounts her personal relationship to the cinema industry and to the key players who influenced her acculturation into auteur cinema. Finally, *Les Cents et une nuits* pays homage to the entire history of cinema with an eye towards its future. The notion of memory, both personal and collective, overarches these works as Varda probes the question of what it means to remember, be it a specific summer, a life or an entire century.

This deep preoccupation with memory in Varda's oeuvre is meticulously detailed by Smith in her monograph on the filmmaker. Placing an emphasis on Varda's post-1990s works, wherein Smith notices the emergence of public commemoration alongside personal memory, she methodically combs through Varda's films in order to put into relief "the ways in which both personal and social pasts act on the protagonists of Varda's world, the ways in which she evokes them and the significance she finally lends them."[6] She explores the links or oppositions between memory and a slew of other related themes such as nostalgia, tradition, personal and collective pasts, progress and identity and concludes by stating that, especially in her later works, "Varda envisages memory as an active process; the past is something which has an active role in the present and which can be put to creative use as inspiration, not something to be nostalgically desired."[7] The three films discussed in this chapter reflect the

[6] Smith, *Agnès Varda,* 144.

[7] Smith also offers an analysis of the use and function of flashback in three of Varda's films. She proposes that it serves to provide insight into the subjective state of the principal characters in *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961) and *L'Opéra-Mouffe* (1958) and works to elucidate the operation of memory in *Documenteur* (1981). The discussion on memory in this chapter does not extend to flashbacks because, as Smith notes, they "divide [a] film into

evolution of this vision of memory in that they trace the shift from an unfulfilled desire for a nostalgic recreation of the past in *Ulysse* to a more active, *enacted* and *embodied* process of remembering in *Les Cents et une nuits* and *Les Plages d'Agnès.* Finally, as part of Varda's profoundly phenomenological project, continually concerned with the human experience in the material world, these works resonate with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's characterization of memory as an ambiguous process that is a consequence of a "series of temporal positions and possibilities" particular to the experience of the lived body.[8] In other words, memory, whether personal or collective, is not a return to the past, but instead enacted in the present through the lived body. The past converges in the present, where we confront the ambiguities of remembering in the now even as our memories slip through our fingers. This notion manifests itself repeatedly in Varda's works through her tendency to link memory and the process of remembering to the body. In such instances of embodied memory, the lived body, in addition to being a marker of time, becomes the mechanism that works to draw the past into the present. Thus, Varda's films provide a representation of memory as not a strictly conscious or mental process, but one that takes place on the body and arises from its engagement with the material world.

Consequently, in her works, Varda seeks to remember *actively*, a notion that counters an interpretation offered by Emma Wilson. In her article "Salvage and the Art of Forgetting," Wilson also makes the connection between memory and Varda's emphasis on the material but she approaches the topic from its negative counterpart of forgetting.[9] She posits that in *Les*

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clearly defined timelines" (152), and therefore do not support the notion of a past being materialized in the present. It is important to note that Varda use of flashback is minimal and limited to a few brief instances.

[8] David Farrell Krell, "Phenomenology of Memory from Husserl to Merleau-Ponty," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 42, no. 4 (June 1982): 503, quoting Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity: Course Notes From the Collège de France (1954-1955)* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 72.

[9] Wilson, Emma. "*Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*: Salvage and the Art of Forgetting." In *The Art of the Project: Projects and Experiments in Modern French Culture*, edited by Johnnie Gratton and Michael Sheringham, 96-

Glaneurs et la glaneuse, Varda is working towards "forgetting death through a salutary move of its disavowal" and elaborates on this notion by maintaining that for the filmmaker, art is "bound up with survival and relationality, a move to forget and move to the future."[10] While I agree with Wilson's broader argument that the two directions that Varda pursues in *Les Glaneurs*—the first towards movement (in its status as a road movie) and the second towards beauty (in its unique aesthetic and focus on the material)—function to steer the film away from the contemplation of death and to affirm life in the film's insistence on art and salvage, I disagree with the notion that an *active forgetting* is inherent to her work. Wilson's analysis of *Les Glaneurs* is certainly rich and incisive, taking into account the film's commentary on cultural memory, its move for a "non-ossified" commemoration of the past through the reuse of objects and its insistence on *not* forgetting the social problems of poverty and waste. However, the article ends on a false note in positing the notion that Varda is using art, beauty and movement to forget her own death as well as Jacques Demy's. I offer an alternative interpretation of Varda's insistence on movement and the material, not only in *Les Glaneurs,* but in her oeuvre in general by arguing that in the face of decay, death and transience, Varda insists on the material world and the body in her films in order to preserve memory, to enact it and to bring it to the surface of the lived experience.

While the focus of this chapter is on the material and corporeal representations of memory in Varda's works, with the aim of illuminating the ways in which her films anchor the act of remembering in the lived body's phenomenological experience in the world, it is important to note that for Varda memory is also often linked to a physical place. As she elegantly demonstrates in *Les Plages d'Agnès,* the Belgian beaches along the coast of the North Sea evoke images of her early childhood, scenes from which she re-enacts repeatedly in

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110. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005. Because of their concern with the notions of loss and mourning, Chamarette and Wilson's works are revisited in Chapter Three.

[10] Wilson, "Salvage and the Art of Forgetting," 97.

the film, thus vividly transporting the past into present-day spaces. In another example, the island of Noirmoutier, where she frequently vacationed with Demy, is a landscape that painfully recalls her days with her late husband. As we see in Chapter Three's discussion of *Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier* (2006), the filmmaker inscribes the intimate landscape that is her dying husband's body within the topography of the island so that the memory of him as well as Varda's grief are embedded in the emotionally fraught space.

This salient notion of space and memory in Varda's artistic and filmic works has received a fair amount of scholarly attention. While I recognize the importance of these studies as works that point toward a phenomenological grounding of Varda's oeuvre, I dig deeper within her filmic spaces to examine the ways in which the bodies and objects that occupy them serve to make the past present. Both Marie-Claire Barnet and Maryann De Julio evoke Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* in their analyses of Varda's films. In her discussion of *Les Plages d'Agnès,* Barnet brands Varda's staging of a "Paris beach," in which the filmmaker lines the street in front of her production headquarters on the rue Daguerre with massive amounts of trucked-in sand, as a "*lieu de mémoire*" that appropriates "Nora's historical and national sense [of the term] at the local scale of *le quartier*."[11] Similarly, De Julio remarks that the fishing village of La Pointe Courte, which is the setting for Varda's first film of the same name, situated "outside of Sète where she grew up, can be seen as a *lieu de mémoire,* where a street now ceremoniously named for Varda marks a collective memory."[12] Both of these analyses point to the manner in which Varda inscribes her subjective experience within broader, collective contexts, melding personal memory with commemoration and creating a strong sense of a shared past.

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[11] Marie-Claire Barnet, "Elles-Ils Islands: Cartography of Lives and Deaths by Agnès Varda." *L'Esprit Créateur* 51, no. 1 (2011): 98.

[12] Maryann De Julio, "Aging and Memory in Agnès Varda's *Les Plages d'Agnès,*" *Senses of Cinema* 67 (July 2013), http://sensesofcinema.com/2013/feature-articles/ageing-and-memory-in-agnes-vardas-les-plages-dagnes/. Varda's first film, *La Pointe Courte* was made in 1954.

Taking this notion of space and memory in a different direction, Chamarette analyzes a number of the filmmaker's art installations and characterizes them as temporalized and participatory spaces of memorialization and mourning charged with representations of the past. While Chamarette's analysis specifically treats Varda's installation spaces rather than the films themselves, her work is invaluable to my discussion of the intersubjective process of remembering that occurs in Varda's cinema in that she recognizes the how "these gestures and sites of longing and bereavement offer an open and ludic space for shared flows and communities of affect and memory between filmmakers, artworks and audiences."[13] In the current chapter, I take this very important notion of intersubjective memory and apply it more generally to Varda's filmic works rather than just her art installations while turning its focus away from the *spaces* of memory in order to highlight instead the body and material objects as primary sites of remembering.[14]

What makes Varda's treatment of memory in her filmic works so extraordinary is the pervasive link between memory and material objects and memory and the body that exists therein. The examples abound, too numerous to be taken on here in their entirety, but they reinforce the material-based film aesthetic that fuses Varda's work and makes a commentary on the fugacity of memory and its precarious, and often impermanent ability to survive in material objects. In her written autobiography, the first part of which is collection of musings organized alphabetically by themes from Varda's life, the entry under the letter M reads,

> **M comme Mémoire**.
>
> Je n'en ai pas beaucoup. J'ai de mauvais rapports avec elle. Tout ce livre est un combat pour pactiser avec cette mémoire souvent muette. Il me semble jouer du piano sur une table où sont dessinées des touches blanches et noires. Ce piano des pauvres

[13] Jenny Chamarette, "Spectral Bodies, Temporalised Spaces: Agnès Varda's Motile Gestures of Mourning and Memorial." *Image & Narrative* 12, no. 2 (October 5, 2011): 1.

[14] The notion of intersubjective mourning in Varda's films will be visited more fully in Chapter 3.

> ressemble à ma mémoire. On peut toujours s'exercer mais aucun son ne correspond aux mouvements des doigts. [15]

Varda's book serves as the material object or body in which her memories reside and which attempts to ward off the inevitable *oubli,* the silent oblivion that comes with time. Yet, even in this tangible and prosthetic manifestation of Varda's memory, remembering is not complete. It comes in stages, in bits and pieces and not in a cohesive and intact re-presentation of the past—a notion that is embodied by the fragmented nature of the book. It does not present a smooth, conventional narrative in prose that sews Varda's life together chronologically, but rather advances by thematic association, much in the way natural memory functions. For instance, the letter G reminds her of Gérard Philippe and she dedicates a little column to him. After the *abcédaire* portion, the rest of the book is more conventionally divided into chapters, each one devoted to a discussion of a different film in Varda's corpus. However, each chapter retains a fragmented quality and is reminiscent of a small scrapbook composed of pictures, handwritten notes, screenshots, images of political buttons, old photographs, film strips and maps. Opening Varda's autobiography is akin to opening a box of assorted memorabilia, each one of which can be handled individually, each one standing for a different portion of Varda's life without ever providing the complete picture. As with the metaphor of the "*piano des pauvres*" whose fake, painted keys will never produce the desired sound, Varda's book as externalized memory can never correspond exactly to a full representation of the past, yet it points to Varda's insatiable urge to anchor the process of remembering in physical objects. As I point out above, this penchant for making memory material also pervades Varda's cinematic works yet similarly, it proves to be an insufficient strategy for attaining a complete and

[15] Agnès Varda, *Varda par Agnès.* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1994), 24. "**M as in memory.** I don't have much of one. I have a bad relationship with it. This entire book is a struggle to come to terms with this often mute memory. It's like playing piano on a table where the black and white keys are drawn on. You can always practice on it but no sound corresponds to the movement of your fingers. This poor-man's piano resembles my memory." (my translation)

faithful reconstruction of the past. Eventually, the past recedes, photographs fade and mementos lose their evocative significance, leaving behind only a vague and gossamer impression of what used to be.

Ulysse and the Obstinacy of Memory

Varda's 1982 short documentary *Ulysse* is exemplary among her films as a work devoted to memory. It adeptly interweaves material memory with embodied memory in an attempt to define the process of remembering, an endeavor that ultimately proves to be inadequate in capturing the past. The film demonstrates that while an object may trigger a memory, this memory is often subjective, flawed and never complete. The mnemonic trigger around which Varda constructs *Ulysse* is a black-and-white photograph that she took on May 9, 1954. Both the film and the picture center on Ulysse Llorca, the youn son of the filmmaker's Spanish neighbors on the rue Daguerre, whose sad eyes as a child inspired Varda to take him on as a subject.

In the film Varda describes the photograph as "Nature morte ou paysage avec figure, comme disaient les peintres anciens. Les figures, c'est à dire, des personnages nus dans la nature."[16] As a still life, the image is meticulously composed on a pebble-covered beach at St. Aubain in northern France. The picture's rocky, granular surface draws the haptic eye across its coarse texture and along the jagged line in the background where the waves converge with the shore (figure 1). A dead goat, disturbing in its stillness even within this still life, limbs splayed out in impossible angles, takes up the right portion of the foreground. In the middle ground of the photo, to the left of the goat, sits a young boy, nude, almost entirely in profile but looking over his shoulder at the camera. Standing to his left along the same plane is a naked man facing the sea, his smooth back and buttocks in stark contrast to the rough landscape surrounding him. While this photograph serves as the centerpiece of the film,

[16] "Still life or a landscape with figures, as the old masters said. Figures, that is, nudes in the open."

Varda intersperses this short poetic documentary with modern-day footage of the people in the picture and their families, as well as with other photos that she had taken around the same time. She also uses the film to document her transition from photography to filmmaking by incorporating images of herself directing on the set of *La Pointe Courte*. In this way, *Ulysse* commemorates a significant event in Varda's life while at the same time grounding her experience within a broader context. She adds a further layer to the film by inserting archival footage and still images of newspaper clippings reporting on events that took place on that day, events that Varda does not herself remember and had to unearth through archival research for the purposes of the film. Despite these digressions, the film always cycles back to the central image, exploring it from different angles, both visual and conceptual.

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

The film opens with a 16-second still shot of the photograph, allowing time for the spectator to scan its contours and textures. Eventually, Varda's voice intervenes to introduce the image, accompanied by smooth, continuous camera movements that sweep the surface of the photograph, constantly reframing it to suit her narrative needs. In this way, Varda introduces each of the subjects in the image, starting with the goat and ending on the man, Fouli Elia. She states that she has not seen Elia since the time of the photograph and with this comment, the camera withdraws from the image and pulls us into 1982 to show an older Elia standing in his office at *Elle* magazine. As in the 1954 photograph, he is naked, but here, he is facing the camera, his genitals hidden by his cluttered desk (figure 2). Thinner, paler, with skin that has lost the firm smoothness it had 28 years ago and hair that is wiry and gray with

age, Elia converses casually with Varda. The filmmaker remains offscreen except for the initial moments when she first greets him and presents him with a bundle of photographs and a handful of large pebbles from the beach at St. Aubain. The stones make a hollow, raucous sound when she passes them to Elia and serve as a material and aural link to the past that echoes the dustiness of the memories Varda wishes to evoke.

The beginning of this sequence emphasizes the need for the material and for the embodied in the act of remembering. By having Elia pose nude in the interview, Varda directly recalls his physical state in 1954, naked in front of a camera, as if feeling the air on his skin could activate the process of remembering. The pebbles and the photographs serve as material mnemonic aids that he can hold and feel, making contact with the past. Finally, there is the visual aspect of the photos in which Elia tries to see the past. Thus, Varda, in her "*combat*" with memory, pads the process of remembering with numerous strategies that rely on a number of senses and somatosensory associations and that require the activation of the body's physical memory in the act of recalling a past experience. Sadly, however, these strategies fall short of their aim—Elia's memory proves choppy and his nudity and the dusty pebbles that he scatters on his desk assume a discordant note in the scene when taken out of the context they are meant to evoke.

Analogous to these broken memories, Varda and Elia's conversation itself is fragmented, almost labored as the latter peruses the photograph of himself and Ulysse. Struggling to remember the context of the image, he speaks in amorphous thoughts and halting phrases as he attempts to articulate a series of disjointed memories. He cannot remember the year in which it was taken—was it 54, 55, 56? He says he does not want to remember, then muses that if one does not remember, then one is in trouble. He then falters in his thought process by adding that he's just saying things and what does he know, after all? As he flips through the photographs of him taken by Varda, he recalls some details but not

others—the boy, yes, but not his name. Was it Maurice? He recalls that he carried this lad around a lot, but the reason for this escapes him. He has memories of Varda photographing dead things. Strangely, when Elia sees an image of himself, this time clothed, standing next to a building, he claims to remember the sweater he is wearing as well as the shoes, but he has no recollection of where the picture was taken and does not recognize the man as himself. The camera closes in on his face in the photograph as he makes this last statement. Varda responds, "Comme c'est troublant! On se souvient des vêtments mais pas de qui on était?"[17] In a typical self-reflexive move, she ponders her personal experience and wonders if she can say who she was when she took the picture of Ulysse, Elia and the goat 28 years ago. This interaction is significant because as Elia rattles off all of the individual *things* he remembers as he sees them in the photographs, he is presenting his memories fragment-by-fragment. It appears he does have a memory based in material objects, just not the ones that Varda has brought to him for perusal, all of which points to the subjective nature of remembering.

The latter half of Varda's interview with Elia demonstrates the fallibility of memory even when confronted with a tangible and vivid image of oneself in the past. As illustrated in the souvenirs from the Japan episode in *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse,* time can render the body alien and unrecognizable to self. Here, time erodes the memory so that the self in the past becomes unrecognizable to the self in the present. It is difficult for both Elia and Varda to recall *who* they were at the time the photograph was taken and thus, distance from the past becomes distance from oneself and one's experience. Significantly, Varda, who is not represented *in* the photograph but rather *by* the photograph as the creative force behind it, attempts to situate her identity with relation to her art in *Ulysse* as in *Les Glaneurs*. However, in *Ulysse,* she is recalling a *past* self through a direct link to her artistic expression and with noticeably less self–assuredness due to the spotty and distorted filter of a memory tempered

[17] "How troubling! You remember your clothes but not who you were?"

by time. Within the grand narrative of Varda's life as an artist, it is apt and significant that Varda question who she was in 1954 because in that crucial year, her creative focus was on the verge of shifting from photography to film. The latter half of *Ulysse* depicts this transition through a series of still images showing Varda filming *La Pointe Courte*, while in the first half of the film we primarily see pictures of her at work as a photographer.

After the interview with Elia, the focus of the film shifts to Ulysse and his mother Bienvenida. It transitions form the present-day Elia to the adult Ulysse through the intermediary of the 1954 photo, which Varda shows again between the two sequences, this time zooming in on the waifish child Ulysse, who sits naked on the unaccommodating pebbles and gazes forlornly at the camera. The zoom reveals him to the spectator in greater detail and creates a sense of unease—the rocks look hard and painful against his skin and the expression on the boy's face elicits a sentiment of pity. His thin, bent body, dwarfed by both the man next to him and the distorted dimensions of the foregrounded goat, tugs at the heartstrings briefly before the camera moves to the right in a continual tracking shot that leads the viewer from the 1954 photograph to the present-day in all its vibrant color. In this way, Varda subtly melds the past and the present together through two abutting images sewn together by her fluid camera movements. In the latter image, Ulysse is shown with his wife and two children standing in front of their Parisian bookstore (figure 3). They are caught in a posed stillness, as if in a photograph, for about four seconds before Ulysse, who appears uncomfortable, turns and walks into the bookstore, followed by his wife and then his kids. While there is no indication of how long Ulysse had been posing before walking out of the shot, this short segment suggests a reluctance on his part to participate in Varda's tableau. His fidgety manner while posing, his brusque turning away from the camera and his wife's hesitation about whether to follow him in all indicate that it was his spontaneous decision and not Varda's direction that prompted him to go inside.

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

This same reluctance and sense of unease is apparent when Varda speaks to Ulysse about the photographs from his youth. The pictures of himself as a child do not move him. There is no emotional spark or sense of warm recognition. Ulysse remembers that some of the photographs of him were taken at home on the rue Daguerre, but not much else. Varda shows him the snapshot she took on beach and he emphatically claims not to have *any* memory of it even though as a child, he painted a picture based on it. To further complicate things, when the filmmaker presents him with the painting, Ulysse does not recall drawing it, but says that he remembers seeing it on the closet door of her studio (figure 4). The uneasiness in the scene intensifies as Varda accuses Ulysse of not wanting to admit that the photograph is proof of his childhood, of actively denying it as a link to his past. Ulysse's painting, which to her is a very real artifact of the past, is for him no more than a disassociated figment from his youth, a fact that Varda rues: "[La peinture] est vraie mais elle n'a pas de sens réel; tu es obligé d'imaginer ton enfance," implying that he refuses to base the memory of his childhood on tangible proof, but rather on something that is cognitive, mental and perhaps less trustworthy.[18] The tension escalates and Ulysse replies tersely that everyone has his own story. His frustration is palpable—he lets out an exasperated laugh and nervously swallows. As the interview deteriorates, Ulysse's mother walks up behind him and the strain in the scene is alleviated only when the film transitions to the next sequence, in which Varda interviews Bienvenida.

[18] [The painting] is real but not for you. You must imagine your childhood."

This rather overwrought interaction between Varda and Ulysse raises a number of issues around the notion of memory. While Varda is attempting to exteriorize memory by linking it to a material object and prompting Ulysse to articulate outwardly what he remembers, the latter internalizes it as a personal "story," therefore relegating it to the realm of fiction and imagination, at least in Varda's opinion. But given the inadequacy of material objects to incite "real memories," Varda's distinction between real and fictive, memory and imagination collapses. She ultimately accepts Ulysse's axiom that "chacun a sa propre histoire—même si c'est troublant entre le réel et l'imaginaire."[19] One might argue that Varda is attempting to incite memory through imagination, since it is her creative work, the Ulysse photograph, which serves as the "proof" of the past. It is a constructed, fictive scene composed to create a certain mood and tone without necessarily being an indexical link to past reality. Therefore, how much can it really say about the past? How much can it help to close the gaps in the subjective memory of those it represents? Does the "reality" that it depicts correspond to reality as experienced by its subjects and their remembrance of it across the ravages of time? Based on the interviews of Elia and Ulysse, the photograph fails miserably to open the floodgates of memory—in fact, it highlights instead the resistance of a memory-on-command. In his vivid analysis of the film, Ari Blatt recalls Barthes' "photographic paradox" and remarks:

> The conceit that every photograph is "readable" as a representation, as a construct, inevitably butts heads with its undeniable status as an indexical analogue, or trace, of the real. Which is to say that no matter how beautiful or suggestive, no matter how profound its connotation or rich in symbolism, all photographs are always dependent in one way or another on the subject matter they depict.[20]

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[19] "Everyone has his own story. Even if it's strange between the real and the imaginary."

[20] Ari J. Blatt, "Thinking Photography in Film, or The Suspended Cinema of Agnès Varda and Jean Eustache," *French Forum* 36, no. 2 (2011): 184.

The question remains then—what is "truer," a broken memory based on material proof or a personal "story" fleshed out by the imagination? And why does the distinction need to be made? Are the two mutually exclusive? It is the nature of memory, like the photograph, to be problematic—to reside in the troubling space between the real and the imaginary, to be eroded by time, embellished by the imagination and filled in by emotion as a way of compensating for the impossibility of truly remembering.

Furthermore, when there is trauma involved, memories can go dormant. Such is the case with Ulysse who claims later in the film that he remembers the *physical pain* from the coxa plana malady he was suffering at the time, but that he does not recall the trip to the beach where he was taken to recover. The pediatric ailment, which attacks ossification in the hips and impedes walking, explains the reason for which Elia had to physically carry Ulysse around. However resistant they might be to the photographic representation of the past, both Elia and Ulysse appear to have a stronger link to embodied memory—for Elia, it is based in the act of carrying the child around and for Ulysse, in the pain associated with his illness. The distinction is that in Elia's case, time has simply eroded the memory—he has forgotten the malady as he has forgotten the child's name. However, for Ulysse, time has ossified the memories from that period of his life, the embodied remembrance of physical trauma perhaps blocking a deeper recollection of those months of recovery during which Varda took the photograph and creating an emotional refusal to engage with a painful period in his past. Consequently, Elia and Ulysse's embodied memories aptly demonstrate that "everyone has his own story," incomplete, inaccessible, unreliable and based utterly in a subjective experience.

A third "story" which Varda presents in *Ulysse* is Bienvenida's recollection of the beach trip. In her interview with Varda, Ulysse's mother stands against a cracked wooden wall (figure 5). This choice of background is characteristic of Varda, who often frames her

filmic subjects against textured surfaces that have been worn or broken by time and which incite a haptic visuality in the spectator with their scarred and peeling, palimpsestic surfaces. Framed against this tactile reminder of time's effects on the body of things, Bienvenida discusses the photograph taken on the beach. She admits that it is not her favorite picture from the trip to St. Aubain. When asked by Varda if it is because of the memory or the image itself, Ulysse's mother answers that her dislike of the photograph stems from the memory it provokes. She remembers a beautiful but sad day on the beach because Ulysse was sick and she was worried about him. As she recalls his suffering, Bienvenida collapses into tears and the camera considerately cuts to a slow montage of still images of her taken 28 years earlier.

Fig. 5

The emotion exhibited by Bienvenida is in stark contrast to the lack thereof in the interviews with Elia and Ulysse. It is precisely this emotion that Varda was seeking in her conception of the film. In *Varda par Agnès,* the filmmaker expresses the pain and betrayal she felt regarding Ulysse's reluctance to remember or rather, to enter into the act of remembering with her. She states, "Il me refusait et avait fermé les portes de sa mémoire," her use of active verbs highlighting an intentional refusal on Ulysse's part.[21] Varda goes on to say,

> En 1982, quand il a accepté que je le filme, je pensais qu'il serait content et meme ému de revoir cette photographie dont il est le centre. Or, rien. Il n'a pas pu ou pas

[21] Varda, *Varda par Agnès,* 135. "He refused me and had closed the doors of his memory." (my translation)

> voulu se souvenir. Il a parlé discrètement, il a "figuré" dans mon film, ne voulant pas y "être." J'avais l'impression d'une trahison.[22]

The emotion Varda was hoping to elicit from Ulysse does not come. He chooses not to (or perhaps he cannot) relive the past—he figures in the film as he figures in the old photograph but distances himself from both. Ulysse refuses to be the center of the photograph and the nexus from which a remembrance of the past is supposed to emanate. Firmly anchored in the present, he turns and closes the door on the past and on the emotion that it might recall.

Bienvenida, however, lets the emotion evoked by the memories associated with the photograph wash over her. Her remembrance of the events of the summer of 1954 takes the form of an affective memory, bringing with it an embodied response—a sob that shakes her shoulders and makes way for tears. For Bienvenida, the pain of the past rises up to meet a very real *re*-embodiment of that pain in the present as memory takes hold. About this surge of emotion exhibited by Bienvenida, Varda writes,

> Elle ressentait encore la peur que son enfant boite et l'espoir qu'il guérisse […] mais son émotion, vingt ans après était fixée sur son ancien souci. Son amour maternel était si évident qu'elle devient l'image forte du film plus que toutes mes recherches et plus que son fils au prénom-titre. Moi je faisais des commentaires sincères, elle disait des paroles vraies.[23]

Herein lies the true and intended power of the film and of the photograph that inspired it—that is, their potential to elicit a memory accompanied by verbal, affective and physical responses that together constitute a truth. Thus, the memory becomes multifaceted, taking on

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[22] Varda, *Varda par Agnès,* 136. "In 1982, when he accepted that I film him, I thought he would be happy and even moved to revisit this photograph of which he is the center. However, nothing. He could not or did not want to remember. He spoke discreetly, he 'figured' in my film, not wanting to 'be' there. It felt like a betrayal." (my translation)

[23] Varda, *Varda par Agnès,* 136. "She was feeling again the fear that her child might limp and the hope that he would heal […] but her emotion, 20 years after, was fixed on an old concern. Her maternal love is so evident that she becomes the powerful image of the film more than all my research and more than her eponymous son. I was making sincere commentaries, she was speaking the truth." (my translation)

many dimensions and becoming "truer" and stronger as a result. Whereas elsewhere in the film, the photographs have failed to achieve this effect, and ironically failed with their very subjects, with Bienvenida, they succeed in bringing about a fuller memory. At this point, the focus of the film shifts to Ulysse's mother. Whether it is maternal love and concern, as Varda proposes, or the absence of the distorting or reluctant subjectivity that renders the characters in the picture unrecognizable to their present day counterparts, Bienvenida is able to remember this period in her life. Perhaps she maintains the appropriate critical distance from the past reflected in the photograph—while the time of her son's illness was painful for her, it was not traumatic like it was for Ulysse, who experienced it physically and emotionally at an age when memories are formed impressionistically. And unlike Elia, whose relationship to the Llorca family was transitory enough that over the years he forgot the boy's name, when Bienvenida carried Ulysse around, it marked her significantly, as a mother carrying her son, carrying the body that came from hers and therefore, she was not able to so quickly separate herself from the experience. In any case, Bienvenida's vividly emotional reliving of the past, in contrast to Elia's tempered indifference and Ulysse's tense resistance and their individual forms of disassociation form their past selves, demonstrates the volatile link between subjective experience and memory.

In the second half of the film, Varda transitions from this appeal to a personal memory of the photograph and attempts to situate it within a broader collective memory. Using archival footage and press clippings, Varda presents an album of the current events that occurred on the day the photograph was taken. One blaring headline reads "La France se souvient" and is followed by footage showing the bittersweet events of May 9, 1954 as a day that saw a confrontation between France's past and present. It was the 10th anniversary of the Allies' victory in the Second World War, but in year 1954, the celebration of a past glory coincided with the pain of a present-day defeat that the French suffered at the Battle of Dien

Bien Phu in Vietnam during the First Indochina War. Varda recounts that the celebratory pomp and pageantry was replaced by an environment of silent mourning in honor of France's fallen soldiers. She describes other events from the day such as political demonstrations, cultural news and trends and the ongoing Geneva conference, but admits that she does not recall these occurrences from memory. Rather, she had to dig through archival material to reconstruct the past. Once again, even within her attempt to offer another, more collective dimension to memory in an effort to more fully recall the past, to once more "pad" the personal memories she attempts to awaken in the film, this time with a broader sense of commemoration of historical events, memory remains obstinately elusive. As Blatt remarks, the desire to resuscitate the past falls short because "the past is always inevitably doomed to abstraction in the present, to become as fleeting, and as potentially misleading, as the 'shadows on the wall in Plato's cave.'"[24] In this way, Varda's problematic memory, as well as the nebulous personal memories of the subjects of her film mirrors France's ambiguous and distorted memory of its own history, especially with regard to its contentious role during the Second World War and its difficult relationship to its past as a colonizing power.

With the unresolved questions surrounding memory, both collective and personal, still lingering in air, the film again returns to the photograph of Ulysse. The camera again zooms in on the image as Varda further ruminates on the effects of the film and reflects on the act of remembering. She acknowledges that she has succeeded in situating the image in her life and in a historical context, but it remains a fragment. And indeed, the snapshot floats from person to person, including Varda, without attaching itself to one particular person's subjective recollection of the past. The photograph, as a material link to the past, as a mnemonic device or marker of time becomes problematized much in the way proposed by Barthes:

Not only is the photograph never, in essence, a memory (whose grammatical

[24] Blatt, "Thinking Photography in Film," 187.

> expression would be the perfect tense, whereas the tense of the photograph is the aorist) but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory.[25]

In the film, Varda herself point out that the image exists as an isolated incidence, timeless like the aorist tense that designates a past action with no indication of its duration or completeness, in that she could have taken it 28 years ago, last Sunday or yesterday. It could have been taken by her or someone else. She concludes, "L'image est là. C'est tout. Une image—on y voit ce qu'on veut."[26] To underscore this notion, Varda runs through her different interpretations of the image:

> J'y voyais les clichés d'une enfance tiraillée, tiraillée entre l'image du père, le futur, debout, et l'image de la mère au gros ventre chaud, couchée. L'enfant, que pense-t-il? J'aime qu'il soit celui de Los Olvidados, qu'il soit Le Petit Prince, Pauvre Blaise, Oliver Twist et tous les autres enfants tristes légendaires. Un autre jour j'ai vu dans cette image l'énigme du Sphinx, résolue en trois visions, les trois âges de la vie.[27]

Fig. 6

While Varda speaks these words, the camera returns to the photograph. This time, however, it takes on a distorted, kaleidoscopic quality—portions of the image that show one

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[25] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straussand Giroux, 1981), 91.

[26] "There is only the image. That's all. You see anything you want in it."

[27] "I saw in it the clichés of a childhood torn between the image of the upright father (the future) and the image of the mother, prone and big-bellied. What does the child think? I see him as one of Los Olvidados, or as The Little Prince, Poor Blaise, Oliver Twist, or every other child legendary and sad. Once I saw the image of the riddle of the Sphinx, the ages of man in three visions."

of the three subjects are repeatedly embedded inside the empty spaces of the larger photograph so that the image becomes even more haptic—it is layered, textured, multiplied, densely material, yet unstable in its lack of unity and coherence (figure 6). Smith concludes that the enlargements, close-ups, embedding and re-framings of the photograph in *Ulysse* point to the "frustrating incompleteness of a photo as a concrete visual memory. The photo's grainy surface merely becomes apparent like a barrier to an entry into the image."[28] I maintain that instead of creating a *barrier* into the image, the manipulated photograph takes on a more haptic quality and encourages an exploratory surface-contact with it, thereby allowing the spectator to approach it impressionistically and sensually. Rather than trying to visually master the image as a complete and signifying entity and a cohesive link to the past, the spectator touches the individual fragments of the photograph, handling them one by one. As a result, the viewer, like the filmmaker and the characters in the film, fully *feels* the frustration that the photograph provokes and from this, meaning is constructed. As Smith states, "as memory, as symbolic image, a still photograph is necessarily incomplete, which doesn't prevent the interrogation of it from being both fascinating and revealing."[29] On the contrary, this fragmentation and incompleteness that Varda so skillfully inscribes technically into the body of the image with her manipulations of it, are exactly what cause the interrogation of it to be so fascinating. One can no longer grasp the big picture but rather is confronted by the limitless possibility of interpretation. Blatt maintains that,

> The image, like the most compelling works of art, evokes meaning and invites interpretation. At the same time, however, the film refuses to neglect the referential, and perhaps more importantly material, nature of the image. *Ulysse* not only interrogates the photograph's quality as a document, it playfully acknowledges its

[28] Smith, *Agnès Varda,* 155.

[29] Smith, *Agnès Varda,* 158

> status as an object like any other, something that may be consumed with one's eyes, or otherwise.[30]

This "otherwise" is the cornerstone of the above analysis, which demonstrates how the material object/image might be "consumed" not just visually, but haptically, affectively and with the entire body, each time inviting a new interpretation. With regard to the photograph as a mnemonic object, it prompts a multitude of subjective interpretations of the past, multiple if somewhat degraded memories and, in the case of Varda's attempts at a material and embodied reconstruction of the past in *Ulysse*, it leads to an intersubjective piecing together of what constitutes memory itself, an experience shared among film, filmmaker and viewer.

Les Plages d'Agnès: Walking Backwards Through the Fragments of a Materialized Past

Varda's more recent works continue to exhibit similar tendencies when it comes to the representation of material and embodied memory. In *Les Plages d'Agnès,* her lyrical autobiographical film, "which Varda describes as both memoir, and a prosthetic or externalized memory, as her own octogenarian one begins to fade," the filmmaker presents her past through haptic images layered with meaning and an impressive array of material objects—mirrors, framed photographs, old film postcards, paper flowers, and sand to name a few.[31] As in *Ulysse,* the act of remembering is anchored in the material as well as within the body. In a number of key scenes, Varda physically spurs her memory by walking backwards. When speaking of her late adolescence and her move to Paris, the past she recreates and recounts is interspersed with shots of her rowing a boat along the Seine. This embodied and *embodying* gesture threads her memories together just as the Seine threads together the two halves of the city that was to greatly influence her formation as an artist and become her

[30] Blatt, "Thinking Photography in Film," 183-184.

[31] Chamarette, "Spectral Bodies," 34.

professional and personal headquarters for over 60 years. Finally, in a series of evocative vignettes, she recreates scenes from her childhood as a way of bringing the past to life. According to Kelley Conway, this particular film "is different from her previous work in the intensity of its autobiographical impulse – her subject is herself, unabashedly – and in its style, which reflects a more pronounced interest in discontinuity, staging and re-enactment."[32] Thus, with *Les Plages d'Agnès,* Varda creates a small universe, furnished with pieces of her memories, vibrant in color, rich with texture, alive with movement, and the contours of which the spectator explores along with the filmmaker.

