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Agnès Varda between 2017 and 2019

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Agnès Varda in *The Gleaners and I.* (Image from Caroline Leone, *Cléo: A Journal of Film and Feminism*)

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Abstract

In 2017, Agnès Varda, French film director, was awarded an honorary Oscar, in addition to her documentary, *Faces Places,* being nominated for Best Documentary feature at the Academy Awards. She graced the cover of the Winter 2018 issue of *The Gentlewoman,* in addition to the cover of lifestyle magazine, *PUSS PUSS,* and had her first ever traveling retrospective in the UK in 2018. In Holly Brubach's profile of Varda for *The Gentlewoman,* she states: "A familiar figure for decades on the indie circuit, Agnès has only recently ascended to a higher degree of fame" (Brubach 225). This thesis explores the possible reasons as to why, and how, Agnès Varda gained more attention at the end of her lifetime, between 2017 and 2019, up until her death in March 2019.

This thesis focuses on the director's three most recent documentaries: *The Gleaners and I* (2000), *The Beaches of Agnès* (2008), and *Faces Places* (2017). By closely analyzing the three films, with a firm approach in persona studies, this thesis explores how Varda has shaped her persona through her films, and how her films have shaped her persona. Coupling this approach with theories from feminist and film studies, these close analyses offer possible reasons as to why the filmmaker gained such attention between 2017 and 2019. This thesis close reads her documentaries in order to understand how Varda's films have created her persona, and vice versa.

Introduction

> *"But to the extent that I understood the cinema, even if I hadn't seen very many films, I always felt it was illustrating, a novel or a play, something like that. I immediately felt that the cinema had to be contemporary. I needed to invent* my *cinema.'"*
> (Kline 139)

A Tribute to Varda

On the morning of March 29, 2019, *Le Figaro* reported Agnès Varda's death at the age of ninety (Le Figaro with AFP). Before her death, the filmmaker was still working, as, in February 2019, she "presented her latest film, '*Varda by Agnès*,' at the Berlin Film Festival and received the honorary Berlinale Camera award" (Chu). In a tribute to her career, movie critic, Peter DeBruge "said that Varda's oeuvre bore an unmistakably personal stamp. 'Where other directors make movies, Varda crafts personal works of art, revealing dimensions of herself in the process'" (Chu).

Varda's work, while often including personal dimensions, almost always is part of a collective. While her work has been characterized as autobiographical, that does not necessarily mean that her work has been strictly a self-portrait (McFadden). She stated in her 2008 film, *The Beaches of Agnès,* that: "The feminist struggle had to be collective in order to exist" (01:26:22). This recognition that, without the collective, the fight cannot exist, has been a driving force in Varda's oeuvre. Her work is characterized by keeping her eyes and her ears open: "There is a recurring affect in Varda's films and more specifically in her identification with her marginal protagonists and background figures, as if it were an image of herself that both captivates her imagination and directs her inquisitive, empathetic eye toward other places and people: the stories of forgotten landscapes and ways of life in *La Pointe Courte*, a pregnant woman

overwhelmed and alone in the throng of *L'Opéra-Mouffe*, and Mona, the emblem of the ultimate abandonment of self-abnegation and failure of the social contract" (Conway 71).

Her work, while reflecting herself, is also a reflection of society. In an interview about Mona, the protagonist of her 1984 film, *Vagabond,* she stated: "One day, in a public debate, a French professor said, 'This is entirely like the ending of a Stendhal novel...' Which one--*Le Rouge et le noir*? He says, 'A novel's character is a mirror who walks along the road.' That's extraordinary. Because we learn much more about this xenophobic society than about her. [...] The theme of the mirror interests me because Mona is the mirror of a society that rejects her. And she is nothing. She is a denial and she is nothing more than the walking mirror" (Varda 156).

Varda's work in fiction film, documentary, and installation art have focused around herself, but herself in connection to, and a part of, a collective. What is key to Varda, and sets her apart, I argue, is her propensity for saying, *I don't know, but I want to learn.* For example, what struck me in my research on Varda was how little knowledge she had about cinema before directing her first film, *La Pointe Courte.* As she said: "I didn't go to the cinema. I'd seen very few films. [...] So, I had no cinema culture, strictly none. No film school, no conferences. No internship or stint as a P.A. It's so unbelievable that when Alain Resnais was editing *La Pointe Courte* he asked me, 'Have you been to the *cinémathèque* very often?' I didn't even know there was a *cinémathèque* in Paris on Avenue Messine. I'd never been" (Varda 134).

It strikes me that Varda, who is often dubbed the "Grandmother of the French New Wave," claims, herself, to have had no cinema culture (Neupert). However, this is what, I would suggest, makes Varda's work unique. As Richard Neupert notes: "Her background in art, literature, and theater was much stronger than her knowledge of film history or techniques, so it

has always struck historians as somewhat bizarre that, in contrast to the wild *cinéphilia* of people such as Astruc, Melville, or the *Cahiers* critics, Varda initially began filmmaking from a rather naive perspective" (Neupert 57). However, Varda simply said, "So why did I want to make films? Let me think of a reason: I believe that I liked photography, but I also like dialogue. Not necessarily talking, blabbing, but the idea of some kind of dialogue between people meant a lot to me" (Varda 134).

While other *Nouvelle Vague* directors prided their work on their film knowledge, Varda did the opposite. Godard made proclamations about cinema, saying that, "All you need for a movie is a gun and a girl," but Varda was driven by her curiosity, and her propensity for keeping her eyes and her ears open (Elkin). This thesis seeks to examine some of the reasons as to why Varda gained more contemporary attention near the end of her lifetime, between 2017 and 2019.

Varda: the Honorary Oscar

In 2018, Agnès Varda's film, *Faces Places,* was nominated for Best Documentary Feature at the Academy Awards. Although Varda was unable to attend the Academy Award's Nominees Luncheon, her co-director, JR, "brought the French filmmaker with him [...] in the form of a cutout" (Gardner). JR created three different cutouts for the event, documenting their journey together via Instagram Stories, and, at the luncheon, "the cutout got face time with Spielberg, who gushed, 'Agnès, you are the tallest littlest person I've ever met; your films are so tall and huge and you fill the room wherever you go'" (Gardner).

Varda has been at the center of attention since 2017. While she has been a "familiar figure for decades on the indie circuit, Agnès has only recently ascended to a higher degree of celebrity. She's a fashion icon ('At 89, Agnès Varda Stopped Our Hearts in Gucci,' *Vogue*'s US website

raved about her red-carpet ensemble, a rose-printed tunic and trousers border in stripes). She's a role model for women in film, exalted as a pioneer in Hollywood now that the #MeToo movement has toppled a handful of kingpins. She's an art world darling, mounting installations at international fairs, galleries and museums" (Brubach). Varda has been on the cover of the Winter 2018 edition of the fashion magazine, *The Gentlewoman,* and on the cover of culture and lifestyle magazine's January 2019 issue of *PUSS, PUSS.*

She has been at the center of headlines claiming that the director is "Still Going Places," and that she is "'still alive, [and] still curious'" (Schwartz, Hattenstone). She was present on the steps at the 2018 Cannes Film Festival, with headlines stating: "Cate Blanchett, Agnès Varda lead 82 women in silent Cannes red carpet protest" (Goodfellow). Her film, *Faces Places*, was nominated for an Academy Award in the section of Best Documentary Feature, while Varda, herself, was awarded an Honorary Oscar.

Although Varda has been making films since the mid-1950s, she has been at the center of more contemporary attention since 2017. The figure, below, tracks Varda's nominations and wins for awards she has received *as a director,* while her films, themselves, have received different amounts of nominations and awards. These statistics strictly have to do with awards she has gained as a director. As seen below, between 1958 (her first nomination at the Cannes Film Festival) and 2000, she won twenty awards. Between 2000 and 2010, she won twenty-five awards. Between 2010 and 2019, she won 41 awards, with fourteen nominations and wins in 2017, and fifteen in 2018. After each of her documentaries was released, each film garnered more attention and awards (IMDB).

Agnès Varda: Nominations and Awards

1958	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1977	1981	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1995	2000
I	I	I	I	I	I	III	II	I	I	IIII	I	I	I	IIIII

2001	2002	2003	2004	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
IIIII	II	II	I	II	IIIIII II	III	I	I	II	II	I	IIIIII IIIIII II	IIIIII IIIIII III	II

(Figures from IMDB)

For example, between 2000 and 2001, she won ten awards, with the majority of the awards recognizing her 2000 documentary, *The Gleaners and I.* The same pattern follows after *The Beaches of Agnès* was released in 2008, as she won thirteen awards between 2008 and 2010. However, with the release of *Faces Places* in 2017, she was nominated for, and won a total of, twenty-nine awards, including her nominations at the Academy Awards.

Between 2017 and 2019, Varda has garnered more attention, not only on the film circuit, but in contemporary news and media. As Brubach stated in *The Gentlewoman*: “At 90, Agnès Varda suddenly finds herself exalted as a role model for women in film; a fashion icon; loved by the art world -- never mind her 40 films as a pioneering director” (Brubach). How is it, though, that despite Varda’s work as a film director since the 1950s, has she been gaining more contemporary attention, since 2017? This thesis seeks to explore some of the possible reasons as to why, and how, Varda has gained more attention within the last two years of her lifetime.

Scholarly Attention Towards Varda

In *The Cinema of Agnès Varda,* Delphine Bénézet states that there has also been a resurgence in academic interest in Varda between 2007 and 2012. Bénézet claims that this

resurgence is due to three separate but interrelated reasons: the embracing of theoretical changes (i.e. the phenomenological and ethical turn), grounding interpretations in archival research, and Varda's shift to, and work in, art installations (Bénézet 4). While Bénézet claims that scholars tend to focus on Varda's work to suit their needs (i.e. using *Cléo from 5 to 7* or *Vagabond* in feminist studies), Bénézet sets to review "Varda's career as a whole with a focus on her neglected films, and offers an original perspective on her career" (Bénézet 13). While Bénézet's work contributes to Varda as a film director, she also notes how: "In the flesh, Varda is also an engaging, obstinate and witty figure" (Bénézet 4).

In *Gendered Frames, Embodied Cameras,* McFadden argues that French female filmmakers "turn the camera to their bodies as a way to show the process of artistic creation and to produce themselves as filmmakers and artists in their work from 1987 to 2009" (McFadden 10). In Varda's 2008 film, *The Beaches of Agnès,* "Varda explicitly lays out her artistic and aesthetic path [...] as a way to synthesize the influences that ultimately produced her as both a filmmaker and social actor" (McFadden 46). Furthermore, "Alan Williams noted that 'Varda's films, documentary and fiction alike, have been a form of intellectual autobiography. In them one can follow both her personal and political issue--in particular, the development of her *feminis*--and her formal and aesthetic interests (generally derived not from mainstream cinema but from literature, theatre, photography, and painting).'" (McFadden 45).

Similarly, in Kelly Conway's 2015 book, *Agnès Varda,* Conway focuses on "Varda's own trajectory, through her career and in the world," noting that her study "traces stages of Varda's journey, each place shaping her art and her vision of the world, shifting her identification between visitor and local" (Conway 2). As McFadden also stated, Varda's filmic inspirations are

not so much from mainstream cinema, but "Varda's trajectory through film history conforms neither to the traditional story film historians tend to tell about the French New Wave, as Richard Neupert adeptly makes clear in his 2007 history of the movement, nor to our sense of the conventional trajectory of independent filmmakers more generally" (Conway 3).

In academic work, as much as contemporary media, there has been a resurgence in the interest in Varda. In academia, though, this interest has been derived not just from her films, but also from her public figure, as Bénézet stated that: "In the flesh, Varda is also an engaging, obstinate and witty figure" (Bénézet 4). However, in order to understand why Agnès Varda has gained more contemporary attention between the years 2017 and 2019, it is also necessary to understand *how* she has become a site for contemporary attention.

Shift to Persona Studies

In order to understand some of the possible reasons as to why Varda has garnered more attention since 2017, I want to turn to persona studies to understand *how* Varda's figure has been constructed as a persona. Barbour and Marshall state that a "persona helps us understand the construction, constitution and production of the self through identity play and performance by the individual in social settings" (Barbour and Marshall 2). In "Making Intellectual Room for Persona Studies," Barbour and Marshall claim that: "Something quite extraordinary has shifted over the last twenty years that has led to this intensive focus on constructing strategic masks of identity. The catalyst is the development of online culture and its invocation to personalize the expression of a public self--essentially a persona--regularly and incessantly" (Barbour and Marshall 1).

Similarly, in an August 2018 profile of Varda, entitled, "Agnès Varda, the queen of the meme," Charlie Phillips claims that: "Cats, strange vegetables, street art, foraged food, feminism and playful ironic self-reflection: these things are at the heart of Instagram culture, but Agnès Varda, the veteran French-Belgian documentary-maker, was filming them years ago" (Phillips). Furthermore, Phillips claims that: "*Faces Places* is typical of Varda's interests--public art, hidden stories, digressions, jaunty animals--but the presence of Instagram star JR places them in a social media context and underlines how ahead of her time she was. She understood memes years ago--the fascination with heart-shaped potatoes in *The Gleaners and I* is very now--and *Faces Places* is a riposte to celebrity culture, promoting 'ordinary' people as photographic subjects" (Phillips).

Barbour and Marshall's claim that the need for persona studies comes from online culture's "invocation to personalize the expression of a public self," resonates with the idea that Varda has been using the instruments of online culture (i.e. the meme) before the Internet offered the platform in which to use those instruments. I want to suggest that Varda has been using the instruments of the Internet, and "personaliz[ing] the expression of [her] public self" since before the creation of online culture. However, Varda has been performing this expression through the filmic medium, as opposed to the medium of the Internet and social media.

In "Persona Studies: Mapping the Proliferation of the Public Self," Marshall claims that "we are moving from a *representational media and cultural regime* to a *presentational media and cultural regime*" (Marshall 160). In this, Marshall states that representational media has been the dominant form of media for "at least the last two centuries" (Marshall 160). The term "representational" is understood as stories, narratives and images, encompassing books, newspapers, magazines, film, radio and TV. He claims that "it is important to understand that this

system of representational media is in decline. It is not being replaced, but rather it is being supplanted so that representational media is thought of in quite different ways" (Marshall 160).

In place of, or supplanting, representational media is presentational media: "Presentational media, by its name, is identifying media that is performed, produced, and exhibited by the individual or other collectives and not by the structure of representational media which is almost by definition large public and private media corporations. Presentational media is supported by the generations of applications online for producing and making content relevant for the expression of the self to others" (Marshall 160).

Varda's filmic work has continuously been a form of "intellectual autobiography," and she is and among the artists who "turn[s] the camera to their bodies as a way to show the process of artistic creation and to produce themselves as filmmakers and artists in their work" (McFadden 10). Varda's oeuvre symbolizes the oscillation between representational and presentational media. Her films, though, I argue, function more in the form of presentational media, since her work functions as her "expression of the self to others," through the medium of film.

Although Marshall claims that "our culture [has shifted] quite dramatically beyond a system of representative individuals to an expansive new presentation of the self," he also claims that this shift is by no means exacting and exhausting (Marshall 158). He states that the presentational media identifies how the self is situated in contemporary media differently from that of the self in the representational media structures. However, because of "the intersection of representational media forms and presentational media structures via social networks, what is emerging is *intercommunication.* Intercommunication is an elaborate layering of types and forms

of communication that are filtered and directed and engaged with by particular individuals in the most interpersonal way" (Marshall 160).

Varda's medium through which she executes her "intellectual autobiography" has been through film: a representational form of media (McFadden 45). On the other hand, Varda's filmic content has been navigating and working within the terrain of the presentational forms of media, "the expression of the self to others." However, as Marshall claims, presentational media *has been supported by "*the generations of applications online for producing and making content relevant for the expression of the self to others" (Marshall 160). However, as Phillips stated in his piece for *The Guardian,* "the presence of Instagram star JR places [Varda's interests] in a social media context and underlines how ahead of her time she was" and that "she understood memes years ago" (Phillips).

Considering Marshall's claim that contemporary culture is shifting from the representational form of media to a presentational form of media, I want to suggest that Varda's work and her public figure have always been working in the presentational form of media. Considering, though, that the presentational form of media *is supported by* online platforms, she has been executing her work and her "expression of the self to others" through film. I will argue that Varda's use of presentational media, in a representative form, is one of the possible reasons as to why she has become a center for contemporary attention. While she has been filming memes years ago, online platforms and the shift to presentational media allows viewers to engage with Varda's work in a way that is understood as a "meme," or online content, in 2017, as in Phillips' reading of her work.

Varda's Persona Construction

As noted in *The Gentlewoman's* profile of Varda, she is seen as a myriad of figures: a film director, an art world darling, a fashion icon, and a role model for women in film (Brubach). In "The Art and Politics of Artists' Personas: The Case of Yayoi Kusama," SooJin Lee uses persona studies as a way to interrogate the persona of artist, Yayoi Kusama. What interests me in Lee's article is the way in which she foregrounds how personas, and creation of personas, fulfill social needs or desires. Taking from Carl Jung and Erving Gofman, Lee states that "personas can be used to trace the society's dominant desires and discourses of identity. An artist's persona, which operates in any cultural sphere, is formed out of his/her social relations as well, and may therefore also mirror and reveal the society and culture's collective myths and their dominant notions of identity" (Lee 30).

Lee proposes "to conceptualise artists' personas as sites of intercultural exchange and conflict between the artist and her socio-cultural context. Artists' personas can be analysed to make visible and elucidate the related landscapes of art (of the art world), culture (of the masses), and everyday life (of individual participants), which are often separated in modernist art discourses or are taken for granted in contemporary art criticism. This conception of persona can be understood as similar to how architectural historian Esra Akcan conceptualizes translation as both a 'contact zone' and 'a contested zone' that 'not only makes cultural exchanges possible, but also reveals the tensions and conflicts created by the perceived inequalities between places' (4). Also, by emphasizing artists' use of personas, their own bodies and performative tactics, we can empower artists as agents of creative production and its global circulation" (Lee 28).

This thesis, coupling Marshall's conception of representational and presentational media and Lee's use of persona, will foreground the notion of Varda's work as connecting her personal

to the collective, and as a key part in Varda's persona formation. The idea of expressing the personal *through* a collective, or a platform which brings together the masses, is key in understanding how personas are constructed. The persona, though an individual, speaks to, and through, a collective's concerns and identities. For example, as I have stated at the beginning of this chapter, Varda's work, although nearly always autobiographical, also functions as connecting to, or speaking to, a collective. I want to foreground this notion throughout my analyses, and suggest that this is key in how Varda's persona is constructed. In using this to understand how Varda constructs her persona, I can then begin to examine some of the possible reasons as to why, and how, Varda's persona has gained more attention between 2017 and 2019.

Furthermore, Lee argues that "an artist's persona can become a medium of art and politics, and [...] an artist's artworks can become by-products of the artist's larger-than-life public persona" (Lee 25). However, this thesis will examine how Varda's work is part and parcel of her persona; that, instead of her artwork as a by-product of her persona, Varda's work *is her persona,* just as much as her persona is her artwork.

Methodology

So far I have discussed how Varda's work has functioned as a form of "intellectual autobiography," and as a way to understand "the influences that ultimately produced her as both a filmmaker and social actor" (McFadden 45). In order to understand some of the possible reasons as to why Varda has gained more attention between the years 2017 and 2019, I will be close reading her three most recent documentaries: *The Gleaners and I* (2000), *The Beaches of Agnès* (2008), and *Faces Places* (2017). Through closely analyzing her films' content and stylistic choices, these analyses can help to understand how Varda has constructed her persona

through her films. Furthermore, these analyses will help to examine the notion that her artwork is not a by-product of her persona, but is part and parcel of her persona.

Scholars looking at Varda's work have studied Varda as either: one, a personality or figure or, two, have studied her work directly. However, these scholars have studied her work as separate from her personality or figure (McFadden, Bénézet, Conway). By studying how her films construct her persona, and vice versa, this will help to understand some of the possible reasons as to why Varda gained more attention within the past two years, between 2017 and 2019.

In addition, I want to argue that close reading her films is a productive form of analysis because of how Varda characterizes her work as *cinécriture. Cinécritucre*, as characterized by Jefferson T. Kline's, *Agnès Varda: Interviews*: "To give a name to her very particular and personal search for a cinematic language, Varda coined the term *cinécriture.* As she explains to Jean Decock: 'When you write a musical score, someone else can play it, it's a sign. When an architect draws up a detailed floor plan, anyone can build his house. But for me, there's no way I could write a scenario that someone else could shoot, since the scenario doesn't represent the writing of the film.' Later she would clarify, 'The cutting, the movement, the points-of-view, the rhythm of filming and editing have been felt and considered in the way a writer chooses the depth of meaning of sentence, the type of words, number of adverbs, paragraphs, asides, chapters which advance the story or break its flow, etc. In writing it's called style. In the cinema, style is *cinécriture"*' (Kline xi).

Since Varda characterizes her work as a kind of writing style (even paralleling literature with *cinécriture*) I will be closely analyzing, or closely reading the films, as one would closely

read a literary text. Through this close, this analysis aims to understand how her filmic style shapes her persona, and vice versa, and how this persona figures as a contemporary site of attention within the last two years.

As stated, I will be focusing on her three most recent documentaries: *The Gleaners and I* (2000)*, The Beaches of Agnès* (2008)*,* and *Faces Places* (2017). I am choosing these three documentaries for a twofold reason. One being the fact that her documentaries, in particular, have been characterized as autobiographical-esque, and I want to focus on the films that produce Varda's persona; therefore, I will be focusing on these documentaries since they are characterized by their autobiographical content. Secondly, since I am trying to understand why Varda has gained more attention between 2017 and 2019, I have decided to, temporally, choose the three most recent documentaries. Since I am trying to understand the reason for Varda's reception within a limited time frame, between 2017 and 2019, I want to keep my focus, also, as current as possible in regards to my close analysis of her work.

I am focusing my analyses on Varda's filmic work in order to keep the attention on how her *cinécriture* has shaped her persona. By honing in my focus on these three films, I want to produce analyses that understand how her oeuvre uses multimedia, different editing techniques, and mise-en-scène to create her persona. While I will be approaching each film with different theoretical perspectives, my conclusion will bring together these analyses in order to find commonalities and differences. Through comparing and contrasting these three chapters (with each chapter focusing on a different film), I hope to reach an understanding as to how each documentary contributed to constructing her persona, and whether each film took the same, or different, approach in Varda's persona construction. In the conclusion, then, I will reach an

understanding as to how these films, and my analyses, can contribute to some of the possible reasons as to why, and how, Varda's persona became a site of attention between 2017 and 2019.

Theoretical Framework

As I have already discussed in my introduction, SooJin Lee's essay, in coupling persona studies and art history, interrogates the figure of Yayoi Kusama, "demonstrating how an artist's persona can become a medium of art and politics, and how an artist's artworks can become by-products of the artist's larger-than-life persona" (Lee 25). As I have stated, scholars have studied Varda and her work, but they have separated Varda, as a persona, from Varda's work, itself. At the same time, though, scholars have stated that Varda's work tends to be on the personal side, as well, and a reflection of her own life and her interests (McFadden).

Taking this into consideration, I will consider Varda's films as a part of her persona and study them, as such, in order to understand some of the possible reasons as to why she has come to the center of contemporary attention. Instead of examining "how an artist's artworks can become by-products of the artist's larger-than-life persona," I will examine Varda's films and writing, not as by-products of her persona, but as a part of her persona; or, to quote Spielberg, to examine how she is "the tallest littlest person [and how her] films are so tall and huge and [how she] fill[s] the room wherever [she goes]" (Gardner). From a theoretical standpoint, I will not be separating her work from her persona, but examine the way in which her work *is* her persona, and vice versa.

With that in consideration, it is also necessary to analyze the site of reception in order to understand why she has gained attention between 2017 and 2019. As I have stated in the introduction, I am arguing that Varda's work has always been working within the presentational

form of media, through a representative medium, that being film. Marshall states in his essay that we are currently undergoing a shift in which we are turning from the representational form of media, to a presentational form of media. In order to explain this, I discussed the *Guardian* article, which states that Varda is the "queen of the meme" and has been filming meme-like content before the advent of social media (Phillips).

Similarly, within meme studies, a meme is defined "as cultural units that spread from person to person, [and] memes were debated long before the digital era" (Shifman 362). While Richard Dawkins first coined the term in 1976, "the Internet turned the spread of memes into a highly visible practice, and the term has become an integral part of the netizen vernacular" (Shifman 362). As Marshall stated, we are currently working in a presentational form of media, characterized by word-of-mouth, so to speak: "Presentational media, by its name is identifying media that is performed, produced, and exhibited by the individual or other collectives [...] the presentational form of address surrounds and situates a great deal of media and communication content: for example, the sharing of music from one friend to another, or passing the link of an amusing videoclip via YouTube acknowledge that an individual is involved in the distribution of highly produced forms. It is mediated by the personal and presented therefore in a different frame than traditional forms of representation" (Marshall 160).

As stated, thanks to the Internet, memes have become an "integral part" of the online user's life and way of communicating. In this sense, we can consider memes as part of the presentational form of media because it is a sharing of media that links the individual and their personal expression to a circuit of communication among a collective. As Shifman argues, the meme should be regarded from a "communication-oriented perspective," since memes are "units

that propagate *gradually* through interpersonal contact, they were considered unsuitable for exploring content that is transmitted simultaneously from a single institutional source to the masses. But this is no longer the case in an era of blurring boundaries between interpersonal and mass, professional and amateur, bottom-up and top-down communications" (Shifman 364).

Considering the way that memes travel through these blurring boundaries, I will argue that memes are a figure, and function of, the presentational form of media. Furthermore, considering how Varda's work has been characterized as meme-like, I will argue that her work, then, is particularly adept to this contemporary moment because of: a., the shift to presentational media and, b., memes' popularity now, and how her work is characterized as meme-esque. For example, "since at least the 1990s, [memes] have been said to 'replicate at rates that make even fruit flies and yeast cells look glacial in comparison'" (Shifman 362).

Since the contemporary site of reception is one in which memes are now part of the "netizen vernacular," I will argue that Varda's meme-filled work is particularly suited to this current moment. Her work is punctuated with meme vocabulary, and the current moment is filled with a meme literate society (so to speak); therefore, I am arguing that the site of reception, today, is more capable and drawn to Varda's work, because of the meme's popularity.

As I have stated, I will be closely analyzing Varda's last three documentaries. For my theoretical perspective, I will couple my approach from persona studies, regarding Varda's films as representational media, but reading it as a presentational form of media. How can her films, despite being representational forms of media, be read as presentational forms of media? I will closely analyze her films to understand how the content and stylistic choices can be understood as presentational forms of media. In addition, I will also be analyzing the films to understand

how Varda's persona is created through her films and, furthermore, understanding personas as that which "can be used to trace the society's dominant desires and discourses of identity" (Lee 30).

I will be reading each of Varda's films coupled with different theoretical perspectives from film studies and feminist studies, though grounded in persona studies, focusing on how she uses media in her films. By using theoretical approaches from film and feminist studies, I hope to produce alternative readings that help to understand Varda's work as social and political critiques, but also part of how these critiques, and the films' use of mediation, function in crafting Varda's persona, and vice versa.

Chapter I: The Beaches of Agnès

The Beaches of Agnès, Varda's 2008 documentary, came out to generally positive reviews. The film was nominated for thirteen awards, and won eleven awards, including a César Award in France for Best Documentary Film (IMDB). *The Guardian* gave the film a four out of five-star review, while Roger Ebert gave the film a four (out of four-star) review. The film "offers a more or less chronological tour of the sites (in France and elsewhere) and the sights (her movies, photographs, and art projects) of her life," therefore being coined, mostly, as an autobiographical film (Brody). Ebert states that it "...is not an autobiography, although it is about her lifetime. [...] The film is her memories, evoked by footage from her films, and visits to the places and people she filmed. But that makes it sound too straightforward. The film is a poem, a song, a celebration" (Ebert).

Varda's notes on the film, her proposed screenplay to potential investors, stated that: "'This project [of the film] is to recount myself, as a woman and as a filmmaker, by my current activities and recent projects, but especially through the images of my films and my installations: a biographical film [*bio-film*] as a pretext for a filmography-film [*filmo-film*]'" (Conway 117). Considering Varda's proposed notion of using mixtures of biographical elements, and traditional "filmo-film" elements, it is no wonder that the film's reviews are hesitant to label *The Beaches* as a strictly "autobiographical" film.

However, what I want to pay attention to, here, is Varda's purpose to recount herself *as a woman and as a filmmaker.* Strikingly, in nearly all reviews of the film, both in scholarship and in magazines, all reviewers make note of her haircut. Ebert characterizes Varda in that her "face is still framed by a cap of shining hair"; Peter Bradshaw for *The Guardian* talks about her being

a “mop-haired gamine -- she has artlessly kept the same hairstyle all her life, now variously dyed”; and Kelley Conway, in her biography of Varda’s work, states that: “Her signature bowl-cut-cum-bob still frames her intelligent, impish face, although depending on the season and her humor, it can be fully aubergine or half grown-out into a two-toned monk’s tonsorial fringe with a silvery cap” (Ebert, Bradshaw, Conway 111).

Of course Varda’s style, and hairstyle, is so recognizable that, in a film that recounts the director’s life, it is difficult not to make note of such a signature style. However, while these reviews and critiques have made note of Varda’s iconic bob, there is little to no correlation between her style and her work. Conway states that: “Vallaux’s affectionate sketches [of Varda] bear witness to just how recognizable and consistent Varda’s image--the Varda ‘look’--has been over the years. She has gradually evolved from an elfin gamine of the *Nouvelle Vague* to the punk granny of independent film and installation art [...] If Varda’s appearance seems both *negligée* and fastidiously *soignée,* it is emblematic of a paradox in her work: she has deliberately cultivated a down-to-earth persona through years of quietly observant self-portraiture and sympathetic identification with marginal figures, while placing herself resolutely in the center of that work with the narcissism of an irrepressible artist who must express herself of die” (Conway 111).

While Conway discusses the signature Varda “look” and the paradox that her work embodies, I want to examine, further, how her work produces this signature “look” and persona, and vice versa. Furthermore, Conway discusses the invitations Varda received “to participate in biennales and other fine arts exhibitions [that] have reinforced the sense that Varda herself is the

brand that is being sought out, and she has played along, offering further declensions of a playful, self-deprecating artist who wants to show us something" (Conway 111).