The film is loosely structured around the different spaces that recall chronologically Varda's life, but it often takes digressive flights related to the topics of her films before returning to the main narrative line. Consequently, *Les Plages d'Agnès* exhibits a great extent of fragmentation and discontinuity within the larger framework of the story of Varda's life, and, similar to her written autobiography, the film often advances through thematic or semantic associations. For instance, when introducing the island of Noirmoutier in the film, Varda inserts a small and very tactile filmic poem in honor of the island's seafood industry, which serves as an aleatory transition between sequences. The ode begins with a haptic close-up of an oyster, haptic because the creases and wet jagged folds of its almost unrecognizable shell fill the screen so that it becomes decontextualized and invites an exploratory touch of its ridged surface (figure 7). As we encounter from a destabilizing proximity this oyster, as obstinately closed as the one in Ponge's celebrated poem, this tactile image beckons our prehensile eye to crack open the miniature topography presented by the oyster, to feel our way through the material world of Varda's film.

This detailed image of the oyster is followed by a close-up of a mussel in water, its blue edges drawing the eye in close to its voluptuous contours as the waves wash over it

[32] Kelley Conway, "Varda at Work: *Les Plages d'Agnès," Studies in French Cinema* 10, no.2 (2010): 126.

(figure 8). These haptic mini-portraits are accompanied by Varda's voice-over, which recites, "Ô la belle huître. Ô la belle moule. Ô la belle vague…La Nouvelle Vague…"[33] From that point on, succumbing to the pull of a series of associations all linked to material objects, the film turns its focus onto the New Wave filmmakers. In this way, the film itself *enacts* the process of remembering as an associative phenomenon, suggesting that memory does not occur in a linear fashion, that it is spontaneous, fragmented and incomplete and that it lives in the material world as well as in the body and the mind. The film repeatedly returns to this notion. In the following section, I detail the way in which the walking backward episodes and the opening sequence's use of mirrors, photographs and sand respectively embody and enact the process of remembering even as the film problematizes memory.

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

Fig. 9

The clearest and most significant example of embodied memory occurs regularly in the film in the guise of Varda walking backwards, a motif that reappears at the introduction of each of the different places that mark Varda's life and signals that she is about to move retrospectively through time and space. She mimes the process of remembering with her

[33] "O beautiful oyster. O beautiful mussel. O beautiful Wave…the New Wave…"

physical body and thus, renders memory an enacted experience with the material world. Thus, appropriately, the documentary begins with the filmmaker walking in reverse on a beach, barefoot on the seaweed-strewn sand, filmed in a long shot with the ocean and the sky in the background (figure 9). The soulful tunes of a non-diegetic violin play in conjunction with the diegetic sounds of lapping ocean waves, seagulls and wind, all overlaid by Varda's voice. This opening shot not only presents the spectator with an embodied *expression* of the abstract notion of memory, it also immediately activates the viewer's somatosensory perception, thereby producing an embodied spectatorship.

Furthermore, the shot is extremely tactile in a number of ways—Varda is barefoot on the coarse sand strewn with dry, rough strands of seaweed, which together weave the surface fabric of the image. Her bare feet and the viewer's haptic eye are both in contact with this surface and anyone who has ever walked on a beach can feel the gritty interaction between sand and skin. The image is further striated and textured by the line of the beach meeting the water and the water meeting a sky streaked with clouds. Even though horizon is in view, the stratified nature of the shot defies a depth of field and resists an optic and distanced visuality—rather, it brings all the textures to the surface of the image for a closer, more haptic representation of the filmic space. Varda's body is foregrounded against this multi-textured landscape. Looking obliquely at the camera, she says, "Je joue le rôle d'une petite vieille, rondouillarde et bavarde, qui raconte sa vie. Et pourtant ce sont les autres qui m'intéressent vraiment et que j'aime filmer."[34] From the beginning, Varda emphasizes two important bases for the film. Firstly, with her words, she calls attention to her three roles in the film: author, main character, and narrator. Secondly, by walking in reverse, she enacts the process of retrospection through which these three roles will coincide in the film. The same reverse

[34] "I'm playing the role of a little old lady, pleasantly plump and talkative, telling her life story. And yet it's others I'm interested in, others I like to film."

movement occurs at least four other times in the film and serves as a physical sign that Varda is leading the audience into another chapter of her life.

Logically then, the second instance of a backward-walking Varda shows her on the beach at Sète, where her family escaped from Nazi-occupied Belgium during the exodus in 1940. As she walks, Varda reminisces about Sète:

> Sa colline en forme de baleine, son port de pêche, ses célèbres jouteurs, et sa grande plage. Je reviens aujourd'hui sur cette plage à reculons, à reculons comme tout ce film. [The shot transitions to Varda in a rowboat, her back to the camera.] Et je rame en arrière pour atteindre le quai où nous habitions."[35]

This doubly embodied return to the past is accompanied by a reenactment of her childhood days. Consequently, the memories from her past come to life, through her body itself as well as through the body of her film, which itself embodies the process of remembering as it goes "backwards" to enact and expresses the sunny scenes from her youth aboard their houseboat. It is important to note that the memories that Varda depicts are not complete narratives, but short, fragmented vignettes which reflect the often disjointed and aleatory nature of memory. Varda's adult presence in these reenactments, as she walks through the scenes from her past, keep these sequences from falling into the category of the flashback by anchoring the past in the present and blurring the division between the two. In other words, her memories are materialized in the present rather than re-presented as intact storylines in the past.

The third walking-backward scene occurs on the Pont des Arts leading up to the façade of the École du Louvre where Varda studied art history after high school. Even though her family had moved to Paris during the final year of the occupation, attending the École du Louvre was her first independent experience in the capital and Varda approached the large

[35] "with its whale-shaped hill, its fishing harbor, its famous jousters and its vast beach. I return today to this beach heading backwards, backwards, like this film." [The shot transitions to Varda in a rowboat, her back to the camera.] "Now I'm rowing backwards, to the quay where we used to live."

and unfamiliar city with a mixture of trepidation and pleasure. This is apparent in the cautious, unsure manner in which she works her way backwards among a crowd of people towards the entrance of the school and in the shy smile on her face. Once again, Varda approaches memory not as merely a mental act, but as an active movement into the past localized both in space and on the body, this time adding an element of affect.

Later in the film, a similar backward walking shot builds a connection to the memory of creating a specific film. Usually in *Les Plages d'Agnès,* it is a material object such as a film postcard found at flea market or a sewing machine that mnemonically triggers associations to her cinematic oeuvre. However, in this sequence, it is the action of Varda walking in reverse in her famous and cherished courtyard that becomes a direct link to her earlier films. In this case, it recalls the eponymouse protagonist walking down the street in *Cléo de 5 à 7.* The present image of Varda in her courtyard dissolves like soluble matter into the image from the 1961 film. The natural uncertainty that comes with walking backwards in this shot enacts not only the precarious process of memory, it also reflects Cléo's anxiety as she walks the street alone after her existential crisis. Here, the filmmaker blurs the lines between herself and her character by creating a direct embodied association with Cléo through the action of walking, and within the body of the film itself. With the dissolve, Varda and Cléo meld into one, a cinematic technique that vividly underscores the idea that the fear of Paris that her character feels is modeled on the filmmaker's own anxieties of the city in her youth. Varda writes, "Qu'évoquait pour moi Paris? Une peur diffuse de la grande ville et de ses dangers, de s'y perdre seule et incomprise."[36] In this segment, Varda's embodied act of remembering takes her back to the memory of making her 1961 film, but also to an earlier time in her life when Paris and its unknown "shores" loomed menacingly before her. Thus, the film telescopes into the different layers of the past and in the process, creates an affective spiral between Varda in

[36] Varda, *Varda par Agnès,* 48. "What did Paris evoke for me? A diffuse fear of the big city and its dangers, of getting lost there alone and misunderstood." (my translation)

the present, her earlier work and her teenage self, a dynamic that manifests itself on the body of the film for the spectator.

The final walking backward instance occurs on a pier at Venice Beach in Los Angeles, where Varda spent the years from 1967 to 1969 and again from 1980 to 1981. During these two "American periods" in her life, Varda made a number of films in the United States, in both English and French. These include *Oncle Yanco* (1967), *Black Panthers* (1968), *Lions Love (…and lies)*(1969), *Murs murs* (1980) and *Documenteur* (1981). This specific backward walking scene is significant because Varda adds yet another material element to it—she personifies her memories as addling flies that swarm around her but escape her grasp. The wheeling skateboarders and low-flying seagulls surrounding her on the pier enact the movement of these metaphoric flies, hovering around Varda, but too quick to capture (figures 10 and 11). In addition to underlining the fugacity and elusiveness of memories by representing them as flies, the scene also suggests the tendency for memories to present themselves inconveniently when they are not necessarily welcome, buzzing in one's periphery but remaining just out of reach.

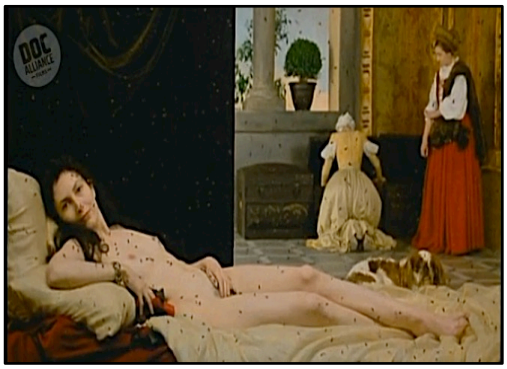
Fig. 10

Fig. 11

In a subsequent chapter in the film, during the segment on *Jane B. par Agnès V.* (1987), the metaphor of memories as flies returns when Varda admits that she cannot keep her two visits to Los Angeles distinct in her mind. A tableau vivant from the film on Jane Birkin is shown covered with live, noisy flies as Varda narrates, "Je l'ai déjà dit, les souvenirs sont

comme des mouches qui virevoltent...des bouts de mémoire en désordre (figure 12)."[37] This statement functions like a checkpoint in the film—Varda stops to reflect upon all that has been shown in the peripatetic episodes preceding it. Despite attacking her past and her memories with an armory of strategies, visual, haptic and embodied alike, the memories refuse to coalesce. Varda compares this impossibility of attaining a cohesive picture of the past to a puzzle that one assiduously assembles, only to find that a piece obstinately remains missing in the middle of it all.[38]

Fig. 12



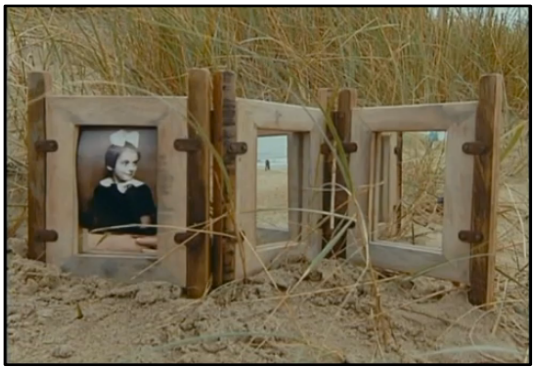


Fig. 13

Fig. 14

Fig. 15

In addition to her embodied acts of memory, Varda relies enormously on material objects as a connective tissue between her past and her present. This is apparent from the very first sequence in the film. Varda is on a North Sea beach, which represents her early

[37] "I've said it before, memories are like flies swarming though the air…bits of memory, jumbled up." The two paintings in question are: Titian (Tziano Vecellio), *Venus of Urbino*, 1538, oil on canvas. In another recreation, Varda combines *Venus of Urbino* with Francisco Goya's *The Clothed Maja*, c. 1800, oil on canvas. See Chapter Four.

[38] This metaphor resonates with the ending of George Perec's novel *La Vie mode d'emploi* (1978) in which Bartlebooth assembles his last puzzle only to find that the final piece he holds is in the form of an X while the missing piece is in the shape of the letter W.

childhood in Brussels. She states, "Cette mer du Nord et le sable, c'est le début pour moi," indicating that it is not just the location that she associates with her youth but the actual *material* that makes up that space.[39] Again, Varda associates sand with memory. Within this significant beachscape, the filmmaker plants photos from her youth and stages reenactments of her childhood filmed alongside images of herself as an adult (figure 13). The same beach also serves as the setting for an elaborate art installation involving an assortment of mirrors, of differing shapes and sizes, either fixed in the sand, propped on rustic wooden tripods or suspended on chains (figure 14). One mirror in particular reminds Varda of her parents' bedroom furniture in her childhood home and this association morphs into an aural memory of the music her family used to play on their phonograph (figure 15). Here, the sand functions as a material conduit for memory, even if for Varda it is impossible to keep the granules from running through her fingers, to fully hold on to the past.

During this opening sequence, Varda claims, "J'ai pas beaucoup de rapport à mon enfance. C'est pas une référence pour les choses auxquelles je pense."[40] It is evident from her statement that for Varda, memory is not a mental process. Rather, it is the physical photographs that she retains from her youth and other material objects that provide her the material with which to construct her autobiographical film wherein she veritably brings these objects to life, vividly conjuring the past materially to the surface of the present. Dominique Bluher remarks that "the laying bare of the *mise-en-scène* is not a demystification, but a representation of the mediation of the past (the remembered) by the present (the act of remembering)."[41] An example of this notion occurs when Varda presents an old black and white picture that shows her as a young girl in a dark bathing suit with wide straps meeting in

[39] "The North Sea and its sand is the start for me..."

[40] "I don't feel a strong link to my childhood. It's not a reference in my thought processes."

[41] Dominique Bluher, "Autobiography, (Re-)enactment and the Performative Self-portrait in Varda's *Les Plages d'Agnès/The Beaches of Agnès*," *Studies in European Cinema* 10, no. 1 (2013): 64.

a V at the front and a big white bow in her hair (figure 16). In a subsequent scene, she recreates this image on the present-day North Sea shore, thereby transplanting the material traces of a memory sparked by the photo into the sand where she stands as an adult. The memory consists of Varda playing with seashells and paper flowers with her sister on the Belgian beach (figure 17). Digging through this recollection of the past, she remarks that it had also manifested itself subconsciously in a very material way when she was creating an installation devoted to her deceased cat Zgougou (whose face graces the logo of Ciné-Tamaris), underlining the very subtle capacity that memories have of seeping through into the present and, in Varda's case, into her art (figure 18).[42] With regard to the installation for Zgougou's tomb, her art takes on a double memory—one drawn subliminally from the recesses of her past and the other from the desire to commemorate her much beloved cat.

In these first sequences of *Les Plages d'Agnès,* the mirrors and photographs on the beach collectively form a prism that reflects simultaneously Varda's present self at work on the beach recreating her past as well as that very past, thus firmly establishing the film as an autobiographical endeavor. DeJulio astutely interprets this scene as a way of "playing with the multiple possibilities of framing its subject" and indeed, Varda unequivocally asserts her presence both as the subject and the creator of the film from the very start of the film.[43] By doing so, she creates an inextricable link between Varda the person and Varda the filmmaker and visual artist. According to Kelley Conway, digging into her history "helps Varda understand not her past or present self, but her *work* […] The events and the relationships of

[42] L*e Tombeau de Zgougou,* a looped time-lapse video, was part of a larger exhibition entitled *L'Île et elle* held at the Fondation Cartier from June to October of 2006. Other exhibits included *Ma cabane de l'échec,* a glass shack whose walls were lined with strips of celluloid from Varda's unsuccessful 1966 film *Les Créatures* as well as another video installation by the name of *Les Veuves de Noirmoutier,* which provided a bulk of the material for Varda's concurrent film *Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier* (2006). Shirley Jordan's 2009 article "Spatial and Emotional Limits in Installation Art: Agnès Varda's *L'Île et elle*" provides a detailed description of the exhibition's contents and layout in its entirety. See also the artist's visually stunning annotated album devoted to the exhibition: Varda, Agnès. *L'Île et elle.* Paris: Fondation Cartier/Actes Sud, 2006.

[43] De Julio, "Aging and Memory," http://sensesofcinema.com/2013/feature-articles/ageing-and-memory-in-agnes-vardas-les-plages-dagnes/

her life have certainly enriched her work, but it is her work, the film's structure and logic imply, that offers the richest record of her life."[44] I add that Varda's exploration of her past through the meandering structure and associative logic of the film equally allows her and her audience to gain insight into the capricious and erratic nature of memory.

Fig. 16

Fig. 17

Fig. 18

Varda certainly succeeds in "framing" herself in the film, but she also subtly frames the subjects of a broader collective memory with photos and moving images. In addition to revisiting her own past and her own work, she repeatedly pays homage to the history of cinema and art by highlighting her relationships with various filmmakers and artists throughout her life. For example, she situates herself within the Nouvelle Vague lineage and fondly recalls her friendship with the artist Calder, who was her neighbor for many years. Furthermore, as in *Ulysse,* Varda evokes a national, collective memory by recalling significant historical events such as the women's rights movement in France as well as alluding to darker aspects of her country's past. DeJulio remarks,

[44] Kelley Conway, "Varda at Work: *Les Plages d'Agnès*," *Studies in French Cinema* 10, no. 2 (2010): 130.

> Mixed in with photographs of friends and family […] are photos of anonymous people […] some pictures found and purchased at the Marché aux Puces, and now framed and hung on a wall in Varda's […] home; others unnamed, young Jewish girls, whom scout leaders from Varda's girlhood, without Varda or the other girls knowing, regularly helped pass unnoticed into Switzerland on one of their mountain hikes in the Alps. Varda [makes] similar use of photos, film and anonymous persons in her installation *Hommage aux Justes de France*, commissioned by the French government […] (2007), which commemorates those who sheltered Jews during the Holocaust.[45]

DeJulio's observation illuminates Varda's continual concern with fixing memory, whether individual or collective, personal or anonymous, within a material presence that continually exerts itself in the present. It also demonstrates Varda's skill at intervweaving her personal past with that of a broader collective, a tendency that is apparent not only in the three films discussed in this chapter, but in other works such as *Daguerréotypes* (1975), *L'Opéra-Mouffe* (1958) and *Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier* (2006).

As the above section illustrates, while Varda meticulously compiles a collection of memories, represented tangibly, materially and through the body in *Les Plages d'Agnès,* this accumulation does not cohere into one smooth narrative of Varda's life, but rather remains unsewn, each memory separate from the others. Through these fragments or swatches of memory, filmmaker and spectator sample Varda's past, all the while questioning the task at hand. In the latter part of the film Varda explicitly addresses the idea of fragmentation. In 2007, at the Palais des Papes in Avignon where she was exhibiting her early photographs of the city's celebrated theatre festival, Varda camera captures footage of a worker who is laying tile in the chapel. She admits, "Il y a l'idée de fragmentation que j'aime beaucoup, qui correspond vraiment à quelque chose de la mémoire. Est-ce qu'on peut reconstituer ce

[45] De Julio, "Aging and Memory," http://sensesofcinema.com/2013/feature-articles/ageing-and-memory-in-agnes-vardas-les-plages-dagnes/.

personnage, cette personne de Jean Vilar?"[46] The spectator is invited to ponder this "memory puzzle" with relation to the film they are watching—does it succeed in reconstituting this person, Agnès Varda? The itinerant nature of her autobiographical film and the diffracted quality of her memories as they pass through her present-day self suggest that the film does not or cannot arrive at reconstituting a cohesive picture from the mosaic pieces of the past.

Mnemonic Acrobatics: Engaging an Embodied and Material Collective Memory in *Les Cent et une nuits de Simon Cinéma*

The final film which this chapter on embodied and material memory treats is a little-known work by Varda entitled *Les Cent et une nuits de Simon Cinéma.* It was made in 1995 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the invention of cinema. The protagonist, played by Michel Piccoli, is Simon Cinéma, a cantankerous, feisty but at times melancholic centenarian who, as his name suggests, is the living incarnation of cinema. Having lost the use of his legs to old age, sporting a wig to cover his bald head and losing the memory of his past, i.e. the history of cinema, he hires Camille Miralis, a young film scholar, to tell him stories about the cinema over the course of a 101 nights. The story line is clearly a modern, subverted rendition of Princess Scheherazade and the *One Thousand and One Nights.* The twist is that here, the storyteller ("*la conteuse*") is not the one in danger of dying. It is her aging audience, M. Cinéma, who must be kept alive by the stories Camille tells.

In an impressive array, the film references more than 70 films made throughout the 100-year history of cinema, from the Lumière brothers *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1895) up to Gus Van Sant's 1991 film *My Own Private Idaho.* The cast reads like the ultimate list of who's who in cinema, with appearances by celebrated film icons such as Marcello Mastroianni, Gérard Depardieu, Catherine Deneuve and Robert De Niro. Even deceased cinema personas, such as the Lumière Brothers, make an appearance, represented by

[46] "This whole idea of fragmentation appeals to me. It corresponds so naturally to questions of memory. Is it possible to reconstitute this personality, this person Jean Vilar?"

two actors dressed in black suits and top hats, their bodies outlined with a string of lights (figure 19). With regard to this nearly absurd lineup of stars, Varda writes, "Le générique, quand il se déroule, fait rire, tant il y a de comédiens."[47]

Fig. 19

Les Cent et une nuits, although a commercial flop and not one of the better-known French films, is perhaps the most comprehensive homage to cinema of all time. Not only does it verbally and visually cite the most influential and canonical films to have appeared since 1895 through dialogue, the use of source material and ludic reenactments, it also showcases a wealth of cinematic *material* that is parallel to any film museum's collection. Simon Cinéma's mansion is decked to the ceilings with cinematic paraphernalia—wall-to-wall movie posters, notable film props, life-sized cardboard cutouts of famous cinema personalities such as Alfred Hitchcock, antique filming apparatus, a white porcelain bust of Marilyn Monroe, and the moon from Méliès' *Le Voyage dans la lune* (1902), to name just a few examples. Additionally, because after all, what would the sum of the entire apparatus and art of filmmaking amount to without the ability to project the end product, two oval frames adorn the sides of M. Cinéma's headboard and function as screens that change images throughout the film according to the topic at hand. The first image to appear in the frames is of Orson Welles as Camille sings the praises of *Touch of Evil* (1958).

[47]Agnès Varda, *Album d'Agnès V.-images et notes latérales,"* in *Tout(e) Varda* DVD box set (Paris: Arté Editions & Ciné-Tamaris, 2012), 72. "When the credits roll, it makes people laugh there are so many actors." (my translation)

Once again, as in the works analyzed above, this insistence on the material is accompanied by the embodied. In *Les Cent et une nuits*, cinema is embodied, not only literally in its personification by M. Cinéma, but also by Camille's film school friends who spontaneously recreate scenes from their favorite films. Additionally, in his monumental mansion, M. Cinéma's housekeeper Kiwei travels through the house by performing elaborate acrobatics. Her function becomes clear as M. Cinéma explains, "Le mouvement, c'est la vie et c'est le cinéma."[48] Later, he tells his houseguest Mastroianni that he has hired a "jeune beauté [qui] fait faire de l'aérobic à ma mémoire."[49] M. Cinéma, his memory failing and his body immobile in a wheelchair, craves movement, the very basis of film and consequently, for him, the very basis of life. Indeed, cinema is an extremely kinetic and proprioceptic medium—motion is its essence. Not only does it consist of moving images, but its very language is centered on movement: fused to the filmmaker, whose body executes its own movements, the camera "zooms," "travels" and "tilts." Film starts "rolling" when the director yells "action." In projection, whether the medium is analogue or digital, the material onto which the film is inscribed is in constant movement in the device that is playing it. Thus, in *Les Cent et une nuits*, the energetic acrobatics of Kiwei, as well as the vitality of Camille and her young friends are necessary to animate the dormant, museum-like shrine to cinema inside the mansion, illustrating both the need for motion and regeneration in cinema.[50] Furthermore, Kiwei's gymnastics embody the movements that Camille's (hi)storytelling is creating in M. Cinéma's memory as she jump-starts it out of a stagnating forgetfulness into the process of remembering. As with the real cinema, which relies on movement and renewal both in the

[48] "Movement is life, movement is cinema."

[49] "A young beauty [who] is having my memory do aerobics."

[50] This idea of cinema over the years and its regeneration is covered later in Chapter Three. It is important to remark here that Varda's son Mathieu Demy plays the role of Camille's boyfriend, an aspiring filmmaker, in *Les Cent et une nuits*. Thus, she adds the element of "progeny" to "regeneration" and underlines the fact that cinema for her is not a just a career, but also holds a very strong presence in her family life. The link between the life of the filmmaker and her œuvre is covered in Chapter Four.

mechanisms native to it and the world it captures, the film's embodying protagonist requires motion and regeneration both externally and internally.

M. Cinéma exteriorizes his memory's lack of suppleness and agility by using a now-familiar material metaphor. Matter of factly, he states, "J'ai des souvenirs mais je ne me souviens pas. Comme si je savais pas attraper les mouches."[51] With this comment, he compares his arduous process of remembering to the act of trying to catch flies that buzz around his head and even mimes the action. Like Varda on the pier at Venice Beach in *Les Plages d'Agnès,* where she subtly cites this earlier film, M. Cinéma enacts the futility of trying to remember as he claws at the air for elusive, invisible flies. For the tortured persona, the memories refuse to come into clear view and his demise looms before him. In the daytime, Simon Cinéma is tormented by the shadows that haunt his decrepit memories and at night, he grows melancholic as he contemplates his death. However this sad, wasted figure is eventually rejuvenated by Camille and her young, creative friends who are making their own film and signaling a new future for cinema.

M. Cinéma also receives the help of an energetic "memologist," played by Jean-Paul Belmondo, who shows up at the end of the film to "treat" M. Cinéma (figure 20). In a ludic and dynamic scene, as the iconic actor straps his client into an old laboratory helmet that pays homage to the early science-fiction genre, he waxes eloquent: "Une mémoire qui dort c'est un lion sans griffes, un feu éteint. Un cerveau sans souvenirs c'est une valise fermée à clé, c'est un lustre sans lumière."[52] With this series of vivid metaphors, which ends in a punning wink to the origins of cinema, Belmondos remarks materialize the *loss* of memory in objects that are lacking in some way, that are somehow not whole or functional. This itself makes a commentary on the deteriorating effects of time on memory and the inability of material

[51] "I have memories, but I can't remember them. As if I couldn't catch flies."

[52] The reference to the lion is an allusion to Belmondo's character Sam Lion in *Itinéraire d'un enfant gâté* (1988). "A dormant memory is like a clawless lion, an extinguished fire. A mind without memories is like a locked suitcase, a chandelier without a light."

objects to permanently serve as effective mnemonic triggers. What is once strong, the lion, the fire, the chandelier, inevitably falls victim to the ravages of time and becomes weak, loses its force and its luster. Still, as Varda says in her written autobiography, one must actively exercise memory and even grapple with it, as M. Cinéma does in the film, to keep it alive. Remembering becomes important because it is tied to history, personal, collective, even cinematic, without which the present loses its anchor.

Fig. 20

While the scenes described above are ludic and approach the topic of memory with a tongue-in-cheek humor, Varda's more serious concerns are still very present. Again, she demonstrates that memory as an isolated mental process is bound to fail unless supported by active remembering through the use of mnemonic objects or through enactments of memory. Merely speaking about film to M. Cinéma will not suffice—he requires a full body treatment, he must live among the material manifestations of the history of cinema and most importantly, he must fully embody cinema by moving. By the end of the film, he is no longer a recluse and ventures out into the world. Despite still being in a wheelchair, he becomes mobile. He travels to Hollywood and when he comes back, he stars in Camille's film, thus taking an active role in the perpetuation and rejuvenation of cinema. To be sure, unlike *Ulysse* and *Les Plages d'Agnès*, films that principally deal with personal and individual memory through various angles, the larger commentary in *Les Cents et une nuits* is about the history, and the future, of cinema—it is intended to be a memory or a commemoration *of* cinema.

However, because of a secondary commentary about the act of remembering as lived and embodied that weaves itself through the film, the distinction between commemoration and memory is distorted and the film becomes a collective co-memory of cinema, shared by the film, the filmmaker and the spectator.

Conclusion

The three films discussed in this chapter, in their preoccupation with remembering, all point to a paradox about memory. While it is true that we can never fully remember, it is also true that we can never fully forget. This paradox begs the question where does memory reside and can the past truly be preserved or reconstructed? In an attempt to address these questions, I turn to the conclusion of David Krell's discussion on phenomenology and memory. Relying on Merleau-Ponty's "Monday Course" notes from the Collège de France, Krell writes:

> Finally, if memory is neither conservation nor construction, neither storehouse nor interior decorator, then neither is it the contrary of forgetting. "True memory," according to Merleau-Ponty, is to be found at the intersection of remembrance and oblivion, "à l'instant où revient le souvenir oublié *et gardé par l'oubli,*" at the instant when a memory returns— a memory forgotten *and preserved in* its forgottenness. Both remembering and forgetting are "modes of our oblique relationship to a past that is present to us only by virtue of the determinate emptiness it leaves in us (emphasis added by Krell)."[53]

It appears then that the problematic nature of memory and the ways in which it can become cracked, distorted and fraught with holes over time is what gives it its unique texture and distinguishes the fabric of the past from that of the present. Perhaps the fact that memory remains obstinately out of our reach is what perpetually brings us back to the present. As Varda tells us at the end of *Les Plages d'Agnès,* "Je me souviens pendant que je vis," a

[53] Krell, "Phenomenology of Memory," 503, quoting Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity*, 72.

statement which resonates with one from Merleau-Ponty: "What is past or future for me is present in the world.[54] Thus, as we steadily track forward through time in a phenomenological experience within a material world that contains us and within a material body that puts us into a perceptual and intersubjective contact with this world, there arises a constant, varied and beautiful tension between remembering and forgetting, much like the tension that derives from the relationship between the violin and metronome. And it is these points of tension that fascinate us, that cause us to contemplate our relationship to the past and the passage of time from the vantage point of the present. In the next chapter on death and loss, I turn to another sort of tension, that which arises from a paradox in our human condition as simultaneously living and dying beings.

[54] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), trans. Colin Smith (London: Routeledge, 1962): 478. "I remember while I live."

CHAPTER THREE

Mourning Bodies: Varda's Haptic and Embodied Representations of the Cycle of Life and Death, Loss and Absence in *L'Opéra-Mouffe, Jacquot de Nantes* and *Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier*

"Materiality is mortality"
–Laura Marks[1]

"Des roses et des begonias"

It is exceptionally rare to encounter a film by Agnès Varda that does not touch on death explicitly or implicitly. In *La Pointe Courte* (1955), a child dies and a community mourns. Thérèse's sudden and ambiguous death at the end of *Le Bonheur* (1965) leaves the spectator wondering if it resulted from an accident or from suicide. Regarding this ambiguity in the film, Varda writes, "Qu'elle soit morte par accident ou par suicide ne change rien à la réalité. Dans cette fiction la mort est le ver caché à l'intérieur d'un très beau fruit aux couleurs de l'été."[2] In a later film, *Sans toit ni loi* (1985), the mysterious demise of Mona, a homeless drifter found dead in a ditch, launches the film, which then attempts to piece together her final days retrospectively. In *Murs Murs* (1980), Varda's portrayal of murals in Los Angeles showcases a number of works that depict skulls and other Day of the Dead imagery. In other instances, Varda mourns the dead openly in her films. For example, in her autobiographical documentary *Les Plages d'Agnès* (2008), the filmmaker throws roses and begonias at the feet of larger than life-sized photographs of the deceased members of Jean Vilar's Théâtre National Populaire (TNP), for which she served as official photographer in the early 1950s. In this way, she inscribes her own life narrative with stories and memories of those she has lost.

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[1] Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xi.

[2] Agnès Varda, *Album d'Agnès V.-images et notes latérales,"* in *Tout(e) Varda* DVD box set (Paris: Arté Editions & Ciné-Tamaris, 2012), 72.

Jenny Chamarette justly notes that Varda's films are a "complex layering of mourning practices (of lives now over), and a commemoration or reactivation of the memories that are still being lived, via Varda, the living filmmaker," whose works will ultimately outlive her as monuments-in-the-making to the dead.[3] This "complex layering of mourning practices" is particularly evident in *Jacquot de Nantes* (1990) and *Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier* (2006). Even in her portrayal of the living, especially when they are existing in survival modes as in *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000), this depiction is underpinned with the notion that there is a tenuous balance between life and death.

To be clear, it is not so much that Varda's repeated representations of death and dying is darkly morbid, but more that death, loss and absence all become a tenacious presence in her films. Often, as a result of her nuanced and sensitive treatment of death, her films appear to emit a melancholic sigh. However, this melancholy is tinged with hope and an appreciation for the vibrancy of the lives she portrays. Furthermore, there is no debilitating fear or pathological anxiety associated with the death that Varda showcases. Rather, she approaches it with a wistful attitude of acceptance. She acknowledges that death has taken a number of people dear to her and that someday it will claim her, but she mitigates this fact by ardently depicting the lives of her filmic subjects so that life and death act as interdependent counterpoints to each other. As a result, in the films of Varda that paint the specter of death as an umbra that eclipses the lives she represents, life and death create a thematic chiaroscuro. From this play of light and shadow emerges the grand paradox of existence—as we live, we are already in the process of dying, and the aging, ailing lived body becomes the landscape where this paradox plays itself out daily. In *Being and Time,* Heidegger uses the term "being-

[3] Jenny Chamarette, "Spectral Bodies, Temporalised Spaces: Agnès Varda's Motile Gestures of Mourning and Memorial," *Image & Narrative* 12, no. 2 (October 5, 2011): 34.

toward-death" to name this particularity of human existence.[4] It is a mode in which *being* is *existing toward* death, so that as we live, we carry our inextricable mortality with us. Thus, death is not the final event that marks the end of life, but rather a concomitant current that underlies our daily existence and our phenomenological experience with the world.

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the ways in which Varda's cinema deftly captures the dynamic of "being-toward-death" in its contemplation of death, dying, absence and loss. A close analysis of three films, *L'Opéra-Mouffe* (1958), *Jacquot de Nantes* (1990) and *Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier* (2006), reveals how Varda represents the balance between life and death and the impact of death on the living through her haptic aesthetics whereby her camera pulls the spectator into closer contact with her films and their subjects through tactile and embodying images.[5] The first type of image evokes the sense of touch through a presentation of close range surface textures and resists an exclusively visual identification of the subject at hand. The embodying image focuses on bodies and forms that incarnate abstract notions and is at times reinforced by cinematographic techniques that incite the spectator's somatosensory system. While there is a distinction between these two types of images, they both contribute to the viewer's haptic perception of the film and even more so when they overlap within the same shot.

The films analyzed in this chapter, which deal directly with mortality, are in various ways perceptual appeals to the audience's *pathos* and consequently, they awaken an empathetic response that engages the affect as well as the body. Their attention to the human form and to the objects, contours and textures contained in the filmic environment endows them with a materiality and tactility that invites the spectator's touch. And, since touch is

[4] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 371-398.

[5] Ironically enough, this chapter devotes the majority of its attention to *L'Opéra-Mouffe*, the shortest of the three films due to its importance in establishing the interplay between life and death that then reappears in Varda's later films.

reciprocal, the films push back with their poignant haptic poetics.[6] The result is an *embodied* spectatorship that implicates the body and is based in shared emotion, empathy and a commiseration about the mortal condition of humanity. In other words, the images that inform the analysis in this chapter, are not merely seen, they are *felt* as well.

Heidegger's existential phenomenology, in contrast to his predecessor Husserl's essentialist transcendental phenomenology, serves the purpose of this chapter particularly well because of its ontological, rather than epistemological, bent. Heidegger's rethinking of the phenomenological principles put forth by Husserl focuses not on a transcendental consciousness as the seat of knowledge, but rather, on an embodied consciousness that allots a primacy to the lived body and its experience with the world. His philosophical concepts of "being-in-the world" and "being-toward-death" fittingly punctuate this chapter's larger concern with a non-hierarchical, intersubjective and embodied filmic experience because they posit a mode of being in which the divisions between subject and object are erased into a smoother, more integrated state of existence *within* a world that we affect and which affects us. In this state of being, the material world and the beings inhabiting it are involved in a mutual subjectivity, or otherwise put, an intersubjectivity.