I want to return to the notion, also, that Delphine Bénézet discussed in the academic resurgence in focusing on Varda's work. As Bénézet argued, Varda's turn to fine arts work, and mounting exhibitions, is one of the reasons that there was a resurgence in academic interest in Varda (Bénézet 4). Secondly, Conway states, that Varda "has played along" with the brand that is herself, that spectators have gotten to know. How, though, has this "brand" been created, and why has she received more attention between 2017 and 2019? While Conway definitely takes into consideration that Varda is, and has cultivated, a persona, I want to ask *how* the persona has been cultivated, and why it is at such center of attention between 2017 and 2019.

In order to answer this question, I will be analyzing *The Beaches of Agnès* in two different ways. First, I want to analyze Varda's use of representational forms of media, as in paintings and photographs, throughout *The Beaches of Agnès*. I will read these scenes in conjunction with a persona studies perspective, aiming to understand how her use of mixed media functions within a persona studies perspective. Does her use of representational media, then, help in creating her persona? And can this created persona, through the use of mixed media, perhaps answer the question as to why she has gained attention between 2017 and 2019?

For the second part, I will be analyzing the film as a feminist statement. I am taking into consideration Varda's own notes on the film, that the film acted as a project to recount herself "'as a woman and as a filmmaker'" (Conway 117). In order to do this, I will use Kristin Thompson's concept of cinematic excess in my analysis the film. This framework will help me to read the film as a feminist film, a commentary on the exclusion of women from professional and

private spaces. I want to hypothesize that, from my feminist reading of Varda's film, that the film's content is particularly attuned to receiving widespread attention between 2017 and 2019.

Paintings and Photographs: Mixed Media and Intercommunication

Varda tends to use mixed media throughout the majority of her films, and is inspired by representational media. For her very first film, *La Pointe Courte,* "she was inspired by William Faulkner's *Wild Palms,* a novel that oscillates between two storylines" (Conway 12). However, the film shows "no obvious connections between the two stories in Faulkner's novel; Varda's film, likewise, braids together two stories while forging few links between them" (Conway 12). So, while Varda uses representational media, in this case, a novel (as a source of inspiration) she makes that form of media *her own*, and creates her own story from that initial starting point.

Considering how Varda used Faulkner's novel, then, I want to argue that she performs what Marshall coins as intercommunication: "Intercommunication is an elaborate layering of types and forms of communication that are filtered and directed and engaged with by particular individuals in the most interpersonal way" (Marshall 160). In this scenario, Varda is that particular individual, using Faulkner's novel in the "most interpersonal way" in that, one, she used his novel as inspiration for her own film; and, secondly, that her first film, *La Pointe Courte,* was a personal project, in itself. As Varda narrates to us in *The Beaches of Agnès,* her first film was set in her hometown of Sète, and included her neighbors as actors in the film (00:22:57).

I want to analyze, then, Varda's use of representational media in *The Beaches of Agnès* as a way of creating her persona. Marshall identifies representational media as traditional forms of media that have been the "dominant form of media for at least the last two centuries" (Marshall

160). It is important to note that representational media forms "attempt to embody a populace" and that these "stories, in all their manifestations, represent a culture" (Marshall 160). Furthermore, "this system of representational media is in decline. It is not being replaced, but rather it is being supplanted so that representational media is thought of in quite different ways" (Marshall 160).

Representational media, then, is being supplanted by presentational media: "identifying media that is performed, produced, and exhibited by the individual or other collectives and not by the structure of representational media which is almost by definition large public and private media corporations. Presentational media is supported by the generations of applications online for producing and making content relevant for *the expression of the self to others*" (Marshall 160, my emphasis). What is important to my analysis, here, is the personal and communicative aspect of presentational media. Presentational media is not only a way of identifying media, but it is a communicative act that links the personal to a collective: "In other words, the presentational form of address surrounds and situates a great deal of media and communication content: for example, the sharing of music from one friend to another, or passing the link of an amusing videoclip via YouTube acknowledge that an individual is involved in the distribution of highly produced forms. *It is mediated by the personal and presented therefore in a different frame than traditional media forms of representation*" (Marshall 160, my emphasis).

What is key to me, here, is the notion of using presentational media as a form of personal expression. This brings to mind Conway's characterization of Varda's seemingly paradoxical work, and persona, that Varda places "herself resolutely in the center of that work with the narcissism of an irrepressible artist who must express herself or die" (Conway 111). While I want

to argue that Varda uses representational media in order to create presentational media, I need to address the fact that film is also a form of representational media. However, I want to argue, that Varda's use and appropriation of photographs and painting, although used and appropriated through film, are done in such a way that her expression of the self is communicated through the medium of film. In this sense, then, I want to argue that Varda uses presentational media aspects by appropriating traditionally representative media, and communicates this through the medium of film. I will analyze two scenes in which she uses iconic paintings to communicate her personal history to the viewer.

The Lovers

Near the ending of *The Beaches of Agnès,* Varda visits flea markets in the South of France, while the camera follows her, watching her rummage through objects. At one stand she finds a box filled with "cinema cards": pictures of famous film directors, their names, along with short summaries of their most famous works. Varda finds herself, and then finds the card about her late husband, Jacques Demy, who died in 1990. The camera focuses on a close-up shot of Varda's hands holding her and Demy's cards, paying the merchant for the cards, with her voiceover, narrating: "Before we were cinema cards with cardboard heads, we were flesh and blood beings. Lovers, like Magritte's" (01:09:16).

From the flea market and at the moment Varda mentions Magritte, the scene cuts to a shot of a recreation of Magritte's painting, *The Lovers.* However, while the image is recognizable as that particular painting (and referred to by Varda in the scene just beforehand) Varda completely appropriates and recreates the artwork. The scene begins with the iconic heads of a man and a woman, their faces covered in sheets, apparently trying to kiss and embrace. However, because

the painting is static, we can only see the lovers in Magritte's painting in one permanent, kissing position.

Varda's recreation, though, has the heads moving, trying to kiss over their sheets, their faces fondling. Then, with the camera remaining static, the two characters start walking backwards, facing the camera (though their faces remain indiscernible thanks to the sheets), holding hands. The couple is completely nude, emphasizing, and almost parodying, the idea from Magritte's painting, that one is definitively female, and one is definitively male. Magritte's painting makes this distinction through the clothing of the painting's protagonists: the man is wearing a black suit, white collared shirt, and a tie. The woman wears a red, sleeveless, shirt, probably a dress. Thanks to Magritte's outfit choices, he makes it apparent to the viewer that, while the faces are not showing, it is evident that these lovers fit within a heterosexual framing of what "lovers" are.

Varda reflects Magritte's choice, but turns it on its head and takes it to an almost comical extreme. In order to identify the lovers as "man" and "woman" through stylistic choices (as Magritte does), Varda has them naked, a definitive way of her pointing out that the lovers, indeed, fit within this heterosexual framework. As the couple in the film back up from the camera, we now see their full bodies, and also recognize the setting: Varda's alleyway in her home on rue Daguerre in Paris. At the end of the courtyard, the couple stand, still holding hands, and the image goes from hyper-colored, then to black-and-white. From there, the scene cuts to a black-and-white film segment of Demy and Varda embracing one another, as Varda narrates the sequence in voiceover: "We shared a bed, a table, children, games, and trips to Noirmoutier. But the courtyard afforded us two domains" (01:10:03).

Varda uses Magritte's painting as a way to link space, emotion, and time. It links her memory of Demy, from the cinema cards she finds at the flea market, as her lover, to her courtyard in her Parisian home, to the memories of that courtyard, and its role it took in her relationship with her husband. Varda's recreation of the Magritte painting, therefore, uses representational media in a twofold sense: one, she recreates a painting (the first medium) through the medium of film. However, she uses the painting's recreation as an "expression of the self" (Marshall 160). The painting's recreation expresses her love she had for Demy, the space of their home in the courtyard, and how the courtyard figured as a personal space for the couple, along with a professional space.

In another scene, Varda recreates another painting though, this time, imbuing it with her own personal and stylistic choices. After she shows images of Joan of Arc, discussing her casting choices for that role in one of her films, we cut to an image of a Renaissance-era painting of a woman from the bust up, with two figures, most likely to be handmaidens, in the background, on the floor, not facing the painting, cleaning. The image then cuts to a recreation of the image with actors: the two female handmaidens still in the background, now moving as they clean, but still not facing the camera. Now, instead of a static portrait of a Renaissance-era woman, instead, in the foreground, we see a naked woman laying on a chaise lounge, still in Renaissance-style decoration. The woman stares at the camera, blinking. The shot then goes into a close-up shot to her face, and she is now completely covered in flies, and the camera pans out, again, to a medium shot, to film all the flies on the woman's body, the handmaidens still in the background. Varda narrates the scene, stating: "I've said it before, memories are like flies swarming through the air, bits of memory all jumbled up" (01:29:38).

Why has Varda substituted, twice now, nude actors in place of clothed, painted figures? Again, and similar to the Magritte scene, Varda recreates historical artworks through reenactment, with moving bodies, and imbuing her own personal history into the refashioned images. In this scene, however, Varda's memories are imbued more literally into the image: the flies, as she claims, represent her memories, and entangle and mesh themselves into the space of the recreated painting. Again Varda uses the painting, representative media, in a presentational sense: to quite literally imbue the painting with her memories, and share that with the audience.

However, along with her recreation of representative media to create a presentational media form, there is something else at work here. Why does Varda decide to go into a close-up shot of the nude model's face covered in flies? Why does she not leave the camera in the medium shot, so the viewer can continuously see the handmaidens in the background? I want to suggest this is part and parcel of Varda's aim to make the film "'as a woman and as a filmmaker'" by appropriating images in her own feminist vision (Conway 111). There is something about the nude, reclining woman, seeing her blinking face in a close-up shot, which forces the viewer to engage with her not as a static image, as usually depicted in a painting, but as a moving entity: "Traditional representations include women as objects of male desire, as passive beings without agency, as no more than a space to be overcome for the male character in narrative, as vessels of reproduction, as biologically determined individuals, as mothers, as sex objects, as bearers of meaning, and as the nude model for the male artist" (McFadden 10).

The nude model is not foreign to Varda's work. Not only have we seen Magritte's lovers, nude, earlier in *The Beaches,* it is also a key scene in Varda's *Cléo from 5 to 7.* The protagonist, Cléo, follows her friend to an art class, to see the all-male classroom drawing the nude female

model in the middle of the room. The female model stands on a pedestal, posing for the male artists, and her body is juxtaposed along with the slabs of concrete in the background (presumably for sculpture classes), placing her as another static object that the men use for their artistic pursuits. However, Varda uses the nude female model in *The Beaches* as a way of challenging the viewers' notions of the female figure in artwork, and imbues her image with flies: Varda's own memories.

Cinematic Excess and a Feminist Reading

Turning from my analysis of Varda's appropriation of representative media in *The Beaches,* I now want to turn to a slightly different reading of the film. As I have already analyzed the nude female model in *The Beaches,* there are parts of Varda's film that forces the viewer to question: why did Varda make that choice? What was the purpose of that with regards to the storyline? Instead of trying to resolve the question, I want to further probe these issues, and produce an alternative reading of the film. While the film is (rightly) characterized as quasi-autobiographical, I want to read the film also as a feminist reading of space.

In order to do this, I will use Kristin Thompson's concept of cinematic excess. Informed by Russian Formalists' definition of narrative, along with Stephen Heath's and Roland Barthes' readings of films, Thompson proposes: "...critics have suggested that films can be seen as a struggle of opposing forces. Some of these forces strive to unify the work, to hold it together sufficiently that we may perceive and 'follow' its structures. Outside of any such structures lie those aspects of the work which are not contained by its unifying forces -- 'the excess'" (Thompson 54). Thompson proposes excess as a potentially productive way of reading a film. Within traditional Hollywood cinema, forces in a film unify towards the narrative

structure and goal, however, some films "leave their potentially excessive elements more noticeable" (Thompson 55).

Excess can be called non-diegetic elements of a film, but it does not mean that they are not an efficient object of analysis: "Probably no one ever watches *only* these non-diegetic aspects of the image through an entire film. Nevertheless, they are constantly present, a whole 'film' existing in some sense alongside the narrative film we tend to think of ourselves as watching. The idea that the critic's job might include the pointing-out of this excess may startle some. But we have been looking at the neat aspects of artworks so long that we may forget their disturbing, rough parts. As Barthes says, 'The *present* problem is not to destroy the narrative, but to subvert it.' For the critic, this means the realization that he/she needs to talk about those aspects of the work that are usually ignored because they don't fit into a tight analysis" (Thompson 56).

It is these aspects of *The Beaches of Agnès* that I will analyze: the scenes that make the viewer ask: "... 'are [these scenes] not a kind of blunting of a too-obvious meaning, a too-violent meaning? . . . do they not cause my reading to skid?'" (Thompson 56). It is precisely these moments of *The Beaches of Agnès* that I want to address and analyze. Through my analysis of these scenes, I want to suggest that *The Beaches of Agnès,* according to its "cinematic excess," is a feminist film. However, I want to, first, clarify how I will be understanding the following scenes as cinematic excess.

Varda's work is characterized by its defamiliarizing techniques and nonlinear chronological framework. The scenes I am reading below, though, are scenes that are part of telling a certain *story:* the first being the story of her childhood, the second being the story of rediscovering her childhood home. I am reading the below scenes as cinematic excess because of

the way in which these scenes *stray from* the storyline Varda is presenting to us; in other words, these scenes lie outside of the structure of the narrative Varda is presenting us with: "Outside of any such structures lie those aspects of the work which are not contained by its unifying forces -- 'the excess'" (Thompson 54). I am, then, reading the unifying forces within these two scenes as the narrative storyline of recounting her childhood, and then recounting her finding her childhood home.

First, I want to note that Varda does discuss feminism outrightly in the film. In one scene, the camera focuses on Varda in a medium shot, with a women's liberation protest taking place behind her, talking directly to the camera, saying: "I'm not sure when I realized that it wasn't just a question of freedom. The feminist struggle had to be collective to exist" (01:26:22). She discusses, then, her own experiences of the pro-choice movement in France, with images of women protesting onscreen. The shot switches, again, to the medium shot of Varda in front of a women's liberation protest, stating: "I tried to be a joyful feminist, but I was very angry" (01:26:51).

These scenes, along with others, obviously place Varda as a feminist filmmaker, and situate her, personally, as a feminist. However, the scenes I will be reading in the film do not explicitly label themselves as feminist issues in the film. I will read these scenes as "excess," precisely for the way in which they "cause my reading to skid," and make the viewer ask questions about space and value in regards to women's placement, and feminist struggles (Thompson 56). Varda's filming technique: "According to Varda, women should not be defined by the other's gaze: 'The first feminine gesture is to say: "Okay, one looks at me, but I also look." . . . The world isn't defined by how one looks at me, but how I look'" (McFadden 15).

The first scene I will analyze is Varda's recreation of a scene from her childhood, at school in Sète. The image focuses on a close-up shot of a young girl, around ten years old, with a big decorative bow on her head, wearing a white and blue pinafore dress, while Varda says in voiceover: "In school, two things were mandatory: Vichy pinafores, and singing for old Marshal Pétain" (00:16:50). The image then cuts to an overhead, wide angle shot of all the girls, from around ten- to fifteen-years-old, standing in the school's courtyard in a circular shape around the flag pole, with a teacher lifting the flag, while the girls sing: "Marshal, here we stand, before you, who saved our land, we, your boys, we swear to you..." (00:16:55). The image then cuts abruptly (not allowing the song to finish) to a medium shot of the girls at recess playing in the courtyard while Varda narrates: "'We, your boys.' That's right, we sang that. And we played hopscotch" (00:17:12).

While this sequence is a recreation of Varda's childhood, she cuts the song abruptly, cutting off the singing, cutting off the unifying structure of the song's narrative, right at the time the girls sing: *"Nous, des gars"* ("We, your boys"). The rest of the sequence films Varda and her friends playing, at school and at home, with her friends and her family, and typical childhood scenes. However, Varda's decision to cut the song disrupts the linearity of a song, and cuts off the sequence in an abrupt manner. I would argue that this is excess of the film because it does not follow the narrative structure of following Varda as a child, singing in the school's courtyard. Instead, it *cuts* the narrative structure of the song, and includes Varda's comment.

However, I consider this scene as Varda's statement about women and space. The girls have to wear the Vichy pinafores and are forced, at school, to take part in the Vichy regime. However, they are audibly, in the song, not included in the Vichy regime, as Varda states, *we*

really did sing that we were boys. The scene points to the institutional exclusion of women. Even as a child, they had to take part in the Vichy regime, but they do not allow space for girls, for women, to take part in that regime. It is a visible exclusion of girls and women that Varda makes the viewer aware of by disrupting the narrative structure: by creating this cinematic excess.

While Varda points to the exclusion of women from spaces, I want to analyze a scene which, I argue, comments on how women inhabit space. At one point in the film, Varda returns to her childhood home in Brussels, as the current tenants contacted her that they are selling the home. They invite Varda to the home as a way of saying "good-bye" to the place she grew up: "And so I went to Brussels, on Rue de l'Aurore, with my little camera, headed for my childhood home" (00:10:25). The narrative structure of this scene includes Varda entering the home, examining old rooms and found objects that allow her to recount to the viewer stories of her childhood. She recalls the "pear-shaped basin" in the home's backyard, white-painted brick walls, stating that: "The garden is here, but emotion is absent" (00:10:49).

At one point, Varda finds her own bedroom, recounting childhood memories to the viewer. The image of the bedroom then cuts to an image of Varda sitting in front of a doorway, and a man walking in through the doorway holding a miniature train, walking up to Varda, and holding the train directly in front of the camera's lens, as she says in voiceover: "I wanted to locate where my sister's bedrooms were. He wanted to show me his miniature train collection" (00:12:35). The image then cuts to a tracking shot of the man's collection of miniature trains in glass encasing, shielding them off from the possibility of touching them. The image then cuts to a medium shot of the man sitting on the couch, with his legs spread widely, him situated in the frame's foreground, while his wife sits next to him on the couch, in the

frame's background, and sits with her arms crossed. He says to Varda: "The most expensive one cost me 15,000 Belgian francs in the 1980s" (00:13:00).

The image cuts to a close-up shot of the man holding another train, saying: "It's worth 80,000 Belgian francs in Switzerland today. There were only 150 of them made" (00:13:09). The image cuts, again, back to the man and wife on the couch, him still in the foreground, her in the background, except now he is holding a beer, takes a drink, and says of the collection: "It's an investment" (00:13:33). After, Varda is filmed leaving the home in a wide shot, exiting the building's entrance, saying: "It was an amusing encounter, but an unusual one" (00:14:17).

I would argue that the man's train collection scene is cinematic excess because, one, it does not fit within the narrative goal of the film's scene, that being of Varda rediscovering her childhood home, and the memories along with it. However, I want to argue that this scene is in line with the message from the Vichy scene. Varda includes this scene to comment on women, space, and value. In the beginning of the scene, Varda frankly states that she wanted to find her sister's rooms, but he wanted to show off his collection. Here, there are two different registers of value: for Varda, the home holds nostalgic memory while, for the man, the home holds his collection and, therefore, a monetary value.

Varda, as a child in school in Vichy-era France, she was forced to sing that she was a boy, being made aware of her institutional exclusion as a woman in male-dominated spaces. Here, in this scene, Varda is forced to listen to a man talk about his toys, while he takes up all the space on the couch, leaves no space for his wife, and no time or space for Varda to wander around her childhood home and explore her memories. Instead, as in the Vichy scene, the meaning of the childhood home is imbued with the man's definition of the space: who gets to inhabit it, what has

value, and, again, this space's meaning is determined by a man, for a woman. In other words, he "mansplains" to Varda.

These two scenes do not lend to the narrative linearity of the film's sequence. The Vichy scene and the childhood home scene are both part of larger sequences of the film that are supposed to recount Varda's childhood memories. Instead, my analyses of these two scenes provide a different narrative within the film: a narrative that describes the exclusion of women from space, and the absence of women from the meaning-making of said spaces.

The Beaches of Agnès between 2017 and 2019

In both my analyses of the film, I have pinpointed certain scenes that shape Varda's persona. In the film's use of Magritte's *The Lovers,* and the traditional Renaissance painting, Varda uses representational media and reconstructs these paintings through, one, the prism of her own personal history (i.e. with her lover and husband Demy, her filmmaking techniques, etc.), to create a new image and affords the "expression of the self" to the viewer (Marshall 160). Considering that Marshall claims that we are currently shifting from the representational to the presentational form of media, I want to argue that Varda's personal recreation of representative media speaks, particularly, to audiences of 2017 and 2019.

In my theoretical framework, I discussed the scene of reception of 2017 and 2019 as being meme-literate: that "the Internet turned the spread of memes into a highly visible practice, and the term has become an integral part of the netizen vernacular" (Shifman 362). I discussed, further, how memes are used as communicative content: the meme should be regarded from a "communication-oriented perspective," since memes are "units that propagate *gradually* through interpersonal contact, they were considered unsuitable for exploring content that is transmitted

simultaneously from a single institutional source to the masses. But this is no longer the case in an era of blurring boundaries between interpersonal and mass, professional and amateur, bottom-up and top-down communications" (Shifman 364).

Varda's use of representative media blurs the boundaries around representative media, and transforms it into presentational media. I argue that audiences of 2017 and 2019 are now more adept, and enthusiastic to, pick up on and engage with Varda's work because of its "expression of the self" (Marshall 160). I will continue with this notion in the coming chapters, further exploring Varda's use of representative media in the presentational format.

Chapter II: The Gleaners and I

In Varda's 2000 documentary, *The Gleaners and I,* the filmmaker takes a sequence from the film to document her return home from a trip to Japan. She films the exterior of her infamous house on rue Daguerre in Paris, filming the entrance, her cats, the plants (ones alive and dead), and the mold on her ceiling; the mold, which she tells the viewer, that she has come to appreciate. The film lingers on a close-up shot of the mold, with Varda narrating: "It's like a landscape, an abstract painting" (00:31:51). The shot then cuts to famous paintings, with Varda narrating, "a Tapiès, a Guo Qiang, a Borderie" (00:31:52). There is no doubt that her ceiling mold does, indeed, look like priceless artworks. The shot cuts, then, to a red, plastic bucket, Varda claiming: "There's water dripping" (00:3153).

In a span of a few seconds, Varda takes ceiling mold, something that is typically unwanted and exterminated, and likens it to artwork, thanks to her use of comparisons, parallels, and editing. It is not simply by including the ceiling mold into the film that it becomes "artwork," but by juxtaposing the mold to the uncannily similarity to the paintings she references. Throughout the film, Varda takes that which is usually deemed as valueless, and frames it as something for the spectator to reconsider as valuable--not excluding herself. The following scene states Varda's project for the film. As she shuffles through photos of Rembrandt paintings (souvenirs from Japan), resting on one of Saskia, she states: "Saskia, up close" (00:32:45). Then, her hand moves into an extreme close-up shot: we can see her wrinkles, and her wedding ring, as she narrates: "And then my hand up close. I mean, this is my project: to film with one hand my other hand" (00:32:46).

What does it mean to film one hand with the other? Quite literally, this is what Varda is doing: she films her hand and shows us, the spectators, that which is her "other hand," along with the goal of her film's project. However, *The Gleaners and I* is situated as a documentary: a documentary about gleaners, the history of gleaning, and the contemporary social context of gleaning. If it is a documentary, though, how, and why, does Varda situate herself in the middle of it; why is she filming the one hand with the other, and how does that fit into her documentary?

In order to understand how Varda films "one hand with the other," I will be analyzing the film in two ways. First, I will explore how the digital camera informed her filmmaking and vice versa. I want to examine how the combination of the digital camera and documentary style actually help to further inform and create Varda's persona. While, in persona studies, SooJin Lee argues that "an artist's persona can become a medium of art and politics, [...] and an artist's artworks can become by-products of the artist's larger-than-life public persona," I will explore how *The Gleaners* is part and parcel of creating Varda's persona, and vice versa (Lee 25). I want to suggest that Varda's artworks are not by-products of her persona, but her artworks *are* her persona. The digital camera and documentary format of *The Gleaners* act as tools that help Varda to shape her persona.

Secondly, I will examine *The Gleaners and I* as a film that uses the politics of comparison to explore the notion of difference and value. As I have already outlined with Varda's comparison between her ceiling mold and famous paintings, Varda's filmic technique uses comparison as a form of reassigning, and questioning, value. While most academic commentary has been on the comparisons that Varda draws throughout *The Gleaners*, I also want to assert the notion of productive difference that these comparisons create. In order to do this, I will be using

Audre Lorde's conceptualization of difference. I will analyze the film's mise-en-scène and its editing techniques to understand how Varda's use of comparison shows difference, and how this difference functions.

Varda's use of filmic techniques and productive difference in her film are ways in which she films her one hand with the other, whether that is literally or figuratively. On filming with the digital camera, she stated that: "I felt free at that time. With the new digital camera, I felt I could film myself, get involved as a filmmaker. It ended up that I did film myself more, and it did involve me in the film. Later on, I felt that I was asking so much of these people to reveal themselves, to speak to me, to be honest with me, that I should reveal something of myself, too. I felt that although I'm not a gleaner—I'm not poor, I have enough to eat—there's another kind of gleaning, which is artistic gleaning. You pick ideas, you pick images, you pick emotions from other people, and then you make it into a film" (Anderson 175).

Gleaning, as defined by the English Oxford Dictionary, includes two different definitions. One being: "Obtain (information) from various sources, often with difficulty" ("Glean"). Its second definition is defined as "historical" and as follows: "Gather (leftover grain) after a harvest" ("Glean"). Varda provides the definition of gleaning in the film, herself, but I want to take note, here, of the two definitions of gleaning and how the second definition implies the use of hands. Varda's project, to film her one hand with the other, then, is a form of artistic gleaning, but she uses her own body, her physicality, to do "artistic gleaning" (Anderson 175). Her film's project to film one hand with the other is like a reflexive form of gleaning. She is filming the tools she uses in which to artistically glean: her hands, filming her one hand with the other.

The Documentary and the Digital Camera

The Gleaners and I is Varda's first film with a digital camera: "...a feature-length documentary about the long-standing practice of 'gleaning' in France, originally a desperate scavenging for remnants of crops after the main harvest had taken place, and more figuratively a form of grazing for table scraps and leftovers in a variety of contexts, both social and cultural" (Conway 72). While the film is an investigation into what the practice of "gleaning" is, and follows Varda throughout France, talking to gleaners, "taken together, [the film] provide[s] a portrait of the filmmaker: Varda's love of painting, observations about her aging body, and her fascination with her digital video camera" (Conway 73).

Varda's documentary style is not that of a "typical" documentary. As stated, she often turns the camera towards herself, interrogating her own image; after all, her project is to film the one hand with the other. However, Varda uses herself in the film as a subject, and object, of critique to further interrogate the definition of gleaning. In Kelley Conway's book, *Agnès Varda,* she notes that, in Varda' proposal for *The Gleaners and I* project, that: "One section of the proposal, humorously titled 'And Me and Me and Me' (which cannot help but evoke singer/actor Jacques Dutronc's 1966 hit 'Et moi, et moi, et moi,' a verse of which intones '900 million dying of hunger, and me and me and me, with my vegetarianism, and all the whisky I can drink, I think of them and then I forget, *c'est la vie, c'est la vie*), anticipates shots of a miniature video camera in Varda's hand followed by brief shots of Varda's other hand. Buttressing the idea of a subtle authorial presence in Varda's stated goal of creating a 'subjective documentary' made by an '*auteur*' who would be 'almost hidden but whose presence (through the look, by the questions, by the subjects) would provide the tone' (3)" (Conway 83). Varda's use of the camera, to film

herself, taken from Dutronc's song, also acts as a form of social commentary. She uses herself as part of her critique in the film, aligning herself with her subjects, and also allows herself, at times, to be an object, up for critique and examination.

In addition, by alluding to the Dutronc song in her proposal's title, she considers herself as part of her film in that she is also a subject and object that is available for critique. I want to insist on the notion that, at times, she is both the subject and object. For example, in one part of the film, she goes to Beauce in order to investigate potato production, and the waste. She speaks to an employee at the potato factory and, as she asks why tons of potatoes are dumped, he responds: "We reject all the outsized and green ones, the cut or damaged ones. Because they're unsellable. To the trade, we sell potatoes within a range of two to four inches and anything bigger is automatically thrown away" (00:08:48).

Later in the film, she marvels at a heart-shaped potato, saying to a gleaner of the dumped potatoes, "The heart, I want the heart!" (00:09:58). However, she aligns herself with these potatoes: "Agnès Varda, the celebrated 'grandmother of French New Wave' likes to introduce herself as a potato. 'I see myself as a heart-shaped potato--growing again' [...] [she] says that like an old potato sprouts new leaves, her recent turn to contemporary art is a kind of creative rebirth" (Quito). Not only aligning herself, she embodies the object, as "she dressed up as a potato to celebrate the presentation of her immersive art installation 'Patatutopia' at the Venice Biennale" (Weiss).

Based on her physical embodiment of the object of her film, the allusion to the Dutronc song, and the way in which she proposes to use *The Gleaners* as a *"*'subjective documentary' made by an '*auteur*' who would be 'almost hidden but whose presence (through the look, by the

questions, by the subjects) would provide the tone'", Varda uses herself in the film as both a subject and object of critique (Conway 83). This, I want to suggest, is a form of filming "one hand with the other," and, also, producing her persona through the medium of film.

Figure 1: Agnès Varda directing *La Pointe Courte.* (Image from Isabel Stevens, British Film Institute)

Figure 2: Agnès Varda in *The Gleaners and I.* (Image from Caroline Leone, *Cléo: A Journal of Film and Feminism*)

Digital Camera and Varda Filmmaking

I want to argue that Varda's use of the digital video camera furthers Marshall's notion of the idea that we are moving from a representational to a presentational form of media. Varda's video camera allows for more mobility with her filming but, more than anything, the digital camera simply allows Varda to continue filming *as Varda does.* What I mean to say is that Varda was able to use the digital video as a way to "'reduce the distance between the two sides of the camera'" (Conway 89). Varda uses the digital camera as a way of connecting on a more personal level with her film's subjects (herself included).

She uses the digital camera in a presentational media way, in that it allows for the "expression of the self to others," not only to the film's spectators, but also to allow herself to connect with her films' subjects (Marshall 160). Varda claims: "She asserts that modesty, which she strives to inculcate in the audience was one of her primary motivations for using a DV camera. Eyeline matches and slightly oblique camera angles stitch us into her conversations with her interviewees, but it is the small size and flip-out monitor of her handycam that allows us to get physically closer to people during interviews without intimidating them: 'to look them in the eye,' she says, 'without having to hide behind the camera' (Havis). Nothing inherent in digital cameras leads inevitably to changed relations between filmmaker and subject, but the DV camera's unobtrusive size and secondary viewscreen offer possibilities for such a difference, and Varda's film embraces these possibilities" (Bonner 503).