The Interrelation of Time, Memory, Death in Varda's Works

It is clear from even the few examples listed above that death, along with time and memory, occupies a privileged status as one of the three principal topoi in Varda's collection of works. As the previous two chapters on time and memory illustrate, the theme of death is frequently interwoven with the other two major thematic strands. For example, Chapter One demonstrates that time and death are intricately linked for Varda, as evidenced by her portrayal of the eponymous protagonist in *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961) who feels the overwhelming

[6] As discussed in the introductory chapter, Varda's formation in the arts and photography, rather than in cinema studies, has greatly contributed to the development of her haptic aesthetic and set her apart from her New Wave counterparts.

menace of death and for whom time becomes so crucial that she begins to embody it, to enact it using the very physical body that carries her fatal disease. In Varda's films, there is also a close thematic ligature between time and the *process* of dying. According to Alison Smith, "Time and decay, and the struggle of life against time and decay, are again themes which recur throughout her work, from *La Pointe Courte* and *L'Opéra-Mouffe* to *Sans toit ni loi* and indeed in *Jacquot de Nantes.*"[7] These themes emerge whether Varda is representing her ailing husband in his last living days in *Jacquot de Nantes* or filming at close range a potato that has decayed into an unrecognizable mass of wrinkles and spiny eyes in *Les Glaneurs*. Such images encompass time, past, present and future, within the bodies that the camera tenderly explores and caresses.

While the link between death and time is easy to trace in Varda's films, the connection between death and memory is not as explicit. However, it exists insofar as memories, forever problematic in their impermanence and fallibility and subject to death themselves, serve only as faulty nets with which the living attempt to hold on to the dead. Like the beings they inhabit, memories grow old, wither and ultimately deteriorate, often making the act of remembering an exercise in symbolic resurrection. Confronted with this decay and transience, Varda insists on the material world and on the body in her films in order to preserve memory on the surface of the lived experience no matter how Sisyphean the task may be.[8] The same tendency arises when memory intersects death or loss. For example, Varda's offering of roses and begonias to photographs of the departed in *Les Plages d'Agnès* uses both the lived body and the material of photographs and flowers to recall the dead.[9] Varda's direct appeal to the

[7] Alison Smith, *Agnès Varda,* French Film Directors Series (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 4.

[8] See Chapter Two for a discussion of Emma Wilson's article "*Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse:* Salvage and the Art of Forgetting" and an alternative interpretation of Varda's insistence on the material world wherein Wilson proposes that Varda is working toward forgetting death through a salutary move of its disavowal.

[9] See the section on *L'Opéra-Mouffe* below for a discussion on Barthes' analysis of the photograph as a "return of the dead."

camera and by extension to the viewer, implicates the latter. According to Chamarette, scenes such as this "enact mourning as an affective, intersubjective, motile […] strategy for articulating the unspeakability of the loss of another, and its paradoxical irrecuperability into any memorial practice.[10] While the sense of loss may be impossible to articulate, Varda's haptic and embodied representation of it affectively transmits it to the viewer so that her mourning becomes a joint act of commemoration. As the sections below illustrate, Varda's use of the medium of film coupled with her haptic aesthetics succeed in articulating not only the unspeakability of loss, but also our phenomenological engagement with the world simultaneously through a "being-in-the-world" and a "being-toward-death."

L'Opéra-Mouffe: The Matter of Life and Death on a Parisian City Street

In the introduction of her book *Touch* Laura Marks writes, "Materiality is mortality."[11] This concise statement is a fitting slogan for the films of Varda, a director who has a particular aptitude for inscribing our human condition and our mortality within the material world. Her third film *L'Opéra-Mouffe,* an avant-garde short documentary structured around a series of thematic vignettes that depict the once-squalid world of the rue Mouffetard from the perspective of a pregnant woman, is a multifaceted example of Varda's capacity for a moving portrayal of human existence as "being-toward-death." As the discussion on the relationship between death and photography demonstrates later in this chapter, *L'Opéra-Mouffe*'s reliance on the "moving" portrait recalls Barthes' concept of the *Spectrum* in *Camera Lucida.* If, according to Barthes, every photograph is a return of the dead, then these living filmed portraits that emulate photographs further emphasize the constant presence of death in life by conflating the photographic image with the cinematic one.

[10] Chamarette, "Spectral Bodies," 33-34.

[11] Marks, *Touch,* xi.

While *L'Opéra-Mouffe* can generally be categorized as a documentary, this short, haunting film resists the traditional parameters of the genre. Firstly, like the city symphony genre of the 1920s and 30s, with which it shares certain aesthetic and thematic similarities, the film contains a light element of fiction. In addition to documentary footage, it incorporates staged scenes to present an aestheticized reality.[12] Furthermore, it does not rely on dialogue, interviews or descriptive voice-over, but rather finds its expression through a stylized montage that adheres to what Alexander Graf characterizes as the "rhythmic or associative editing" common to the city symphonies of the mid-1920s.[13] Thus, *L'Opéra-Mouffe* challenges traditional documentary modes based within rhetorical or observational frameworks by offering a poetic representation of social realities unfolding in an urban context through its intimate depiction of the denizens of the previously seamy rue Mouffetard in Paris. It is a documentary that liberates itself from mere exposition by employing a formal poetics that not only engages the viewer's critical mind, but also, and with more primacy, promotes an acutely sentient and embodied spectatorship.[14] As a result, *L'Opéra-Mouffe* functions within the poetic mode of documentary, which, according to Bill Nichols,

> explores associations and patterns that involve temporal rhythms and spatial juxtapositions [and] stresses mood, tone, and affect much more than displays of

[12] Some of these similarities resound in the title of the film itself. The opening title page of the film declares it to be a "carnet de notes filmées rue Mouffetard à Paris par une femme enceinte en 1958" ("filmed diary of a pregnant woman on the rue Mouffetard in 1959"). (my translation) This description is acutely reminiscent of Vertov's opening credits in *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929), which present the film as "excerpts from a camera operator's diary." Furthermore, the title of Varda's film, which by incorporating the word *opera,* draws a direct parallel to "symphony," its sister art form. The fact that it is a black and white silent film with an expressive musical score further echoes the city symphony style.

[13] Alexander Graf, "Berlin-Paris-Moscow: On the Montage Aesthetic in the City Symphony Films of the 1920s," in *Avant-Garde Film,* ed. Alexander Graf and Dietrich Scheunemann (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2007), 78.

[14] Delphine Bénézet offers a rich examination of *L'Opéra-Mouffe* as a both a historical document that provides insight into the Paris of the 1950s and an "essayistic film focusing on the corporeal" (11). She posits that the various representations of the female body in the film point to differing female subjectivities in order to present Varda's rejection of a fixed female subjectivity. See: Bénézet, Delphine. *The Cinema of Agnès Varda: Resistance and Eclecticism*. Directors' Cut Series. New York: Wallflower Press, 2014.

> factual knowledge or acts of rhetorical persuasion. The rhetorical element remains underdeveloped but the expressive quality is vivid. We learn in this case by affect or feeling, by gaining a sense of what it feels like to see and experience the world in a particular, poetic way.[15]

Like many city symphonies, which fall within the poetic mode, *L'Opéra-Mouffe* is an *expression* of the world it portrays rather than a description, and our understanding of this world is informed by *feeling* rather than fact.

L'Opéra-Mouffe further challenges conventional forms of documentary by adding an element of autobiography into the mix, a tendency that is typical of Varda's cinematic alchemy. The film came about at a crucial point in Varda's life. Having just finished *Ô saison, ô châteaux* (1957), which she considered a pleasant enough documentary to make but which, being a commissioned work, was not truly her own, Varda sought a more meaningful project. She writes, "Tourner quelque chose de plus personnel arrivait au moment où j'observais en moi une eventuelle altération du regard ou de la sensibilité."[16] On the one hand, this comment indicates a shift in her artistic vision and her perception of herself as a filmmaker—in Varda's words, "c'est le premier film où j'ai senti que je faisais le beau métier de cinéaste."[17] On the other hand, as her career was flourishing into something beautiful, Varda herself was standing at the threshold of motherhood, which left her "heureuse et émue" and opened her sensibilities to the world around her.[18] At the time, the young filmmaker was pregnant with her first child, Rosalie and she inserts herself as a character in the docu-

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[15] Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 162.

[16] Agnès Varda, *Varda par Agnès* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1994), 114. "Making something that was more personal came at a time when I was noticing a potential change in my look and in my sensitivity." (my translation)

[17] Varda, *Varda par Agnès,* 115. "It's the first film where I felt that I was practicing the great profession of filmmaker." (my translation)

[18] Varda, *Varda par Agnès,* 114. "happy and moved" (my translation)

fictional narrative that the film presents. Smith maintains that "*L'Opéra-Mouffe* […] illustrates [Varda's] great skill at exploring the subtleties of her own experience and translating it into a visual experience both subjective *and* objective."[19] While I agree with the general notion underlying this statement, namely that Varda is adept at translating her personal experience, or that of her characters, into an experience for the viewer, I propose that this experience is not strictly visual but also haptic and embodied. It awakens the sense of touch and other somatosensory modalities by building tactile associations through material and embodying images, encouraging the viewer to *feel* and thus creating a dynamic of intersubjectivity between spectator, the film and by extension, the filmmaker. As we will see further on in this chapter, this dynamic does not erase the individual and distinct entities of viewer, film, filmmaker, but rather blurs the distinctions between them, decenters the subject-object dichotomy and allows them to share "occupancy" of the cinematic space, to borrow the phrasing used by Vivian Sobchack.[20] This sense of shared occupancy emerges from the very first shots of the film.

Varda begins *L'Opéra-Mouffe,* with a shot of herself from behind sitting nude on a stark wooden bench. The opening credits roll over this image, in essence inscribing the film on the body of its creator. Varda becomes consubstantial with her film as her body, acting as a screen, reflects her work. At the end of the credits, the image lingers—Varda's body is engulfed in blackness and what stands out against this obsidian background is her pale flesh (figure 1). There is something uncanny about the image in the way her dark hair is swallowed up in the background, giving the impression that the body is headless. The spectator is left only with the contours of Varda's back, of her asymmetrical sloping shoulders, of the violin shape of her torso and hips, of the knobby vertebrae that line her back from her shoulder

[19] Smith, *Agnès Varda,* 9.

[20] Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 10. The section below on *L'Opéra-Mouffe* explores this notion in more detail.

blades to her buttocks, and of the thin arms that extend out from her body so that her hands rest on either side of her on the bench, looking more like the tips of wings than fingers. Her buttocks are pressed firmly onto the bench, the flesh misshapen and forming a small dark fold at her sacrum. The headlessness of the body and its unrecognizable hands defamiliarize the image, and the spectator, unable to make sense of it solely on a visual level, is thus prompted to rely on other senses, to trace the form with a prehensile eye in order to better grasp it, in all senses of the word.

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

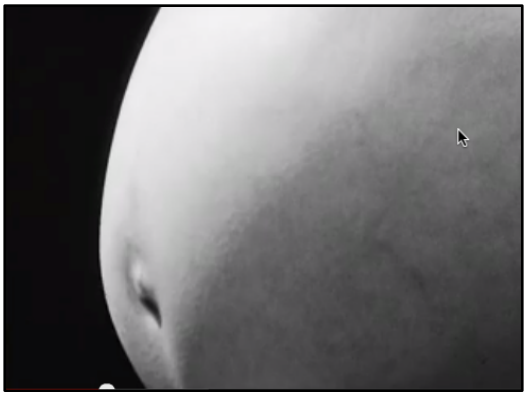

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

However, the image disappears before we can fully take it in and is replaced by a more recognizable still shot of a pregnant woman's torso and thighs in profile (figure 2). Framed against a black background, the lines of the body jump out at the viewer—the curve of the breasts, the elegant dome of the belly cradled on smooth thighs. The body appears to be leaning back into a cushion of nothingness, at once emerging from it and returning to it. These opening shots are more than just visually striking aesthetic images; they create the basis for the entire film, which is a study in contrast that explores the shifting edge where life and death

meet. The full, life-sustaining belly captured against the black void underlines the delicate balance between life and death, between vitality and the mortality that shadows existence.

Varda's camera insists on this precarious balance, on this life and death dichotomy that is taken up by her body and the void surrounding it, by honing in on the filmmaker's pregnant belly, which soon takes up more than three-quarters of the screen (figure 3). It fills the frame like a giant, white moon and we can discern on its topography a delicate mapping of veins and blood vessels beneath the goose bumps on her skin. Our tactile eye follows the round contours of the belly, taking into account the dip and shadow created by the navel. From this close proximity, the belly loses its context and the spectator is left to grope around the image—the more it is abstracted, the more our eye clings to it, attempting to identify with it and find meaning therein.

With the next shot, the film, sentient in its anticipation of the spectator's need for contextualization, cuts and pulls back from the close-up of the belly to show it again at medium range, still in profile, but this time recumbent against the dark background (figure 4). The camera does not pull back enough to provide the full picture, but distances itself enough to reestablish that the viewer's haptic gaze has been engaging with a pregnant woman's body. Each of these shots lingers about four to seven seconds, long enough to allow the eye to thoroughly scan the surface without exhausting the image. In other words, the length of the shots and the rapid, clean cuts between the images permit sufficient time for the spectator to build tactile associations but not to interpret or rationalize what is being perceived. Consequently, we are left with the pervasive *sense* of a body, living and full of life but verging on nothingness, nude, cold and exposed, whose flesh expands and contracts with each breath it takes. This breath connects it to the body of the viewer so that film and spectator breathe together in a synchronized and intersubjective movement.

Fig. 5

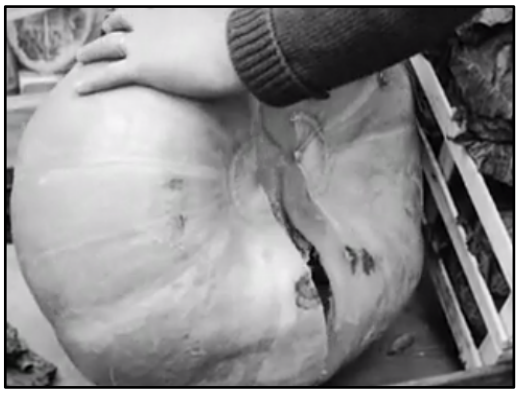

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

After this intimate introduction, by which we make contact with the film through the filmmaker's body and her sentient camerawork, Varda's next shot takes us abruptly into the world of the rue Mouffetard. In fact, it brings us into immediate contact with it via a close-up shot that serves as a haptically visual link between the enceinte body we have just encountered and another gestating body—a corpulent pumpkin whose exposed stem base at the center of its converging ridges reiterates the human belly button shown in the previous shots (figure 5). In juxtaposing the image of the belly with the shot of the pumpkin, Varda leads the viewer to make a connection between them, to identify one with the other so that with the subsequent shots, a bodily shock arises in the spectator—suddenly, a disembodied hand grasps the pumpkin by its voluptuous curves as another drives a knife through the thick rind, splitting it open to reveal the flesh and the seeds nestled inside (figures 6 and 7). The pumpkin resists the knife as the wielder exerts himself to saw it in half. The next series of quick close-up shots show the hands tearing out the sinewy inner fibers and dissecting the pumpkin into a number of hollow, disjointed pieces.

A greengrocer slicing a pumpkin open and removing its seeds was surely a common sight on the rue Mouffetard in the late 1950s. A more benign act than beheading a chicken or skinning a rabbit, it does not in itself constitute a violent act. However, through a skillful and well-timed montage of extremely haptic images that edge their way under the skin and into the viewer's body, Varda introduces an element of violence to the greengrocer's actions. The juxtaposition of the belly with the pumpkin enables a streamlined association between the two "bodies" for the spectator, whose own body is implicated in the shock and recoil (or at least in the sentiment of unease) that the image generates. Through this association, Varda transfers her anxieties and fears about being pregnant onto an object whose similarities in size, shape and gestational function to her enceinte belly allow it to be a body-by-proxy through which the dread of evisceration can be enacted. According to Varda, "*L'Opéra-Mouffe* est un film de panique. C'est au fond un film tendre, ce qu'on a appelé sa cruauté ne relève que de l'affolement."[21] At the root of this panic lies Varda's desire to build empathy between her audience and the images they experience, especially for those who have known pregnancy and childbirth. In a 1965 interview with Harold Portnoy, Varda affirms this notion:

> Des femmes enceintes ou d'autres qui avaient eu des enfants disaient: "C'est extraordinaire parce que toutes les sensations décrites, suggérées ou racontées dans ce film, au fond, on les a eues, on n'y a jamais pensé" ou bien "On n'osait pas les avoir. " On n'osait pas se dire: "il y a une certaine forme de panique."[22]

Varda's use of the word "sensation" is telling—the polysemic character of the word, which can mean both perception through the senses as well as through affective feeling, effectively

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[21] Agnès Varda, interview by Jean Michaud and Raymond Bellour, *Cinéma* 61, no. 60 (October 1961): 12. *"L'Opéra-Mouffe* is a film of panic. At heart, it's a tender film, what has been called its cruelty is only alarm." (my translation)

[22] Varda, *Varda par Agnès,* 231. "Pregnant women or others who had had children would say, 'It's extraordinary because all the sensations described, suggested or recounted in this film, deep down, we've had them, we never thought about them' or 'we didn't dare have them.' We never dared to say to ourselves that 'there is a certain form of panic.'" (my translation)

covers the range of ways in which *L'Opéra-Mouffe* intersubjectively engages its viewers both physically and emotionally.

The pumpkin, then, as an externalization of the panic associated with pregnancy, functions as a prosthetic womb—and like the womb, it is paradoxical in its potential for life and in its extreme fragility. As with the fecund, pregnant body contrasted against the black void of nothingness in the opening four shots, the cutting up of the pumpkin also comments on the tenuous balance between life and death in daily existence, from which the wider-reaching paradox of "being-toward-death" emerges. This entanglement of life and death is the thread that sews together the images of *L'Opéra-Mouffe* so that the film becomes not just a life story, but *life's story*, exploring the breadth of human existence as marked by vitality, emotion, love, survival, alienation and ultimately, death. Varda frames her film as a diary of notes from the perspective of a pregnant woman. This idea of pregnancy, of containing life and death within the same fragile body pervades the work so that the film itself becomes pregnant. Otherwise stated, *L'Opéra-Mouffe* is a microcosm of the world, inhabited by people interacting with a material world, candid in its representation of a less-than-perfect and mortal humanity. Hence, it becomes the locus of an intersubjective experience for the spectator, also a living/dying being.

After the pumpkin sequence, Varda's camera approaches this microcosmic world with trepidation, as one who is entering it as an outsider. The first shot of the Mouffetard market shows a seated man from behind and is vaguely reminiscent of the opening shot of Varda in that both images use the back as a barrier that resists immediate recognition, creates a heightened sense of unfamiliarity and suggests that the experience at hand might raise some points of tension. In a 1962 interview with Pierre Uytterhoeven, Varda alludes to this tension, which for her lies in the contradiction at the juncture of the hope that comes from being an expectant mother, the panic associated with pregnancy and the fear that her newborn child

might grow up to be "a bum, an alcoholic" or in some other way, a member of the "dregs of humanity" that once lined the Parisian street.[23] It is at this critical moment, as Varda and her camera venture out into the world, that the film's libretto joins the orchestral music, providing in song a loose and minimal narration of life in the rue Mouffetard and guiding the spectator through its crowded folds.

The libretto is divided into ten parts, each corresponding to a titled chapter in the film. Intertitles introduce the segments in the following order: "l'opéra-mouffe," "des amoureux," "du sentiment de la nature," "de la grossesse," "quelques-uns," "les chers disaparus," "joyeuses fêtes," "de l'ivresse," "des angoisses" and "des envies."[24] While I will not be treating all of these individual sections in this chapter, the vignettes merit mention because their titles underline the notion that *L'Opéra-Mouffe* encapsulates life's story, that it recounts in miniature the universal narrative that overarches the scope of human existence from birth to death and all the gray areas in between.

The first chapter focuses on food, slangily known as *bouffe* in French. The libretto takes full advantage of the rhyme between *bouffe* and the shortened name for the rue Mouffetard: "L'opéra-mouffe/au premier accord/au premier abord/c'est la bouffe."[25] In this way, food, as sustenance, as the most common need for all of humanity, begins the story. At its core, existence is first and foremost a game of survival, a game of life and death in which the shopkeepers and patrons of the market street are constantly engaged—the violence that underlies the eviscerated pumpkin and the slabs of meat lining the butchers' shops is counterpoised with the knowledge that these products will eventually nourish a living body.

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[23] Agnès Varda. "Agnès Varda from 5 to 7," interview by Pierre Uytterhoeven, in *Agnès Varda Interviews*, ed. T. Jefferson Kline (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 4-5.

[24] "the opera-mouffe," "the lovers," "on the feeling of nature," "on pregnancy," "some people," "the dear departed," "joyful celebrations," "on drunkenness," "anxieties" and "desires"

[25] "The opera-mouffe/from the first understanding/from the first glance/is about food."

This chapter alternates between shots of the produce at the market and the patrons who occupy the street. The focus on the food is intense—at first it is shown from a panning crane shot, a slow and distant aerial view that reinforces the uneasy entry into the rue Mouffetard (figure 8). Soon however, the camera acclimates to its environment and approaches the food from a more intimate distance as it provides a close up of the shaggy roots of a pile of leeks that soon becomes abstracted into something other than itself, grotesque and unfamiliar (figure 9). In this sense, the effect of this shot recalls Alain Resnais and Jean Cayrol's 1955 film *Nuit et brouillard*, in which the camera tracks over close-ups of images showing the massive piles of human hair shorn from the heads of concentration camp victims during the Holocaust (figure 10). While the experience of the Mouffetardians that Varda depicts is in no way on the same scale of horror as the atrocities of the Holocaust as represented by Resnais and Cayrol, both films succeed in haptically articulating the abject through a denaturalization of the material. In contrast to Resnais' chilling film, Varda's camera eventuallly offers relief from despair—after giving the prehensile eye a moment to dig into the dense folds of this intimate image, it pans up to re-contextualize the leeks in a massive and compact mound of produce, a textured tapestry that calls the eye to scan its surface (figure 11). Seconds later, the camera again zooms out to show the grocer's stall from a farther distance, further contextualizing it within the rue Mouffetard and reintroducing humans into the picture (figure 12). The chapter ends with long, lingering medium shots of women in the market talking animatedly. Behind them, others mill about in the crowded street in a hive of living activity.

Fig. 8

Fig. 9

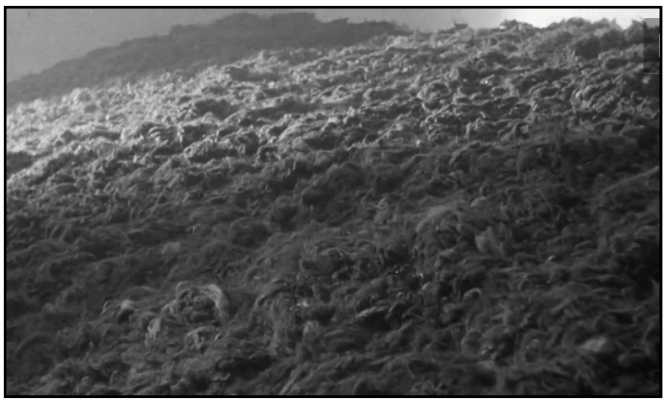

Fig. 10

Fig. 11

Fig. 12

In this way, the film's focus moves smoothly from the food of the rue Mouffetard to the inhabitants that this food sustains, inhabitants who are in the process of interacting as intersubjective beings whose phenomenological experiences with their environment touch and overlap. The best illustration of this overlap is the food that the people of the market consume, food that nourishes their bodies and through which they *incorporate* their environment—as the body takes in food, the sustenance animates it and gives it life. Thus, Varda's images of the rue Mouffetard and its denizens portray Heidegger's concept of *Dasein,* a mode of being in which the divisions between subject and object are erased into an intersubjective state of "being-in-the-world." In this mode of being, the material world and the people inhabiting it are mutually engaged. William Pamerleau's succinct summary of the notion of *Dasein* further clarifies the state of "being-in-the-world" as proposed by Heidegger in *Being and Time*:

> Heidegger is attempting to deepen our understanding of the concept of "being," and he does so by examining those beings for whom this is an issue at all–human beings. In order to emphasize our unique nature, he uses the term "Dasein"–or "being there"–in

> place of "human being." This term already implies the essential character of ourselves as being in a place, involved in a world […] If I ask what my conscious life is like, I find that I am fundamentally part of a world of objects and persons which shape my awareness […] I am only concerned with how those objects are present to me, not how they are in themselves, apart from anyone's thinking them.[26]

L'Opéra-Mouffe accomplishes just this in its portrayal of the "Mouffetardians" engaged in their daily involvement with a world that shapes them, and not just their awareness as in the example of the pregnant woman's perception of the space around her, but also, as we will see later, their physical bodies onto which their experience with the world is etched.

Therefore, although the film initially speaks to a targeted female audience through the subject of pregnancy, it is largely universal in its portrayal of humans *being* and its preoccupation with broader existential concerns, which becomes amplified as the film goes on. After the chapter entitled, "la grossesse," in which the anxiety associated with pregnancy returns in the form of a dove trying helplessly to escape from a deep glass bowl, comes a vignette called "quelques-uns." At this point, the film enters more intensely into the shadows of the thematic chiaroscuro of life and death as it begins to contemplate our mortal condition.

The camera work in this sequence is intimate, bringing the viewer into proximity with the dejected populace and abject environment of the rue Mouffetard. At first, the film presents a series of close-up shots of one or two people at a time. The camera is static and lingers on each person in a style that has since become characteristic of Varda and which she especially uses to its fullest extension when introducing the various shopkeepers of her neighborhood in her 1975 documentary *Daguerréotypes*. Each of these shots takes on the dimensions of a portrait, a living snapshot that the spectator can hold and contemplate. Later in the sequence, the camera inserts itself into the fold. It commits to one character and holds on to him with a

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[26] William C. Pamerleau, "Antonioni's Cinema as Being-in-the-World," *Cinemascope Independent Film Journal* 18 (2012): http://cinemiz.net/cifj/?p=2221.

subjective tracking shot. If the person disappears into the teeming crowd, the camera seeks him out. In other shots, Varda films the figure walking towards the stationary camera so that person's body executes the forward tracking and in this way, mimics the cinematic apparatus. Finally, in another strand of images, a particular character is framed within the wider context of the street in a full shot, which creates distance between the spectator and the individual filmic subject but serves to recontextualize the person within his or her larger environment. In a majority of the shots, whether static or moving, the person in the image makes direct eye contact with the camera and, by extension, with the spectator (figure 13).

LIVING PORTRAITS OF THE DENIZENS OF THE RUE MOUFFETARD

Fig. 13

What surfaces from this living album of humanity that Varda compiles is that these people share a commonality in their general sense of world-weariness, which manifests itself in the wrinkles and folds of their faces and in their physical carriage. Many walk with limps and some are laden with objects, implying a degree of toil and impeded movement through the world. The characters on the rue Mouffetard are all asymmetrical and imperfect, old and haggard, weathered by their contact with the world and the abrasiveness of daily existence. These are not people *living* in the world, but rather *inhabiting* it—incorporating the world and being incorporated and shaped by it. It is no accident that Varda does not depict the younger population of the street—to have done so would have diminished the impact of the powerful thought that all of these people were once newborns, anxiously awaited, unshaped by the world, fresh to existence like smooth-skinned blank canvases for experience. The libretto in this chapter of *L'Opéra-Mouffe* supports this idea by chiming in "ils étaient des nouveau-nés quelqu'un quelqu'autre quelques-uns."[6]

Furthermore, what the systematic variety of shots described above achieves is a close contact with the people of the rue Mouffetard that is built on multiple points of entry and multiple, shifting subjectivities that smudge the distinctions between the film, the *filmed*, and the spectator. It is a film that enfolds these people and the material world around them into a fabric of human experience, the surface of which is multifaceted and textured by bodies and forms, by the panoply of food items, by the shiny cobblestones, by the slick skin of the umbrellas and by the thin membrane of film onto which all of these are etched. The spectator, as a human being, is implicated in this fabric and ceases to be what Sobchack calls a "viewer viewing" and instead engages in a "mutual possession" of the filmic experience. According to Sobchack, this "mutual possession" is based in

> perception and its expression by filmmaker, film, and spectator—all *viewers viewing*, engaged as participants in dynamically and directionally reversible acts that

> reflexively and reflectively constitute the *perception of expression* and the *expression of perception.* Indeed, it is this mutual capacity for and possession of experience through common structures of embodied existence, thorough similar modes of being-in-the-world, that provide the *intersubjective* basis of objective cinematic communication (italics in the original).[27]

Of course it is important to note that, as Sobchack emphasizes, this decentering of the subject-object dichotomy "does not conflate the film and the viewer" but rather that they share a "double occupancy" of the cinematic space, a fact of which the viewer is constantly aware and must endlessly negotiate in order to extract its "experiential significance."[28]

Moreover, the people on Mouffetard are often presented in living snapshots through Varda's technique of cinematic portraiture. These moving portraits straddle the divide between film and photography, between motion and stillness and underline their subjects' "being-in-the-world" and their simultaneous "being-toward-death." The photograph has long been theorized as emanating a spectral presence. According to Laura Mulvey,

> Standing, as Rosalind Krauss puts it, rather strangely at the crossroads of science and spiritualism, still photography had already, immediately after its invention, generated associations of life and death, while also supplying, for the first time in human history, a mechanized imprint of reality."[29]

Theorists such as André Bazin, Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes have extensively treated this relationship between death and photography. For Bazin, photography "embalms" time and thus preserves and immortalizes the dead.[30] According to this perspective, photography works against and transcends death. Susan Sontag writes, "Ever since cameras were invented

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[27] Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, 5.

[28] Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye,* 10.

[29] Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 54.

[30] Bazin, André. *What Is Cinema?*. Translated by Hugh Gray. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

in 1839, photography has kept company with death. Because an image produced with a camera is, literally, a trace of something brought before the lens, photographs were superior to any painting as a memento of the vanished past and the dear departed."[31] In *Camera Lucida,* Barthes, names the photographic subject the *Spectrum* in order to retain at its root the notion of "spectacle," which "adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead."[32] In short, for Bazin, Sontag and Barthes respectively, the photograph functions as relic, as a trace and as a ghostly presence of the dead. It is the latter idea that resounds with this chapter's focus on death and absence as a *presence* among the living.

In a later chapter, Barthes puts forth that, "each photograph always contains this imperious sign of my future death."[33] For Barthes, this relationship between photography and death correlates to its temporal ambiguity, as in the photograph's ability to bring the "that-was-then" into the present, as well as to an ontological shift that arises. He writes:

> Each time I am (or let myself be) photographed, I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity, sometimes of imposture (comparable to certain nightmares). In terms of image-repertoire, the Photograph (the one I *intend*) represents the very subtle moment, when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (or parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter.[34]

In this sense, if those of Varda's filmed images that emulate photographs exist somewhere between the moving image and the photograph, then, using Barthes theories on death and the

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[31] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2003), 24.

[32] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1981), 9. Barthes names the photographer "*Operator"* and the viewer he calls "*Spectator."*

[33] Barthes, *Camera Lucida,* 97.

[34] Barthes, *Camera Lucida,*13-14.

photography, the subjects they portray also exist somewhere between life and death—they are becoming specters, or otherwise put, "being-toward-death."

This idea is reiterated in the subsequent vignette named "les chers disparus." In this segement, Varda again materializes absence but this time by the use of actual still photographs depicting those inhabitants of the rue Mouffetard who have passed away. While analogue film is in itself a material process and a material documentation of the world, when Varda films the rue Mouffetard, the moving images establish a living presence, however tinged with mortality, of the people she represents. With the use of photography, she adds another layer to this representation in which the dead return to the world of the rue Mouffetard and embed their presence into the structure of the film itself. Even though these photographs are filmed and in a sense animated by montage, the images clearly differ from the shots emulating portraiture that Varda uses to show the living members of the rue Mouffetard. These latter shots lack the absolute stillness of the photograph within the frame—even though the camera is static, there is motion inside the frame. However, the actual photographs that the video camera scans lack movement within the frame, but while the camera is in motion, this, along with the montage, creates the illusion of movement. In both cases, there is a sense of movement as well as stillness, of presence as well as absence and of death alongside life.

Consequently, for the viewer, Varda's use of photographs in the "chers disparus" sequence presents two skins across two media, the skin of the film and the skin of the photograph, which together make up the matter of life and death. Throughout the film, the spectator not only makes contact with the living (and dying) denizens of the rue Mouffetard, but also with its dead, all of whom coexist in the simultaneous modes of "being-in-the-world" and "being-toward-death." Each living presence implies death and each ghostly return exerts a presence. If the viewer perceives any anxiety in watching the film, it is because the film is

paradoxically pregnant with both life and death, one folded perpetually into the other.

As a result, *L'Opéra-Mouffe* and the ways in which the film invites an embodied and intersubjective spectatorship, expands our phenomenological understanding of our own relationship to the world around us because we engage with the film through a haptic visuality, a term coined by Laura Marks. In her book *Touch,* Marks maintains that optical visuality, which has traditionally prevailed in the ocularcentric cultures of the West, seeks a mastery of what is being seen and exerts a dominance that "parallels the dominance of idealism."[35] As a result, it perpetuates the subject-object dichotomy and imposes a hierarchy on our interaction with the world. On the other hand, *haptic* visuality, which relies on touch and other somato-sensory modalities, seeks not to dominate an object, but to make contact with it. In her earlier work, *The Skin of the Film,* Marks maintains that optical visuality "assumes that all the resources the viewer requires are available in the image" and therefore "privileges its representational power."[36] In contrast, haptic visuality, by recognizing the material presence of the image, "inspires an acute awareness that the thing seen evades vision and must be approached through the other senses," thereby ceding mastery of what confronts it.[37]

Marks also points out that since "haptic visuality is not the same as actually touching," it "acknowledges both the physicality and the unknowability of the other" and becomes an ethical look.[38] Thus, haptic visuality promotes an intersubjectivity in which the perception of the other becomes less idealized or essentialized. This is significant because, as Kate Ince maintains, "our subjective experience of others is of other *selves*—embodied, flesh-and-blood

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[35] Marks, *Touch,* xvii.

[36] Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, (Duke University Press, 2000), 163.

[37] Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 191.

[38] Marks, *Touch,* xviii.

beings with whom our meaningful encounters are social and precognitive," and that such encounters "never achieve or seal an identity between the identifying parties, but remain permanently open, mutable and incomplete."[39] The haptic experience then, leads not to an isolating, unified subjectivity that is only accessible to the I/eye and in opposition to an Other, but rather to a "dispersed" subjectivity" that connects us to other *selves*.[40] According to Merleau-Ponty, these "other selves" all manifest "a miraculous prolongation" of one's own self."[41] I would add that in the case of *L'Opéra-Mouffe,* as a work that incites a haptic visuality while exploring ontological issues, this dispersed subjectivity connects us to other selves all "being-toward-death."

Jacquot de Nantes: Haptically Documenting a Dying Body

In her 1991 film *Jacquot de Nantes,* Varda engages once more with the phenomena of "being-toward-death," but this time with a very personal investment in the images she presents as she mourns her beloved dying husband, Jacques Demy. The principal framework of the film portrays the life of Demy, who at the time of the film's production was in the last stages of his battle with AIDS. Along with the biographic sequences that Varda recreates to depict Demy's childhood and adolescence in Nantes, the film also incorporates scenes from Demy's corpus of films, recent footage of the adult Demy in his last days, as well as a strand of intermittent extreme close-up shots that runs through the body of the film. These textured and haptic shots show in excruciating detail the aging and ailing body of Jacques Demy, touched by Varda's camera in a final mournful caress of her husband months before his demise. Each shot becomes an intimate space of mourning and a landscape of loss as the camera slowly pans the different parts of Demy's body—the bristly salt and pepper hair, his

[39] Kate Ince, "Bringing Bodies Back In: For a Phenomenological and Psychoanalytical Film Criticism of Embodied Cultural Identity." *Film-Philosophy Journal* 15, no. 1(2011) 4.

[40] Marks, *Touch,* 97.

[41] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 412.

wrinkled, haggard cheeks covered in a rough stubble, the wiry hair on his arm, the purple blotches of Kaposi's sarcoma suffusing the ridged surface of his swollen hand and the delicate fringe of his eyelashes framing his glassy eye. Varda pays special attention to his tumid ring finger, which the thin gold wedding band encircles tightly, cutting into the flesh. With this image, she offers a material and corporeal representation of both the bond that exists between her and Demy and the penetrating pain that his imminent death provokes (figures 14-18).

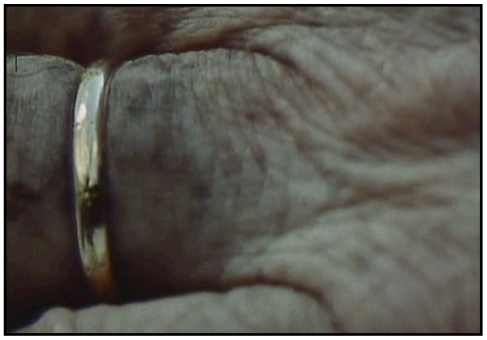

Fig. 14

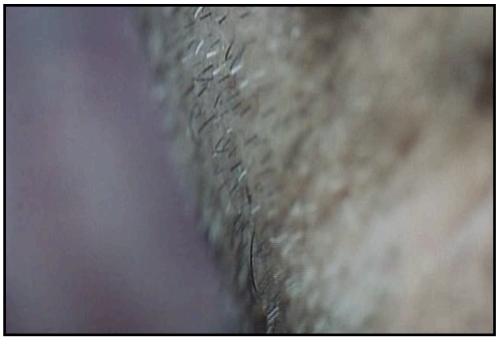

Fig. 15

Fig. 16

Fig. 17

Fig. 18

In these powerful images, each return to the material surface of Demy's body is an attempt to solidify his presence even as he is in the process of dying. As in *L'Opéra-Mouffe,* Varda once more weaves death with life to again create an elastic tension between vitality and mortality, this time by embedding images of a terminally ill Demy inside of a larger work that

commemorates his life and career. With her haptic aesthetics, Varda turns a body racked with disease into a poetic landscape and a living site of mourning.[42] The images themselves, which run like a string of beads through the larger framework of the film, and which Emma Wilson appropriately calls "tactile fragments of Demy," act as moving, living artifacts dedicated to a dying body.[43] Wilson expounds on this notion by citing Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey's work *Death, Memory and Material Culture,* in which the authors

> remind us of the practice of creating jewelry from [the] hair of departed loved ones. They comment that: "Human material that was regarded as 'dead' while the person was living, is thus transformed into a 'living' substance at death in the sense that it is reanimated as a possession capable of sustaining the decrease in close proximity to the bereaved." In *Jacquot de Nantes*, Varda recalls and reinvents a memorial practice. She does not literally make jewelry from Demy's hair, but captures it on film in images which, like the commemorative jewelry, speak both of the mortality of the body and its animation In mourning art.[44]

Yet Varda does not mourn alone—rather, she invites the spectator to touch Demy's dying body with a haptic eye, to join her in the act of cherishing something about to be lost and to build a tactile memory of him, to not merely *look* at the images, but to *feel* them intensely. These images "touch" us touching them and the sense of loss is enormous as we are brought into close contact with a body that is very much alive, but on the verge of disappearing. Thus, by bringing the spectator's tactile eye directly to the surface of the film and onto the skin of

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[42] In *Cinema and Sensation,* Martine Beugnet offers a discussion of body landscapes through which the body functions as a repository of visual memory. She briefly analyzes these images of Demy as well as the images of herself that Varda presents in *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse.* See: Beugnet, Martine. *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

[43] Emma Wilson, "*Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*: Salvage and the Art of Forgetting," in *The Art of the Project: Projects and Experiments in Modern French Culture*, ed. Johnnie Gratton and Michael Sheringham (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005), 103.

[44] Wilson, "Salvage and the Art of Forgetting," 103, quoting Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 136.

its subject, Varda creates a haptic relationship between viewer and image in which, according to Marks, "our self rushes up to the surface to interact with another surface. When this happens, there is a concomitant loss of depth—we become amoeba-like, lacking a center, changing as the surface to which we cling changes. We cannot help but be changed in the process of interacting."[45] In engaging with the images of Demy, we are changed affectively and slightly bruised from the contact with and recognition of our own mortality. The awareness that we are all in the process of dying, of "*being-toward-death"* in varying degrees builds an empathy that is shared through the filmic medium and its potential for moving us, not just in the sense of touching us affectively, but by haptically pulling us nearer to the surface of the image. Thus, the spectator's proximity to the film and the visual touch that it incites plays no small part in creating a dynamic of empathy between the two "bodies." Mark Paterson, relying heavily on the works of Edith Wyschogrod and phenomenological thought, treats this relationship between touch and empathy. He characterizes touch as a "receptive, expressive" sense that can "bring distant objects and people into proximity" and that this "felt proximity of another works as the engine of empathy."[46] Paterson elaborates on this notion by positing that touch

> engages with alterity by entering into a relation with another affective, empathetic body. Wyschogrod defines empathy as the "feeling-act through which a self grasps the affective act of another through an affective act of its own" […] However, rather than talking of a "feeling-act," which suggests an individuated self performing an isolated

[45] Marks, *Touch,* xvi

[46] Mark Paterson, *Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2007), 1 and 153.

> act, […] as part of a "felt" phenomenology, we can talk of "feeling-with," invoking corporeity, tactile empathy in a more unfolding, processual way.[47]

In *Jacquot de Nantes*, as in the film *Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier* analyzed in the section below, Varda effectively uses haptic and embodying images to create this sense of "feeling-with" through a tactile empathy that underlies our intersubjective experience with her works and her filmic subjects.

Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier: Sharing Loss Through Material Mourning

For Varda, the loss of her husband had resonations that eventually rippled out into other works related to mourning such as the 2006 film *Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier* and the correlated art installation entitled "Les Veuves de Noirmoutier."[48] The film and the exhibit are based on a series of filmed interviews conducted by Varda on the island of Noirmoutier, located off of the mid-Atlantic coast of France in the Bay of Biscay. On maps, the calla lily-shaped island seems to blossom off the coast of France into the bay. It is here where she and Demy would go to retreat from the Paris, both for leisure and for work. The island holds extreme significance for Varda as a site where her life with Demy was able to unfold and flourish—Noirmoutier nurtured her marriage, her growing family and her career. In *Les Plages d'Agnès,* Varda states, "si on ouvrait les gens on trouverait des paysages. Moi si on m'ouvrait moi, on trouverait des plages."[49] As *Les Plages* demonstrates, her internal landscape is represented by the many beaches which have shaped her life including those along the Belgian coast, Venice Beach in Los Angeles and of course, the beaches of Noirmoutier. Each

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[47] Paterson, *Senses of Touch*, 104, quoting Edith Wyschogrod, "Empathy and Sympathy as Tactile Encounter," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 6 (1981): 28.

[48] For a detailed description of Varda's installation and the larger *L'Île et elle* exhibition of which it was a component, see: Chamarette, Jenny. "Spectral Bodies, Temporalised Spaces: Agnès Varda's Motile Gestures of Mourning and Memorial." *Image & Narrative* 12, no. 2 (October 5, 2011): 31–49 and Jordan, Shirley. "Spatial and Emotional Limits in Installation Art: Agnès Varda's *L'Île et elle*." *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 13, no. 5 (2009): 581–588.

[49] "If you opened people up you would find landscapes. Me, if you opened me up, you would find beaches."

of these sites represents a different phase in her life—her childhood in Belgium, her sojourn into the liberal, free love politics of 1960s California and a shared haven from city life for her family. However, during Demy's illness and after his death, the landscape that dominated her world was that of Noirmoutier, which her grief transformed into a funerary space that eventually opened up to admit other women on the island coping with the loss of a spouse.

In *Jacquot de Nantes,* the space of mourning created by the intermittent strand of images showing Demy in his last days is a private one. While there is the potential for a shared empathy between the viewer and Varda within the space of the film, it largely excludes a broader, collective experience. *Jacquot de Nantes* is a deeply personal window into the grief of one woman who is losing her husband to a terminal illness. Consequently, the dynamic of intersubjective empathy is a more closed system that implicates mainly the viewer, the film and the filmmaker. Conversely, *Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier* builds a more expansive network of empathy around the experience of losing a spouse, specifically that of a wife losing her husband. As in *L'Opéra-Mouffe*, Varda once more takes her own subjective experience and translates it into a repertory of mutual intelligibility among a broader base of people. Bénézet affirms that the film is as much "*allo-portrait*," or the portrait of the self as other, as it is an "*auto-portrait*" or self-portrait of Varda.[50] The film is a 70-minute documentary that takes place entirely on the island of Noirmoutier and presents footage of 17 widows whom Varda interviews one by one in private settings. The filmmaker introduces each woman in her characteristic filmed portrait style before inviting her to speak about her individual experience as a widow.

The women, some of whom have been widowed for decades and others for mere, raw weeks, give poignant and frank accounts of their loss, often weaving in commentary on a variety of related topics. They touch on what it means to be a widow and what it means to be

[50] Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda,* 35. Although Bénézet does not provide a definition of "*allo-portrait,"* the term comes from Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's 1979 work *Portrait de l'artiste, en general*.

married, on motherhood and children, on absence and loss and on life and loneliness. Each interview is skillfully intercut with a series of poetic images that vary in specific content, but can be classified into one of the following categories: scenes of the island's marine landscape and the sea surrounding it, extreme close-ups of important photographs, shots of objects such as clocks, long takes of empty dining room tables, images showing the women's homes and gardens, and finally, shots of their hands either knitting, clasped together in front of them, or fidgeting, some still sporting their wedding bands (figures 19 and 20). These haptic images of bodies, landscapes and objects interweave in the film to build a tapestry of material representations of loss and absence. As Chamarette notes, the objects in the film, because of the personal or collective significance that each one holds, "reveal the complexities of both a communal and a deeply personal, incommunicable sentiment of grief."[51] In short, *Quelques veuves* contemplates death, loss and absence in two modes—through the widows' own words and testimonies and through haptic and embodying images that draw you deeper into the collective space of the island and into the private homes of the women Varda interviews.

RECURRING IMAGES OF THE MATERIAL AND THE EMBODIED



[51] Chamarette, "Spectral Bodies," 42. Chamarette engages primarily with the installation "Les Veuves de Noirmoutier" to show how Varda's use of objects, photographs and video as well as the disposition of the exhibit serve to create an interactive space of mourning. Similarly, Bénézet, in *The Cinema of Agnès Varda,* treats the installation to demonstrate the ways in which "art can summon the intangible," particularly through the *dispostif* of the exhibit in the gallery space (35). I do not treat the installation in this chapter, firstly, because Chamarette analysis leaves little to be said on the topic and secondly, because I feel that the film alone equally demands a haptic analysis that effectively reveals the potential for the medium to incite an embodied and intersubjective spectatorship even outside of the more clearly-defined interactive space of the museum gallery.

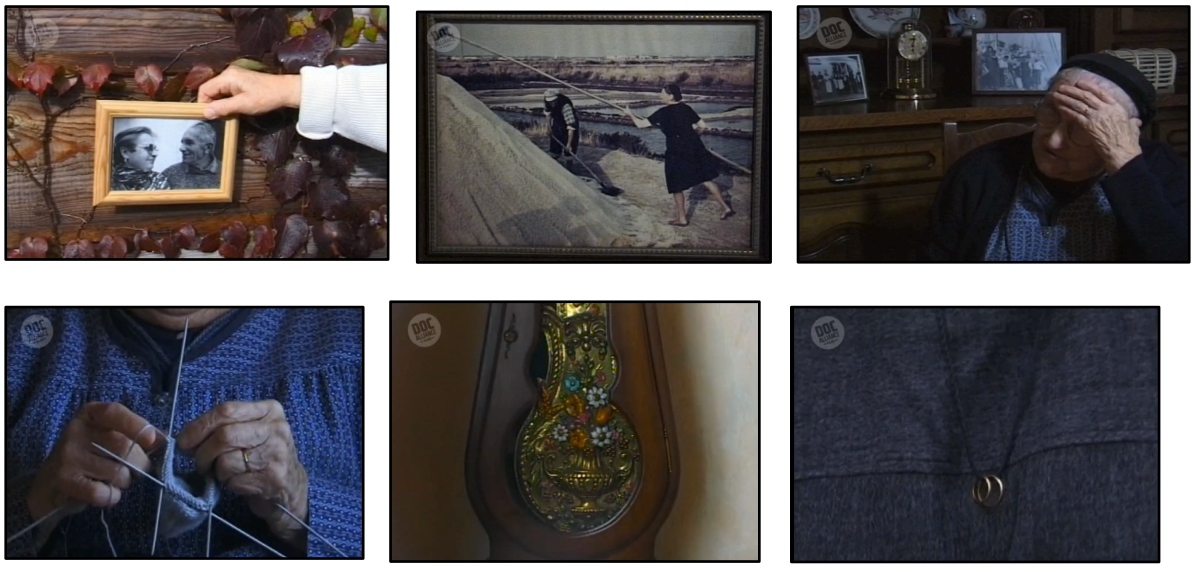

Fig. 19

Added to these two modes, the body of the film itself, specifically with regard to the continuity editing, create periodic spaces for contemplation on the part of the spectator. The transitions between the interviews usually show sustained long-range shots depicting nature scenes from the island, allowing room for reflection before moving on to the next widow. However, on a few occasions, there is hardly any more transition than a straight cut between stories, a technique which varies the rhythm of the film and prevents it from falling into a pattern of homogeneity and monotony. Rather, the nuanced, poetic montage gives the film its emotional crests and valleys while allotting sufficient time for the contemplation of the testimonies that the women share with Varda and her audience.

What results from this mixed repertory of carefully framed images sewn together with a well-timed montage is a vividly textured film. Varda's meticulous camerawork succinctly captures the physical landscape of the island, its varied surfaces and skins in order to bring to life the material world that the widows inhabit. As the collection of stills below demonstrates, these images are extremely haptic, inviting touch with the vibrant materials, textures and contours that they array for the spectator. The viewer repeatedly comes up against rock, water, sand, concrete, flora and peeling paint, thus coming to know the island in very intimate ways, not just by seeing it, but by *feeling* it and getting a sense of its body

(figure 20). The viewer's interactions with the widows and their stories of loss and absence are compounded by this detailed exposure to the island, whose topographical complexities and isolated position off the mainland become analogical to the internal affective "landscapes" of the women in their individual states of mourning. Varda's film, however, serves to bridge these experiences for the widows, herself included, and for the spectator touched by their portrayal.

THE MANY TEXTURES OF THE ISLAND

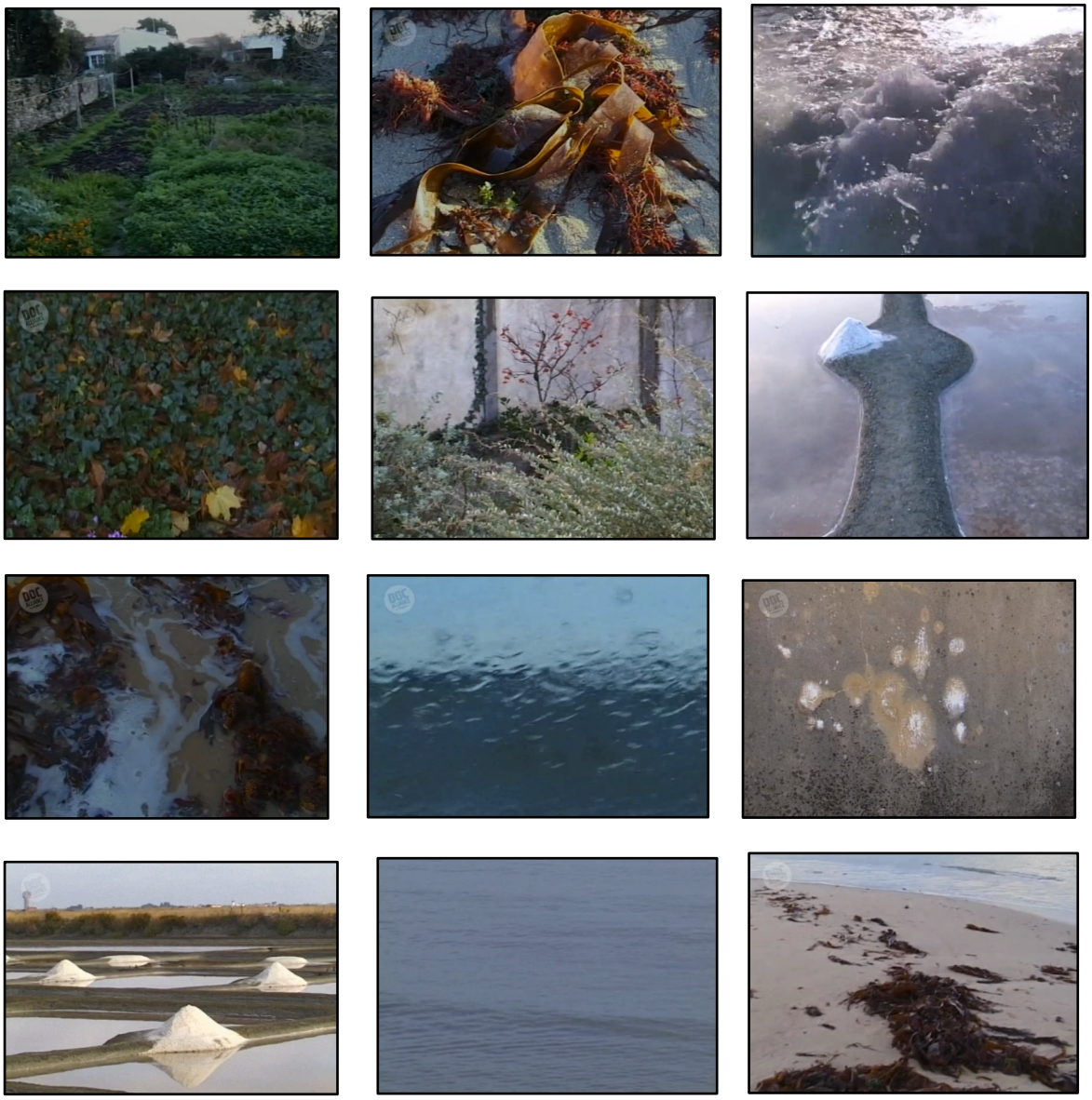

Fig. 20

Another way in which the film's structure and form underline the larger themes of life and death has to do with its circular nature—it begins and ends with very similar sets of images that first unfold after the title sequence and return again in reverse order right before the closing credits. This structure speaks to the cyclical nature of life and death and forms a closed ring, which binds the widows to each other and recalls the many wedding bands that appear in the film. *Quelques veuves* opens with an establishing shot of a beach, beyond which the ocean extends into the horizon. The only sound is the diegetic rush of the waves making contact with the shore, an insistent sound through which the island manifests its presence. In center frame, planted in the sand, stands a simple wooden table (figure 21). The camera lingers on this image for a few seconds before a figure clothed in black enters the frame, slowly followed by a number of others (figures 22 and 23). The women circle the table like uncertain satellites, unsure of how to situate themselves around it, unsure of how to orient themselves in their grief, in this landscape of loss that extends out into the void of the ocean. They walk a few steps, stop, turn around and walk the other way in an ever-shifting constellation of embodied mourning. Bénézet astutely notes that this haunting scene challenges social taboos related to mourning by giving centerstage to the widows' grief.[52] As a result, mourning becomes public and collective, rather than personal and private.

[52] Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda,* 33.

Fig. 21

Fig. 22

Fig. 23

Within this constellation of collective grief, the table at the center exerts a strong, gravitational presence, pulling the women toward it. As the film progresses, the viewer begins to understand its significance—the dinner table becomes an important symbol not only in the lives of the widows, but also in the film. Associated with the home, family and food, the dining table turns into a material representation of loss when those who once sat around it have gone. In many of the interviews, Varda films the women sitting at their tables alone except for the implied presence of the filmmaker and her camera. Other shots show empty tables surrounded by empty chairs as the women speak in voice-over of the deep absence in their lives. Through the use of such objects and the symbolic value they hold, Varda materializes absence so that it exists as a presence in the lives of the bereaved women. The words "manque," "absence" and "vide" recur across the 17 interviews as the women try to negotiate their loss and express the difficulties of learning how to live with the void they *feel*

both emotionally and physically as an *entity* in their daily lives.[53] One woman describes the emptiness she senses as a "gros gros vide," thereby defining its depth and giving it shape, localizing it like a profound crater that has marked her emotional landscape.[54]

The empty dining room table is just one way in which the void left by death manifests itself. The many photographs that the women display to Varda also ground their loss in their material environment. This use of photographs in *Quelques veuves* resonates with the earlier discussion of Barthes' notion of photography as a conduit for the "return of the dead" who, as *Spectrum*, inhabit the empty houses of the widows, who crowd their fireplace mantles and also bear witness to the physical signs of their own disappearance: the empty table, the empty bed and the grieving woman who still wears her wedding band.

The presence of the dead and the ever-present void occurs with a concomitant loss of self for some of the widows, who feel the extreme loneliness of not having their "better halves" with them. The fourth widow to be interviewed, Christiane Bouchereau poignantly states, "on se trouve diminué […]on n'est plus deux, on est un."[55] Another woman compares the loss to amputation. Having lost her newlywed husband mere weeks ago, she rues the fact that he died just before they were to celebrate their first anniversary. She tries to articulate her loss and what the word widow means to her: "Je me sens amputée…amputée…amputée de lui. Je fais couple avec un mort."[56] This sense of the physical self diminishing, of being torn in two or losing a limb produces symptoms analogous to those experienced by someone who actually undergoes an amputation and imagines the missing body part to be present as a phantom limb. For the widows in the film, however, their "phantom limbs" are braced with

[53] "lack," "absence," "emptiness/void,"

[54] "a large, large void"

[55] "You find yourself diminished […] you're no longer two, you're one."

[56] "I feel amputated…amputated…amputated from him. I'm in a couple with a dead man."

the material reminders of their loss—photographs, letters, wedding bands and dresser drawers filled with the deceased's clothing all serve this purpose, as do the empty dining room tables and beds. Prompted by Varda, although we never hear her ask the question on camera, the widows each talk about whether they keep to their side of the conjugal bed after the death of their husbands. Most of them claim to have stayed on their side and, while they admit to being lonely in their beds at night, this tendency implies a way of mitigating that loneliness by giving it a defined space next to them and, in essence, going to bed and living with it. This presence of absence guarantees that they are not completely alone in their grief.

The same holds true in their waking hours when the widows assert that they still feel the presence of their husbands. The sixth widow, Alice Thibaud maintains that even though her husband has passed, she still senses him next to her: "J'ai l'impression d'entendre un bruit, une chaleur."[57] Unable to rely on her vision to carve out the presence of a departed loved one in her landscape of grief, she relies on her body and her other, more tactile senses to keep a him near her. As she mentions the "chaleur" she feels, the camera cuts to her hearth where a wood fire burns with ardor. Varda's insistence on the flames underlines the way in which this widow's loss manifests itself materially in her physical environment. Later in the film, another woman, Odette, succinctly sums up this notion of living with the felt void left behind by death, stating matter-of-factly, "Beh, le manque c'est quand même la presence."[58]

As in *L'Opéra-Mouffe,* Varda again presents the close connection between life and death in a variety of ways. Firstly, there is the notion established above that the widows of Noirmoutier are living every day with death. Life does not stop for death, but rather carves out spaces to accommodate it so that the absence and pain caused by loss emerge in relief. A second, different example of the interwoven link between life and death becomes particularly apparent in a story told by Alice Thibaud, who recounts that after her husband's death, she

[57] "I get the impression of a noise, of a warmth."

[58] "Well, absence is a presence all the same."

donated his kidneys and saved the lives of two ailing individuals by doing so. For Alice, the fact that her husband's deceased body was literally able to sustain life keeps him in the present. This idea emphasizes the tenuous cycle of life and death in which the latter gives rise to the former. Organ donation is one way that this cycle repeats itself; the procreative processes of the natural world is another. Varda's regular use of images taken from nature on the island and its seaside cemeteries creates a link between life and death as the two intertwined and perpetual mechanisms of the biological cycle. The dead bodies that are buried in the earth of the island nourish it and sustain the vibrant spectrum of life that inhabits it.

A final way in which the film emphasizes the imbrication between life and death occurs in the interview with the twelfth woman, who also happens to be named Agnès and who has been twice widowed. The first time she was seven months pregnant with her fourth child. She remembers the economic hardship caused by the death of her husband and shows us the shed where she and her four children had to live, with little food to sustain them. There is something poignant and irreconcilable in the thought of a woman who is nurturing life in a body overcome by grief, simultaneously sustaining life and mourning its loss. One is left to wonder, how does the pain of childbirth compare with the pain of losing a loved one? How does mourning make space for morning sickness? How does the will to survive and sustain life find inspiration in a bereaved body? Unfortunately, the woman does not offer answers to these questions that emerge from the play between life and death, taken up again, as in *L'Opéra-Mouffe,* in a pregnant woman's body.

Earlier, I stated that the film interviews 17 widows. However, in reality, it *portrays* 18 grieving women, only 17 of whom verbally relate their stories to the camera. The last widow, Varda herself, does not speak. Rather, she sits and lets her body language and her physical presence speak for her in the second to last sequence of the film. As the camera leaves the 17th widow, Nicole Viaud, it cuts to an extremely haptic close-up shot of tangled, auburn algae

that line the sand on a beach. Offering up a texture akin to heaps of glossy, unraveled film or audio ribbon, the algae chokes the sand, material body upon material body. The camera pans slowly to the right, running its prehensile eye over the mounds of seaweed. Suddenly, an empty chair enters the frame and immediately after, a second chair appears next to it, this one occupied by Varda, filmed in a long shot, facing the camera with her hands resting on her thighs. She is dressed in black, forlorn, small and alone against the seeming miles of sand and seaweed around her (figure 24). This image serves as a negative to the one that ends *Jacquot de Nantes,* in which Varda recreates George Segal's 1970 installation "Alice Listening to Her Poetry and Music." In this adapted version of the installation, a mourning Varda, dressed in white, sits at a table with her back to the camera as images of ocean waves crashing onto the beach are projected onto her body so that her grief converges inward (figures 25-27). Conversely, in the mourning shot in *Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier,* Varda faces the camer and projects her pain outward into the landscape, diffusing it across the island to the other widows and and across the filmic space to the spectator.

Fig. 24

Fig. 25

Fig. 26

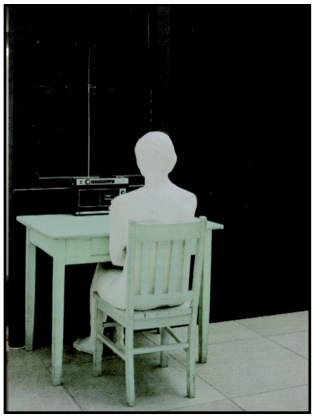

Fig. 27

It is difficult to conjecture how Varda's appearance in this shot affects viewers in general, but as one who has seen the film multiple times, I can aver that it always produces the same effect in me—as the camera pulls my haptic gaze along the surface of the algae-ridden beach and settles it on Varda's doleful figure, I am *moved* to tears. In empathy with this diffused mourning, I feel deeply the pain of all of the women on Noirmoutier who sit alone with their loss, who form a couple with death. Every emotion, every sensation, every association that the film has been cultivating comes to a head in this touching sequence. The empathy, the intersubjective commiseration that the film elicits from the spectator, all of this sustained affect is unleashed with Varda's appearance. With it comes the realization that all the stories she has been collecting and for which the film acts as a repository have been Varda's own. She can say nothing more of the pain of loss; she can only embody it and occupy the space next to its material representation, the empty chair that holds so much significance. Shoulders slouched, eyes dull and listless, tears on her face, she *herself becomes* the pain of loss that radiates out into the island. In the absence of words, the communicability of her sorrow comes down to the image, which articulates her loss for her. It is through her body language and the chair next to her that the spectator empathetically grasps Varda's pain. While she does not address the embodied elements of this scene, Chamarette's comments on the empty chair succinctly sum up its role in creating an intersubjective link between the audience and the film:

> Consequently, the filmed or cinematographic object becomes infused with an intersubjectivity of mourning, presence and absence. The chair is affectively imbued with the spectral presence and achingly evident absence of a man who was, and of all the memories that constitute this man-who-was within that chair. The absence

> inexorably bound up with the screen presence of that chair connects to the presence of the chair upon which the spectator sits.[59]

The link that Chamarette creates between the empty chair and the spectator's chair is an astute one and can be extended to encompass Varda's chair and the mourning body that occupies it. The filmmaker's bodily presence compounds this "intersubjectivity of mourning, presence and absence" by creating a *network* among the filmmaker, the film, its 17 subjects and the audience rather than a mere two-way exchange between the spectator and the empty seat.

After a moment of silence during which Varda gazes at the camera and the camera approaches her ever more closely in order to better show the pain etched on her face, Varda's voice-over begins to sing a doleful a capella rendition of Jacques Prevert's poem "Sables mouvants" (figure 28).[60] The wild seascape imagery that the song evokes beautifully underscores the scene that accompanies it. The last verse, which reads, "deux petites vagues pour me noyer," especially resounds with the images of the bereaved Varda on the beach. As figures 27 and 28 illustrate, Varda does indeed seem to be drowning in the environment around her. Her clothing and her hair being a color very similar to the algae's suggests that she is becoming subsumed or incorporated into this landscape of loss.

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[59] Chamarette, "Spectral Bodies," 43.

[60] "Sables mouvant" in Jacques Prévert's *Paroles* (1946). "Démons et merveilles/ Vents et marées/Au loin déjà la mer s'est retirée/ Démons et merveilles/Vents et marées/ Et toi comme une algue doucement caressée par le vent/Dans les sables du lit tu remues en rêvant/ Démons et merveilles/Vents et marées/Au loin déjà la mer s'est retirée/Mais dans tes yeux entrouverts/Deux petites vagues sont restées/Démons et merveilles/Vents et marées/[Deux petites larmes] Deux petites vagues pour me noyer." "*Quicksand*": "Demons and marvels/ Winds and tides/ Far away already the sea has gone out/ And you/ Like seaweed gently caressed by the wind/ In the sands of sleep you stir dreaming/ Demons and marvels/ Winds and tides/ Far away already the sea has gone out/ But in your half-open eyes/ Two little waves remain/Demons and marvels/Winds and tides/ [Two little tears] Two little waves to drown myself in." (The verse in brackets was added by Varda.) The same song appears at the end of *Jacquot de Nantes* as Varda shows a final shot of the ailing Demy sitting on the beach, gazing sadly into the camera. This is just one example of the ways Varda's works communicate with each other and relates to the notion of her oeuvre as constituting a body. Chapter Four pursues this subject in more detail.

Fig. 28

The song also supports the intersubjective nature of Varda's film by virtue of the fact that while there is a poetic persona present, there is no single fixed subjectivity and therefore, it resists a subject-object dichotomy. The personal pronouns in the lyrics, "tu," "toi" and "me" are a mix of object and subject. Furthermore, it is not just the "tu" who acts, but the entire natural environment so that the waves, the wind, the tide and the characters implied by the pronouns all exist together in the world of the song in a dynamic of intersubjectivity. Every element affects and is affected by the other elements and the experience of loss and the pain that comes with it is dispersed across multiple points. Consequently, the song becomes a microcosm of the film, which diffuses Varda's pain so that the both the filmic space and the zone and between the viewer and the image, is saturated with it.

Incidentally, the song also appears at the end of *Jacquot de Nantes*, which unequivocally links the two films as spaces of mourning. Varda further strengthens this connection at the end of the above sequence by showing an unexpected and moving shot of a frail Jacques Demy in the last days of his life, reclined on his elbow on a sandy beach. The image is taken from the strand of caressing color shots of her husband that punctuate *Jacquot de Nantes.* This reuse of footage not only sews her works together into one grieving body, but it also returns the late Demy to the island. Even though he is dead, he is still present on the island, on its beaches and, by extension, within Varda's internal "landscape," all marked by loss. In the final sequence, of *Quelques veuves*, the film ends as it began, with the women in

black circling the table on the beach. This time, instead of congregating, they too disperse, one by one, to be absorbed by the film and by the island, by the cycle of life and death.

Conclusion: "Being-Toward-death" and a Dying Medium

In their own particular manner, the three films discussed in this chapter provide touching treatments of the universal theme of death that connects all human beings and the world around them, all the while insisting on the continued rhythms of the lives they portray. They are mourning films, which through their haptic aesthetics, through their focus on the body and the material world, invite the spectator to navigate multiple landscapes of loss, to empathize with those whose lives have been affected by death and to contemplate the mortal human condition of "being-toward-death," thus bringing us into contact with other "selves."

I conclude this discussion by reflecting on the appropriateness of treating the phenomenon of "being-toward-death" through the medium of film. As with time and memory, Varda's unfolding of the topos of death through this medium keenly underlines her subject matter. Not only does film allow for the moving and touching expression of emotion and its perception by the audience, but cinema *itself enacts* the balance of life and death that Varda treats in her films. In other words, cinema, whether we mean the industry, the history or the technology, is a living/dying body, and one that carries its own startling paradox—as it dies, it regenerates itself in a perpetual being-toward-death. Old forms perish to give ground for new ones to flourish from their dying bodies so that today's cinema carries with it a particular genetic code that can be traced back through its entire history. In this way, cinema, in its totality, behaves much like a potato, the tuber so dear to Varda and her philosophy of renewal, the ubiquitous rhizome that after a certain step in its process of decay begins to regenerate itself and grow out of its own expiring body. In the final struggles of a withering potato, life and death are ensnared within the same mass through an elastic tension that also binds the world at large. The cinema, as a dying body with a past and a memory that renews and *re-*

members itself, is a medium that fundamentally thinks and rethinks the inextricable notions of existence and mortality, both cinematic and human. As Laura Mulvey maintains,

> the presence of the past in the cinema is also the presence of the body resurrected and these images can trigger […] questions that still seem imponderable: the nature of time, the fragility of human life and the boundary between life and death.[61]

Certainly, for Varda, the medium of film and its moving and sonorous expression is an effective vehicle for communicating loss, emotion and pain. She writes in her autobiography that, "le cinéma, c'est le mouvement des sensations," whereas "pour les blessures de l'âme, la photographie ne suffisait pas."[62] Although Varda frequently uses photographs and filmed images that emulate photographs, she asserts that still photography is not sufficient for capturing the wounds of the soul, suggesting that the scope of human emotion and sensation extends beyond the parameters of the fixed and silent photographic image. Perhaps photography alone is not sufficient for the fullest expression of emotion and sensation because since affect *acts* on and through the body, in order for this to be *perceived* by the spectator, it must be set in motion. Without movement, as in photography, emotion becomes calcified in one moment of time and appeals only to the imagination and, in a limited way to the memory, without engaging the senses. Conversely, when movement comes into the picture, as in film, affect can animate the entire body and bring about an embodied spectatorship whose contours are defined by emotion and physical sensation, a spectatorship that, especially when confronted with the theme of death that pervades Varda's films, becomes an encounter with the sublime, in the Burkean sense, in which a resounding tension between pleasure and pain can play itself out.

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[61] Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, 58.

[62] Varda, *Varda par Agnès*, 39. "For the wounds of the soul, photography does not suffice" and "Cinema is the movement of sensation." (my translation)

Furthermore, such an embodied spectatorship challenges us to rethink traditional notions of subjectivity.[63] In *Phenomenology and the Future of Film,* Chamarette keenly explores this last point. She posits that films, in addition to being objects for interpretation, are also "moments of experience" and that this experience "shifts the opposition of thinking about a viewing subject and a viewed object."[64] Chamarette characterizes these moments of encounter with film as a double contact and draws on Merleau-Ponty's concept of the "flesh" put forth in *The Visible and the Invisible* to illustrate this dynamic. She writes that, "'flesh' is not a quality but an element that reflects subjectivity upon itself and enfolds it with the world it perceives. 'Flesh' is the incarnation of Being with sensibility; that is, our ability to sense the world that also permits us to recognize ourselves as sensing bodies.[65] As the analyses of *L'Opéra-Mouffe, Jacquot de Nantes* and *Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier* show, Varda fittingly and skillfully uses the medium of cinema as a 'flesh' with which to reach out to the spectator, to imbue the filmic environment, as well as the intersubjective space between the viewer and the film, with a perceptual exchange and a connectivity among living/dying bodies, both cinematic and human.