The digitals camera's "unobtrusive size" is made visually obvious in Figure 2. As seen in Figure 1, the analogue camera is larger and, therefore, more difficult to maneuver. In addition, the analogue camera adds more distance between what is being filmed and the filmmaker; whereas, in Figure 2, Varda is able to hold the camera easily with one hand, with her eye looking directly at us. It is almost like the camera is her second eye in the way in which she is able to hold the camera and gaze at the viewers with such ease. In comparison, though, the analogue camera is harder to maneuver and, therefore, more difficult to "'reduce the distance between the two sides of the camera'" (Conway 89).

The digital camera, its size and mobility, then, allows for Varda to speak on a more personal level with the people she interviews: nothing gets in the way. In this way, then, the digital camera allows for Varda to move into a more presentational form of media, as it allows

for a more open and personal way for Varda to communicate with her interviewees, and her film's audience, as well. In this sense, the digital camera helps Varda to work in the presentational form of media in that the "individual is involved in the distribution" and helps for the "expression of the self to others" (Marshall 160).

The digital camera, while reducing the space between herself and her subjects, also allows Varda to turn the camera on herself in a more reflexive manner. She used the digital camera "as a kind of 'notebook' for sketching out her ideas in solitude. She would never have asked a cinematographer to film her hands because 'I wanted to look at them myself. There is a personal and immediate relationship [between the camera and my] impressions and thoughts' (Frodon, 'La caméra numérique')" (Conway 89). The digital camera works in a twofold, seemingly paradoxical, but complementary sense. On the one hand, the camera allows for Varda to connect with her subjects on a more personal level: it reduces the distance between the filmmaker and the filmed. On the other hand, the camera also allows for Varda to connect *with herself* on a more personal level. The film, then, reflects a self-portrait of Varda in a twofold sense: Varda as part of the world as a gleaner (*la glaneuse*), and Varda as separated from the world.

When I suggest that the film allows Varda to interrogate herself as separate from the world, I want to return to the notion of the "And Me and Me and Me" that Varda included in the film's proposal. By using that title, and referring to Dutronc's *"Et moi et moi et moi,*" it allows Varda to include, herself, in the film as an object up for the camera's critique and examination. For example, in the beginning of the film, Varda ruminates on the new cameras, narrating to the viewer that: "These new cameras, they are digital, fantastic. Their effects are stroboscopic, narcissistic, and even hyper-realistic" (00:04:42). The camera then cuts to a shot of the film's

manual, harkening back to the very beginning sequence, when Varda provided, from the filmed dictionary, a definition of "gleaner." She not only provides a definition of her film's subject, but provides the viewer with the definition of the film's apparatus, itself.

The camera then cuts to a slow-motion sequence of Varda, lying on the couch in her home, her hand over her face, then uses her hand to cover the camera's lens. We are then taken to a close-up image of Varda's eyes in the sunlight, and the camera zooms out to reveal Varda's whole face, fragmented and pixellated. Then, again, we are taken to an extreme close-up shot of Varda's scalp, her hair, and her hands taking a comb through her hair, narrating: "No, it's not, 'Oh, rage,' no it's not, 'Oh, despair,' it's not even, 'old age, my enemy.' It might even be, 'Old Age, my friend,' but still, my hair..." (00:05:36). The shot then cuts to a close-up shot of Varda's left hand, we can see she is now in a car, she has on her wedding ring, and continues narrating: "...and my hands keep telling me that the end is near" (00:05:47). The camera then lingers a bit on Varda's hand, then states: "Ok, right now, we are driving towards Beauce" (00:05:54).

So, Varda begins by showing the spectator *how* this new camera works: what it can do. She shows us the manual, as she showed us the dictionary definition for "gleaner," she then shows us the new modes of filming made available: slow motion and fragmentation via pixellation. In order to do this, she uses herself as the object for experimentation of these new filmic techniques made available by the digital camera. Her use of the camera's new technical capacities, though, lead to a rumination on her age. However, she dictates to the spectator what the sequence means: she does not feel sadness, she does not feel devalued by her aging hands, her graying hair. She informs us not to feel sad for her, she does not want our pity. She simply tells us, my body is telling me that my time is nearly up, and here it is.

Comparison and Difference in Varda's Editing and Mise-en-Scène

In one section of *The Gleaners,* Varda interviews an ex-truck driver in Beauce, who is homeless and gleans for food as a way to make ends meet. She interviews him, asks him what happened, and he tells her that he was fired for drinking while on the job, which followed with a divorce and losing custody of his children. We follow him as he heads to the dumpsters, to glean, and he finds perfectly packaged, untouched bags of apples, wrapped cheeses, vegetables, and more. He shows Varda where they get their water, as they pass by abandoned and totaled cars on the side of the road, deserted spaces with no inhabitants, save for the ex-truck driver. Varda then sits with him in his trailer, her sitting behind the camera, and he tells her about the expiration dates of the food he gleaned: not one or two days past-date.

From the ex-truck driver's trailer, the image then cuts to a kitchen in a restaurant, with a chef in typical white uniform and tall hat, yelling to his staff to prepare the "*amuse-bouche et beignets pomme de terre*" (00:17:54). The difference in images is striking: one, for the speed in which the viewer is taken from a homeless man who gleans for food and, two, for the visual difference between the homeless man's gleaning, to the pristine kitchen and the chef's yelling about five-star meals. In Virginia Bonner's analysis of *The Gleaners,* she claims that in nearly every viewing she has seen of the film, "predominantly middle-class audiences always laugh at this comparison of a poor traveler and a gourmet chef" (Bonner 501).

She claims that "the laughter may also originate in Varda's direct class comparison, one that necessarily calls attention to the viewer's own class position" (Bonner 501). Furthermore, she states, that "this moment of awkwardness functions not as a slap at bourgeois audiences but as a gesture of inclusivity in the first-person plural: we must situate ourselves on a continuum of privilege ranging from the pristine, stainless-steel affluence of the chef as he prepares fetishized,

expensive foods to the shabby, trailer-bound poverty of the traveler who must scrabble for leftover fish from garbage cans" (Bonner 501).

Later, Varda asks the chef what goes to waste, and the chef responds that nothing goes to waste, that everything is used; he says, "Nothing should be thrown away" (00:18:15). From the kitchen, the image then cuts to a wide, overhead shot of a field with Edouard, the chef, with a basket and his dog, an image reminiscent of Millet's painting of the gleaners we were introduced to in the beginning of the film. Varda narrates to the viewer that Edouard is a "born gleaner," and she asks him, "How come you, a chef, also pick?" (00:19:41). Edouard replies that, "...because my grandparents taught me to [...] and also because I then know what produce I get and where I get it from" (00:19:42).

So, as Bonner suggests, the way that Varda edits the sequence between the ex-truck driver and the Michelin-star chef is a "gesture of inclusivity," but, at the same time, one cannot but ignore the differences in living conditions, and reasons for gleaning practices. Bonner claims that *The Gleaner's* "sociocultural critique teaches us to reject our prescribed role under consumer capitalism. It is a counterhegemonic second-person address that might more aptly translate: 'Hey, you, gleaning comrade! Value your fellow humans and the environment!' Toward this end, *Gleaners* strives not simply to target the second-person 'you' but to inspire our embrace of a stronger, communal sense of the first-person plural, 'we'" (Bonner 499). Bonner concludes that Varda's "funny asides and anecdotes strategically usher us into sympathy with the film's larger political issues, especially that we are all, in some sense, gleaners and therefore should not discriminate against those who glean out of poverty" (Bonner 505).

While I do not disagree with Bonner's conclusion, I want to use, here, Audre Lorde's concept of difference, and how difference can function productively. Varda's use of comparison

and editing between the ex-truck driver and the chef brings about the similarity that both of them are gleaners, but it is not as if they are the same kind of gleaners. While she draws comparisons in order to note similarities, I also want to suggest that Varda uses comparisons in order to show differences. While Varda's film inspires a sense of community among a group of gleaners, she also demonstrates the differences in kinds of gleaning, and that these differences should not be romanticized and reduced simply to "we are all gleaners, therefore, we are all the same." If that were the case, then why does Varda take the viewer so quickly, and visually drastically, from the desolate, impoverished conditions of the ex-truck driver, to the pristine kitchen of the Michelin-star chef?

I suggest that Varda uses such drastic comparisons in order to produce difference. I want to follow Audre Lorde's conception of difference, and how difference is taught; as she states: "Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy, we have *all* been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of the three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals. As a result, those differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion. Certainly there are very real difference between us of race, age, and sex. But it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from out misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation" (Lorde 115).

I want to suggest that Bonner's comment that every screening of the film, at the moment of the shift between the ex-truck driver and the chef, is a form of ignoring the difference or, at

least, is a result of the fact that "we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals" (Lorde 115). While Varda creates a kind of community with her film of gleaners, whether they be the chef or the ex-truck driver, to simply state that "we are all gleaners" would be to fall into the fallacy that Lorde warns against: "Too often, we pour the energy needed for recognizing and exploring difference into pretending those differences are insurmountable barriers, or that they do not exist at all. This results in a voluntary isolation, or false and treacherous connections. Either way, we do not develop tools for using human difference as a springboard for creative change within our lives. We speak not of human difference, but of human deviance" (Lorde 116).

While I have analyzed Varda's editing as producing difference, I want to analyze a scene's mise-en-scène, and how Varda creates difference through her film's content. At one point, Varda goes to a vineyard and, when she asks one of the employees of the vineyard about gleaners, he responds: "Wine growers have always protected themselves against [gleaners]. If you let people pick in your vines, how can you be sure they are not going to pick on a large scale?" (00:22:24). The shot then cuts to images of the vines, and grapes on the floor, with Varda narrating in voiceover: "...the surplus [grapes] have been deliberately left on the ground. They're drying out, lost for everybody" (00:22:45). She interviews more wine producers, as one comments, "It's a measure to protect our profession and capital" (00:22:52). Another comments on the legal capacities of gleaning among the vineyards: "Gleaning, or picking, is forbidden in Burgundy. It ended three or four years ago" (00:22:38).

In another shot, we see Varda, in a medium frame, picking food off of a tree, saying to herself (or at least not directly to the camera), "Anyway, people are stingy. They won't allow gleaning because they don't feel like being nice" (00:28:21). In the next shot, Varda returns to

the idea of the legal ramifications of gleaning through her production of visual difference in the scene's mise-en-scène.

We are introduced to a wide shot of a cabbage field, with an unidentified narrator in voiceover stating, "The harvest of the cabbage is over" (00:28:45). Then, the camera pans to reveal what seems to be a judge or a priest, some kind of official-looking figure in a black robe, big glasses, and holding a large, red book. The scene is confusing and comical: this man looks to be lost, completely out of place in the cabbage patch. He continues standing there in his official robe, holding the book, stating that, "These cabbages can be gleaned with absolute impunity by gleaners from Avignon or around" (00:29:02). He refers to his "bible, the penal code," and claims that it is not him making the decisions: "And it's not me [who says so], it's the penal code that says so" (00:29:14).

The shot then goes to a medium shot of the man, as the camera pans down to the book, as he narrates: "...in article P-26.10. Here: gleaning is allowed from sunup to sundown. Second condition is that gleaning occurs after the harvest" (00:29:24). Varda then asks the judge, "But what if they don't glean because they are poor or starving [as required by law], but they do it for fun?" (00:29:56). The image then returns to a medium shot of the judge in the field, again standing among the cabbage, looking out of place and dressed completely inappropriately for the setting, and states, "If they glean for fun, it's because they have a need for fun," which, therefore, makes it legal (00:30:15). We then see the judge walk out of the cabbage fields, having to lift his robe, and walk uncomfortably and awkwardly around the cabbage.

Taking into consideration Varda's disdain for "stingy" people who forbid people from gleaning, I want to argue that Varda constructs the judge-in-the-cabbage-patch scene as a way of creating a productive difference. She places a figure, or representative, of the law in the middle

of the cabbage field. Already, this scene is striking in its difference: what is a man in full legal regalia, a long black robe, holding a penal code, doing in the middle of a cabbage patch? By placing him in the field, Varda shows how out of place it is to put the law in the middle of a cabbage field. If the judge, the representative of the law, looks out of place there, then why is the law determining what happens to the cabbage? By creating this visual difference, Varda forces the spectators to rethink laws surrounding food consumption. What is the place of the law to keep food from being consumed by those who need it?

Representative and Presentative Media

Lastly, I want to discuss Varda's use of paintings, museums, and spectators as a form of creating presentational media. Throughout the film, Varda introduces the viewer to oil paintings, which are used as a segue to introduce new concepts, ideas, or locations to the viewer. For example, in the beginning of the film, Varda reads from a dictionary the definition of "gleaner." The definition is accompanied by a painting, "the celebrated painting by Millet," *Les Glaneuses,* by François Millet (00:00:40). After a close-up shot of the black-and-white reproduction of the photo in the dictionary, the image then cuts to a wide shot of the large clock at the Musée d'Orsay, with Varda narrating, "The original is at the Musée d'Orsay" (00:00:46). The image then cuts to a medium shot of the original Millet painting at the museum, but with someone looking at the painting, so we see the painting obstructed by the spectator's head. Varda then plays a montage of the painting with passer-by's taking photos, looking at it for a while, and pointing to it.

Varda takes viewers to several museums throughout the film: from the Musée d'Orsay, to the museum in Arras, to the Hôtel-Dieu Museum in Beaune. What is striking, though, is that at each museum, whatever painting Varda is filming, she does not film the painting in its entirety,

completely unobstructed: we never get to *see* the paintings. For example, at the Musée d'Orsay, when she films the Millet, she does not allow us, the viewer, to look at the painting without people in front of it; however, when she does film the painting unobstructed, she films extreme close-up shots of the painting's figures. I want to argue that Varda's film suggests that artwork is not unseparated from its viewers. Furthermore, I want to suggest that this way of filming paintings and including its spectators is a move towards presentational media.

Presentational media is "performed, produced, and exhibited by the individual or other collectives and not by the structure of representational media which is almost by definition large public and private media corporations" (Marshall 160). Furthermore, this form of media acknowledges that "an individual is involved in the distribution of highly produced forms. It is mediated by the personal and presented therefore in a different frame than traditional media forms of representation" (Marshall 160).

When Varda drives to Beaune, she goes to the Hôtel-Dieu, where *The Last Judgment* by Rogier van der Weyden is held. From the road, we are taken to wide shots of the museum itself, and then to a wide shot of the altarpiece. However, again, we are not introduced to the painting in its entirety, unobstructed. Instead, Varda films from all the way in the back of the crowd in the dark room, silhouettes in front of the illuminated altarpiece, the silhouettes moving around, and we hear the silence of the room and shuffling of the spectators. Varda then goes to extreme close-ups of certain figures in the painting, as we see the "Archangel Michael," looking him in the eye, as if Varda were about to start interviewing him (00:21:01). She then films extreme close-up shots of those, in the painting, who are waiting for their judgment, and those who are suffering. However, we never see the altarpiece in its entirety unobstructed. I want to suggest that Varda's choice to include spectators notes how the "individual is involved in highly produced forms," in

that, a painting, or a piece of artwork, is not separated from the viewers who attach meaning to it, and are part of the experience in seeing the artwork, and creating the meaning of the artwork (Marshall 160).

In regard to artwork being inseparable from the viewer's meaning-making, I will analyze Varda's use of the Breton painting. After reading the definition of "glaneur" from the dictionary, and taking the viewer to the Musée d'Orsay to see the original Millet painting, Varda takes us to the museum of Arras, where Jules Breton's *La Glaneuse* is held. We are introduced to a close-up shot of the painting, so we see the singular figure, the *glaneuse,* up close, with her determined look and hay on her shoulder. We are then taken to a wide shot, which reveals the large painting, but also Varda, herself, standing to the right of the painting, with two people holding up a cloth backdrop for her, as she imitates the painting's determined figure, hand on hip and motivated look. Varda also holds a bundle of wheat on her shoulder, and her camera in her other hand, this hand on her hip, as she narrates to us, "The other *glaneuse*, like the title of this documentary, that's me" (00:04:28).

The shot then cuts to a close-up shot of Varda, in the exact same kind of framing that she introduced us to the *glaneuse* of Breton's painting. Varda looks at the camera with the same determined look, the same bundle of wheat, and the cloth background to give us the impression that she was a painting herself. She then drops the bundle of wheat off her shoulder, and brings the camera up to her eye, as she narrates, "I let the bundle of wheat fall so I can take my camera" (00:04:39).

Just as Varda films all the paintings in the film in either close-up shots, or full shots, but obstructed by museum spectators, Varda films the Breton painting in close-up, and then paralleled with Varda as a live reenactment of the painting itself. Thanks to this comparison,

Varda uses the representative media (the Breton painting) as a way to assert her "personal expression of the self to others," the others being us, the film's viewers (Marshall 160). Varda uses herself as a recreation of the Breton painting to assert the notion that she, also, is a gleaner. However, while Varda begins with the same material as Breton's figure, the wheat, she replaces it with a camera, suggesting that while Varda, like Breton's girl, is also a gleaner, her tools for gleaning are a bit different. Overall, Varda uses paintings throughout her film either in close-up or obstructed by viewers in order to suggest that artworks cannot be separated from its viewers.

Conclusion

The Gleaners and I, Varda's first digital film, allowed Varda not only to connect more personally with her interviewees, but also with herself. Thanks to the digital camera, Varda was able to film in a presentational form of media. The camera afforded Varda mobility and the ability to "'reduce the distance between the two sides of the camera'" (Conway 89). This allowed Varda not only to connect with her interviewees, but also with herself, in other words, "to film with one hand my other hand" (00:32:46).

I want to return, here, to the notion I suggested earlier that Varda's artwork and film are not "by-products of the artist's larger-than-life public persona," but her film *is* her persona, and vice versa. The use of the digital camera gave Varda the ability to film in a more personal and a much more up-close manner: Varda was able to film her infamous hair in a close-up fashion, and to film her hands in detail. The film produced her persona because the camera gave her the ability to be more personal and reflective about herself.

For example, I analyzed earlier the scene in which Varda shuffles through photos from her trip to Japan, and then ruminates on her hands: "And then my hand up close. I mean, this is my project: to film with one hand my other hand" (00:32:46). Afterwards, Varda lets the camera

linger on her hands, narrating to the viewer: "...to enter the horror of it, to find extraordinary things. I have the impression that I am a beast. Even worse, I am a beast that I do not know" (00:33:05). She then lifts up her finger, revealing the face in one of the photos she took in Japan: the face of the self-portrait by Rembrandt, as she says to us: "And, here, the self-portrait of Rembrandt. It's the same thing, really. It's always a self-portrait (00:33:13).

Again, Varda uses a painting, Rembrandt's self-portrait, in order to reflect on herself. However, here, she suggests that the two are the "same thing, really," always a self-portrait. What does Varda mean by that, though? That all artwork is a self-portrait? Or any sort of reflection one has about oneself, or life, is always a self-portrait? What is important, here, though, is that Varda's use of the digital camera not only allowed for herself to film her one hand with the other, but it also allowed her to let her thoughts linger for the camera. We are introduced not only to Varda's hands, Varda's self-portrait, but Varda's thoughts and the interiority of her self-portrait. The digital camera allowed for Varda to produce her self-portrait in a more intimate and reflexive manner. In addition, it allows for her own "expression of the self to others," allowing her to connect with herself, and with her viewers (Marshall 160).

Chapter III: Faces Places

In Agnès Varda and JR's 2017 documentary, *Faces Places,* Varda and JR, her 33-year-old co-director, and a fellow artist and photographer, sit in a café discussing the itinerary of their film. Varda begins asking JR about his glasses, and why he never takes them off. This is a common theme throughout the film. In the beginning of the film, when she is photographed for the first time by JR, she tells him she does not understand why he never takes off his sunglasses (00:04:37). As she admits this to JR, Varda says, in voiceover, "I think of Jean-Luc Godard, with his black glasses [...] sometimes he took them off for me" (00:04:39). During Varda's monologue, the image cuts to black-and-white images of Godard with his sunglasses on, and one in which he took them off for Varda, revealing his eyes for the camera.

Throughout the film, Varda comments on JR's glasses, how she thinks it is not "friendly" that he wears them constantly (1:03:57). This is not a surprise for a film director whose work relies on interviews, as in her documentary *The Gleaners and I,* and interviewing old friends, and new, in *The Beaches of Agnès*. After all, eye contact is pivotal for a director whose use of the digital camera, she claimed, was a way in which to "'reduce the distance between the two sides of the camera'" (Conway 89).

Back inside the café, Varda continues pressing JR about the glasses, getting heated, saying to him: "For you, they're like a costume. For me, I am as I am [*Je suis comme je suis*]." (1:03:59). JR takes her questions lightheartedly, and asks her in response: "And your haircut, isn't that a costume? As you choose and change the color; why do you do that?" (1:04:03). Varda looks a bit baffled, as if the two are not the same thing, saying to him, "Because I like the color, because I don't want to have white hair, like the dog here" (1:04:07).

Varda motions to the white labrador sitting on the other side of their booth in the café; the dog's hair is a bright white, not far off from the color coming from Varda's roots. The image then cuts from the wide shot of Varda and JR in the booth interrogating one another, to a medium shot of the dog's face, looking up as if asking, "Hey, who's talking about me?" Afterwards, Varda says she does not want to discuss it anymore, and the movie continues on.

What is interesting, here, is how Varda sees herself in relation to her hair. Varda's hair has been a theme throughout her work and her life. In *The Gleaners and I,* Varda ruminates on her hair in extreme close-up shots, as she discusses, in voice-over, the process of aging, how it is made visible by her hair, and her thoughts: "...it might even be, 'Old Age, my friend,' but still, my hair..." (00:05:36). In *The Beaches of Agnès,* most commentary on the film includes remarks about Varda's iconic bob, that her "face is still framed by a cap of shining hair," and that her "signature bowl-cut-cum-bob still frames her intelligent, impish face, although depending on the season and her humor" (Ebert, Conway 111).

In *The Gleaners and I,* Varda uses her hair as a filmic object to communicate her thoughts on aging. In *The Beaches of Agnès,* Varda's bob is a signature of herself, as a director and an artist. However, in *Faces Places,* her hair acts neither as a filmic tool, nor as an icon of herself and her work, but, instead, is an area of inquiry. It is the first time in which she is interrogated *by someone else* about her hair's function: why does she have this hairstyle? Prior to Varda's rebuttal to JR that she dyes her hair because she doesn't want white hair, she tells JR that she is as she is: "*Je suis comme je suis"* (1:03:59). Her hair, although dyed, is who she is: the process of coloring it, the process of ruminating the symbolism it holds for her as a metonym for aging.

Though her hair may be perceived as a costume, as JR insists, what Varda does is who she is, and, as she suggests, she should be taken at face value.

Faces Places is the first film that Varda has ever co-directed. The pairing between JR and Varda may be unlikely, because of their age (he was thirty-three during filming, while Varda was eighty-nine), but "both Varda and JR find the extraordinary in the apparently ordinary, draw energy from incessant travel and creation, and strive to make political interventions that are both subtle and accessible" (Conway 24).

Varda's films have always focused on the socially marginalized, as in her 1960s documentaries *Black Panthers* (1968) and *Salut les cubains* (1967), the former documenting the Black Panther Party's protests after the incarceration of Huey Newton, and the latter filming Cuban life post-revolution. Needless to say, her 2000 documentary *The Gleaners and I* focuses on gleaning, a socially marginalized activity, from the perspective of different social and economic classes. JR's work has this same penchant for focusing on, and listening to, the socially marginalized.

JR, who was born in 1983 in the Parisian suburbs, started graffiti at thirteen, and, at seventeen, he "found a camera in the metro [and] began putting photocopies of his photographs on walls in Paris, creating a kind of sidewalk gallery of unauthorised images in public spaces" (Conway 23). JR's work gained critical attention in 2004 when he photographed: "a young French-Malian man standing with a group of black children in front of a dilapidated, graffiti-covered building. The man looks directly at the camera and holds what appears to be a gun, creating the impression of confrontation. But the man is actually holding a video camera and is Ladj Ly, JR's friend and fellow artist. The photograph was taken in Cité des Bosquets, an impoverished housing project in the Parisian suburb of Clichy-Montfermeil, and was part of

'Portrait of a Generation', JR's first project of large-scale pastings" (Conway 24). These pastings consist of photographs of the people JR encounters, then he prints them in large-scale, and pastes, or glues, them onto the sides of buildings. In this sense, then, people are confronted with the images for, one, their immense size (sometimes taking up the entire wall of a ten-story building) and, two, for their location: on the streets and neighborhoods where people live.

JR's work continually focuses on everyday people, drawing social and political commentary. After "Portrait of a Generation," and the 2005 uprisings in Les Bosquets, which left two boys dead when trying to escape the police, journalists took to JR's work, and the artist "returned to Les Bosquets and created new photographs of the residents. He exhibited these images, illegally, in prosperous neighborhoods of Paris" (Conway 23). JR's signature work is his "gigantic, site-specific, ephemeral images of faces on buildings in places marked by poverty or conflict" (Conway 24).

The two filmmakers use art (for JR, photography, and Varda, film) as a way of exploring the conditions of the socially marginalized, but also as a way of illuminating their conditions to the wider public. It seems inevitable, in a sense, that the two would collaborate. However, what is interesting, is the way in which the two artists can converse with one another about themselves and their practices. For example, while, so far, this thesis has explored the notion of Varda's hair, Varda has not been questioned about the role her hair plays in relation to herself. Thanks to her co-director, this kind of interrogation is made possible.

In this chapter, I will analyze the notion of seeing the film through Varda's eyes, thanks to the co-directing of the film. I will argue that JR co-directing the film makes it possible for Varda to make a film not just through her eyes, but *from her eyes*. Quite literally, we take on Varda's vision. This will help me further the idea that Varda's artwork is not a by-product of her persona,

but her artwork is *actually* her persona. Furthermore, in response to criticism the film received for lacking political commentary, I will explore the film as working within forms of emotional knowledge. I will analyze two scenes, in addition to relating to her earlier work in *The Beaches of Agnès,* in view of Uma Narayan's concept of the role of emotions in knowledge production. I will argue that Varda's emotion-producing, and invoking, scenes work within the domain of emotional knowledge production. Lastly, I will, again, discuss the use of presentational and representational media in the film, but through the lens of *creating* representational media for social media. What role does JR, and his following on Instagram, play in the film? And, to what sense, does his use of selfies bring Varda and her media into the 21st century (so to speak)?

Varda Vision

The beginning of *Faces Places* opens with a sequence in all the ways that JR and Varda did not meet; the off-chances in which they could have encountered one another, but just missed each other. In one instance, Varda is sitting at a bus stop in Paris. JR walks into the shot and is also waiting. At this moment, we expect this to be the story of how they met. The image then cuts to a shot of the bus stop's digital screen with the arrival times of the buses. However, the image is blurry, and we can't make out what it says. Varda says out loud, to no one in particular, "How long is the wait? I can't see a thing" (00:03:02). At this moment, we know that the camera has taken Varda's point of view, that we are quite literally seeing the world through Varda's eyes. After JR responds the waiting time, Varda decides to walk the route, instead.

The scene suggests a few things that will be developed in the film. One, that although Varda's eyes are failing her, she has her co-director and friend, JR, by her side to read the bus stop times. Secondly, it communicates to the viewer Varda's aging body. Already, in *The Gleaners and I* and *The Beaches of Agnès,* we have seen the filmmaker wonder about her aging

body and its limitations. Quite literally, the project of *The Gleaners and I*, as a film, was for Varda to film "one hand with [her] other hand" (00:32:46). At the same time, at another point during *The Gleaners,* she looks at her hands and says, "...and my hands keep telling me that the end is near" (00:05:47). While the previous two films in this thesis have been Varda exploring the notions of her aging body, and communicating these explorations to the viewer, Varda now allows the viewer to embody her aging body. What does it mean to see the world blurred, through Varda's eyes? Lastly, seeing through Varda's eyes is also a form of community-building, and a way in which Varda continues her personal "expression of the self to others" (Marshall 160).

For example, in one scene, we follow Varda to an eye surgery. In one instance, Varda and JR are at a fish market in Northern France, filming the fish, focusing on a close-up shot of a fish's eye. From the fish's eye, the image cuts to a medium shot of blue surgical fabric draped over a face, like a blanket, with one hole cut out, so only the eye peers out. The eye is being held open by a doctor wearing white gloves, holding wires, reminiscent of *A Clockwork Orange*. We then hear a voice from under the blanket, that we now know is Varda's, and JR is filming the process (which, he assures the viewers, Varda has allowed him to film).

The scene cuts to Varda walking outside the hospital, in surgical gear, blue scrubs, gloves, and a blue hair net, her hands behind her back, as she says to the camera, "I have an eye issue" (00:35:25). JR, behind the camera, asks what the eye exam she has to undergo consists of; she responds, wearing eye exam glasses, "Look at the letters" (00:35:29). The image then cuts to a wide shot of thirty-five people on the steps of the *Bibiothèque Nationale* holding letters of various sizes. It is a live reenactment of an eye examination, with the largest letters at the top,

and the smallest letters at the bottom. Varda instructs the letters to move, and we see some blurry, and some more clearly.

This scene enables us to see through Varda's eyes and to live in her failing eyes. Furthermore, it is an act of community-building. On the one hand, Varda builds a community by expressing her eyesight as a way of communicating the personal "expression of the self to others": through using the camera as her eyes, we, the viewers, understand her personal struggle with her eyesight (Marshall 160). On the other hand, her eyesight brings together JR, the one inquiring about her eyesight, and all of the letters, and the people holding the letters. Varda's filmic sight uses her "expression of the self to others," also, as a form of community-building (Marshall 160).

I also want to suggest, and build upon, the notion that it further helps to construct her persona. I have already discussed how SooJin Lee explores the idea of "how an artist's persona can become a medium of art and politics, and how an artist's artworks can become by-products of the artist's larger-than-life public persona" (Lee 25). Throughout this thesis, I have argued against Lee's idea that an artist's artworks are by-products of their persona; instead, in the case of Varda, I have demonstrated that Varda's artwork *is* her persona, and her persona is her artwork. I want to argue that, the fact that we see through Varda's eyes throughout the films is a concrete expression of Varda's artwork *being* Varda: "*je suis comme je suis*" (01:03:59). Quite literally her film, her artwork, becomes her eyesight: her films embody her, and her artwork is herself, and her persona.

However, this is not the first time we have seen Varda embody an object of her artwork. For example, I have already discusses in the chapter *The Gleaners and I* her affinity, and sympathy with, potatoes. In the film, she jumps at the chance to save a heart-shaped potato from

being thrown away, informing her art installation work, where "she dressed up as a potato to celebrate the presentation of her immersive art installation 'Patatutopia' at the Venice Biennale" (Weiss). Varda's embodiment of her art and films means that her artworks are not "by-products of the artist's larger-than-life public persona," but her artworks are quite literally her persona (Lee 25). Through Varda's embodiment of her artwork, she creates her persona and vice versa.