The notion of connectivity is critical to Varda's oeuvre. Laura Marks' use of the term "connective tissue" to describe the images that hold the body of a film together can be broadened to help conceptualize the intratextual web that binds Varda's entire body of work so intricately. As the last three chapters demonstrate, her films often promote a connective dynamic of intersubjectivity that encompasses the spectator, the filmmaker and the filmic world through their use of haptic images and proprioceptive camerawork. Accordingly, when

[63] To understand this idea better, imagine the difference between looking at a still photograph of an arm that has been pierced by a needle and seeing a 30-second film that shows the needle approaching the skin, piercing it and the reaction of the flesh to the metal. The moving image will most likely touch the spectator on a more visceral level.

[64] Jenny Chamarette, *Phenomenology and the Future of Film: Rethinking Subjectivity Beyond French Cinema* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hamphsire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 3.

[65] Chamarette, Phenomenology and the Future of Film, 56.

zooming out to survey Varda's larger body of works, which incorporates her films as well as her recent art installations, it becomes increasingly more apparent that the oeuvre she has created is not just a mere corpus of individual works, but rather an evolving *corps*, a communicating body that continually seeks contact with the spectator. It is a body with a personal past, echoes of which often reappear in the individual works so that her oeuvre constantly remembers itself as it develops. It is also a body that belongs to the collective history of cinema and art, participating in the changing aesthetics of the past 60 years. The following chapter elaborates on this concept of Varda's oeuvre as a rhizomatic body, of her corpus as *corps*.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Dimensions of a Body of Work: Varda's Corpus as *Corps*

"I cannot understand the function of the living body except by enacting it myself, and except in so far as I am a body which rises towards the world."

Maurice Merleau-Ponty[1]

Tout(e) Varda: The Dimensions of a Corpus

On November 21st 2012, Agnès Varda's independent production company Ciné-Tamaris released a 22-DVD box set containing the 36 films that constitute her complete cinematic oeuvre.[2] The collection, entitled *Tout(e) Varda*, comes packaged in a white cardboard cube printed with the title in black and red as well as with playful caricatures of the filmmaker, a black and white photo of a young Varda next to her movie camera, a short quote from her describing the collection and a long list of all the films contained in the set (figures 1 and 2). These design features spotlight first and foremost the filmmaker herself and present her unequivocally as the person responsible for the extensive cinematic corpus contained in the box set. On the Ciné-Tamaris website, Varda presents the anthology in a way that links it immediately to her own physical body. The description reads, "1m48, 60 kg et 1,8 kg de creation," with the first two numbers corresponding to Varda's height and weight respectively, followed by the weight of the entire box set.[3] The filmmaker's comment carries two immediate effects. In the first place, it underlines a consubstantial, bodily connection

[1] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), trans. Colin Smith (London: Routeledge, 1962), 87.

[2] Agnès Varda, *Tout(e) Varda,* released November 21, 2012 (Paris: Arté Editions & Ciné-Tamaris), DVD boxset.

[3] Agnès Varda, "Ciné-Tamaris Accueil-Accualités," *Ciné-Tamaris: le site officiel d'Agnès Varda et Jacques Demy,* accessed December 1, 2012, http://www.cine-tamaris.fr/actualites/sortie-de-tout-e-varda . "1.48m. (4'9"), 60 kg (132lb), and 1.8 kg (4lb) of creation." (my translation)

between the filmmaker and her oeuvre, a notion further emphasized by the prominence of the punning title, *Tout(e) Varda*, on the box. Secondly, through its focus on weight and dimensions wherein Varda juxtaposes her size with that of the box set, the description raises the question of how such a vast body of work can be housed in such a small container. By extension, since Varda provides her own "dimensions," we are left to ask how the filmmaker's own living body and her life are implicated in the creation of this compact but substantial corpus. Consequently, the quote underscores the key point of inquiry at the heart of this chapter, which explores Varda's oeuvre as a *body* of work. As the analyses in the previous three chapters illustrate, the material nature of Varda's films, their textured and layered aesthetics, their concern with the body and its "intervolvement" with the world and their ability to incite an embodied and intersubjective spectatorship, demands that they be read phenomenologically from a haptic perspective that engages with these salient characteristics of her oeuvre.[4] In this chapter, I posit that because of the reasons listed here, Varda's oeuvre, when examined as a whole, emerges as a corpus that impels us to read it as a *corps*, as a body "being-in-the-world" and one that is emphatically linked to the body and the life of the filmmaker that produced it.[5]

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

[4] The word "intervolvement" is borrowed from Merleau-Ponty (see the section on phenomenology and the body below). I use it throughout this chapter instead of "involvement" to emphasize the chiasmic or reciprocal engagement between body and world posited by Merleau-Ponty.

[5] I do not claim here to touch on every one of Varda's works in her vast oeuvre; such a task would require volumes more. However, in the pages that follow, I turn to the films and installations, as well as the autobiographical aspects of Varda's life that most effectively delineate her body of work due to the reasons outlined above.

In the booklet accompanying the box set, Varda summarizes her artistic career with a brevity that belies its range and magnitude by stating that, "Les chats ont sept vies. Moi, je n'en ai eu que trois: photographe, cinéaste et artiste."[6] The first of these professional lives officially began in the early 1950s when she became the photographer for Jean Vilar's Théâtre national populaire (TNP). In 1954, the release of her first film, *La Pointe Courte,* launched a long vocation in filmmaking and finally, at the turn of the millennium, Varda reinvented herself as a visual artist. Indeed, these three lives have resulted in an impressive array of work. While Varda has advanced through these phases of her life chronologically—moving from photography to film to installation art—there are no distinct boundaries among them because Varda's aesthetics have always incorporated a mixture of the three disciplines. In other words, her films rely heavily on photographs and on the tropes of photography and repeatedly incorporate the other visual arts, while her artistic installations integrate both film and photography. As a result, her entire oeuvre, constructed over the past 65 years, takes on the dimensions of a vast body characterized by Varda's unique creative style. It is a body with an anatomy, born within a specific environment and bearing a distinct genetic code that reflects its connectivity to that context and to the world at large. It is this body of work, this *corps,* that the current chapter sets out to delineate.

As a first step toward characterizing this body, I delve into what constitutes the notion of body semantically and philosophically before launching into an analysis of Varda's corpus as a *corps* that has grown from the lived experience of the filmmaker and that implicates her own body in a number of ways. In the next few pages, I provide a definition of the word body in French, followed by a brief discussion of the phenomenological discourse on the body put forth by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose writings provide the main theoretical grounding for

[6] Agnès Varda, *Album d'Agnès V.-images et notes latérales,"* in *Tout(e) Varda* DVD box set (Paris: Arté Editions & Ciné-Tamaris, 2012), 3. "Cats have seven lives. Me, I have only had three: photographer, filmmaker and artist." (my translation)

this chapter. It is within this framework that I explore Varda's oeuvre as a multi-dimensional body that presents itself to her audience. Based on the dynamic of intersubjectivity that Varda's work creates between film, filmmaker and spectator, I argue that her oeuvre as a whole comprises an equally intersubjective body in which "the distinction of subject and object is blurred," to quote from Merleau Ponty.[7] As the brief literature review provided below demonstrates, the conceptualization of Varda's corpus as a *corps* is a notion that Varda scholarship has been broaching in recent years without the idea fully coalescing in any single study. By building on the works of a handful of scholars, this chapter proposes a fuller view of the dimensions of this *corps* in order to promote a richer, more intersubjective experience with Varda's oeuvre as a cohesive body of meaning and perception with which our own perceiving bodies come into contact.

Definition of *Corps*

For the French definition of the word body or *corps*, I turn to *Le Petit Robert*.[8] The entry for the word "*corps*" in the on-line edition is substantial and provides four major headings which are subdivided into ever more nuanced definitions, attesting to the complex and polysemic nature of the word. The four major categories are as follows:

I. Le corps. Partie matérielle des êtres animés

II. Partie principale de qqch

III. Un corps. Objet matériel (XIIIe)

[7] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Philosopher and His Shadow," in *Signs*, trans. Richard McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 167.

[8] In *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*, Varda opens the film by looking up the terms "*glaner*" (to glean) and "*glaneur*" (gleaner, masc.) in the encyclopedic dictionary *Le Nouveau Larousse illustré*. While I would have greatly enjoyed using the same resource as the filmmaker in defining the word *corps* for the sake of a certain continuity between this work and hers, I found the entry in *Le Petit Robert* to be richer, more succinct, more organized and in effect, better suited to the purposes of this discussion.

IV. Ensemble organisé (fin XIIIe)[9]

The first definition pertains to the physical, anatomical body, the organism "dans sa globalité," comprised of the head, the organs, the viscera, the limbs and so forth, that houses the mind and the emotions but that also acts as the site of sensation.[10] The first subentry under this heading reads, "l'organisme humain, par opposition à l'esprit, à l'âme: chair" and thus caters to the Cartesian dualism that has long characterized Western philosophy and which Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology counters.[11] This issue is addressed in further detail in the ensuing section, but it merits mention here in order to illustrate how deeply this dualistic vision penetrates Western definitions of the body. A further subentry provides the following: "Le corps considéré come le siège des sentiments, des sensations, de la sensualité."[12] Thus, taken in its entirety, section I insists on the perceived division between body and mind/soul while at the same time accentuating the material aspects of the body and positing it as a locus of contact with the world in our lived experience. In this chapter, I draw largely from the latter, more phenomenological definition that posits the body as point of contact with the world.

The second entry, "Partie principale de quelque chose" and the third, "Un corps. Objet materiel," extend the definition of the body within the realm of material objects. The former usage provides as an example the principal part of a building (defined as a *corps)* as opposed to its wings or any sort of dependent avant-corps. This distinction underlines the idea of the body as something autonomous, standing independent of other structures despite being a part

[9] L*e Petit Robert,* s.v. "corps," accessed August 2, 2014. http://www.lerobert.com/dictionnaires-generalistes/dictionnaire-le-petit-robert-2015.html. "I. The body. Material part of animated beings II. The principal part of something III. A body. A material object (18th Century) IV. An organized ensemble" (my translation) For a copy of the full French entry, see Appendix 1.

[10] *Le Petit Robert,* s.v. "corps." "in its entirety" (my translation)

[11] *Le Petit Robert,* s.v. "corps." "the human organism, as opposed to the mind and the soul: flesh" (my translation)

[12] *Le Petit Robert,* s.v. "corps." "the body as the seat of feelings, sensations and sensuality" (my translation)

of something larger. The third entry specifies the body as a "material object" that can be characterized by its physical properties such as volume or mass. Most of the examples and subheadings cited under this category touch on the scientific: "corps celeste" (astronomy), "corps simple" (chemistry) and "corps noir" (physics).[13] This approach to body highlights the observable nature of the matter that makes up the physical world that the sciences and philosophical seek to define.

The final heading of the entry for *corps* in *Le Petit Robert* takes the idea of body in a more abstract direction by applying it to the organization of individuals within a society and includes terms such as "corps politique," "corps de métier" and "corps des lois."[14] It is under this heading that we find the word *corps* defined as *corpus*, as a "recueil de textes, d'ouvrages."[15] What is worth noting about the fourth major definition of *corps* is that the entry emphasizes the collective body, made up of other bodies, working toward a common cause or serving a common function by which it defines itself and its constituent members.

To summarize, according to *Le Petit Robert,* a body can be an organism composed of many parts, an autonomous entity that can stand on its own but that nonetheless belongs to something larger, a material object with defined, observable characteristics, a material being that interacts with the world and finally, a collective unit whose component parts contribute to its larger sense or function. From this definition, we can infer that as an anatomical entity and the seat of sensation and thought, the body can sense and be sensed, touch and be touched, that through a multitude of perceptive capabilities, it enters into an infinite dynamic of exchange with its environment and that as *material,* it is born from other material bodies. In delineating Varda's oeuvre as a *corps,* I rely on all of these nuances of the word and I turn

[13] *Le Petit Robert,* s.v. "corps." "celestial body" "simple substance" "black bodies" (my translation)

[14] *Le Petit Robert,* s.v. "corps." "political body" "trade" or "profession" "body of laws" (my translation)

[15] *Le Petit Robert,* s.v. "corps." "a collection of texts, of works" (my translation)

once more to the writings of Merleau-Ponty for a phenomenological perspective on the body in relation to the world.

Merleau-Ponty on the Body and Lived Experience

While the dictionary definition of *corps* provides a glimpse into the semantic complexities and linguistic variations of the notion of body, naturally it does not broach an ontological perspective on the lived body as it exists in the world except to set it in opposition to the spirit or the soul. The discussion above delineates what a body *is*, but for the purposes of this chapter, it is also necessary to ask what the body is *with relation to the world*, a question that has continually shaped the history of philosophy. Before the shift toward a phenomenological perspective, mainly influenced by the writings of Edmund Husserl at the turn of the 20th century, Western philosophy largely adhered to a dualistic Cartesian division between the body and the mind, placing a primacy on the former over the latter in our experience with the world.[16] Such a vision, which promotes a *consciousness* of the self as a thinking being, not only isolates the body from the mind, but also separates the body from the phenomena with which it comes into contact, from other bodies, and thus creates a hierarchical subject-object division. In contrast, a basic underpinning of phenomenological thought, which deals with an *awareness* of the self as a physical being, is the integration of the body and mind in a non-hierarchical dynamic which includes consciousness, but also encompasses an embodied, kinesthetic and emotional experience with the world that is based as much on the awareness of self as it is on the consciousness of that world. Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, in its theorization of the perception of phenomena by an idealized or transcendental consciousness, still contains a residual element of the dualistic divide between mind and body, but with the later shift toward an existential phenomenology with the works of Martin Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, the body takes on a primacy in our

[16] A more detailed lineage and history of phenomenological thought is provided in the introduction of this dissertation as well as in Chapter Three.

perception *of* and existence *in* the world. While Heidegger's work is concerned more with being in the world, especially with regard to spatiality and time, Merleau-Ponty devoted his writings largely to our perception of the world. For this reason, the latter thinker's theorizations are of particular importance to the concerns of this chapter.

In Merleau-Ponty's conceptualization of the body and its lived experience in the world, body and world enter into a chiasmic relationship. He writes, "I am conscious of my body via the world," and "I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body."[17] Thus, the body is perceived as an object among others, existing through its awareness *of* and *by* the objective world. Merleau-Ponty further stresses the materiality of the body as it moves through the world, perceptually engaging with the environment around it through the body schema, a notion that is analogous to the idea of haptic perception, through which the entire somatosensory system is engaged with the world and which is a "way of stating that [the] body is-in-the-world."[18] This mode of being implies a dynamic wherein "the body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be *intervolved* in a definite environment (emphasis added).[19]

Furthermore, in his theorization of the body and its negotiation of the world, Merleau-Ponty moves away from the ideal of a subjective gaze that falls objectively *on* a world, and emphasizes rather a lived, intersubjective experience *within* a world that imprints itself upon the entire body:

> I regard my body, which is *my point view upon* the world, as one of the objects of that world. *My recent awareness of my gaze as a means of knowledge I now repress, and*

[17] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 94. The full quote reads: "I am conscious of my body *via* the world, that it is the unperceived term in the centre of the world towards which all objects turn their face, it is true for the same reason that my body is the pivot of the world: I know that objects have several facets because I could make a tour of inspection of them, and in that sense I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body." (italics in the original)

[18] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 115.

[19] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 94.

> *treat my eyes as bits of matter*. They then take their place in the same objective space in which I am trying to situate the external object and I believe that I am producing the perceived perspective by the projection of the objects on my retina. *In the same way I treat my own perceptual history as a result of my relationships with the objective world* (emphasis added).[20]

It is important to note the opposition Merleau-Ponty makes between the passive gaze and the more active "point of view upon the world." The eyes are repressed as pathways to knowledge and subsumed into the matter that constitutes the body and propels the body schema. Thus one's "perceptual history" or lived experience within the material world results from a bodily and haptic "intervolvement" with the environment rather than a distanced, inner cognitive process.

Vivian Sobchack's theorization on the film's body is worth mentioning here as a means of translating Merleau-Ponty's perspectives into an embodied and embodying cinematic experience.[21] While the focus of this chapter is not to expound on the body of film but rather to delineate a body of work consisting of Varda's cinematic and artistic projects, Sobchack's groundbreaking analysis is invaluable to my discussion precisely for the bridge she creates between the phenomenological experience and the film experience. In *The Address of the Eye,* she approaches the body of film from two angles. First, she considers it "in its existence as enabling the filmmaker's and spectator's perception and expression, as the *instrumental mediation* necessary to *cinematic communication* between filmmaker and spectator."[22] In other words, it is the film's chiasmic body and our interaction with it that

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[20] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 81.

[21] See the introduction chapter of this dissertation for a more detailed description of Sobchack's theorizations on this topic.

[22] Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 168.

allows for an intersubjective and embodied cinematic experience. Furthermore, Sobchack posits that the body of the film is also

> the film's means of perceptually engaging and expressing a world not only for us but also for itself. Thus, the film's body [is] considered as a *direct means* of having and expressing a world—given to us as a technologically mediated consciousness of experience, but given to itself, through the praxis of its existentially functional body, as the immediate experience of consciousness (italics in the original).[23]

From this conceptualization of the medium of film, it emerges as a body with its own "perceptual history," and a particular lived experience, through which it exerts a presence and holds its own "point of view upon the world" as "experience expressed by experience."[24]

While Sobchack's analyses are restricted to film, I maintain that they can also be extended to Varda's installation work. As we see in the final section of this chapter, Varda's installations are often outgrowths from her cinematic oeuvre. They regularly incorporate new or existing moving images, recycle the physical material from previous films or make intratextual references to her cinematic works. Therefore, in transitioning to the white cube of the museum space, Varda does not abandon the film's body, but rather displays it under different formats. If we return to my analogy of cinema as a potato in Chapter Three, Varda's installations are akin to the outshoots that burgeon from this rhizomatic body as it evolves. In her artwork, Varda plays with the body of film, revamping it, re-presenting it under various guises in order to deconstruct it, to question it and to reorient it within the evolving and "intervolved" domains of cinema and art.

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[23] Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, 168.

[24] The term "experience expressed by experience" comes from: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingus (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 155.

Taking into consideration the above definitions of *corps,* the philosophical perspectives of Merleau-Ponty on perception and the body and Sobchack's application of these to the cinematic experience, at this point it is appropriate to ask why Varda's corpus particularly lends itself to characterization as a body? I propose that Varda's oeuvre fits the paradigm of a body firstly because it conforms to the dictionary definition of *corps* that I summarize in the previous section. More specifically, her body of work manifests itself as an autonomous entity with observable characteristics, one that stands alone but nonetheless belongs to something larger. Conversely, it is also a collective entity whose component parts contribute to its larger sense. Finally, it is a body that is born from other bodies, as the ensuing analyses of her work demonstrate.

With regard to the phenomenological paradigm I detail in the preceding paragraphs, Varda's corpus emerges as body in that it deeply reflects the life and "perceptual history" of the artist in parallel with those of the subjects it represents. It presents itself as a body that is well travelled, mobile and dynamic, that has aged and bore witness to over 60 years of history, carrying with it a vast experience and a long memory, making sense in and of the world that surrounds it. Moreover, it is an oeuvre that is linked in many ways to the artist's own body, her maternal body, her aging body and her creating body so that she becomes consubstantial with her films. Varda's corpus further manifests itself as body because of its unhindered representation of other bodies, of its emphasis on the corporeal, the sensorial and the material. Consequently, it is a corpus that demands to be read as a *corps* because of its haptic nature, its materiality, its attention to bodies and the resulting ways in which it incites an embodied and intersubjective spectatorship. Therefore, I posit that her oeuvre and the contexts that have inspired it, comprise a corpus that presents itself as a *corps,* as an entity bound by a communicating, intratextual network created by the vital energy of the artist and her production company and evolving over the past six decades.

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes, "our body is not the object of an 'I think': it is a grouping of lived-through meanings that finds its equilibrium."[25] This notion of a "grouping of lived meanings" is crucial to my argument of Varda's corpus as a body of work. Taken as a whole, from Varda's beginnings as the photographer for Vilar's TNP, to her first foray into filmmaking with *La Pointe Courte,* to her latest art installations in Paris and Los Angeles and finally, to the project of restoring her early films and re-leasing them in theaters across France, Varda's artistic oeuvre is truly "a grouping of lived-through meanings." It has grown and aged along with the artist, evolving through a closely-knit system of "lived meanings" insofar as her works are deeply rooted in her personal experience in the world. Finally, as Varda's tongue-in-cheek comment quoted in the first paragraph implies, it is a body that is infinitely bigger than the 1.8 kg cube that contains it.

In positing Varda's corpus as a *corps,* I engage with a particular body of existing scholarship on her oeuvre comprised of works that treat, either individually or in some combination the issues that I address in this chapter: the autobiographical nature of her filmic and artistic output, the production contexts surrounding this output, the intratextuality among her works and the representation of the body, including the filmmaker's own. Certain scholars such as Martine Beugnet, Jenny Chamarette, Delphine Bénézet and Kate Ince have also undertaken a phenomenological and haptic approach to Varda's oeuvre.[26] However, their treatment of the topic is limited to a small and recurring number of films with only a rare mention of her art installations. Consequently, my aim is to elaborate greatly on this latter approach, both in depth and scope and to synthesize it with the other concerns mentioned above in order to "flesh out" Varda's body of work, to show its complexities and its *substance* as a rich and intratextual *corps*.

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[25] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 177.

[26] For more details on the works by these scholars, refer to the ensuing literature review.

The release of *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000) and *Les Plages d'Agnès* (2008) launched a number of works by scholars on the autobiographical impulse in these films and in some cases, in her art installations. Dominique Bluher credits *Les Plages* as one of the rare "genuinely autobiographical feature-length films embracing a whole life" that, in addition to using source material such as photographs and film excerpts, "restages moments of the filmmaker's life" and thus creates "a new cinematic genre of life writing that combines autobiographical narrative with performative self portraits."[27] While Bluher acknowledges briefly that Varda exhibits a similar tendency in her earlier films such as *L'Opéra-Mouffe* (1958) and *Les Glaneurs*, as well as in her video installation "Les Veuves de Noirmoutier" (2006), she does not develop this observation and focuses primarily on *Les Plages d'Agnès*. Similarly, Bernard Benoliel, Agnès Calatayud and Mirelle Rosello offer works that explore Varda's self-portraiture in *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* whereby the filmmaker presents herself as an artistic gleaner of images and stories as well as a woman reflecting on getting older, on the fragility of human life and on the sense of alienation she feels from her changing body.[28] The scholarly works on self-portraiture and autobiography in Varda's work generally tend to focus on her last two films, without examining the larger relationship between her life and her corpus.

Other scholars have taken a more comprehensive approach to Varda's oeuvre by making deeper intratextual connections among her works, yet these too are limited to the analysis of just a few select films or installations. Virginia Bonner, after establishing that Varda's documentary and fiction inform each other, supports her position by launching an

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[27] Dominique Bluher, "Autobiography, (Re-)enactment and the Performative Self-portrait in Varda's *Les Plages d'Agnès/The Beaches of Agnès (2008)*," *Studies in European Cinema* 10 no. 1 (2013): 59.

[28] Benoliel, Bernard. "La main de l'autre," *Cahiers du cinéma,* no. 548 (2000): 62-3. Rosello, Mireille. "Agnès Varda's *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*: Portrait of the Artist as an Old Lady," *Studies in French Cinema* 1, no. 1 (2001): 29-36. Calatayud, Agnès. *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*: Agnès Varda's Self-Portrait." *Dalhousie French Studies* 61 (Winter 2002): 113-123.

analysis of the echoes between Varda's *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* and *Sans toit ni loi* (1985).[29] Lucy Fischer posits that Varda is "rootless" in her aesthetic and applauds her for being a generic vagabond. She offers a brief discussion on the ways in which Varda skims the line between documentary and fiction and characterizes her films as a tapestry of sub-genres including art documentary, socio-political commentary, narrative and memoire. She concludes by analyzing Varda's propensity for salvage and for reassigning value to objects and the ideologies and memories they embody.[30]

In a more far-reaching study, Kelley Conway approaches *Les Plages d'Agnès* in order to examine the ways in which Varda's life has influenced her work, making brief intratextual connections between the film and a subsequent exhibition from 2009 entitled *La Mer...EtSetera*. She describes Varda as a "working professional […] and an artist who has been capable of working in several artistic environments, including photography, fiction filmmaking, documentary production and installation."[31] Conway takes an inventory of Varda's oeuvre as it is presented in *Les Plages* first by examining the impact of the filmmaker's childhood on her films. She then moves on to detail Varda's artistic lineage and its influence on her works, touching on her self-invention as a filmmaker and finally proposing a reading of the film as a layered database that underlies the narrative logic of the film by creating connections between the life of the filmmaker and the source material from her works. Conway concludes that

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[29] Bonner, Virginia. "Beautiful Trash: Agnes Varda's *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*." *Senses of Cinema*, no. 45 (November 25, 2007). http://sensesofcinema.com/2007/feature-articles/glaneurs-et-glaneuse/.

[30] Fischer, Lucy. "Generic Gleaning: Agnès Varda, Documentary, and the Art of Salvage." In *Gender Meets Genre in Postwar Cinemas*, edited by Christine Gledhill, 111-122. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012.

[31] Kelley Conway, "Varda at Work: *Les Plages d'Agnès*," *Studies in French Cinema* 10, no. 2 (2010): 129.

> it is not difficult to understand why the creation of such layered compositions and the mixture of still and moving images would interest Varda. Such techniques allow her to recycle her old work productively, something she has done throughout her career in a variety of ways, all the while experimenting with new digital tools and new exhibition contexts.[32]

Equally comprehensive is Brioude's study in which she retraces Varda's creative path along three analytic axes—Varda's self-portraiture, filming the feminine body and the recurrence of a number of themes in Varda's cinematic and installation works— as a means of showing the strong cohesiveness in her oeuvre. She summarizes her analysis by asserting that

> des motifs comme la peau, la pomme de terre, la jeune femme nue, le pourrissement esthétique de la matière et même le concept de l'écran multiple se retrouvent, diachroniquement et synchroniquement, dans l'œuvre de Varda pour ne plus former qu'une seule et complexe forme d'autoreprésentation métaphorique.[33]

While Brioude's analysis of Varda's oeuvre as a coherent whole is firmly in line with the concerns of this chapter, her study, like those of the other scholars mentioned above do not address the phenomenological perspective that frames this chapter. Kate Ince bridges this gap in her characterization of Varda as a "lived body" filmmaker who has steadily constructed a phenomenological film geography or "world," a world which "for existential phenomenology and for Varda, is materially imbricated with the body that perceives it."[34] Ince's anchoring of a number of Varda's works within a phenomenological framework, as well as the link she creates between the filmmaker's "lived body" and her creative output certainly supports my

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[32] Conway, "Varda at Work," 138.

[33] Mireille Brioude, "Agnès Varda: Les chemins de la création," *Sens Public* (2009): 15. "Motifs such as the skin, the potato, the young naked woman, the aesthetic decomposition of material and even the concept of multiple screens, are diachronically and synchronically found in the works of Varda, creating a single, complex form of metaphoric self-representation." (my translation)

[34] Kate Ince, Ince, "Feminist Phenomenology and the Film World of Agnès Varda," *Hypati* 28, no. 3 (2013): 609.

own approach. However, in elaborating this framework, she adopts a strictly feminist approach, which, while extremely valid, limits a broader conceptualization of Varda's corpus as a "lived body" of its own and leaves unexamined the multifaceted ways in which this body engages phenomenologically with the world to portray first and foremost a *human* experience.

Finally, Bénézet, in her recent monograph on Varda, provides the most comprehensive study of Varda's works to date.[35] She characterizes Varda's corpus as both eclectic and eccentric and highlights the filmmaker's tendency to resort to unorthodox topics and structures in her film. Bénézet approaches the artist's films and installations from various angles—feminist, socio-political, historical, biographical and phenomenological. However, despite her attention to Varda's use of corporeality to reject the notion of a fixed female subjectivity in films like *L'Opéra-Mouffe* (1958) and *Daguerréotypes* (1975), and her brief haptic engagement with two of Varda's documentary shorts *Plaisirs d'amour en Iran* (1976) and *7p., cuis., s. de b.,…à saisir* (1984), the polyvalent nature of her monograph does not allow her the space for a more profound exploration of these topics across Varda's oeuvre.

Each of the studies cited in the preceding literature review resonates to some degree with the concerns of this chapter, yet even the most comprehensive of these scholarly works stops short of providing a larger view of Varda's corpus as a body because of their narrow focus on a small number of Varda's films and installations or because of an insufficient treatment of the intratextual links that bind her work together. Furthermore, aside from Bénézet, who provides background on the production of a few of Varda's films, the scholarly works detailed above largely ignore other factors that have contributed to Varda's body of work, namely the contexts for the creation of her films, the important role of her production company and her achievements as an independent filmmaker. In sum, what is missing in the

[35] Bénézet, Delphine. *The Cinema of Agnès Varda: Resistance and Eclecticism.* Directors' Cut Series. New York: Wallflower Press, 2014.

existing scholarship is a more cohesive work that brings together, under the umbrella of a haptic theory, Varda's background, her films, her installation art and her strong presence therein as a way of creating a deeper understanding of her corpus as a distinct *corps* to which we can relate intersubjectively as one body to another. It is through widening the analytical scope on Varda's oeuvre that we can gauge its dimensions as a being, as a body of work that recounts its own lived experience as art, as cinema, as a body among others.

Ciné-Tamaris: The Central Nervous System of Varda's Body of Work

The first step in fleshing out the "lived experience" that has contributed so greatly to Varda's body of work involves an examination of the strong presence the filmmaker exerts in Paris as well as an exploration of the environment in which her oeuvre has taken root as an autonomous being that is nonetheless anchored within a broader, biographical and professional context, as a *corps* with a distinct history. Such an inquiry leads us to the site of her production company, Ciné-Tamaris and her adjoining home, both nestled in the 14th arrondissement of Paris on the rue Daguerre, where a pink building with a maroon, purple and green striped gate stands out among the more nondescript Parisian entryways on the street (figures 3-4). It is no secret that Agnès Varda resides behind these doors and has done so for over 60 years. To the left of the gate sits another pink building with a modest wooden door that leads into the main headquarters of Ciné-Tamaris. Across the street is a storefront that houses the boutique for the company, dedicated today to the distribution and promotion of both Varda and Demy's works. In the back of this store is Varda's humble editing room, giving the space a distinctly artisanal feel (figure 5).[36]

[36]Alison Smith makes the same observation and goes further to call Varda "le cinéaste du coin" or "neighborhood filmmaker." Alison Smith, *Agnès Varda,* French Film Directors Series (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998): 10.

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

In contrast to larger production companies that tend to promote numerous artists, Ciné-Tamaris was initially founded by the filmmaker herself solely to fund the production and dissemination of her own work. For this reason, in my conceptualization of Varda's oeuvre as a *corps*, I propose that Ciné-Tamaris, as a centralized space that processes her filmic material through editing and distribution, functions as the central nervous system that regulates her body of work and orients it in the world. True, all film goes through the editing and distribution process, but in Varda's case, the extreme control and artistic autonomy she exercises in the production of her films in an environment so consistently and deeply anchored in her daily home life sets her apart from other filmmakers. This is not to say that Varda is singlehandedly responsible for her cinematic creation. As Bénézet has noted, collaborative filmmaking, whether it means working with other directors, editors and cinematographers as well as with various composers, has shaped Varda's output since *La*

Pointe Courte, which was edited by Alain Resnais.[37] However, her decision to collaborate with other professionals in the field of her choosing reinforces her auteur status and her deep concern for creative autonomy.

Varda started Ciné-Tamaris, at first just called Tamaris, in 1954 to fund the making of her first film *La Pointe Courte.* The name took its inspiration from the tamarisk trees, "solid, southern" and "discreet," common to the region of Sète in France where *La Pointe Courte* was filmed, a fact that creates a subtle material link between Varda's works and the worlds in which they unfold.[38] The company began as a cooperative comprised of the actors and crewmembers involved in the film's production. According to Richard Neupert, "about 35% of the funding came from the cooperative" and no one was paid during filming in these lean early days.[39] Aside from financial motivations, Varda also was driven by a desire for independence and solidarity in the creative process to launch her own company, a fact that a number of scholars have noted. Neupert writes that even today,

> Varda is adamant in maintaining personal control over the entire production process; and owning her own production company […] guarantees great independence while providing a small team of pleasant, devoted employees and colleagues who often function as her extended family. She engages actively in the management of every

[37] In *The Cinema of Agnès Varda,* Bénézet offers a rich commentary on Varda's subversion and assertion of her role as an auteur filmmaker and provides a more developed discussion of the artist's cinematic collaborations and the ways in which they illuminate her auteur status.

[38] In a recent email exchange, Varda explained in more detail this choice of name, stating: "Dans le sud de la France le long des routes on voit des buissons de tamaris. Ils sont quelquefois grands comme des arbres. Ils font des petites fleurs roses délicates…Le tamaris, c'est un arbre que j'aime, solide, méridional et discret. Voilà pourquoi j'ai choisi ce nom pour une société de production dont le premier film a été tourné dans le Sud, à Sète." "In the south of France, along the roads we see tamarisk bushes. They are sometimes as big as trees. They grow small, delicate, pink flowers ...The tamarisk is a tree that I love, strong, southern and discreet. That is why I chose this name for a production company whose first film was shot in the South, in Sète." Agnès Varda, email message to the author, March 31, 2015.

[39] Richard John Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007): 57.

> aspect of filmmaking, from finding funding to writing song lyrics and editing the final cut.[40]

Fiant, Hamery and Thouvenel succinctly summarize Varda's artistic trajectory while underlining the priority she accords to exercising a high degree of freedom throughout:

> Il n'est guère aisé de circonscrire le parcours et l'activité d'Agnès Varda: cinéaste, photographe et, depuis quelques années, artiste plasticienne auteur de plusieurs installations muséales, son itinéraire l'a menée depuis le début des années 1950 à multiplier les formats, les supports, les sujets, les registres, adoptant pour seul impératif celui de la fidélité à soi-même et pour credo celui de la création en toute indépendance.[41]

Finally, Alison Smith remarks that Varda has repeatedly eschewed institutional restraints and censorship to continually maintain control over every aspect of her filmmaking, all of which has resulted in "themes and creative choices [that] recur in changing forms throughout her career."[42] It is precisely these "themes and creative choices" recurring in various forms throughout Varda's oeuvre that provide the connective tissue of her corpus by creating links among her works and allowing them to grow and evolve. The section below on Varda's intratextual oeuvre explores this in more detail.

What is clear from the citations above is that the degree of control the creation of her own company allowed Varda to exert during her career as a filmmaker helped to strengthen this connective tissue that binds her work. The freedom with which Varda is able to regulate

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[40] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave,* 352.