However, I want to interrogate further the idea of her finding sympathy, and identifying with, her artistic objects, made subjects (à la the potato). In order to do this, I want to use the concept of emotional knowledge production and identity proposed by Uma Narayan in her article, "The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Feminist." In discussing how knowledge is generated and produced from oppressed groups, she states that: "it would be a mistake to move from the thesis that knowledge is constructed by human subjects who are socially constituted to the conclusion that those who are differently located socially can never attain *some* understanding of our experience or *some* sympathy with our cause" (Narayan 220). She continues that: "one sort of suffering may simply harden individuals to other sorts or leave them without energy to take any interest in the problems of other groups. But we can at least try to foster such sensitivity by focusing on parallels, not identities, between different sorts of oppression" (Narayan 220).

I want to argue that Varda's work, and her embodiment of her artwork, is a form of focusing, and creating, parallels. Varda's penchant for curiosity and social justice has been a driving force in her work. However, it is through her embodiment of her artwork, whether it be filming through her own eyes or embodying the potato, that she attempts to find parallels with

her film's subjects or objects, often deemed as valueless by society. When I state valueless I mean in the sense that: one, the potatoes in *The Gleaners and I* are deemed valueless if they do not fit to the perfect dimensions stated for sale at grocery stores. Two, Varda uses her body, and vision (in all three of the films explored in this thesis), to assert the notion that an aging body is deemed "valueless" in society, and Varda's films interrogate this notion through her inquiry and embodiment.

Emotional Knowledge Production

Faces Places was met with mostly positive reviews, including a nomination for Best Documentary at the 2018 Academy Awards. However, some reviewers claimed that the film was not "political enough"; for example, as Conway summarizes: "The film as a whole was widely praised by critics, but it nevertheless elicited some criticism for its perceived lack of political critique. *Libération* complained that '*le film, un genre de feel-good documentaire, n'a rien à dire de la France*' ['the film, a genre of feel-good documentary, has nothing to say about France'] (Péron 2017). Another reviewer complained that 'this feel-good film conceives of social relations as somehow devoid of antagonism and unpleasantness: it never mentions deindustrialisation, outsourcing, immigration, the decline of organised labour, or the rise of the National Front' (Balsom 2018)" (Conway 27).

What is interesting is the implicit notion in both critiques that "feel-good" cannot elicit any kind of critique. In addition, the idea that the documentary has nothing to say about France, though the film travels all throughout France, visits French towns, photographs French towns, and interviews French people. One has to wonder: what more of France could they be referring to? I want to explore the notion that the film uses emotional knowledge to produce its critique, or

commentary. I want to follow the notion of emotional knowledge as proposed by Narayan in the same article, "The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Feminist."

Narayan's article discusses the project of feminist epistemology in how it "sees mainstream theories about various human enterprises, including mainstream theories about human knowledge, as one-dimensional and deeply flawed because of the exclusion and misrepresentation of women's contributions" (Narayan 213). In this essay she examines the "dangers of approaching feminist theorizing and epistemological values in a noncontextual and nonpragmatic way, which could convert important feminist insights and theses into feminist epistemological dogmas" (Narayan 214). What is key to my analysis, here, is her discussion of the role of emotions in epistemology.

On emotions, she states that: "an important theme on [feminist epistemology's] agenda has been to undermine the abstract, rationalistic, and universal image of the scientific enterprise by using several different strategies. It has studied, for instance, how contingent historical factors have colored both scientific theories and practices and provided the (often sexist) metaphors in which scientists have conceptualized their activity (Bordo 1986; Keller 1985; Harding and O'Barr 1987). It has tried to reintegrate values and emotions into our account of our cognitive activities, arguing for both the inevitability of their presence and importance of the contributions they are capable of making to our knowledge (Gilligan 1982; Jaggar and Tronto essays in this volume)" (Narayan 213).

I want to argue that *Faces Places,* much like Varda's filmic work, in general, functions in using emotions to create knowledge. Varda's film takes the "perspective [of] feminist epistemology [that] rejects the 'Dumb View' of emotions and favors an intentional conception that emphasizes the cognitive aspects of emotions. It is critical of the traditional view of the

emotions as wholly and always impediments to knowledge and argues that many emotions often help rather than hinder our understanding of a person or situation (See Jaggar 1989)" (Narayan 218).

Varda's emotional filmmaking (I will elaborate on this later) produces new forms of knowledge. However, I want to argue that the reviews from Péron and Balsom take the perspective that emotions are traditionally seen as impediments to knowledge, as both reviews even note the "feel-good" aspect of the documentary. Analyzing Varda's film from the perspective of emotional knowledge, though, allows for new perspectives that break the standards of traditional epistemology, which are often seen in binaries, and often sexist. Feminist epistemology "has also attacked various sets of dualisms characteristic of western philosophical thinking--reason versus emotion, culture versus nature, universal versus particular--in which the first of each is identified with science rationality, and the masculine and the second is relegated to the nonscientific, the nonrational, and the feminine (Harding and Hintikka 1983; Lloyd 1984; Wilshire 1989)" (Narayan 214).

Varda's work, I want to argue, is often informed by emotions, and produce socially and politically aware, and critical, films. For example, in discussing the catalyst for the film *The Gleaners and I,* she states that: "As you know, there is a way of saying, 'Oh, my God, these poor people.' At the beginning, this sentiment led me to make the film. I felt bad for them. I could see an old woman bending with difficulty, and I remembered that image so strongly. I felt she's obliged to do it—if she could afford to buy without bending, she'd do it. There was a kind of . . . not sentimental, but pitiful feeling. When I slowly approached the gleaners, some of them didn't want me to speak to them, didn't want me to film. One person said, 'You will ruin our business. If you tell everybody, they will come and pick the fruit.' It was so interesting. Some people were

not aggressive, but discussed the facts of the subject. I respected them. If somebody didn't want to be filmed, I wouldn't steal an image. Only in one scene in the market, and from very far, or from the back. I wanted to show that gesture, that humble gesture, of picking up things from the ground. In France, we have a saying: '*le geste auguste de semeur* [the majestic gesture of the sower].' That's why I spoke in the film about *le geste modeste de glaneur*" (Anderson 175).

As Varda stated, it was the sentiment of "I felt bad," that led her to start making the film. I want to further build on this idea that Varda's films work within the terrain of emotional knowledge. While the above excerpt from the interview shows that her film's catalyst was a "sentiment," an emotion, I also want to argue that her films *produce* a knowledge, one that is socially and politically aware, *through* generating emotions. In other words, while Varda's films are initiated by her emotions and "feeling bad" for oppressed people (or, in this case, people who have to glean for food), her films also produce social and political critiques through producing viewers' emotions. In order to examine this idea, first I will analyze a scene that produces emotion, and functions within the terrain of emotional knowledge. Second, I will relate the emotional themes in both *The Beaches of Agnès* and *Faces Places* which touch on Varda's own emotions.

Coal Miners of Bruay

Near the beginning of the film, Varda and JR head to Bruay, a former coal mining town, with "black hills and land," accompanied with wide shots taken from the passenger seat of the car, of large, expansive land, filled with hills of black (00:07:25). These images are followed by postcards of old black-and-white images of coal miners that Varda kept from a trip she went to Bruay years ago. They are images of coal miners in the mines, in addition to at their homes, and with their families (00:07:32).

The image cuts to tracking shots of the city, gray and seemingly desolate, with brick house after brick house, "some abandoned" (00:07:45). Varda tells the viewer: "We found a road of houses, which seemed to be abandoned" (00:07:51). The image cuts to a tracking shot of this street of identical, dilapidated brick houses, the dead trees lining the roads. Varda continues: "We met Jeannine, the last person living on this street" (00:07:55). The image cuts to a close-up shot on Jeannine's face, as she tells Varda and JR that, "They're too many memories [...] no one understands what we've lived" (00:08:18). Jeannine is referring to the life of the coal miner, as Jeannine is the daughter of a coal miner and a widow of a coal miner, and now the last resident on a street that was traditionally lived in by coal miners.

JR and Varda use the images of the coal miners in Varda's postcards to create gigantic murals of the coal miners on the abandoned buildings of Jeannine's street. Varda interviews another inhabitant of Bruay, in his home, and she notices that he has the original photo of one of her postcards (00:09:29). The image is of a woman rubbing the back of a coal miner: he is sitting on the floor, hunched over, covered in soot, as the woman rubs his back for him. The interviewee tells Varda that the image is of his grandma and grandpa.

The image then cuts to a wide shot of JR's team on the scaffolding, putting the mural up on the walls of Jeannine's street. A crowd has now gathered on the abandoned street, as Varda interviews one of them, stating, "For us, it's great, we're so happy" (00:08:43). Varda and JR ask Jeannine more questions as she stands at the windowsill of her home, leaning on the frame, the curtains draped on her back. She discusses the lives of her father and her husband, the suffering they endured as coal miners, and the support she gave as caregiver to her father, and then her husband (00:10:58). At the end, the camera films a tracking shot of the abandoned street, now

populated with the mural figures of the coal miners: young and old men in black and white, covered in soot, looking at the camera.

Lastly, the camera lands on Jeannine's house, where they've done a mural of Jeannine's face, in close-up, on the side of her home, which was "Varda's idea." Her face covers the whole wall, looking out at the people on the street, and is among the coal miner figures on the same street (00:11:06). The image then cuts to a wide shot of Jeannine's house, as we can see her mural on her home, and we see her exiting her house to cross the street and see the murals. As she crosses the street, the camera follows her face and, in close-up, we see her reaction to seeing the mural of her face. Jeannine starts crying, covering her mouth with her hand (we can see she still wears her wedding ring), as she says, "I don't know what to say... nothing" (00:11:18).

This specific scene functions as using emotion to create knowledge. Jeannine stated at the beginning of the sequence that "no one understands what we've lived," stating that the life of a coal miner was at the margins of society, and a source of great hardship and suffering. At the same time, though, it is clear, through the images throughout the sequence, that it was a man's job. The images in the postcards were all men working, or returning home from work. However, Varda's mural of Jeannine takes into consideration the emotional labor women performed to support the male coal miners. For example, the original image she found of one of her postcards: the woman rubs the coal miner's back. In interviewing Jeannine, the viewer understands the work she performed to support her father, and her husband, and her dedication-- that she has remained on the abandoned street even after her husband's passing, and still wears her wedding ring.

Varda's inclusion of Jeannine elicits the emotional reaction from Jeannine, but also highlights the gender inequality in what work is considered work. The murals consist of four coal

miners, but they end with Jeannine. Including Jeannine in the murals links her to the coal miners' work, including her labor and support, though it is not traditionally regarded as work as coal mining is. The emotional process, for the inhabitants and descendants of the Bruay coalminers, the murals also sheds light on the gendered roles that went into the coal mining community, and includes women's labor in that workforce.

Varda's emotional vision

Varda's films also function within this emotional economy on the filmmaker's personal level. In *The Beaches of Agnès,* Varda visits Avignon for a festival, where she had worked with Jean Vilar, as a photographer for the festival decades beforehand. At the festival, during the filming of *The Beaches of Agnès,* they dedicated a photographic exhibition to Vilar, featuring images of the actor. Varda wanders through the exhibition, looking at the images, while, in voiceover, she says: "Emotion is something you can't control. It's funny to see Vilar with his sunglasses as a mustache [...] But mostly what I see is that they're dead. So I bring them roses" (00:42:00). The image then cuts to a medium shot of Varda, holding a bouquet of roses, as she drops roses on the floor, a form of honoring her friend who has passed.

Varda's emotions shape the way in which she views the photos, and, therefore, the way in which she films the scene. As she says, for most spectators, it is simply an image of Vilar with sunglasses propped under his nose. For Varda, though, she sees the image as a friend who has died. This emotion, though uncontrollable, she claims, is used to inform her filmmaking technique. Similarly, Varda's emotions inform her filmmaking in *Faces Places,* as we have seen with Jeannine, but also her personal emotion. Near the end of the film, Varda and JR are on a train, going to see her friend, Godard, whom she has already compared to JR earlier in the film,

thanks to their liking for wearing sunglasses. JR asks what Varda expects of Godard from their meeting, and she tells JR that Godard is "unpredictable" (01:20:08).

JR and Varda approach Godard's home, they stand outside, trying to knock and ring the doorbell, but there is no response. On the window of his door, he has written a note for Varda, which says: "*À la ville de Dordogne, du côté à la côté*" ("In the city of Dordogne, from coast to coast") (01:22:42). JR asks what it means, to which Varda tells him that it's a coded message from Godard, as she explains that: "There's a café in Dordogne that we used to eat at, with me, Jacques, and Jean-Luc, on the boulevard Montparnasse... and '*du côté à la côté*' I don't know [...] this means that he's thinking of Jacques, but it's not very funny. It's not very funny" (01:22:49).

Varda holds back tears as she leaves pastries for Godard on his doorstep (from his favorite bakery, apparently), and she leaves a response on the window pane, writing: "Thanks for having me in your memories, but no thanks for leaving your door closed. From, Jacques" (01:23:50). Afterwards, JR and Varda walk along the lake, then sit down on a bench and JR asks the emotional Varda, "What can I do for you?" (01:25:29). The image then cuts to the back of JR's head, and we see Varda's face, but we can see the back of JR's head, taking off his elusive glasses. The image then cuts to Varda's point of view, looking at JR in close-up, but the image is blurred: this communicates to the viewer that we are taking Varda's eyesight, again. Varda says, in voiceover, looking at JR's blurry, de-glasses face, "Thank you, that's nice of you. I don't see very well, but I see" (01:26:21).

Varda's missed encounter with Godard, and his message to her, bringing up her late husband, leaves Varda emotional and feeling vulnerable. However, from this scene, we take on Varda's eyesight. Varda's personal emotional outlook inform her filmmaking. From Godard's

cryptic message, she finds solace in her friend, JR, who takes off his glasses for her. We see through her eyes, though we don't see since it's blurry. As she says, "I don't see very well, but I see." She cannot see her friend, but she can see the gesture, and, to her, that is more than enough.

JR, the selfie, and social media

Lastly, I want to continue using Marshall's representational and presentational media, within the context of this film. There are many instances within the film in which JR either compliments Varda's work, or Varda discusses her work. For example, near the beginning of the film, the two claim that it is "funny that [their] paths have never crossed before," but discuss how they have always admired each other's work (00:04:08). For JR, he has never "forgotten the images of her films," while shots from her films *The Gleaners and I* show onscreen, "the face of Cléo" shows onscreen from Varda's *Cléo from 5 to 7,* and a wide-shot image of a mural of the ocean on a wall in L.A. shows onscreen, from Varda's film, *Murs Murs,* which, JR comments, was a film that "really left an impression" on him (00:03:35). What is interesting with this is that it collapses Varda's work temporally and emotionally: *The Gleaners and I* is from 2000, *Cléo from 5 to 7* from 1962, and *Murs Murs* from 1981. With JR's comment, and the montage of images from the film, all three of the films are brought to an audience in 2017.