[41] Antony Fiant, Roxane Hamery and Eric Thouvenel, introduction to *Agnès Varda*: *le cinéma et au-delà,* ed. Antony Fiant, Roxane Hamery and Eric Thouvenel (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2009): 7. "It is hardly easy to define the limits of Agnès Varda's career and activities: filmmaker, photographer, and as of the past several years, visual artist and creator of a number of museum installations. Since the early 50s her professional path has led her to use a multiplicity of formats, media, subjects, and registers, adopting as her only imperative that of self-integrity and as a credo that of creating with total freedom." (my translation)

[42] Smith, *Agnès Varda,* 17.

her body of work through the activities of Ciné-Tamaris aligns her company with the functions of a central nervous system (CNS), which *Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary* describes as follows:

> Receptors detect external and internal changes and transmit impulses along sensory nerves to the CNS. Receptors are found in the skin, muscles and joints, viscera, and the organs of taste and smell. The CNS uses this sensory information to initiate appropriate responses to changes; reflexes involving muscle contraction or glandular secretion, or voluntary movement, all mediated by motor nerves. A function specific to the brain is the integration, analysis, and storage of information for possible later use; this function is learning and memory."[43]

Thus, Ciné-Tamaris, as the control center of Varda's body of work, both cinematographic and artistic, is the pathway through which the raw material that is at the base of her work gets processed, integrated and transmitted. The footage for Varda's films and installations, captured by the skin, viscera and organs of the cinematic apparatus comprised of the lens, the microphone, the strips of film, digital sensors and so forth, as well as her own acute sensory awareness in filming are the receptors through which the stimuli of the world pass as "sensory impulses" in order to be analyzed and processed by the editing process, then transmitted as "motor impulses" by the distribution side of the Ciné-Tamaris command center. Added to this is her concern with documenting her work in her extensive archives, which act as the storage of information function of the CNS that is the basis of memory and learning.[44]

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[43] *Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary*, s.v. "central nervous system," accessed August 20, 2014, http://www.tabers.com/tabersonline/view/TabersDictionary/766271/0/central_nervous_system?q=central%20nervous%20system.

[44] It is also true that other filmmakers such as Eric Rohmer and François Truffaut also were concerned with documenting and archiving their careers but what they lack is a consolidated center like Ciné-Tamaris, a base where editing, distribution, archives, production and other aspects of their professional lives continually converged with their personal lives.

Furthermore, as a result of the archival and distribution efforts of Ciné-Tamaris, Varda's body of work continually re-members itself, extending out into the world in a variety of formats. Currently, Varda is in the process of restoring her older films and rescreening them often with the principle actors and the filmmaker herself present at the premieres. Her corpus is undergoing a "face lift" in order to stay current and relevant in the digital age while also engaging with and reactivating the memory and history of both her own corpus and cinema at large. All of these factors contribute to Varda's body of work simultaneously standing apart from the conventions and restrictions of the film industry at large while still being firmly anchored within the history and evolution of cinema, both as an art form and as a commercial enterprise. When approaching Varda's corpus as one that is linked closely to the filmmaker's lived experience, it is important to consider the important role that elements outside of her films play in shaping her work and in deepening our understanding of them. The creation and continuing endeavors of Ciné-Tamaris is one such element. As the example of *Daguerréotypes* illustrates in the ensuing section, the production contexts around Varda's films play an equally important role.

Bodies Born from Bodies: The Creative Contexts Behind *Daguerréotypes* and Varda's "Twin Films"

The previous section, which draws primarily on the biographical, illustrates the ways in which Varda's production company functions as the central system that controls the "motor impulses" of her body of work and orients her corpus as a *corps* in the world. In this section, I turn to Varda's filmography in order to discuss how this body is linked, albeit at times metaphorically, to the body of the filmmaker herself, specifically with regard to a number of her films that were conceived of in ways which evoke the physiological processes of gestation and birth. Therefore, my purpose here is to illustrate that Varda's oeuvre, as a *corps*, is a body that is born from other bodies, that of Varda and that of other films in her corpus. To achieve

this, I first analyze the creative impulse behind her 1975 documentary *Daguerréotypes* before undertaking an inquiry into her "films jumeaux," or twin films.

Fig. 6   **Fig. 7**

Released in 1975, *Daguerréotypes* stands out as Varda's first feature length documentary. In the space of 80 minutes, it depicts the lives of the shopkeepers on Varda's stretch of the rue Daguerre. The film is a portraiture of the "Daguerreotypes" in their quotidian lives, wherein the self-professed "Daguerréotypesse" Varda invites their comments, reveries and stories, breaking through the banality of everyday existence by aesthetizing their lived experiences.[45] Varda repeatedly refers to herself as a "daguerréotypesse" both in the film and in the pages devoted to it in *Varda par Agnès*, further strengthening the link between herself and her body of work. In describing the film, I insist on the word portraiture rather than portrayal because Varda employs a particular filming technique to create an aesthetic that mimics the process of daguerreotype photography. Repeatedly in the film, she introduces her filmic subjects by having them pose in front of her video camera in carefully framed still shots that last on average 4-7 seconds (figures 6 and 7). While this is significantly shorter than the 10-minute pose time required by the daguerreotype process of the mid-1800s, it is unconventionally long for the moving image and thus succeeds in conveying the daguerreotype aesthetic intended by Varda. This long "exposure time" not only underlines the pun in the film's title, but it also firmly asserts its concern with offering a portraiture of the

[45] With the title of the film, Varda plays on the double meaning of the word "*daguerreotypes*" in French, a double meaning that is created from a pun. The word, which refers to the photographic process, can also be read as the "*types*" (folks, guys) on the rue Daguerre, a meaning that is lost in translation. "*Typesse*" is simply the feminine form of "*type*."

people of the rue Daguerre.[46] Varda also threads the film with subtle references to the social climate of France at the time, touching on issues such as abortion, the decline of artisanal trades and the plight of a working class in a changing city, thus anchoring the film's personal history within a larger historical context as a body in the world.[47]

Alison Smith's characterization of Varda as the "cinéaste du coin" is apt, especially as it pertains to the subject matter of *Daguerréotypes* because it categorically aligns Varda with the shopkeepers and artisans living on her street and thus inscribes her within that world. Varda herself does not appear in the film except as a disembodied narrative voice-over that occasionally poses questions to the shopkeepers. We do not see her body implicated *in* the film, but rather enfolded in its production context because, as Kate Ince observes, the Varda "organiz[ed] the film around her body."[48] In *Varda par Agnès,* Varda recounts that in the months before she began filming *Dagurréotypes,* she had given birth to her son Mathieu Demy.[49] The desire and the necessity to stay close enough to her home so as to be able to nurse her infant played a large role in her choice of subject for the film. In an interview accorded to *Cinéma,* she describes feeling trapped at home after Mathieu's birth and reflects on how her situation was exemplary of the creativity that is at times stifled in women by

[46] Bénézet offers a deeper analysis of this notion by maintaining that in keeping "these moments of awkward stillness" to remind us that "the film's main subject is the idea of the portrait," Varda is "manipulating the codes associated with the portrait, and reappropriating them" in order to create a space for the contemplation of the relationship between these codes and her cinematic project. Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda*, 29. Bénézet also approaches the film through a corporeal analysis wherein she explores the movement of bodies of the shopkeeper couples in the film, likening it to a "slow ballet" that subverts traditional representations of both masculine and feminine roles. She further examines the various images of women in circulation at the time to posit Varda's rejection of a single reductive ideal of femininity (25-28).

[47] For more on the socio-historical contexts surrounding the film, see Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda,* 22-31.

[48] Kate Ince, "Feminist Phenomenology," 10.

[49] Agnès Varda, *Varda par Agnès.* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1994): 143.

domestic responsibilities.[50] However, with a determination that is characteristic of Varda, she decided to view this constraint as any other, similar to that of making a commissioned film for example, and see what would come of it by asking, "Est-ce qu'à l'intérieur de cette contrainte on pouvait remettre en route un processus de créativité?"[51] In answer to this question, Varda made a memorable creative choice that served to reconcile her maternal and professional responsibilities. She writes,

> Je suis donc partie de cette idée, de ce fait, que les femmes sont attachées à la maison. Et je me suis moi-même attachée à la maison. J'ai imaginé un nouveau cordon ombilical. J'ai fait tirer une ligne électrique du compteur de ma maison, et le fil mesurait 80 mètres. J'ai décidé de tourner *Daguerréotypes* à cette distance-là […] Cela donnait au film un "sens pour moi."[52]

In this way, Varda, by making a decision based on what Ince calls an "entirely material condition," literally attached herself to her home, to her immediate environment and to her filmmaking, with the electrical cable functioning as a creative lifeline among these three aspects of her life and creating a web of lived meaning.[53] Consequently, as much as the film is a portrait of the shopkeepers on the rue Daguerre, it is also a self-portrait of the *Daguerréotypesse,* reflecting who she is and what matters to her in both her personal life and her career. It also represents the moment when she liberated herself from the constraints that her home life or her profession might have posed, by paradoxically attaching herself to both.

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[50] Agnès Varda, "Autour et alentour de *Daguerréotypes*," *Cinéma* 75, no. 204 (December 1975): 39.

[51] Varda, "Autour et alentours de *Daguerréotypes*," 39. "Within this constraint, was it possible to put the creative process back on track?" (my translation)

[52] Varda, "Autour et alentours de *Daguerréotypes*," 39-40. "I began with the idea, the fact that women are attached to the home. And I attached myself to my home. I imagined a new kind of umbilical cord. I ran an electrical line from the meter in my house, and the wire measured 80 meters (262 feet). I decided to film *Daguerréotypes* at this distance […] This gave the film a meaning for me." (my translation)

[53] Ince, "Feminist Phenomenology," 10.

Moreover, the act of running the electrical cable from her house into the street and comparing it to an umbilical cord that would "feed" the making of the film in the environment where it was being created, attributes to the creative process of filmmaking the same anatomical schema as that involved in the biological process of gestation. Ince astutely remarks that "Varda's use of an electrical cable to measure out the maximum distance her camera could travel points wittily to the centrality of her own maternal body to her filmmaking."[54] The implication here is that the film *Daguerréotypes,* organized around Varda's maternal body, was in a sense born from it, a notion that reinforces the connection between the filmmaker's body and her body of work. Yet, as the anecdote below illustrates, it was not just her maternal body that was central to the making of the film, but her physical body in general. She recounts in *Varda par Agnès*:

> On a tourné en très petite équipe. Je dis bien petite. Ni Nurith, ni Christote qui faisait la régisseuse et la scripte, ni moi n'atteignons un mètre cinquante-quatre. Nous allions et venions, comme trois petites souris se planquant derrière la caisse d'un magasin ou dans un coin entre deux parquets.[55]

Here, as she did decades later with the release of her box set, Varda correlates her physical size to her role as a filmmaker, this time emphasizing how her small stature and, that of her cinematographer and of her production manager, enabled them to enter the intimate and cramped spaces of the rue Daguerre shops and inconspicuously film them from within. As a result, *Daguerréotypes* proves to be more than a documentary—with the links to Varda's own body, it would seem that the film is a part of her and an intrinsic part of her artistic *corps,* intrinsic in both the general and anatomical sense. The filmmaker attests to this by concluding

[54] Ince, "Feminist Phenomenology," 10.

[55] Varda, *Varda par Agnès,* 143. "We filmed in a small team. And I mean small. Neither Nurith nor Christote, who were the production manager and continuity girl, nor I reached 1.54 meters (5 feet). We would come and go, like three small mice in the shops, hiding behind crates or in tight corners." (my translation)

that, "le film, ce n'était pas seulement les gens de ma rue, c'était tout autant ce qui se passait en moi. Je ne crois pas à l'inspiration venue d'ailleurs, *si elle ne vient pas aussi du corps et d'un vécu immédiat parfois dépourvu d'idée*" (emphasis added).[56] With this remark, Varda confirms the corporeal origins of her works, a phenomenon that has repeatedly manifested itself in her oeuvre. For example, *L'Opéra-Mouffe* came into being as the result of Varda's fears about pregnancy; *Daguerréotypes* developed in relation to her maternal body and was facilitated by her petite stature; a core idea in *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* is the inevitability of aging and how it affects the body and *Jacquot de Nantes* (1991) is punctuated by her exploration of a body on the verge of dying.[57] Thus, Varda's oeuvre emerges as a *corps* that has moved through the world with a singular experience and a perceptual history, a *corps* that has witnessed birth, aging, and death, first through the body and lived experience of the filmmaker, then through a secondary, embodied cinematic reflection on each of these topics that serves as a locus of intersubjective filmic experience for the spectator. The fact that Varda finds inspiration in the body and in "un vécu immédiat" for her films rather than in pure cognition makes her oeuvre particularly conducive to a haptic theory in that it resounds with Merleau-Ponty's theories on the body and perception, which for him is always embodied, as being primal to our mimetic and chiasmic relationship to the world.

To end this section, I return to the notion of bodies born from bodies by examining a number of films that in her written autobiography Varda calls "les films jumeaux" or twin films. Jean-Pierre Berthomé, who distinguishes between Varda's "films jumeaux" and "films satellites," defines the former in the following way:

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[56] Varda, *Varda par Agnès*, 143. "The film, it wasn't just the people on my street, it was just as much what was going through me. I don't believe in inspiration coming from anywhere else if it doesn't also come from the body and from an immediate, often non-cognitive experience." (my translation)

[57] See Chapter Two for more on the theme of hands in *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* and Chapter Three for a discussion of *L'Opéra-Mouffe,* pregnancy and the filmmaker's body as well as an analysis of the haptic images of an ailing Jacques Demy in *Jacquot de Nantes.*

> Les films jumeaux […] vont par deux, indépendants l'un de l'autre et pourtant soudés par tout un réseau de références […] Ils sont souvent réalisés à peu de distance de l'un de l'autre et tendent à proposer deux approches complémentaires d'un même sujet, l'un privilégiant le point de vue documentaire et l'autre la fiction.[58]

The sets of twin films are: *Du côté de la Côte* (1958) and *La Cocotte d'Azur* (1958), *Murs murs* (1980) and *Documenteur* (1981), *Jane B. par Agnès V.* (1987), *Kung-Fu Master* (1987), *Les Demoiselles ont eu 25 ans* (1993) and *L'Univers de Jacques Demy* (1994).[59] As Berthomé's definition indicates, these works are autonomous films that are nonetheless bound by a shared genetic, if not entirely generic, background. Like fraternal twins, they are "dyzogotic," developing from different seeds, but conceived together and born of the same environment. I borrow the word "born" from Varda herself, who repeatedly uses a lexical field related to birth and birthing when speaking of her "films jumeaux." For example, she remarks that "*Jane B.* […] a enfanté un second film *Kung-Fu Master*" and that "1993 et 1994 ont vu naître deux films complémentaires sur le travail de Jacques: *Les Demoiselles ont eu 25 ans* et *L'univers de Jacques Demy.*"[60] As the lexical field of such comments suggests, the idea of birth, of bodies being born from others as part of a larger *corps* clearly pervades Varda's vison of her twin films.

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[58] Jean-Pierre Berthomé, "L'une film, l'autre aussi: Varda et son double," in *Agnès Varda*: *le cinéma et au-delà,* ed. Antony Fiant, Roxane Hamery and Eric Thouvenel (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2009), 99. "The twin films, as their name indicates, come in pairs, independent of each other yet joined together by a wide network of references. They are often made within a short time of each other and tend to offer two complementary approaches to the same subject, one privileging a documentary point of view and the other a fictional one." (translation mine)

[59] *La Cocotte d'Azur* (1958), a 10-minute short film, was made with the proceeds of its documentary twin, *Du Côté de la Côte* and produced by Anatole Dauman. However, Varda dissociates herself from the film due to a difference of opinion with Dauman and it does not figure in her body of work. Therefore, it can be seen as a "disowned" twin.

[60] Varda, *Varda par Agnès,* 183 and 196. "*Jane B.* […] gave birth to a second film *Kung-Fu Master*," "1993 and 1994 saw the birth of two complementary films on the work of Jacques: *Les Demoiselles ont eu 25 ans* and *L'univers de Jacques Demy.*" (my translation)

Additionally, the communication between Varda's "films jumeaux" serve to create a close-knit intratextuality in her body of work in that they allow her to delve into the worlds she represents from different points of entry as part of an intentional creative choice that she finds liberating because she is not obliged to choose one single version on the subject at hand.[61] With the exception of the films on Demy, these couplings are made up of a documentary-fiction pair, with each genre complementing the other and bringing to the topic a different perspective and aesthetic. Furthermore, the move from one film to another within each twin set brings with it a more intimate glimpse into the worlds on which they are centered. For instance, *Les Demoiselles* focuses largely on Demy's film and the events surrounding the celebration of its 25th anniversary while *L'Univers de Jacques Demy* delves into the life and career of the man himself.

The same shift from the objective to the intimate occurs within the *Murs murs* and *Documenteur* pair. The former is a documentary that Varda made in Los Angeles during her second sojourn into the city and it depicts the striking urban murals that captivated her. As an exploration of street art created by a network of various artists within the community, *Murs Murs* is a collective portrait of these artists and their larger community. The painted walls showcased by Varda speak to the viewer, both with their content and through an ethereal voice-over that gives the name of the muralist and his or her creation each time a new work is presented in the film. Thus, they exert a presence and give testimony to a less than glamorous face of Los Angeles. By contrast, *Documenteur,* which depicts a French woman, recently divorced and picking up the pieces of her life in Los Angeles along with her young son (played by Mathieu Demy), is an intimate portrait of an individual, an outsider who is

[61] In her written autobiography the filmmaker remarks, "Il m'est naturel d'aller de ci, de là, de dire quelque chose puis le contraire, et de me sentir moins piégée parce que je ne choisis pas une seule version des choses." Varda, *Varda par Agnès,* 183. "It's natural for me to go here and there, do say something and then its opposite, and to feel less trapped because I don't choose one single version of things." (my translation)

simultaneously coping with the pain of separation and negotiating an unfamiliar territory. Alison Smith writes,

> If *Murs Murs* sets out, in a fairly conventional documentary manner, to understand its surroundings through the mediation of the filmmaker, *Documenteur* turns this on its head and sets out to understand the person through the mediation of the surroundings.[62]

These two faces of Los Angeles presented by Varda, as different as they may be in their aesthetic approach and their focus, are complementary to each other precisely because of these differences. Taken as a set, they provide a fuller picture of the Los Angeles that Varda experienced, a fuller picture of the rampant poverty, of the racial tensions, of the violence and desperation of the city as well as the diversity and the vibrant urban aesthetic, sometimes beautiful, sometimes not. *Murs murs* brings these issues to the collective forefront through its depiction of the murals and their surrounding communities while *Documenteur* relegates them to the background where they create a backdrop for the individual experience of a woman in pain. Consequently, the two works taken together create an intersubjective exchange between the films, between the film and the viewer and, because they are two versions of a given reality for Varda, between the viewer and the filmmaker herself.[63]

Moreover, within each set of Varda's twin films, there are a multitude of intratextual references that serve to link them to each other and create a more cohesive body of work.[64] For instance, in *Documenteur,* the protagonist Emilie and her son Martin play catch in an empty lot against the backdrop of one of the murals Varda features in *Murs Murs.* Emilie's

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[62] Smith, *Agnès Varda*, 81.

[63] See Bénézet for more context and background on these films, as well as for an analysis (with relation to these two films) of Varda as a *cinéaste passeur,* as a filmmaker who acts as "a mediator not only between the filmed subjects and the spectators, but also between a specific space and time and the moment of screening." Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda*, 71.

[64] I use the term "intratextual" here to mean the references that occur within Varda's entire oeuvre as one body of work.

boss, who is a French filmmaker and whom we never see, asks her employee to read the script of her new film, which is entitled *Murs Murs.* With this reference, Varda, as the author of *Murs Murs,* also subtly marks her own presence. In *Jane B.* and *Kung-fu Master*, it is Jane Birkin who serves as a point of reference in the two works. The first film offers a general catalog of vignettes that attest to Jane's talent as an actor and a singer and provides a mostly professional portrait of Birkin while the second is a fictionalized account of the life of Mary-Jane, an alter-ego to Birkin, once again demonstrating the tendency toward the individual and the personal in the shift from documentary to fiction in her "films jumeaux."

The network of intratextuality in the case of the twin films and the connections to the body implied by this network, as well as by the unique context in which *Daguerréotypes* was created, all suggest that these films belong to a larger *corps*, that of the filmmaker's experience and the entire body of work which it has inspired. To fall back on Merleau-Ponty's writings on the body, Varda's oeuvre is a *corps* that unequivocally offers a "point of view upon the world" and which is a "vehicle of being in the world," committed and "intervolved in a definite environment."

Constructing a Rhizomatic Body: Varda's Intratextual Oeuvre

The intratextuality highlighted in the discussion of Varda's twin films is not exclusive to them. In fact, a broader web of intratextuality exists within Varda's entire œuvre, filmic and artistic, creating a communicative network among her works. For instance, we see the same footage of Jacques Demy on the beach at Noirmoutier filmed by Varda during the last stage of his illness in *Jaquot de Nantes* and in *Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier* (2006)*,* a film which itself was a spin-off resulting from an installation in her 2006 *L'Île et elle* exhibition. As discussed in the previous chapter, these haptic images of Demy, which evoke a sense of loss and materialize mourning on the screen, infuse and, more importantly, *fuse* these works together. Other times it is a theme or a motif that serves as an intratextual link among Varda's

oeuvre. For example, the first three chapters of this project illustrate the ways in which the themes of death, loss, absence, time and memory are repeatedly taken up in Varda's films.

Additionally, the focus on hands, which is manifest in films like *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961), *La Pointe Courte, Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* and *Daguerréotypes,* is another commonly recurring motif in Varda's œuvre. A number of scenes from these works exemplify this: the fortuneteller dealing out Tarot cards to predict Cléo's future, Cléo's own youthful hands in a close-up that both parallels and stands in contrast to the intimate shots of Varda's hands, aged and unrecognizable to her in *Les Glaneurs.* In the latter film, Varda's fist mimics a camera shutter as it closes in on trucks zooming past her car on the highway in an embodied representation of her filmmaking. The magician's hands performing magic tricks for the captivated denizens of the rue Daguerre in *Daguerréotypes*, alternated with images of the shopkeepers' hands as they conduct their daily commerce brings an element of fantasy to the banality of the quotidian while at the same time underscoring the importance of the body and the senses in an embodied daily experience. In an additional example, the nameless female protagonist in *La Pointe Courte*, after joining her estranged husband in his hometown to restore their relationship, constantly picks up objects or runs her hands over them as a way of negotiating an unfamiliar world and perceptually connecting to her partner's past. The variety of examples detailed above attests to the manifold ways in which the motif of hands recurs in Varda's works, yet they all share a common denominator in the association that Varda creates between hands and one's personal and professional identity. The aged hands of the filmmaker, the quick hands of the magician, the calloused hands of the baker, the elegant hands of the pop singer and the wizened hands of the fortuneteller all confirm the function or role of the characters in their given environment, emphasizing the importance of an embodied and perceptual experience of the world.

There are numerous other instances of intratextual connections among Varda's works, connections that create a communication not just among her films, but within her entire professional output across the formats of photography, film and installation art. These links constitute the seams that bind together her three lives as photographer, filmmaker and artist and bring to the surface the breadth and variety of professional and personal experience that is behind Varda's body of work. The artist herself remarks on this continuity in her work by stating, "je sais, de façon évidente, qu'il y a une continuité entre l'inspiration que j'avais à 20 ans et celle que j'ai maintenant."[65]

As detailed in the introduction chapter, before becoming a photographer, Varda studied art history at the École du Louvre, this period in her life perhaps serving as the embryonic precursor to her later three lives. From the study of painting and sculpture to the practice of photography and film and finally, to a synthesis of all these disciplines in her installation work, Varda's creative output mimics the evolution and history of these arts individually and with relation to each other. Varda's cinematic oeuvre has always evolved with contemporary currents in film, using new media and formats as technologies progress. Beginning with her foray into the world of the digital with the making of *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*, she continues to employ new technologies in restoring her earlier films and disseminating them across various formats.

One particular way in which Varda has managed to keep up with the evolving trends in cinema and art is reflected in her relatively recent venture into the museum space as an installation artist who continues to rely heavily on video and photography as well as on plastic compositions and performance to build her prolific body of her work. With regard to her transition from cinema to art, Varda comments:

[65] Agnès Varda, email to the author, March 30, 2014. "It's evident for me that there is a continuity between the inspiration I had when I was 20 years and the inspiration I have now." (my translation)

> Le passage de cinéaste à *visual artist*, il s'est fait naturellement. Depuis toujours je regarde les expositions et les installations, et depuis des années, j'avais envie de travailler en trois dimensions. J'ai découvert les difficultés et les plaisirs d'une autre façon de créer et de "toucher les autres." Partager des impressions et des émotions c'est aussi le but.[66]

This remark demonstrates Varda's continual concern with finding ever more effective ways to "touch" her audience in multisensory ways—her transition from photography to cinema was motivated by her desire to introduce movement and sound into her artistic expression and her foray into installation art was driven by her desire to create in three dimensions, to erase even more the divide between the spectator and her works in the participatory space of the gallery.

Varda's move into the white cube of the museum is a countercurrent to the trend of recent visual artists such as Christian Marclay, Tacita Dean and Pierre Huyghe among others, who incorporate moving images, both original and re-appropriated, into their output.[67] However, this shift from cinema to the museum space is natural for the filmmaker, not only for the reasons she gives in the above citation, but also because of the fact that the visual arts are palpably present in her cinematic oeuvre due to her incorporation of tropes and aesthetics related to painting, installation art and photography. In this regard, Bellour keenly

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[66] Agnès Varda, email to the author, March 30, 2014. "The transition from filmmaker to visual artist was natural. I have always gone to exhibitions and installations, and for years, I wanted to work in three dimensions…When I was invited to the Venice Biennale in 2003 I jumped at the occasion. I discovered the challenges and pleasures of another way to create and 'touch others.' Sharing impressions and emotions is also an objective for me." (my translation)

[67] For more on this artistic current and the ways it incites a rethinking of cinema, art and spectatorship, see: Balsom, Erika. "A Cinema in the Gallery, a Cinema in Ruins," *Screen* 50, no. 4 (2009): 411–427. Casetti, Francesco. "The Relocation of Cinema." *NECSUS* 2 (Autumn 2012): http://www.necsus-ejms.org/the-relocation-of-cinema/. Connolly, Maeve. *The Place of Artist's Cinema: Space, Site and Screen*. London & Chicago: Intellect, 2009. Mondloch, Kate. *Screens: Viewing Media Installation Art*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press; 2010. Nardelli, Matilde. "Moving pictures: Cinema and its Obsolescence in Contemporary Art," *Journal of Visual Culture* 8, no.3 (2009): 243–264.

characterizes *Les Plages d'Agnès* as an "installed film, wherein *mise-en-scène* functions as installation and installation as *mise-en-scène*."[68]

Other examples abound—one only has to consider the portrait-style shots in *Daguerréotypes,* the impressionist hues she employs in *Le Bonheur* (1964) or the tableau vivant that meticulously recreates a combination of paintings by Francisco Goya and Titien in *Jane B. par Agnès V.* to understand this salient tendency in her films (figures 8-10).[69] In other instances, art appears "behind the scenes" as the inspiration for a film or in her choice of actors. For instance, the principal theme of a young woman confronted by death in *Cléo de 5 à 7* was inspired by Hans Baldung Grien's *Death and the Maiden* (figure 14).[70] Cléo tearing off her wig during her moment of crisis halfway through the film is a direct reference to the painting, in which the figure of death holds the maiden by her hair. As a final example, Varda's decision to cast Sylvia Monfort and Philippe Noiret as the leading roles in *La Pointe Courte* was primarily motivated by their resemblance to the stoic figures in the Renaissance-era paintings of Piero della Francesca (figures 11-13).[71] Alison Smith devotes an entire chapter in her monograph to the influence of Western art and literature in the films of Varda, providing a rare extensive overview of the topic. However, given that the work predates the filmmaker's transition into the museum space, it does not address the closely woven relationship between her films and her art installations.[72]

More recently, a number of scholars have turned their attention to Varda's installations, often making connections in passing to her body of films. However, by focusing

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[68] Raymond Bellour, "Varda ou l'art contemporain. Notes sur *Les Plages d'Agnès*," *Trafic* 69 (2009): 17-18.

[69] The two paintings in question are: Titian (Tziano Vecellio), *Venus of Urbino*, 1538, oil on canvas. Francisco Goya, *The Clothed Maja*, c. 1800, oil on canvas.

[70] Hans Baldung Grien, *Death and the Maiden*, 1517, oil on panel.

[71] Piero della Francesca, *Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta*, 1451, oil and tempera on panel. Piero della Francesca, *Portrait of a Lady,* c. 1450.

[72] Smith's chapter in *Agnès Varda* is entitled "*Cinécriture* and the Power of Images."

on only a limited number of Varda's works, their treatment of the topic, while offering rigorous analyses, lacks scope and leaves ample room for a more comprehensive reading of her installations and their rhizomatic connectivity to her films. A case in point is Bellour, who entices us with the concept of "installed film," but does not develop it beyond *Les Plages d'Agnès*. Similarly, Bernard Bastide speculates in passing that since Varda had a formation in the arts, with relatively little knowledge of the cinema before venturing into filmmaking, the iconic culture in her films remains to this day more plastic than cinematographic.[73]

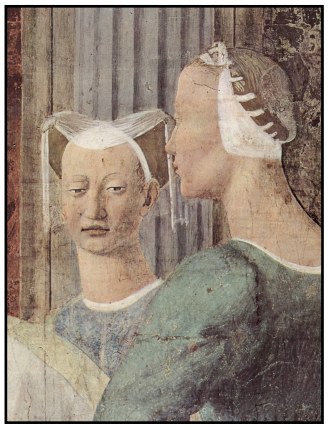
Fig. 8

Fig. 9

Fig.10

Fig. 11

Figs. 12 and 13



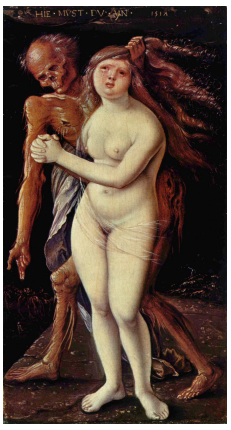


Fig. 14

[73] Bernard Bastide, "Agnès Varda, une auteure au féminin singulier (1954-1962)," in *Agnès Varda*: *le cinéma et au-delà,* ed. Antony Fiant, Roxane Hamery and Eric Thouvenel (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2009): 21.

Other scholars who address Varda's installations to a greater extent include Jenny Chamarette, who has written extensively on Varda's exhibit *L'Île et elle* with a particular focus on the installation piece "Les Veuves de Noirmoutier." In a recent article on the subject, Chamarette posits that the intermediality of the work situates it between cinema and art and incites an intersubjective specatorship. She proposes that this in-betweenness is mediated by "the particular role of gesture as it migrates from on-screen representation and mechanical apparatus, towards the embodied, affective and participatory logic of the work."[74] In a previous article on the same installation, Chamarette similarly focuses on gesture, the spatial arrangement of the piece and Varda's own presence in the video component to demonstrate the manner in which the artist creates a shared "flow" of affect and memory between the filmmaker, her artwork and her audience.[75]

Marie-Claire Barnet offers a rich and detailed analysis of *L'Île et elle,* and the *lieux de vie* that it highlights, in order to map out an emotional cartography of the exhibition as an affective, intersubjective landscape for the visitor to traverse. She touches on Varda's filmic oeuvre by making a parallel between the exhibit and the equally winding structure of *Les Plages d'Agnès*.[76] Shirley Jordan examines the same exhibit, reading it as a continuation of Varda's autobiographic impulse, which for the author manifested itself in *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse,* the film directly preceding it. Jordan makes a connection between the film and the exhibit by remarking that Varda employs similar framing and structuring devices to set limits for the "stark and uncomfortable intimacy" that comes with autobiographical portrayal.[77]

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[74] Jenny, Chamarette, "Between Women: Gesture, Intermediality and Intersubjectivity in the Installations of Agnès Varda and Chantal Akerman," *Studies in European Cinema* 10 no. 1(2013): 46-47.

[75] Jenny Chamarette, "Spectral Bodies, Temporalised Spaces: Agnès Varda's Motile Gestures of Mourning and Memorial," *Image & Narrative* 12, no. 2 (October 5, 2011): 31.

[76] Barnet, Marie-Claire. "Elles-Ils Islands: Cartography of Lives and Deaths by Agnès Varda." *L'Esprit Créateur* 51, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 97-111.

[77] Shirley Jordan, "Spatial and Emotional Limits in Installation Art: Agnès Varda's *L'Île et elle*," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 13, no. 5 (December 2009): 586.

Finally, Bénézet also turns her attention to three of Varda's installations from *L'Île et elle* to examine the ways in which the disposition of each of the works and the materials they present succeed in producing spaces that serve as "creative crossroads" offering "a potentially endless source of connections" and opportunities for "being with and feeling with others."[78]

Scholars such as Bellour, Chamarette, Barnet, Jordan and Bénézet have contributed greatly to the necessary transition in Varda scholarship from a focus on her films to a focus on her art installations, especially in their attention to the latter as intimate spaces for an intersubjective exchange, yet they stop short of integrating her cinematic and artistic output as part of one body of work. In order to bridge this divide, the following section offers an analysis of a number of Varda's installations, concentrating again on the connections between her artwork, her life and her corpus of films. This is the final step in delineating Varda's corpus as *corps.* As we will see, despite being relatively recent, these installations reach back into the history of this *corps,* imbricated as always with the body and the presence of the filmmaker/artist. They constitute the final dimension of Varda's body of work and, through their disposition in the museum space, stand as even richer loci of embodied and intersubjective spectatorship and thus offer new opportunities for a more conscise reading of her work from *within.*

With the transition from filmmaking to installation art, Varda closed the circle of her experience and her perceptual past by going back to her origins as a student of art, growing in a sense "younger" in the process, an idea of which she is entirely aware—in *Les Plages d'Agnès,* Varda describes herself as "an old filmmaker who has become a young visual artist." However, as I indicate at the start of this chapter, the move into the museum space in no way erases Varda's previous professional lives. Instead, it feeds all the aspects of her career simultaneously and so much so that it has engendered other twin (or sibling) sets in her work.

[78] Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda,* 107.

Whereas before, her sets of "twins" consisted of two films, more recently, they consist of an installation piece and a film, thus creating a seam between the museum space and the cinema. Briefly, these sets include *Patatutopia*, a 2003 exhibit that stemmed from *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*; *Quelques Veuves de Noirmoutier,* a film that was created from footage for her installation piece "Les veuves de Noirmoutier," which figured in *L'Île et elle*. Within this same exhibit, Varda also presented "Ma cabane de l'échec," a glass shack whose windows and roof are lined with the unraveled reels of film from *Les Créatures* (1965), an unsuccessful cinematic endeavor which Varda herself calls "un échec epouvantable."[79] More recently, in the spring of 2014, Varda launched her first solo exhibit entitled *Triptyques Atypiques* at the Galerie Nathalie Obadia in Paris, incorporating several references to her films in a number of the installation pieces.