I want to further examine, and explore, the notion of how JR's presence brings Varda's work, and persona, into the purview of 2017 audiences. I have already demonstrated earlier in this chapter how JR being a co-director in *Faces Places* facilitates conversation, and forces Varda to answer questions about her work, and her life. I want to further that claim and state that JR's presence also helps to bring Varda's work into to audiences in 2017. I will examine this notion by continuing to use Marshall's representational and presentational media. I have already argued, throughout this thesis, that Varda's work uses representative media (i.e. paintings in *The Beaches*

of Agnès and *The Gleaners and I*) in a presentational way of expression in, again, a representative format: film. However, I want to argue that *Faces Places,* while also blurring the lines between representative and presentative media, exposes the practice of this media-making and, therefore, "acknowledg[es] that an individual is involved in the distribution of highly produced forms" (Marshall 160).

In order to do this, I will analyze scenes in the film that expose the practice of selfie-taking, along with the ramifications of the practice. In addition, I will be exploring how the film uses Varda's representative media (i.e. her photography) in a presentational format. However, I will explore how these scenes expose the processes of creating that media and, therefore, acknowledging how the individual is part and parcel in creating the work.

Several instances throughout the film include scenes of groups of people taking selfies in front of JR and Varda's installations, or scenes that include JR taking selfies with these groups (00:07:42, 00:10:55, 00:19:16, 00:23:29). In one scene, JR is standing on scaffolding, pasting the large-scale mural onto the side of a wall. It is the street on which Jeannine Carpentier lives, whom I have already discussed in the chapter. JR is on the scaffolding, as the camera films in a wide shot from the bottom of the scaffolding to the top, and we see JR in the middle, pasting one of the murals of the miners onto the side of the building. The image cuts to a wide shot of a group of teenage girls walking down the street, watching JR creating the mural. In voiceover, JR discusses his art-making practice. Then, the scene cuts to a medium shot of an image of the teenage girls, in front of the scaffolding, with JR in the background, as the girl in the front has her phone, and takes a selfie with all the girls and JR. In the next shot, JR is now standing on the sidewalk, behind the girls, leaning down a bit, to get into the shot of the girls' selfies.

In this scene, we not only see how JR creates his artwork, but also how his artwork is distributed. JR's work, by classification, is a form of representational media, since they are large-scale photographs. However, the process of taking selfies in front of the work, shifts his work into the terrain of presentational media, since it functions with the individual. In other words: "the presentational form of address surrounds and situates a great deal of media and communication content: for example, the sharing of music from one friend to another, or passing the link of an amusing videoclip via YouTube acknowledge that an individual is involved in the distribution of highly produced forms. It is mediated by the personal and presented therefore in a different frame than traditional media forms of representation" (Marshall 160).

In this sense, then, the selfies throughout the film take the representative media that JR and Varda are making, and bring them into the domain of presentational media. Furthermore, in another scene, one of the portrait's subjects is interviewed, and discusses the notion of being a mural. At one point in the film, JR and Varda are in a small town in the south of France, and take a portrait of a waitress at one of the city's cafés. They photograph her wearing a polka dot dress, sitting on a ledge, wearing a hat and holding an umbrella. Then, they install the mural onto the side of a five-story building, right in front of the café that the girl works at.

When they interview her about the mural she says that it is "bizarre" to see herself everyday (00:24:02). However, she states that what is even stranger is seeing herself on "the Internet and Instagram" (00:24:38). This interview is then followed by shots of people in the village taking photos on their phones of said mural. In this sense, then, these scenes reveal a twofold process. On the one hand, these scenes show the process of how the murals are made (representative artwork), but they also reveal the process of the selfie-taking. While the selfie

is experienced through online platforms, *Faces Places* reveals the process as to how this presentational media reaches the online platforms.

In addition, JR's presence also helps to bring Varda's representative media to a 2017 audience. For example, in one scene, JR and Varda head to a beach in northern France, where both Varda and JR have already visited. Varda remarks that she had taken photographs of her friend, and photographer, Guy Bourdin, at said beach in 1954, and that they were some of her first photographs (00:52:54). The image then cuts to a black-and-white shot of two boys, naked, on a beach, with a dead animal behind them. Varda reminisces on her time as a photographer, and her photoshoot with Bourdin, and wants to use one of those images to create a mural at the beach. As JR and Varda discuss which image to use, along with JR's installation team, the image then cuts to JR and Varda walking along the sidewalk near the beach. At one point, Varda sees a shed and says to JR, "I took a picture of Guy here" (00:58:05). In voiceover, JR responds, "Oh, yeah, I remember that one" (00:58:07). The image then cuts to the photograph that Varda is referring to: it is the same shed, in black-and-white, with Bourdin sitting on the floor, his back leaning against the shed. The image then cuts to the same exact shot, except in color, with JR taking the place of Bourdin.

In this sense, then, JR is quite literally bringing the 1954 image into the 21st century. The recreation not only works within the terrain of Varda's memories, within a representative format of photography, and film, but, I want to argue, that they are presented in a presentational media format. The image holds sentimental value for Varda, and its recreation not only brings the image into 2017, but also is a form of Varda's "expression of the self to others" (Marshall 160). Therefore, *Faces Places* continues Varda's work in blurring the lines between representative and

presentative media, but JR's presence also helps to bring the film into the purview of 2017 audiences. One being through the exposure of the selfie-taking process, and the second being the way in which JR helps to recreate, and refashion, the images in 2017.

Conclusion

In concluding this thesis, I want to return to the proposition I stated in my introduction, that I will compare and contrast the analyses of all three documentaries. However, first, I want to focus on an interview with Varda from 2018, entitled "Agnès Varda: Filmmaker, Photographer, Instagrammer | BFI" from the British Film Institute. This interview links together Varda's thoughts on her work, and furthers the notion that I was building in chapter three, with the idea of selfies and social media. This conclusion, then, will be separated into two different sections. The first will analyze this interview in light of this thesis' analyses as a whole, and try to relate these analyses to Varda's use of, and thoughts on, her presence on social media. The second part will compare and contrast the conclusions for each chapter, and return to this thesis' main research question. How is it, that despite Varda's work as a film director since the 1950s, she gained more contemporary attention, since 2017?

Vardagram

In 2018, Varda was interviewed by the British Film Institute about her life's work. The YouTube clip starts with a black background with "Agnés Varda" written in white, with the following words appearing onscreen: "Writer, Director, Photographer, Visual Artist, Instagrammer?" (0:09). This shot then cuts to an image from Varda's *Faces Places*, in which JR pushes her in a wheelchair, down one of the grand hall's of the Louvre, as they pass by paintings, Varda admiring them, saying "Botticelli" and "Raphael" (0:20). Then, a text box appears next to this clip onscreen, and it becomes clear that this scene from the movie is also an Instagram post from Varda. We see the account name, "agnes.varda" (without the accent mark), along with the caption, which reads: "*Comme je ne peux plus courir… #HommeageaBandeapart*" ("Since I can

no longer run (0:25). The hashtag is a reference to Jean-Luc Godard's 1964 film, *Band of Outsiders*, in which the characters famously run through the Louvre.

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed how Varda's work functions between the representational and presentational forms of media, along the lines of Marshall's analysis of media. In my previous chapter, about *Faces Places*, I discussed how JR's recollection of his memories of Varda's work collapses three of her films, from three different decades, visually and temporally, for the audiences of 2017. Here, with Varda's Instagram post, she is making use of the same practice. She not only uses her Instagram post to share a part of her film, she uses it to share how she feels (that she can no longer run), and uses a hashtag to pay homage to Godard's 1964 film. In this thesis I have discussed how Varda uses representational media in a presentational way. For example, in my analysis of *The Beaches of Agnès*, I demonstrated how Varda recreates a Magritte painting (representational media) in a presentational way because she uses a live recreation of the painting to recall her personal memories to the viewer, a personal "expression of the self" along the lines of presentational media (Marshall 160).

I also want to return to how presentational media "is supported by the generations of applications online for producing and making content relevant for the expression of the self to others" (Marshall 160). Similarly, as I've noted, Shifman, in discussing memes, states that memes should be seen from a "communication-oriented perspective" since they "propagate *gradually* through interpersonal contact, they were considered unsuitable for exploring content that is transmitted simultaneously from a single institutional source to the masses. But this is no longer the case in an era of blurring boundaries between interpersonal and mass, professional and

amateur, bottom-up and top-down communications" (Shifman 364). Varda's Instagram post provides a platform for communication and interpersonal content in the comments section.

One user, joncarlosb, comments: "@palomaviale thought of you when I saw this on jr," to which we see a response to, later in the comments, from palomaviale, responding: "@joncarlosb same! I thought of you haha" (0:25). This is an example of how online applications, and presentational media, involve the individual more in the distribution of media. Between these comments, it was clear that Varda's Instagram post was shared between the two users, therefore demonstrating the mechanisms of presentational media: that the individual is involved in the distribution of the media. However, it also functions as a form of communicative content.

In the British Film Institute video, she says that, through Instagram now "everybody can make photos on the telephone, everybody is a filmmaker and a photographer" (01:26). She continues that it functions as "a way of trying to communicate freedom […] to communicate joy, or the pain, or concern, about what's happening in the world" (03:27). She states, though, at times, we can be "bombarded" with images, and says that it is important to "go outside and talk to a neighbor. Perhaps it's an act as important as an image on the net" (04:55). As I have shown in this thesis, Varda's work has always been informed by this propensity to "go outside and talk to a neighbor," or to try and understand the lives of others. She used representational media as her format (film) to work in something that is a figure of presentational media: communicative content that portrays the "expression of the self to others" (Marshall 160). As Varda states, going out to speak to a neighbor could be as powerful as an image on the net. However, because of social media, there are now more online applications available for communicative content.

Varda's work, then, has more of a platform, and therefore, audience, to be able to be consumed, and understood, by audiences in 2019.

Comparisons

This thesis started from the inquiry of how, and why, Varda gained more attention since 2017. After proving this through evidence from the spike in nominations and awards she has received since 2017, along with the surge in media coverage, I turned to persona studies to try and understand not only why Varda's persona became a site of attention, but how it became a site of attention. I suggested that, in order to understand why she gained more coverage, it was key to examine how her persona is crafted. In order to do this, I decided to closely read her three most recent documentaries, in order to see if her film's content and style could reveal something about how her persona is crafted.

In *The Beaches of Agnès,* I used Marshall's representational and presentational media in order to analyze Varda's use of, and recreation of, paintings within her film. Her recreations, I suggested, though functioning in a representational form of media (film), functioned more so in the terrain of presentational media. Her recreation of the Magritte painting, for example, revealed how the individual is involved in the distribution of media (Varda's emotions about her late husband), and that the scene functioned as an "expression of the self to others" (Marshall 160). Furthermore, I used Thompson's concept of cinematic excess to analyze two scenes that strayed from their narrative goal of recounting Varda's childhood memories and, instead, revealed feminist commentaries on the distribution of value in space.

I continued using Marshall's representational and presentational media in my analysis of *The Gleaners and I.* In Varda's filming of paintings at museums throughout the film, her choice

to include spectators within the shots, I suggested, demonstrated how the individual is involved in the meaning-making and distribution of media, *à la* the tenets of presentational media. In addition, I continued my feminist analysis of the film using Audre Lorde's concept of difference to examine how Varda's film exposes class differences among the gleaners. Varda created this difference through editing and mise-en-scène, creating a productive difference in order to show that, while the interviewees may all be gleaners, their conditions for gleaning are not at all the same. This forces viewers to be aware of the social and economic differences for gleaning.

Lastly, in *Faces Places,* I argued that the presence of Varda's co-director forced Varda to engage in dialogue about herself and her work. This allowed for a new perspective to be shown on how Varda crafts her persona. I used Narayan's concept of emotional knowledge to argue that Varda's films not only use emotions as catalysts for her film, but that her films produce emotional knowledge as a way of generating social and political critiques. In addition, I argued that JR's presence not only forced Varda to discuss herself and her work, but he also brought her work into the 21st century, quite literally, through recreating some of Varda's work from the 1950s. In addition, I demonstrated how the film reveals the processes of presentational media, through showing groups taking selfies with JR and Varda.

In each of the films, Varda uses herself as a subject, and object, of inquiry. In the reception to *The Beaches of Agnès,* there was a resounding response to Varda's iconic hairstyle. In *The Gleaners and I*, Varda's stated project was to film her one hand with the other, and she ruminated on her hair, and her hands, as areas of examination, inquiring into and analyzing her aging body. In *Faces Places,* Varda is confronted with JR's questions about her hairstyle. Each film demonstrates how: "Varda's appearance seems both *negligée* and fastidiously *soignée,* it is

emblematic of a paradox in her work: she has deliberately cultivated a down-to-earth persona through years of quietly observant self-portraiture and sympathetic identification with marginal figures, while placing herself resolutely in the center of that work with the narcissism of an irrepressible artist who must express herself of die" (Conway 111).

While Varda has placed herself "resolutely in the center of [her] work," I want to suggest that there has been a progression as to how she embodies her work. In *The Beaches of Agnès* and *The Gleaners and I,* her body, her hands, and her hair, all act as areas of inquiry for her films. In *The Gleaners and I,* Varda's hair and hands take such close-up attention in the film, oscillating between both subject and object. In *The Beaches of Agnès,* I want to suggest that this is furthered. Varda comments throughout the film that her memories are like flies all swarming around. In one of the scenes I analyze, flies swarm a recreated painting, with Varda's memories literally imbuing and taking up space in the refashioned painting. Lastly, in *Faces Places,* the film quite literally becomes Varda: we see through her eyes, blurry and difficult to see.

This progression, from Varda oscillating between object and subject of her film, to embodying her film in *Faces Places,* is the reason that I suggest that her artwork is not a by-product of her persona, but her work is her persona. Varda has crafted her persona through her work but, near the end of her career, her work actually becomes her. It is for this reason that I argue that we can consider Varda's work as her persona and vice versa. It is through my analyses of her films' content and style that I can conclude that her films not only help to fashion her persona, but they *are* her persona.

In concluding that Varda's films are her persona, I want to now return to the original research question of this thesis: understanding some of the possible reasons as to how, and why,

Varda became a site of attention between 2017 and 2019. Through using Marshall's presentational and representational media, I argued that Varda's work, though being representative media (film), functions as presentational media, as it is an "expression of the self to others" (Marshall 160). Furthermore, Marshall argues that we are currently undergoing a transition from representational to presentational media, and that this is partly because of the invocation of online platforms. As stated: "Something quite extraordinary has shifted over the last twenty years that has led to this intensive focus on constructing strategic masks of identity. The catalyst is the development of online culture and its invocation to personalize the expression of a public self--essentially a persona--regularly and incessantly" (Barbour and Marshall 1).

While Varda's work is representational media (film), her work has functioned in this presentational format in that it exposes the individual in the construction and distribution of media. In addition, Varda places herself at the center of her films, acting as an "expression of the self to others" (Marshall 160). As Phillips stated in his profile of Varda for the *Guardian,* "...the fascination with heart-shaped potatoes in *The Gleaners and I* is very now--and *Faces Places* is a riposte to celebrity culture, promoting 'ordinary' people as photographic subjects" (Phillips). I want to suggest that Varda's work feels very "now," and that Varda gained more attention in the last two years of her life, because of the invocation of online culture, and that this culture offered the tools in which to understand Varda's work.

By using representational and presentational media as the anchoring point throughout this thesis, Marshall's concept helps us to understand how Varda gained more attention between 2017 and 2019. Her representational media has worked within the terrain of presentational media. Thanks to this, and the invocation of social media and online platforms, presentational media is

becoming the more dominant form of media. Since online platforms are now more available, though, users are now more adept to tuning into and understanding Varda's work, since her films have worked within this presentational media terrain.

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