In each of these pairings, film and installation intertwine in a dynamic that is a reversal of the way Varda previously used her photographs, which she exhibited in her courtyard or gallery spaces early in her career, as a basis for her cinema. Two good examples of this use of photographs to engender films are *Ulysse* (1982) and *Salut les Cubains!* (1962-63). The former is a short film based on a photograph Varda took in 1954 that anchors the film's exploration of memory.[80] In the making of the latter work, Varda relied on 1800 of the 2500 photographs she took in Cuba, between December 1962 and January 1963, four years after Castro's revolution. The pictures, which were exhibited in Paris in June of 1963, comprise the body of a documentary that touches on Cuban history, music, religion, cigars, sugar cane production and agrarian reform as well as providing a glimpse into the artistic output in Cuba at the time by key artists and poets (figures 15-17). Varda even includes a picture of Fidel Castro with wings of stone, perhaps one the most aptly foreshadowing pictures one could take of Castro, whose conflicting hero/dictator image is emblematized in wings that are too heavy

[79] Varda, *Varda par Agnès*, 87. "a colossal failure" (my translation)

[80] For more on *Ulysse,* photography and the notion of memory, see Chapter Two.

to lift him up (figure 18). Despite being composed almost entirely of filmed photographs, *Salut les Cubains!* is extremely animated and vivacious in its earnest, if somewhat idealized representation of Cuba in the early 60s.[81]

Fig. 15 


Fig. 16

Fig. 17 

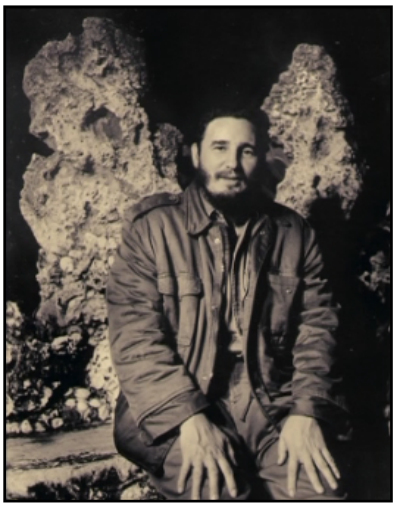


Fig. 18

As *Salut les Cubains!* shows, it is not unusual for Varda's gallery work to lead to her film production. However, with *Triptyques Atypiques,* the reverse occurs. That is to say, in this instance, it is her cinematic output which feeds her gallery installations. Shown at the Galerie Obadia in the Marais district of Paris from February to April of 2014, *Triptyques Atypiques* presented eleven pieces that incorporate to various degrees photography, video and installation art and make use of a wide range of materials. Each piece is tripartite, albeit some

[81] In the introduction to her monograph, Bénézet offers a rare analysis of *Salut les Cubains!* as an example of a work that testifies to Varda's commitment to the practice of *cinécriture*, which "relies on the elaborate combinations of images, voices and sound." She also uses the film to illustrate "what can be gained from looking at Varda's production beyond the well-beaten track" of her more canonical works. Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda*, 2-3.

more clearly than others. Varda sums up the ensemble of the exhibit as, "divers triptyques: des photographies en 3 parties, des portraits argentiques à volets vidéo, des cadres en trois panneaux."[82] The installations reflect the bohemian aesthetics characteristic of Varda's work and the title speaks to her love for the lyrical. In the press release for the gallery, Varda describes the appeal the name of the exhibit holds for her: "Un titre qui rime avec un Y qui se balade."[83] Regarding the project itself, she summarizes it as

> un projet lié aux peintures anciennes et mon goût pour le chiffre trois […] J'aime proposer des juxtapositions et des assemblages en circulant parmi les médias à ma disposition: photographie, cinéma et vidéo, noir et blanc et couleurs, papier, métal ou tôle ondulée, objets qui racontent une histoire… tout est matière à propositions. "[84]

From this wealth of material at her disposal, Varda creates a striking exhibit that is extremely varied in form, texture and content even within the general constraint of the triptych that she imposes on the project (see figures 19-21).[85] A number of the installation pieces echo both visually and thematically other works in her oeuvre. For instance, "Cinq Bacheliers" is reminiscent of Varda's elaborate beach installations in *Les Plages d'Agnès,* both in its composition and its puzzle format (figure 22 and 23 respectively). As she mentions in *Les*

[82]Varda, Galerie Nathalie Obadia press release, January 2014, http://www.Galerieobadia.com/show.php?show_id=2665&showpress=1&language=2&p=1&g=3, "various triptychs: photographs in three parts, gelatin-silver portraits with video side panels, frames in 3 panels…" (Translation in the English press release)

[83] Varda, Galerie Obadia press release, January 2014. "A title that rhymes, with a Y that wanders." (my translation)

[84] Varda, Galerie Obadia press release, January 2014. "A project tied to old paintings and my taste for the number three." "I like to offer juxtapositions and collections by circulating the media at my disposition: photography, film and video, black-and-white and colors, paper, metal or corrugated tin, objects which tell a story…everything is material for propositions." (my translation) Varda's fondness for the number three and triptychs also manifested itself in an installation entitled "Le Triptyche de Noirmoutier" presented in 2004 at the Fondation Cartier in Paris, currently part of the MOMA collection. The piece is comprised of a three-channel video projected onto a tripartite wooden screen, the hinged side panels of which can be closed or opened by the spectators at will. For details, see http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?object_id=117936. One could even characterize her three lives of photographer, filmmaker and visual artist as a lived triptych.

[85] Figures 19 and 20 show, respectively: "Alice et les vaches blanches" ("Alice and the White Cows"), 2013, portrait with video panels and "Rosalie, fille d'Agnès" ("Rosalie, Agnès's Daughter"), 2013, photo triptych. The remainder of the installations are discussed in the body of this section.

Plages, "c'est le côté puzzle qui m'intéresse," a sentiment which is apparent in her tendency to construct her films and installations in an act of artistic bricolage. Later in the same film, Varda compares the process of memory to the act of assembling a puzzle that is missing a piece. The puzzle format of "Cinq Bacheliers," whose pieces can be removed by the artist at will to present various configurations of the work, rendering it forever incomplete, reinforces this notion by offering a material representation of the problematic nature of memory, a bricolage in itself. As in Chapter Two, we are once more reminded of George Perec's Bartlebooth and his missing puzzle fragment and, by extension, of the practice of bricolage, both artistic and mnemonic, that characterizes the Oulipian project at large.

The portrait of the Spanish painter Miquel Barcelo, shown in color in the center frame and flanked by two panels that contain black and white images of the hull of a wooden boat on one side and a fish on the other, vividly bring to mind *La Pointe Courte* (figure 24). The fish on the left panel recalls a shot from the film that lingers on the Pointu fishermen's catch, while the boat evokes their fishing vessels and looks remarkably like the carcass of the old ship into which the protagonists climb during their exploration of the village (figure 25 and 26). Furthermore, the tin panels in the piece resound with the tin-roofed bungalows commonly seen in La Pointe Courte.

In another example, *La jeune fille à la tourterelle,* the black and white images set against an opaque black background are reminiscent of the opening shots of *L'Opéra-Mouffe* as well as a later shot in the film in which a dove, trapped in a class bowl, struggles to escape (figures 27 and 28).[86] Finally, the title of the exhibit takes us back to another of Varda's triptych installations, "Le Triptyque de Noirmoutier" (2004) (see note 84). As a quick glance of the select images on the following page illustrates, this web of intertextuality is reinforced by the overarching haptic, material and corporeal nature of Varda's works, both artistic and

[86] For a full list of the installation pieces, see Appendix 2.

cinematic, all of which acts as a "skin" that holds Varda's artistic *corps* together, that envelopes it and defines it.

Fig. 19

Fig. 20

Fig. 21

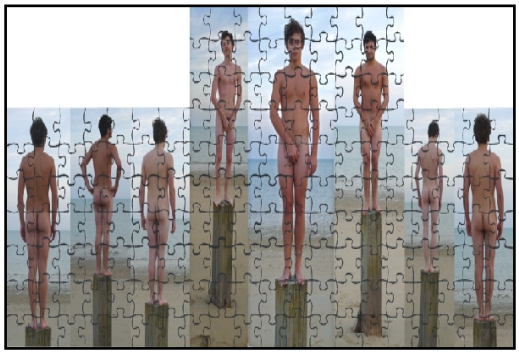


Fig. 22

Fig. 23

Fig. 24

Fig. 25

Fig. 26

Fig. 27

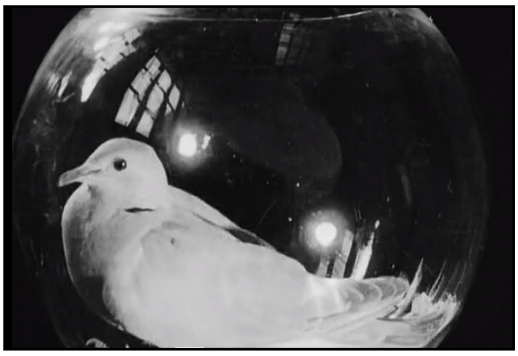


Fig. 28

The list of intratextual echoes between Varda's art installations and her cinematic oeuvre does not end here. From this vast array, I have chosen to examine in detail three installation pieces that especially reverberate with Varda's oeuvre and her life at large. In keeping with the larger scope of this chapter, my decision to concentrate on these three works is based on the fact that they stand out more than others in their hapticity, their materiality and intermediality, as well as in their clear exemplification of Varda's tendency for the reuse and resurrection of filmic material. Consequently, they resound more deeply with her films and vividly illustrate the intratextual nature of her works, ultimately contributing to a fuller reading of Varda's corpus as a *corps.* The first two pieces, entitled "Temps capturé I et II" and "Beau comme…" figure in *Triptyques Atypiques* and the third, "Ma cabane de l'échec," comes from the *L'Île et elle* exhibition mentioned above.

"Temps capturé I et II" is comprised of a series of six panels each of which is a still frame taken from a sequence in Varda's 1985 film *Sans toit ni loi* (figures 29 and 30). The scene in question occurs at the end of the film. It is one of violence and its events ultimately lead to the demise of the protagonist, Mona, a drifter who has given up her job and lives on the road, hitchhiking from place to place and eventually succumbing to death by exposure. As Mona wanders in the commune of Cournonterral in southern France, she becomes the victim of a folk ritual called the Pailhasses, in which a group of revelers dressed as scarecrows chase down passersby and douse them with wine dregs. The violence in this sequence is even more remarkable given that Mona is framed as the solitary vagabond, an outsider unaware of the

local customs. As Mona is accosted by the revelers and soaked in wine dregs, she becomes unrecognizable, her skin stained red, her hair matted in clumps to her scalp. It is a dizzying sequence, edited with rapid cuts, filmed with swift camera movements and lacking in focus, all of which contribute to the chaos of the events and heighten the viewers' senses, viewers who themselves feel attacked by the violent cinematography.

Fig. 29

Fig. 30

Fig. 31

To create the installation piece, Varda selected six stills from the midst of this chaotic scene to display as two triptychs in a line that recalls a ribbon of film (figure 31). This piece is not only a direct reference to one of her films, but it also represents her three lives as well as the forever fluctuating relationship between photography, film and art which marks Varda's work. As a result, it serves as a communication path between the three disciplines, a network of exchange that questions each medium of expression while at the same time emphasizing the links and heredity among them. Furthermore, as the title suggests, the piece makes a

commentary on the notions of movement and time in cinema. With regard to this aspect of the installation, Varda remarks, "On arrête le mouvement d'un film. On capture un 24ème de seconde."[87] In this way, each still frame stands for a magnified segment of time—when considering that the traditional frame rate is 24 images per second, each of Varda's frames comes to represent 1/24 of a second. In this way, Varda returns to the cellular core of film, the still image. With this figurative strip of film made up of stills, she paradoxically reconstructs a segment of the scene by stopping the movement of the film, which is originally stillness put into motion. Otherwise said, "Temps capture I et II" is constructed in such a way that deconstructs film by dismantling the temporality at the base of the medium and displaying it in plain view for the gallery visitor to examine and assemble.

Just as the disposition of the installation materializes cinematic time, the textured and blurred images, dominated by hues of purple and red, and becoming progressively more abstracted with each frame, communicate a remarkable amount of movement. Due to their linear arrangement on the gallery, the visitor is invited to scan the installation from left to right with a tactile eye, to intersubjectively engage as a cinematic apparatus by proxy in an embodied "editing" and re-composition of this filmic material through which to create meaning. With each progressive frame, the images become flatter, more haptic and less accessible to a visual mastery by the eye, morphing quietly into abstract painting. The blurred movement frozen in time creates an impression of brushstrokes in colors and textures that evoke blood and viscera. As a result, the sanguinary tone of the images and the hapticity created by the smeared movement materialize the violence of the scene. It is a violence on two counts—the "blood" and "viscera" seep out from both the embroiled human bodies presented in the first three frames and from the medium itself as it melts into a form of

[87] Varda, Galerie Obadia press release, January 2014. "The movement of a film is stopped. A 24th of a second is captured." (my translation)

expression that lies at the intersection of painting, film and photography. Through this materialized time and movement as well as through the suggestion of bodily fluids, Varda presents two conjoined bodies—that of the film and that of the installation, both becoming increasingly unrecognizable. In this way, Varda questions the relationship between time and movement and between film, art and photography within the context of installation art, smudging the distinctions between the three disciplines, challenging the visitor's perception of the piece and questioning the notion of spectatorship, particularly when faced with a work of art that defies definition. Furthermore, in its blurring of disciplines, the work becomes a layered representation of Varda's professional trajectory, of her "triptych" lives as filmmaker, photographer and visual artist, as well as of the lack of boundaries between these three lives. Thus, "Temps capturé I et II" takes on added significance as a bridge spanning the space between her filmmaking and her museum work, further strengthening the intratextual network that binds her work into one complex body.

Fig. 32

The second installation piece of interest here, entitled "Beau comme…" also resonates with Varda's filmic oeuvre, although through an entirely different formal approach. Rather than relying on the resurrection of film images through which to revisit and deconstruct her cinematic works, the installation "recycles" physical objects that evoke her films as well as other aspects of the artist's life. Set in a separate room, against a white exposed stone wall, "Beau comme…" carries the notion of the triptych to a more material and plastic level (figure 32). Bringing together three discordant objects, a dissection table littered with moss, an

overturned sewing machine and a broken umbrella protruding from it at an angle, this carefully composed installation is first and foremost a tribute to the 19th century French poet le Comte de Lautréamont, whose works greatly influenced the Surrealists. In creating "Beau comme…," Varda's cites one particular sentence taken from a passage appearing in the 6th canto of Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror* wherein the narrator is describing Mervyn, a young man whom he encounters in the street. The sentence reads,

> Il est **beau comme** la rétractilité des serres des oiseaux rapaces; ou encore, comme l'incertitude des mouvements musculaires dans les plaies des parties molles de la région cervicale postérieure; ou plutôt, comme ce piège à rats perpétuel, toujours retendu par l'animal pris, qui peut prendre seul des rongeurs indéfiniment, et fonctionner même caché sous la paille; et surtout, *comme la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie!*[88] (emphasis added)

In its juxtaposition of a series of unrelated, oniric images, it is easy to see the appeal of this meandering sentence for the Surrealists. Varda, who holds an appreciation for both 19th century poetry and the work of the Surrealists, brings to life the last part of the sentence, offering a plastic rendering of an enigmatic simile. In this way, the installation stands as an homage to Lautréamont, to the Surrealist art and literature that he inspired as well as to poetic language more generally. Literature and poetry have always had a strong presence in Varda's films, which act as a vehicule for setting the written word in motion, freeing it from the page

[88] Comte de Lautréamont, *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1869), in *Œuvres Complètes,* ed. Jean-Luc Steinmetz (Paris: Gallimard, 2009): 227. "He is as handsome as the retractibility of the claws of birds of prey; or again, as the uncertainty of the muscular movements of wounds in the soft parts of the posterior cervical region; or rather as the perpetual rat-trap, re-set each time by the trapped animal, that can catch rodents indefinitely and works even when hidden beneath straw; and especially as the fortuitous encounter upon a dissecting-table of a sewing machine and an umbrella!" Translation from: The Count of Lautréamont, *The Songs of Maldoror* (1869), trans. Guy Wernham (New York: New Directions Books, 1966): 26.

and inscribing it within a more multisensorial medium.[89] In "Beau comme…," Varda further frees the written word by endowing Lautréamont's verses with a material form, with a physical and plastic medium of expression. In short, they are given a body with which spectator can interact by approaching it in space from various angles and perceiving the haptic qualities of the rough moss, the smooth skin of the umbrella and the cold metal of the table.

In addition to being a material adaptation of a literary text, "Beau comme" also acts as a referential nexus for Varda's own life and oeuvre by evoking certain associations. The first of these visual echoes comes from the way in which she frames the piece. Three whitewashed walls at the end of a long room surround the table that holds the sewing machine and the umbrella, creating dimensions that recall Varda's famous courtyard at her home on the rue Daguerre (figures 33 and 34). The green ivy strewn about in the right hand corner of this constructed space further adds to this resonance. As Varda recounts in *Les Plages d'Agnès,* the courtyard is the central part of her home and has served as a key creative space for various films. The stylized replica built around the *Triptyque* installation, at once a space for artistic creation and a work of art in itself, immortalizes the courtyard as a *locus amoenus*, as an idealized landscape and a material setting for artistic creation.

Fig. 33

Fig. 34

[89] Some of the many examples include: The parallel narrative structure around which *La Pointe Courte* is built is borrowed from William Faulkner's *The Wild Palms* (1939). Varda's 1965 short *Elsa la Rose* is based on the forty-year relationship between the writers Louis Aragon and Elsa Triolet, and is overlaid with excerpts from their individual works, beautifully read by Michel Piccoli. In *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse,* Varda examines her aging hand as she recites in voice-over a modified version of the first two verses of Don Diègue's soliloquy in Pierre Corneille's *Le Cid*: "Ô rage ! Ô désespoir ! Ô vieillesse ennemie ! /N'ai-je donc tant vécu que pour cette infamie ?" Act I, Scene 4. In *Les Plages d'Agnès,* her childhood friend Andrée Vilar, née Schlegel, flawlessly recites verses from Paul Valéry's "Cimitière marin" (1920).

Furthermore, the organization of the piece and the way in which it frames the series of objects that are all imbued with cinematic associations also evokes a composed shot within a film frame, here presented in an installed and magnified version. Each one of the items that "Beau comme…" assembles, brings to mind a film by Varda and in one instance, by Demy. As a first example, the dissecting table lined with moss is a vivid reminder of the fantastical kitchen Varda creates for the set of *7p., cuis., s. de b…à saisir* (1984). This short film meanders like a reverie or an amorphous memory through the rooms of an apartment, empty at first, but in which Varda slowly plays out loosely related scenes, some realistic and some dreamlike, from the lives of past residents (figure 35).[90] One of these scenes occurs in the kitchen, where Yolande Moreau's character relates a memory. Like the table in "Beau comme…," the countertops of the kitchen in the film are covered with sod, the material presence of which incites the character played by Moreau to relive a childhood memory of polishing her mother's sterling silver knives in the garden by plunging their blades into the soil. As she recounts her story, in an act of embodied remembering, the hapticity of which is not lost on the spectator, Moreau pushes her forefinger into the sod to emulate the blade of a knife passing through the layer of grass and entering the earth underneath. In reality, as we learn in *Les Plages,* this is a memory gleaned from Varda's own childhood, a fact that once more underlines the link between the filmmaker's own life experience and her corpus. This instance of material and embodied memory incited by the dissection table conflates a remembrance of her films with a recollection from her own past to create a third, overarching memory that specifically belongs to her *body* of works.

[90] I provide another example of a scene from this film in the introductory chapter. For more background information, see Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda*, 131-135. Bénézet offers an in depth description of the film as well as details surrounding its production contexts. She also broaches a haptic analysis of it in her description of the spaces, colors and corporeal images that appear therein, thus supporting my notion that Varda's lesser-known works become increasingly more accessible through such an approach.

Fig. 35

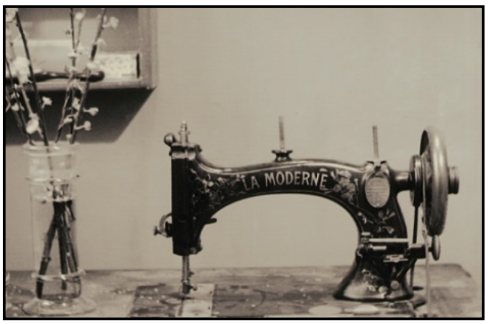


Fig. 36

Fig. 37

Fig. 38

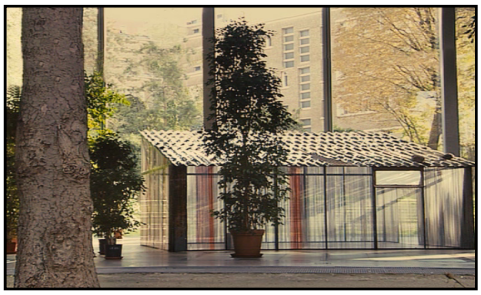
The two other objects in the installation also reverberate with the memory of Varda's body of work. Firstly, the antique sewing machine is a throwback to a similar one shown in a brief, enigmatic shot in *L'Opéra-Mouffe* and the umbrella evokes both the umbrellas carried by the Mouffetardians in the same film as well as Demy's famous film *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* (1964) (figures 36-38).[91] This latter reference creates an association between Varda and her husband, a couple whose careers developed in tandem as two very different and independent bodies, but which nonetheless were imbricated, coming into contact in works like *Jacquot de Nantes*, *L'Univers de Jacques Demy* and *Les Demoiselles ont eu 25 ans*.

At first glance, the dissection table, the sewing machine and the umbrella are apparently unrelated objects aside from their reference to Lautréamont. However, when juxtaposed by Varda in the reconstructed museum space that recalls her courtyard and a film frame, they come together to create a web of meaning by their reference to her oeuvre and to her home life. Each one acts like a scintilla of memory, a material flash to the past equally for Varda and the spectator familiar with her oeuvre. However, given Varda's problematic

[91] In *The Cinema of Agnès Varda,* Bénézet validly interprets the sewing machine as a symbol for modernity and progressiveness and the modern woman's changing status in 1950s France, all of which play into Varda's reevaluation of a stereotyped female subjectivity in *L'Opéra-Mouffe.*

relationship to the memory, she does not present these mnemonic objects in pristine condition.[92] Rather, each item is shown in a degraded state—the moss on the table is sparse and patchy rather than a rich green sod, the sewing machine is lying askance and disused on its side, as is the torn and weathered umbrella, all of which comment on the fallibility of memory as it deteriorates over time. Furthermore, these worn relics reflect on the corpus that they evoke as a *corps* that has aged over time. They manifest themselves to the spectator like the shabby specters of props that once were used to create a vivid filmic environment and which now have been resurrected to give material witness to an oeuvre and a life, and to become once more beautiful as a result.

Fig. 39



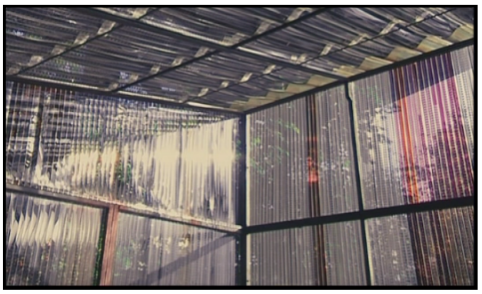


Fig. 40

Fig. 41

Fig. 42

This resurrection and reuse of old material reoccurs in another striking example from Varda's artistic repertoire, "Ma cabane de l'échec"(figures 39-42). In 2006, the Fondation Cartier in Paris hosted an exhibit by Varda entitled *L'Île et elle*. The exhibit brought together a variety of installations centered on the island of Noirmoutier, a place of great importance for Varda professionally and in her private life. It was a haven from Paris for both her and Demy, serving as an alternative workplace as well as a seaside retreat lined with beaches whose

[92] For more on Varda's relationship to memory, see Chapter Two.

sands hold precious and ever-receding memories for the filmmaker today.[93] Varda evokes this sentiment in *Les Plages d'Agnès* by including the beaches of Noirmoutier as one of the many important places from her life that inhabit her and constitute her inner landscape. This very Vardian imagery once again interweaves body and world in a chiasmatic relationship. The title of the exhibit further reflects this notion. In the name *L'Île et elle*, the "elle" (her) clearly refers to Varda but also, intersubjectively, to each of the widows on the island whom she interviews for the video installation "Les Veuves de Noirmoutier.*"* Likewise, the word "il" (him) evoked by its homophone "île" alludes to Demy and the dozens of other departed husbands who have left a palpable absence on the island.

Furthermore, the phonetic ambiguity of the phrase allows it to be understood in a number of ways: "l'île (il) *et* elle," which sounds both like "the island *and* her" or "him *and* her," and "l'île (il) *est* elle," meaning the island *is* her or roughly, he *is* her. The first reading suggests a subject-object dichotomy and creates a division between the "île/il" and "elle," while the second, subtle and delicately phenomenological, conflates the "île/il" with "elle" and blurs the boundaries between subject and object, giving rise to a dynamic of intersubjectivity within which body and world are "intervolved" as "a grouping of lived-through meanings that finds its equilibrium," to borrow again from Merleau-Ponty. It is the second reading that makes sense when approaching Varda's exhibit.

"Ma cabane de l'échec," which translates into "My Hut of Failure," figured in the L*'Île et elle* exhibit in part because of its reuse of the reels of film left over from *Les Créatures*, which was shot almost entirely on Noirmoutier. As described above, the film was poorly received, but rather than disown it as cinematic failure, Varda poetically re-

[93] For a more detailed discussion of this topic, refer to the segment on *Les Plages d'Agnès* in Chapter Two and the analysis of *Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier* in Chapter Three. Additionally, for a detailed description of Varda's installation and the larger *L'Île et elle* exhibition in which it figured, see: Chamarette, Jenny. "Spectral Bodies, Temporalised Spaces: Agnès Varda's Motile Gestures of Mourning and Memorial." *Image & Narrative* 12, no. 2 (October 5, 2011): 31–49 and Jordan, Shirley. "Spatial and Emotional Limits in Installation Art: Agnès Varda's *L'Île et elle*." *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 13, no. 5 (2009): 581–588.

appropriated it in her installation art, giving it a second life and reabsorbing it into her body of work. The cabana, modeled after the fishing huts on Noirmoutier, was installed within the enormous two-story high glass walls on the main level of the museum, thus allowing a maximum amount of natural light to filter through and illuminate the strips of celluloid lining it. Delphine Bénézet observes that "this architectural structure made of recycled film is a sculpture of light, a frame where strips of ageing 35mm celluloid, now grayish and red, echo sheets of metal covered with rust."[94] The use of the filmstrips in such a way reiterates the very material of the fishing huts of Noirmoutier, but more importantly, it presents a material and plastic approach to thinking about and thinking *through* cinema. The play between light and matter that structures "Ma cabane" is a direct reference to cinema through a poetic rendering of the processes that enable the projection of film onto the screen and make cinema possible. In *Les Plages d'Agnès,* Varda acknowledges the relationship of this installation to cinema by reflecting, from inside the hut, "Que'est-ce que c'est le cinéma? De la lumière qui arrive de quelque part et qui est retenue par des images plus ou moins sombres ou coloriées."[95] By exposing the medium of film in this way, the cabana represents cinema at its most material and cellular level and offers a novel, interactive and provocative way of experiencing film whereby museum visitors "edit" the work by choosing how they engage with the installation. Bénézet, using a spiritual imagery, offers a similar interpretation by comparing the architecture of "Ma cabane" to the stained glass windows in churches, whose purpose is to create a space of meditation. She remarks that within Varda's installation, "visitors can take advantage of the static nature of images (and of the relative silence) to come as close as technicians do to the celluloid material of the film."[96] The cabana thus offers itself up as an

[94] Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda,* 103.

[95] "What is cinema? Light coming from somewhere captured by images more or less dark or colorful."

[96] Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda,* 103.

alternate medium for rethinking cinema, materially *from within* and through an interactive participation with a quiet space of contemplation.

As a result, "Ma cabane de l'échec" emphatically reminds us of the materiality of film, but the installation goes one step further to also show that film is a body that can age and change and that has a history and a memory. Varda allows us to approach this body, to even climb inside of it, in order to derive a different perspective on the medium and to question the concept of the cinematic experience that has changed so drastically in the digital age, especially in its move toward the museum space. As she did later with "Temps capturé I et II," in constructing her cabana, Varda ultimately *deconstructs* cinema by breaking the very material of its body down to the still image, to the basic unit of a movement that at its heart is just a beautiful illusion.[97]

The cabana appears in the penultimate sequence of *Les Plages d'Agnès* as an appropriate summation of Varda's relationship to cinema. Throughout the film, during the peripatetic journey into her past, Varda never loses sight of her role as a filmmaker and the ways in which cinema surrounds her—she constantly reminds the spectator of this by showing a multitude of excerpts from nearly all of the works in her oeuvre, as well as footage and photographs of her in the act of filming. When describing her relationship with Demy, she emphasizes his filmmaking and their parallel careers as directors. As she introduces us to her children, she highlights their connection to cinema—Rosalie is a costume designer, Mathieu is an actor, and both have appeared in a number of her films. By the end of the *Les Plages d'Agnès*, we see Varda not just surrounded by cinema but "inhabiting" film in a material and embodied act. She sits serenely in her cabana, using a pile of reel tins as a perch, and states, "Quand je suis là, j'ai l'impression que j'habite le cinéma, que c'est ma maison. Il me semble que j'y ai toujours habité."[98]

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[98] "In here, it feels like I live in cinema, that cinema is my home. I think I've always lived in it."

As this chapter has strived to demonstrate, as much as Varda inhabits cinema, cinema also inhabits her. Otherwise put, she both lives cinema and cinema lives through her, in the sense that her films are born from her life, from her experience and from her body. However, as this concluding sequence of *Les Plages*, and indeed the entire film, also show, she equally inhabits and is inhabited by her art, that is to say, her photography and installations. As she sits in her hut and muses on film, Varda is simultaneously reflecting on her roles as a visual artist and a photographer. This "layered" meditation on her three lives is reinforced by the image on the screen that shows her inside the belly of one of her own installations, which is lined with still images from one of her films that are at heart just photographs on celluloid. With this artistic piece, at the same time a primitive but poignant projection of film and a reconceptualized photography exhibit that speaks volumes about cinema's proto-history and about its future status as an art, Varda presents the cabana to the visitor as a space of intersubjective exchange and exploration where bodies encounter other bodies, all beings in the world, all "rising toward the world" in the words of Merleau-Ponty.

Furthermore, going back to the ideas put forth by Sobchack on the chiasmic body of the film, the image of Varda speaking from inside her celluloid-lined cabana aligns itself seamlessly with Merleau-Ponty's notion of "experience expressed by experience."[99] With the cabana, the body of the film, its very matter, is deconstructed and transformed into an art installation, which is then incorporated into a new film, *Les Plages d'Agnès*, where Varda "occupies" it. This nested representation of bodies within bodies, of experience inscribed within experience, creates a dynamic that supersedes intratextuality and enters the realm of a critical metatextuality that serves as the "skin" enfolding Varda's corpus as *corps,* a metatextuality that considers not just what is *inside* Varda's works, but what is *outside* of her

[99] See footnote 24 in this chapter.

body of work, what has touched it and shaped it, thus allowing it to not only *express* its own lived experience but also to comment on it.

The primary aim of this chapter was to bring to the surface a number of the salient interconnecting seams that link Varda's oeuvre together as a body, to show the ways in which her works communicate and live within each other, and the ways that her artistic *corps* emerges as a body born from other bodies. Based on the analyses presented in the preceding pages, Varda's corpus emerges as a *corps* that resembles Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome, a non-hierarchical, decentered network "characterized by a multiplicity of off-shoots and movements always between points, never arriving."[100] It exists as a body that is constantly regenerating itself, like the heart-shaped potatoes Varda collects, in a continual process of growth, material transformation and renewal alongside a perpetually evolving aesthetic. It is also a body that is consubstantial to Varda's own, recalling Montaigne's famous averment, "Je n'ai pas plus fait mon livre que mon livre m'a fait, livre consubstantiel à son auteur, d'une occupation propre, membre de ma vie."[101] Finally, it is a body that asserts its place in the digital era. At a time when technology is moving toward the ephemeral, Varda's oeuvre continues to plant itself as a material, rhizomatic body even within the age of dematerialization. The concluding chapter of this work will address this issue more closely by looking at the ways in which Varda engages with digital technologies in her recent works by using her DV camera as a "prosthetic hand" with which to touch and capture the world.

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[100] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Rhizome," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 7. One of the main features of a rhizome is that it is a de-centralized structure. Even though I maintain above that Varda's artistic *corps* has a central nervous system in the guise of Ciné-Tamaris, this does not contradict the conceptualization of her corpus as a de-centralized rhizome. In characterization Varda's production company as a "control center" for her body of work, I do not mean that it hierarchically shapes this rhizomatic body, but rather that it is responsible for regulating the creative "impulses" that pervade it.

[101] Michel de Montaigne, "Du démentir," Book II, Essay 18, in *Les Essais* (1580), ed. Pierre Villey and Verdun L. Saulnier (Paris: Quadrige /PUF, 2004), 665. "I have no more made my book than my book has made me: 'tis a book consubstantial with the author, of a peculiar design, a member of my life." (Translation from: Michel de Montaigne, "Of Giving the Lie" (1580), in *Selected Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, ed. William Hazlitt, trans. Charles Cotton (New York: T.Y. Crowell and Co, 1903), 246.

CONCLUSION

In Touch with the Digital: Varda's Prosthetic Hand

Du cinéma à l'art contemporain, de la narration à l'installation […]Varda tisse une trame complexe qui rend les régimes de représentation extrêmement perméables et la libère formellement alors même qu'elle fait la synthèse d'une vie passée avec le cinéma.

—Antony Fiant, Roxane Hamery and Eric Thouvenel[1]

The quote above, taken from the introduction to *Agnès Varda: le cinéma et au-delà*, eloquently encapsulates a key point that overarches the discussion of Varda's corpus as *corps* in the previous chapter. While the authors are referring specifically to Varda's autobiographical work *Les Plages d'Agnès* (2008), their concise characterization of the film as a network of varied and permeable representations, liberated formally and depicting in parallel with the life of the artist can equally be applied to Varda's extensive artistic *corps*. Given the amplitude of Varda's creative output, it is beyond the scope of the four chapters that comprise this project to touch on the entirety of her work. However, my purpose was not to provide a comprehensive monograph on the artist, but rather to present a deep analysis of a variety of carefully selected films and installations with the goal of delineating the contours of her corpus and bringing into relief those aspects of Varda's oeuvre that best exemplify her haptic aesthetics. In doing so, I hope to have opened a new window onto Varda's artistic production, onto the artist herself and onto the vast and expanding field of Varda scholarship.

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[1] Antony Fiant, Roxane Hamery and Eric Thouvenel, introduction to *Agnès Varda*: *le cinéma et au-delà,* ed. Antony Fiant, Roxane Hamery and Eric Thouvenel (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2009): 9. "From cinema to contemporary art, from narration to installation [...] Varda weaves a complex web that renders her modes of representation extremely permeable and formally frees her, all the while synthesizing a life spent with cinema." (my translation)

Many of the phenomenological and haptic strategies for reading Varda's works that the preceding chapters put forth are intended as tools of interpretation with which to approach her films and installations, even those that are not included in this dissertation's corpus. Such an approach to her films not only opens up new philosophical and theoretical terrain for exploring Varda's corpus, it also creates space for a wider appreciation of her works through their phenomenological focus on the body, the senses and the intersubjective human experience within the material world. A haptic reading of the films and installations described above brings to the surface the endless beauty in Varda's works and incites a more participatory and pleasurable cinematic experience. Perhaps her lesser-known films, like the enigmatic work *7p., cuis., s.de b…à saisir* (1984) or *Elsa la Rose* (1965) have escaped treatment by Varda scholarship in part because they do not easily fall into conventional theoretical paradigms based on ideological approaches and simply require a more sensorial approach in order to be fully grasped.

At the outset of this dissertation, I outlined the reasons *why* Varda's work lends itself to a haptic theory and a phenomenological perspective. In this conclusion, I discuss what such a survey of Varda's artistic *corps* reveals about her work at large and how these revelations transcend the limitations posed by other approaches to her work. In an effort to address these questions, I revisit briefly the previous four chapters in order to draw to the surface certain salient features of Varda's corpus that arise through a haptic analysis.

In the opening chapter on the representations of time in *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000) and *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961), I demonstrate the ways in which Varda orchestrates a reverberating tension between objective and subjective time, between "the metronome and the violin," to create a third, intersubjective time that is mediated by the body of the film. Through embodying, haptic images, through the presence of objects and through expressive and sentient camera movements, Varda brings about a corporeal and sensorial spectatorship

that intersubjectively engages with the time-based medium of film to create an exchange of embodied thought through which reflections on the notions of time and subjectivity filter.

The second chapter explores the haptic and embodied representations of memory in *Ulysse* (1982), *Les Plages d'Agnès* and *Les Cent et une nuits de Simon Cinéma* (1995) to demonstrate the ways in which Varda problematizes the act of remembering. In the three films analyzed in Chapter Two, Varda repeatedly endows the process of remembering with a material presence and inscribes it within the body, both human and filmic, as perceptive sites where memory is felt and enacted. What results is a material and corporeal film aesthetic that invites the spectator to intersubjectively co-construct the past with Varda and incites a crucial primary identification between the spectator and the film, an identification that offers insight into the unstable nature of memory. Varda insists on the material world and the body in her films in order to preserve memory, to enact it and to raise it to the surface of lived experience. She does so without falling prey to nostalgia. Rather, Varda's concern with memory is geared towards making the past present.

The subsequent chapter delves into the complex treatment of death and loss in *L'Opéra-Mouffe* (1958)*, Jacquot de Nantes* (1990) and *Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier* (2006). Varda's repeated material representations of death and dying, rather than being morbid or rooted in anxiety, serve instead to mark the tenacious presence of death, loss and absence in her films. She recognizes the inevitability of death, but she mitigates this knowledge by focusing on the lives of the living. A close analysis of the three works listed above reveals how Varda represents the close balance between life and death through her haptic aesthetics as her camera draws the spectator into intimate contact with her films and their mourning subjects, who are all beings "being-toward-death." Her engagement with the topos of death through the medium of film, which is itself a dying body, creates complex layers of embodied meaning. The chapter demonstrates the manner in which Varda makes use

of the medium to its fullest haptic capacity to create an intersubjective space charged with a perceptual exchange between the viewer and the film.

Finally, building on the analyses in the first three chapters, wherein I illustrate the material nature of Varda's films, their haptic aesthetics, their focus on the body and its "intervolvement" with the world as well as their ability to incite an embodied and intersubjective spectatorship, the fourth and last chapter posits her body of work as a *corps* that demands to be read phenomenologically from a haptic perspective. I maintain that Varda's oeuvre exists as a body "being-in-the-world" and closely linked to the body and the life of the filmmaker that produced it. Chapter Four delineates the dimensions of this *corps* as bound by a communicating network of intratextuality into a cohesive, meaningful body with which our own perceiving bodies come into contact.

What emerges from the preceding overview of the chapters in this project is that Varda's corpus not only exerts a presence in the world, but it is also firmly *present* to the world as a body among others. The wealth of haptic images, the prevalence of the body and the insistence on materiality all point to her films and her art installations as sites of contact with the world, touching and inviting touch. Varda's sentient camerawork plays no small part in establishing this contact. In the first three chapters, there emerges a constant link between the intersubjective film experience and the presence of the medium itself. This is not surprising given that the themes of time, memory and death that denote the human condition and that pervade Varda's films also serve to create an existential body of work within which these ontological and phenomenological concerns are taken up *through* the evolving medium of cinema itself, which asserts its *own* body through its technological presence.

Therefore, due to Varda's sentient filmmaking and the ways in which it establishes a contact with the world, I posit that her camera serves as a dexterous prosthetic hand. As the *"cinéaste du coin,"* her films take on a distinct artisan quality—they rely largely on "local"

material and are edited by the filmmaker herself in her boutique at Ciné-Tamaris. As a result, her films and the video footage for her installations develop as "handcrafted" works, the material for which is gleaned by her prosthetic hand. In a 2007 article, Homay King likens Varda's use of a DV camera to a paintbrush with which the filmmaker implements her process of *cinécriture*. King makes the link between filmmaking and painting based on the famous shot in *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* in which Varda poses as the gleaner in a living recreation of Jule Breton's 1877 painting *La Glaneuse*. In the carefully composed shot that reads like a tableau itself, the right side of the frame is dominated by Breton's enormous *glaneuse* standing against the backdrop of a field at sunset. The left side of the frame shows a tall door covered with a fabric in earth tones. Varda stands in front of this cloth, holding a sheaf of wheat on her shoulder, mirroring the posture of the *glaneuse* in the painting. In her other hand, she clasps her small DV camera (figure 1).[2]

Fig. 1

Using an analysis of the same shot, I posit however, that Varda's camera, whether digital or analogue, photographic or filmic, is not a tool but rather a hand, tactile, prehensile and creative, that it sculpts her filmic matter rather than painting it and that it serves as the point of contact between her works, the worlds they represent and the "cinesthetic subject" that perceives her images. In the shot of Varda imitating Breton's painting, wherein she aligns herself with the gleaners depicted in her film, the inclusion of the camera is not incongruous.

[2] Jules Breton, *La Glaneuse*, 1877, oil on canvas.

Her DV camera belongs in the image, not because it creates an association between filming and painting, but because it forms a direct link to the hand of the gleaner and becomes the prosthetic and profoundly "pro-aesthetic" hand with which Varda, as a filmmaker, gleans her artistic material.

The idea of Varda's camera functioning as a point of contact with the world recalls Vivian Sobchack's discussion of Don Ihde's 1977 work, *Experimental Phenomenology*. According to Sobchack, Ihde is concerned with "what occurs when experience is directed through, with, and among technological artifacts (machines) of which scientific instruments are a subclass."[3] She quotes a passage from another of Ihde's works wherein he uses the example of a piece of chalk, as the simplest of instruments, to illustrate his point. He writes:

> I experience the blackboard… *through* the chalk – I *feel* the smoothness or the roughness of the board *at the end of the chalk*. This is, of course, also Merleau-Ponty's blind man who experiences the "world" the end of his cane. If I begin to be descriptively rigorous, I find I must say that what I feel is felt locally at the end of the chalk or, better, at the chalk – blackboard junction. The "terminus" of my intentional extension into the world is on the blackboard.[4]

From Ihde's example, Sobchack extrapolates that

> for the filmmaker, the world (whether "real," drawn, or constructed in any other fashion) is experienced *through* the camera. It is seen and *felt* at the *end of the lens*. Or, more precisely, it is seen and felt at the *lens – world "junction*," the "terminus" of the filmmaker's intentional extension into the world (italics in the original).[5]

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[3] Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 175.

[4] Don Ihde, "The Experience of Technology," *Cultural Hermeneutics* 2 (1974): 271, quoted in Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye,* 175.

[5] Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye,* 175-176.

The notion of Varda's use of her portable camera as a prosthetic hand enters neatly into the discussion put forth by Sobchack in that the portable, hand-held instrument at the filmmaker's disposal serves as the "terminus" of her "intentional extension into the world." It is through this prosthetic hand that Varda haptically enables the spectator to feel the "smoothness" and "roughness" of the world, to feel its textures and contours and to intersubjectively engage with the range of experiences she depicts.

It is important to note that although the compact format of her digital camera facilitates its role as a prosthetic hand for Varda, she has always relied on portable technologies as a way of liberating her filmmaking and her film aesthetics. Varda, like most of her New Wave counterparts, made widespread use of lightweight handheld cameras and portable sound equipment to break free from the constraints of studio filming and to reduce costs. While the on-location, mobile style of filmmaking came to define the revolutionary New Wave aesthetic, for Varda, who quickly diverged from the movement to develop her own unique aesthetic, portable equipment came with the freedom to touch the world around her, not to merely move around in it, but to approach it and make contact. In an interview with Melissa Anderson, Varda discusses her choice of digital camera for the making of *Les Glaneurs*, linking it to her early filmmaking: "I picked the more sophisticated of the amateur models (the Sony DVCAM DSR 300). I had the feeling that this is the camera that would bring me back to the early short films I made in 1957 and 1958. I felt free at that time."[6]

In contrast to other New Wave filmmakers, Varda's aesthetics and her manipulation of the camera exhibited from the beginning a sensorial and sensual quality. This is not to say that her contemporaries were entirely "un-haptic" in their aesthetics—Truffaut's dizzying rotor scene in *Les Quatre cents coups* (1959) is an example that affirms this notion. However, Varda's New Wave counterparts tended in large part to film as if prolonging the gaze,

[6] Agnès Varda, "The Modest Gesture of the Filmmaker," interview by Melissa Anderson. *Cineaste* 26, no. 4 (2001): 24.

whereas Varda tended to film as if prolonging the touch.[7] Since her very first film, with her embodying camerawork, Varda has continually shown a concern for closing the distance between film, filmmaker and viewer, including them all as bodies within the folds of an intersubjective experience. Consequently, her films evince a materiality and a hapticity that result not just from the content matter of the images, but also from the ways in which the camera interacts with this matter. For these reasons, even in the transition from analogue to digital, from the material to the ephemeral, Varda's works have retained, if not increased, their intense materiality.

Scholars such as Homay King and Martine Beugnet have already treated the ways in which Varda's filmmaking asserts a materiality in *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* despite, or perhaps because of, her seemingly paradoxical use of a digital technology that is typically associated with the immaterial. Beugnet and King belong to a handful of haptic theorists whose fascinating explorations into the relationship between the digital and analogue refute the notion that the digital is necessarily or inevitably immaterial.[8] Before embarking on the possibility of a digital materiality, King first presents the point of view taken by D.N. Rodowick regarding the dematerialization that occurs in the shift toward the digital:

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[7] Although Varda has often been called the "mother" or "grandmother" of the New Wave, she was also associated with the Rive Gauche filmmakers along with Chris Marker and Alain Resnais. However, her involvement in these movements is brief and at times ambiguous because her aesthetics diverged greatly from those adopted by directors such as Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut and even by directors associated with the Rive Gauche's more political and bohemian style. Varda's initial formation in the arts rather than in cinema, her "plastic" aesthetics, her feminist engagement, her lack of concern for narrative, her desire to connect with people through authentic encounter, her impulse to touch the world and her blurring of fiction and documentary all set her apart from her New Wave counterparts.

[8] Other scholars include Laura Marks and Laura Mulvey. Marks (like Beugnet) maintains that even if the encoding capacities for digital technologies offer a more pristine replication of images, they are still susceptible to decay in the form of pixel loss and decreased definition resulting from repeated compression through what William Gibson calls "bit rot." See: Laura Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 157. Mulvey relies on a more philosophical argument and proposes that digital technologies, by allowing for "an easy return to the hidden stillness of the film frame […] restores to the moving image the heavy presence of passing time and mortality that Barthes and Bazin associate with the photograph," thus giving it a material existence as "being there." See: Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 65-66.

> *The Gleaners and I* is […] a profoundly materialist film, that is, a film about the conservation of tangible resources—yet it is made in the least material of available image formats, digital video. D. N. Rodowick has noted that the digital arts have come to be associated with the "abstract," the "ephemeral," and the "desubstantialized" […] Rodowick has also rightfully suggested that the digital arts are "the most radical instance yet of an old Cartesian dream."[9]

In support of their respective arguments for a digital materiality that arises precisely as a response to the ephemeral nature of new technologies, both Beugnet and King observe that Varda's emphasis on the material and the body in *Les Glaneurs* systematically offsets the immateriality associated with the digital. King asserts that, "Varda's film counters transcendence with immanence. It insists on matter, body, and duration, despite being made in a medium that is the logical outgrowth of the desire to overcome these things."[10] Beugnet goes further to propose that the

> ongoing emphasis on the corporeal offers itself as a conscious or implicit response to the growing sense of immateriality, arguably endemic to the age of digital encoding and divide […] As we will see however, the digital age appears to bring its own reconfiguration – a corporeality that is different, yet, as the emergence of contemporary haptic aesthetics emphasizes, still tangible.[11]

While Varda's haptic aesthetics have long been a feature of her works, her shift to digital technologies appears to have heightened the material and corporeal nature of her works. Rather than relegating her films to the disembodying and dematerializing realm of the digital,

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[9] Homay King, "Matter, Time, and the Digital: Varda's *The Gleaners and I*," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 24, no. 5 (2007): 421, quoting D.N. Rodowick, *Reading the Figural, or Philosophy after the New Media* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 212 and 39.

[10] King, "Matter, Time and the Digital," 422.

[11] Martine Beugnet, "Encoding Loss: Corporeality and (im)materiality in the age of the digital," *Studies in French Cinema* 12, no.3 (2012): 258.

Varda's DV camera allows her to push her haptic and material aesthetics to ever further limits by functioning as a versatile and prehensile point of contact between filmmaker/artist and the world experiences that she represents.

Indeed, Varda's last two films, *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* and *Les Plages d'Agnès,* her recent exhibits and her latest televised mini-series, *Agnès de ci de là Varda* (2011)*,* all make use of digital technologies to assert an even more profoundly haptic aesthetic than that exhibited in her analogue works. Her use of a small, handheld DV camera firstly offers her increased mobility, enabling her to travel around France and the rest of the world in search of subject matter. It also allows her to enter into closer contact with her filmed subjects, to penetrate the intimate worlds they occupy and to capture these spaces with her prosthetic hand at the "junction" between film and world. The following section provides a series of examples to illustrate this point.

Varda's first major foray into digital technologies was in the making of *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse.* As described in Chapter One, in the film, Varda repeatedly turns her portable camera on herself in the reflexive action of filming "d'une main mon autre main." The digital camera at her disposal thus permits her not only an intimate proximity to her own aging hand and graying hair, but it also allows her to distort these images, bringing attention both to the process of filmmaking and to the ways in which digital capacities can undermine their own purported concern for pristine and flawless capture. The portable camera also offers her increased mobility in her search for fellow gleaners. From potato fields to museums to vineyards, Varda tirelessly travels around France gleaning images in the grandest of the "modest gestures" that she associates with gleaners who humbly lean down to recuperate their found objects with their hands. Her newfound digital prosthetic hand is fascinated by the textures in the world around her, capturing in extreme close-up a range of found objects, flowers, plants and the dry cracked earth of the potato fields. Varda pays special attention to

the potatoes that people collect from fields where they are dumped by producers who deem them unfit for commercial sale due to their irregular form (figure 2). With her prosthetic hand, she gleans images of her other hand sifting through the piles of potatoes and gleaning those that are the most misshapen, preferring the ones that come in the shape of a heart.

Fig. 2

The potatoes that Varda gleans come to symbolize a refusal of the *materialistic* consumer culture that devalues the old and encourages widespread waste. In fact, they take on such importance that Varda treats them as relics, collecting them, letting them decompose beyond recognition and filming the entire process of their simultaneous decay and regeneration. With these relics, she counters a materialistic culture with a material aesthetic that reorients a value onto the discarded goods rejected by society. Her extremely haptic footage of these potatoes, which caresses their wrinkled and spiny skins in tight close-up shots that turn each one into a fantastical landscape, provided the material for her 2003 exhibit *Patatutopia.* The main installation in the show displays a striking combination of the material and the digital. A three-channel video of the footage is projected onto a screen, creating a triptych of alternating and hypnotic images of potatoes at various stages of decay (figure 3). After a moment, the spectator forgets that she is looking at footage of ordinary albeit decomposing tubers. Absorbed by the sheer materiality of the images, she is left to wander the surface of an oniric topography (figure 4).

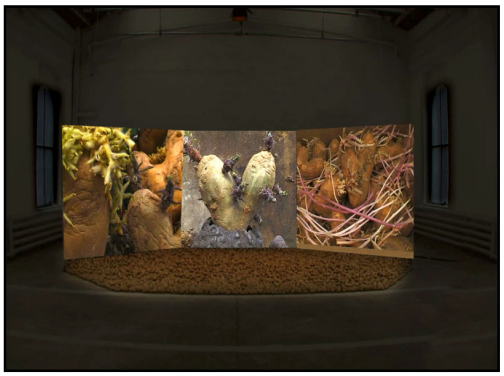

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Another fascinating way in which Varda creates a confrontation, or perhaps a dialogue, between the digital and the material results from the physical disposition of the installation. The space at the foot of the triptych screen is densely lined with 700 kilos of real potatoes, sturdy, solid and material before the digital image. It is important to note that this blanket of potatoes, resembling a rocky beach that separates us from an ocean of moving images, creates a physical distance between the spectators and the screen, yet Varda's haptic cinematography succeeds in pulling them into close proximity with the images. In this way, the installation serves as a prime example of the "different" yet "tangible" corporeality that, according to Beugnet, emerges in the shift from the analogue to the digital.

As in *Les Glaneurs,* the use of a digital camera in her last feature film *Les Plages d'Agnès* allows Varda to easily penetrate spaces that otherwise would have required more effort, equipment and crewmembers, all which would have detracted from the sense of spontaneity that pervades the film. A prime example from the work occurs when she visits the couple who purchased her old childhood home in Ixelles, Brussels. Varda's manipulation of a handheld digital camera and the resulting subjective, point of view shots that meander through this sequence invite the spectator to explore the house with her.

As she and her camera enter the front door, with the viewer firmly in tow, we see a shadowy reflection of Varda in a glass pane, camera in hand (figure 5). Here, as in the opening sequence of the film, in which she and her crew are shown installing a series of mirrors and frames on a beach, Varda includes an image of herself holding her digital camera

(figure 6). In the opening sequence, filmed in part with a larger camera, we catch glimpses of her employing her compact DV camera to film objects at close range, to approach them and touch them with her prosthetic hand in ways that are inaccessible to the bigger instruments used by her crew. In the sequence at her childhood home, she again shows herself with her camera to establish that she is the one filming, although at times crudely "comme une brute," and to convey that she is feeling her way through this space that is at once past and present. From the perspective of her subjective camera, the spectator climbs the stairs with Varda and takes a tour of the apartment. Towards the end of the sequence she interviews the current owners of the apartment and discovers that the husband is a *ferrovipathe* or model train enthusiast. He proudly shows her his collection, which she handles and explores with her prosthetic hand (figures 7 and 8). The subjective point of view shots accompanied by a slow tracking enables the spectator to touch these objects alongside Varda.

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

A final example of Varda's ability to gain close proximity to her subjects and the material objects in her films comes from *Agnès de ci de là Varda.* In episode three of the mini-series, she pays a visit to the Grand Palais in Paris to film Christian Boltanski's exhibit *Personnes* (2010) and to interview the artist. One of the most impressive installations in this

exhibition features an enormous mountain made up of 50 tons of used clothing (figures 9-10). A large mechanical claw that hangs over the pile periodically descends to grab "handfuls" of clothes, lifting them high before releasing them down in a continual reconfiguration of the installation. This piece fascinates Varda and her camera and with good reason. Its reuse of material, its layered and textured surface and the prehensile action of the mechanical hand grasping at the mound of clothes all resonate with her haptic aesthetics. Additionally, the installation, which pays homage to the victims of the Shoah, aligns itself seamlessly with Varda's propensity for materializing loss and absence. In this regard, Boltanksi's massive pyramid of clothes also evokes Alain Resnais and Jean Cayrol's *Nuit et brouillard* (1955), specifically resonating with the excruciatingly haptic images of the monstrous piles of shoes taken from concentration camp victims and stored in the brimming Nazi stockrooms (figure 11). In a slow tracking that recalls Resnais' camera movements, Varda films this haunting mass of clothes at close range, tracing it with her prosthetic hand and reaching into its material folds. Drawn to this impressive monument of materialized loss, Varda's camera pulls the spectator in with her to explore the installation's body, its creases and its contours, thereby relying on the versatility of "ephemeral" digital technologies to bring the solidity of objects and their haptic presence to the forefront of the image.

Fig. 9

Fig.10

Fig. 11

One important consequence of Varda's use of her camera as a prosthetic hand, whether in the form of a lightweight analogue camera or its digital counterpart, is that her concern with the material and the corporeal roots her body of work firmly in the present.[12] Ultimately, an exploration of Varda's haptic aesthetics leaves us with a particular overarching sense of her corpus—that it is unequivocally and phenomenologically *present* to the world. Even in her representations of time and her reflections on memory, death and loss, Varda retains this tendency. With haptic images and a focus on the experiences of the lived body in the world, she continually guides the viewer into the present moment. The examples of this impulse abound in her works—In *Les Glaneurs,* Varda may see the passage of time in her aging hand but she acknowledges this notion without pining for the past or fearing the future. She accepts her wrinkled and spotted flesh, unrecognizable as it is to her, as a chiasmic and phenomenological link to the present world. Likewise, despite the fact that her hair and hands signal that the end is near, she speaks to old age, evoking it as a character with which she is imbricated in the present. In another example, Cléo may contemplate her death, but, because the film is presented in real-time, her experience is firmly anchored in the now. Similarly, Varda's reflections on memory typically are not driven by a nostalgic desire to return to the past, but rather by the need to question her relationship to memory and the pitfalls that it

[12] In her analysis of *Murs Murs* (1980), Bénézet notes a similar tendency. She observes the importance of encounters with others in Varda's works and writes that in *Mur murs, "*Varda films the 'here and now' of her encounters" with the people of Los Angeles in order to "lay emphasis on the fleeting nature of 'being together' and on the question of time more generally," as well as to preserve the material trace of these encounters through film. (Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda,* 79.) I propose that the impulse for filming the "here and now" is not limited to only *Murs murs,* but to the majority of Varda's works.

poses for her in the present. Finally, even though Varda openly mourns Jacques Demy in a number of her films, she does not attempt to recapture her past with him. Rather, she materializes her loss within her actual lived experience, as demonstrated by the empty chair occupying the space next to her in the final scene of *Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier*.

What this Merleau-Pontian "intervolvement" with the present, material world that Varda exhibits in her works illustrates is that before undertaking feminist or otherwise political readings of her films, it is important, as the previous chapters have shown, to first engage intersubjectively and haptically with the humanity behind her corpus and with the ways in which her aesthetics gently push against the world, depicting it as it is, without judgment. Once we recognize the validity and significance of such an approach, the multitude of other perspectives on Varda's work, whether they are motivated by feminist, political, historical or social concerns, can only take on added richness and increased dimensions of meaning. Additionally, a haptic approach to film at large has far-reaching ramifications in an age where the very notion of cinema is changing due to rapidly progressing digital technologies that transform our relationship to the world around us and demand ever-evolving aesthetics as wells as a more varied discourse on those aesthetics. Today, confronted with increasingly ephemeral digital media that threaten to render evanescent the very body of film, the need to connect with the moving image, whether on the silver screen or in the white cube of the museum, to grasp it with our prehensile eye, becomes more pressing than ever.

Filmography

All films directed by Agnès Varda and produced by Ciné-Tamaris unless otherwise noted. In DVD format as part of her box set collection: Varda, Agnès. *Tout(e) Varda.* Released November 21, 2012. Paris: Arté Editions & Ciné-Tamaris Vidéo.

***La Pointe Courte* (1954)**
80 mins
Tamaris Films

***O Saisons, ô châteaux (*1957)**
22 minutes
Films de la Pléiade

***L'Opéra-Mouffe (*1958)**
17 mins

***Du Côté de la Côte* (1958)**
24 min
Argos Films

***Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961)**
90 mins

***Les Fiancés du pont MacDonald* (1961)**
3 mins

***Salut les Cubains!* (1962-1963)**
30 mins

***Le Bonheur* (1964)**
85 mins
Ciné-Tamaris, Parc-Film

***Elsa la Rose* (1965)**
20 mins
Ciné-Tamaris, Pathé Cinéma

***Les Créatures* (1965)**
93 mins
Parc-Film, Madeleine Films

***Loin du Vietnam* (1967)**
115mins
Co-directed with Joris Ivens, Chris Maker
Claude Lelouch, Jean-Luc Godard,
William Klein, Alain Resnais
SLON Films

Oncle Yanco (*1967)
22 mins

Black Panthers* (1968)
30 mins

Lions Love (…and Lies)* (1969)
110 mins

***Daguerréotypes* (1975)**
80 mins
Ciné-Tamaris, INA, ZDF

***Réponses des femmes* (1975)**
6 mins
Ciné-Tamaris , Antenne 2

***Plaisirs d'amour en Iran* (1976)**
6 mins

***L'une chante, l'autre pas* (1976)**
120 mins
Ciné-Tamaris, SFP, INA,
Contrechamp, Paradise Film,
Population Film

Murs Murs* (1980)
81 mins

Documenteur* (1981)
64 mins

***Ulysse* (1982)**
22 mins
Garance

***Les Dites Cariatides* (1984)**
13 mins

***7p., cuis., s. de b. (à saisir)* (1984)**
27 mins

***Sans toit ni loi* (1985)**
105 mins
Ciné-Tamaris, Films A2

***T'as de beaux escaliers, tu sais* (1986)**
3 mins

***Jane B. par Agnès V.* (1987)**
97 mins
Ciné-Tamaris, La Sept

***Kung Fu Master* (1987)**
80 mins

Jacquot de Nantes* (1990)*
118 mins

Les Demoiselles ont eu 25 ans* (1992)*
63 mins

L'univers de Jacques Demy* (1993)*
88 mins

***Les Cents et une nuits de Simon Cinéma* (1994)**
104 mins

***Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000)**
82 mins

***Deux ans après* (2002)**
64 mins

***Le Lion volatil* (2003)**
12 mins

***Ydessa, les ours et etc…* (2004)**
44 mins

***Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier* (2006)**
69 mins
Ciné-Tamaris, Arte France Cinéma

***Les Plages d'Agnès* (2008)**
110 mins
Ciné-Tamaris, Arte France Cinéma

***Agnès de ci de là Varda* (2011)**
Television Documentary Series
5 episodes of 45 mins
Ciné-Tamaris, Arte France Cinéma

* Films made in the United States
** Films on Jacques Demy and his work

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Appendix I

Complete entry for the word *corps* in *Le Petit Robert,* s.v. "corps," accessed August 2, 2014. http://www.lerobert.com/dictionnaires-generalistes/dictionnaire-le-petit-robert-2015.html.

corps [kɔʀ] **nom masculine**

ÉTYM. fin IXe ◊ du latin *corpus*

Famille étymologique ⇨ C**ORPS**.

I. LE CORPS. PARTIE MATÉRIELLE DES ÊTRES ANIMÉS 1. L'organisme humain, par opposition à l'esprit, à l'âme. ➞ **chair.** *« Le corps exprime toujours l'esprit dont il est l'enveloppe »* (Rodin). *Souffrir dans son corps* **(**➞ 1. **physique, somatique).** LOC. *Se donner corps et âme* [kɔʀzeɑm] *à qqn, à qqch.,* tout entier, sans réserve. *Avoir l'âme chevillée* au corps. Une âme saine dans un corps sain* (cf. lat. *Mens sana in corpore sano*). *Être sain de corps et d'esprit.* ◆ (fin XIe) Le corps humain après la mort. ➞ **cadavre, dépouille.** *Levée* du corps. Mettre, porter un corps en terre. Il a légué son corps à la science. On a retrouvé le corps de la victime dans un bois.* LOC. *Pas de corps, pas de victime.*▫ (milieu XIIe) SPÉCIALEMENT *Le corps et le sang du Christ.* ➞ **eucharistie. 2.** Le corps considéré comme le siège des sentiments, des sensations, de la sensualité. (1863) LOC. *Être folle de son corps,* sensuelle, libertine. *Faire des folies de son corps. Avoir le diable* au corps. Faire commerce de son corps.* ➞ se **prostituer. 3.** Organisme humain. *Étude du corps.* ➞ **anatomie, anthropologie, anthropométrie, physiologie.** *Les parties du corps : membres* (bras, avant-bras, main, cuisse, jambe, pied), *tête* (crâne, cou, face), *tronc* (épaule, buste, poitrine, sein, dos, thorax, hanche, ceinture, bassin, abdomen, ventre). ◆ Le corps, considéré dans sa globalité, SPÉCIALEMENT dans son aspect extérieur, sa conformation, sans considération du visage. *La forme, les lignes du corps. Soins du corps.* ➞ **corporel.** *Crème pour le corps. Les attitudes, les gestes, les mouvements du corps. Trembler, frissonner de tout son corps. Avoir un beau corps* (cf. Être bien bâti, bien fait, FAM. bien fichu, bien foutu, bien gaulé, bien roulé). *Un corps d'athlète, de déesse. Corps bien proportionné. Un corps déformé. Exercice du corps.* ➞ **gymnastique.**▫ PSYCHOL. *L'image du corps* (cf. Schéma corporel*). ▫ LOC. *N'avoir rien dans le corps :* être à jeun. *Un aliment qui tient au corps,* très nourrissant. *Pleurer toutes les larmes de son corps,* abondamment. *Travailler* qqn au corps.* ◆ **Loc. adv.** (milieu XIIe) **CORPS À CORPS :** en serrant le corps de l'adversaire contre le sien, dans une lutte. *Combattre, lutter corps à corps.*▫ **N. m.** (1888) *Un corps à corps. Se jeter dans le corps à corps,* dans la mêlée, dans la bataille.▫ (1580) **À CORPS PERDU :** fougueusement, impétueusement. *Se lancer à corps perdu dans une entreprise.* **4.** SPÉCIALEMENT (fin XIe) Le tronc, par opposition aux membres, à la tête. *Une grosse tête sur un petit corps. Les bras le long du corps. Entrer dans l'eau jusqu'au milieu du corps.* ➞ **mi-corps** (à). *Saisir qqn par le milieu du corps.* ➞ **bras-le-corps** (à). *Robe qui moule le corps.* ➞ **moulant.** *Vêtement près du corps,* très ajusté. ◆ PAR EXTENSION (milieu XIIe) Partie de certains vêtements qui recouvrent le corps au niveau du torse ou de la ceinture. ➞ **corsage, corselet, corset.** *Corps d'armure, de cuirasse.* **5.** (Dans des loc.) Homme, individu. (1680) *Garde* du corps.*▫ DR. *Contrainte* par corps. Séparation* de corps.* (fin XIIIe) *Prise* de corps.*▫ (1613) *À son corps défendant.* ➞ **défendre.**▫ FIG. *Il passerait sur le corps de tout le monde pour parvenir à ses fins. Il faudra me passer sur le corps.* **6.** (1680) LOC. *Avoir du corps,* se dit d'un vin **(**➞ **corsé)** qui donne à la bouche une sensation de plénitude (teneur en alcool, vinosité, tanin); d'un tissu, d'un papier assez serré, dense (opposé à *creux*) (cf. Avoir de la main*). (début XVIIIe, Fénelon) LOC. *Donner corps à une idée,* la rendre plus forte ou l'incarner. ◆ *Prendre corps* **(**➞ **forme,** 1. **tournure) :** prendre un aspect sensible, réel. *Projet qui prend corps.* ➞ se **concrétiser,** se **dessiner,** se **matérialiser,** se **préciser.**

▫ **FAIRE CORPS :** adhérer, ne faire qu'un. FIG. *Faire corps avec une idée. « Mon problème est de retrouver le moment privilégié où mon œuvre a fait corps avec moi »* (J. Laurent).

II. PARTIE PRINCIPALE DE QQCH. (XIIIe) **1.** Partie principale (d'une chose). LOC. *Navire perdu corps et biens* [kɔʀzebjɛ̃], complètement (le navire, les marchandises, les personnes). *Couler, sombrer, périr corps et biens. Le corps d'un bâtiment* (opposé à *aile, avant-corps*). (1590) *Corps de logis*. Le corps de ferme et les dépendances.* ▫ *Corps de bibliothèque, d'armoire. Buffet deux-corps. Corps de pompe :* le cylindre. *Corps de chauffe d'une chaudière. Carburateur double-corps,* à deux diffuseurs*. **2.** CALLIGR. *Corps d'une lettre :* le trait principal qui dessine, qui forme la lettre. ▫ (1528) TYPOGR. *Corps d'une lettre :* la dimension d'un caractère d'imprimerie (mesurée en points). *La force de corps d'un caractère. Texte composé en corps 9.* **3.** (1754) DR. *Le corps du délit*.*

III. UN CORPS. OBJET MATÉRIEL. (XIIIe) **1.** (milieu XIIIe) *Corps céleste.* ➙ **astre. 2.** (XVIe) Tout objet matériel caractérisé par ses propriétés physiques. *Volume, masse d'un corps. La chute des corps,* étudiée en mécanique. *La substance des corps.* ➙ **matière.** *Corps solide. Corps fluides* (liquides, gaz). *« Qui donc irait faire grief au physicien d'isoler la pesanteur des autres qualités des corps qu'il étudie et de négliger le parfum, la couleur »* (Paulhan). ◆ (1585) CHIM. *Corps simple.* ➙ **élément.** *Les atomes, les molécules d'un corps. Corps pur,* dont toutes les molécules sont identiques. *Corps pur composé.* ➙ **combinaison.** *États allotropiques* d'un corps.*▫ *Corps gras :* matière grasse. ➙ **graisse.** ◆ PHYS. **CORPS NOIR :** corps idéal absorbant totalement le rayonnement électromagnétique quelle que soit sa fréquence. **3.** Élément anatomique que l'on peut étudier isolément (organe, etc.). *Corps calleux*. Corps caverneux*. Corps jaune*. Corps strié*. Corps vitré*. Corps thyroïde.* ➙ **glande.** ▫ *Introduction d'un corps étranger* dans l'organisme.* **4. A**LG. Anneau unitaire*. *Un corps possède au moins deux éléments, 0 et 1. Corps commutatif,* dont la multiplication est commutative.

IV. ENSEMBLE ORGANISÉ (fin XIIIe) **1.** Groupe formant un ensemble organisé sur le plan des institutions. ⍰ **assemblée, association, communauté, compagnie,** 2. **ensemble, organe, société.** ▫ (1585) *Le corps politique.* ⍰ **état.** (1790) *Le corps électoral :* l'ensemble des électeurs. ▫ *Les corps constitués*. Les grands corps de l'État :* le Conseil d'État, la Cour des comptes, l'inspection des Finances, la diplomatie, etc.; les hauts fonctionnaires qui en font partie. ⍰ **corpsard.** *Élève de l'E. N. A. qui sort dans les grands corps,* dans les premiers. *Corps de la magistrature.* ⍰ **justice.** *Corps municipal.* ⍰ **municipalité. 2.** HIST. *Les corps du commerce et de l'industrie. Corps de marchands.* ⍰ **communauté, corporation, métier. 3.** (1434) MOD. Compagnie, groupe organisé. (1817) *Le corps diplomatique*. Le corps enseignant*. Le corps médical*. Le corps des ingénieurs des Ponts et Chaussées.* ▫ *Corps de métier :* ensemble organisé de personnes exerçant la même profession. SPÉCIALEMENT *Corps de métier, corps d'état :* métiers du bâtiment. *Différents corps de métiers ont travaillé à la construction de cet immeuble.* ▫ (1771) *Avoir l'esprit* de corps.* **4.** (1469) MILIT. Unité administrativement indépendante (bataillon, régiment). *Rejoindre son corps.* ▫ *Corps d'armée,* formé de plusieurs divisions. *Général de corps d'armée* (quatre étoiles). *Corps expéditionnaire*. Corps franc*.* ◆ *Corps de garde*.* **5.** (1835) DANSE *Corps de ballet*.* **6.** Recueil de textes, d'ouvrages. ⍰ **corpus.** *Corps des lois.* ⍰ 2. **ensemble.**

Appendix II

A full list of Varda's art exhibits from 2003-2014, accessed December 1, 2014 on: Varda, Agnès. *Triptyques Atypiques* press release, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, January 2014. http://www.galerieobadia.com/show.php?show_id=2665&showpress=1&language=2&p=1&g=3

Solo exhibitions

2014
- *Triptyques Atypiques*, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris
- A*gnes Varda in Californialand*, LACMA, Los Angeles, USA

2013
- Galerie d'art du Conseil Général des Bouches du Rhône, Aix en Provence
- *The twin shores of Agnès Varda,* Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporaneao, Seville
- *Art on screen, a conversation with Agnès Varda* (Conference), The Getty Center, Los Angeles

2012
- *Plages et pages chinoises*, CAFA Museum, Beijing
- *Y'A PAS QUE LA MER*, Musée Paul Valéry, Sète

2010
- *Portraits brisés et Mer calme*, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Brussels
- *La Cabane sur la plage (qui est aussi une cabine de projection)*, Art Unlimited, Art|41|Basel 2010
- *Patatutopia,* Orangerie, Köln

2009
- *Bord de mer et Le tombeau de Zgougou*, Musée Serralvès Porto, Portugal
- *La mer …etsetera*, Centre Régional d'Art Contemporain Languedoc-Roussillon, Sète
- *Les Veuves de Noirmoutier*, Carpenter Center for Visual Art, Harvard USA

2006
- *L'Île et Elle*, Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, Paris

Group exhibitions

2015
- *Regards Croisés*, Maison Victor Hugo, Paris, France

2013
- Marseille-Provence 2013, Capitale européenne de la culture,

2012
- *Hors les murs*, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Brussels

2010
- *Portraits*, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Brussels

2009
- Biennale de Lyon, Lyon
- Moscow on the Move, Centre d'art Garage, Moscou

2007
- S*elest'Ar*t, FRAC Alsace, Sélestat
- *Transphotographiques*, Tri postal, Lille
- FRAC, Metz

2006
- SMAK, Gand, Belgium
2005
- *Le Lieu Unique*, Nantes
- Centre d'Art de Chamarande, Chamarande

2004
- Haus der Kunst, Munich
- Biennale d'Art, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Taïpei

2003
- Section *Utopia Station*, Biennale de Venise, Venise