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What distinguishes auteurism of Agnes Varda?

Feminist phenomenology in Varda`s auteur style

Bachelor's thesis in Film Studies

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Introduction

“...*La sensation aigue du temps qui passe et de l'érosion des sentiments qui nous infligent moisissures, rouilles, humiliations pas digérées et blessures qui ne se ferment pas... Pour les blessures de l'âme, la photographie ne suffisait pas ...*”¹ (Smith 1998, 4)

One of the major features of French Cinema after the World War 2, Agnès Varda whose long career, diversities of cinematic forms, choose of aesthetics elements as well as her narrative style marked her oeuvres forever, has been oriented toward cinema in order to escape the limitations of photography which was her primary artistic orientation. The wordlessness of pictures soon started to leave a void for her. The reaction was missing in photographic works, said herself, therefore she was desperately looking for to introduce “words” that could match her images and release them from the limitation imposed by the one-dimensional nature of photography. The urge of exploring new dimensions, that of time for example, guided her toward the seventh art, as she claims in above mentioned quote (Smith 1998, 4).

In this dissertation, I will look for “auteurism” according to Varda, as well as the “auteurism” approaches that could be traced in three of her films: *Les Glaneurs et La Glaneuse* (2000), *Les Plages d'Agnès* (2008) and *Varda par d'Agnès* (2019). I would like to further investigate whether those approaches could be linked together by some means of aesthetics and how this would offer a distinguishable meaning to her “auteurism” and making her to be recognized as an auteur feminist uncommon (Fiant, Hamery and Touvenel 2009, 15).

The starting point in this dissertation, in my opinion, should be an attempt toward discovering “Who was Agnès Varda” as I believe that this might help me to discover what would mean “auteurism” to her and ultimately to discover if her life and personal experience could have anything to do with the formation of “auteurism” in her career as a filmmaker. This would be an introduction to begin considering her cinema as the next step and looking for “auteurism” approaches in her films.

Contrarily to Roland Barthes famous concept of “The Death of the Author” (Barthes 1968), I think I shall start from her life and experience because, many aspects of her personality exist in her films

¹ “...the sharp sensation of the time passing and the erosion of feelings which inflict on us mould and rust, undigested humiliations and wounds which don't close. For the wounds of the soul, photography wasn't enough...”

and influenced the way she created her own path toward answering the question of “What is cinema”. The answer that she gave to this question is a hint toward developing the idea of “Agnès Varda, the auteur”.

Problem statement

Based upon long cinematic career of Agnès Varda, her works, in my opinion, manifest many distinctive facets of the “auteurism” theory in cinema and this is impossible to cover them all in this dissertation. Besides, regarding the personality of Varda and her impact on the French Cinema heritage and more particularly on “The French New Wave” and “The French Feminism”, she might have her words on “auteurism”. Her interviews and essays could be investigated for this sake.

For me, despite the need of looking for “auteurism according to Varda” or may be better formulated: her “auteur’s signature”, there exist a need to investigate another important fact: she possessed a certain unique “regard” which in turn enabled her to acquire some special techniques in order to project her “regard”. How her early career as photographer influenced her cinema? What did “image” mean to her? And how this could leave a trace in selected aesthetics elements in her films?

Within the quest for finding what distinguishes her cinema and highlights her “auteurism” compared to other filmmakers, the cinematic elements that she had used in order to foreground feminism issues in her works attracted my attention. Could it be through a feminist phenomenological take, that she succeeded to center the attention on feminism issues? Would it be her “auteur’s signature”?

In order to answer all questions evoked here, I shall focus on the concept of “auteurism” and “auteurism within Feminist Film Theory”. Varda’s feminists take stands out in all her films, I think. For example, in many of her films particularly in those considered in this dissertation, similar recurrent element could be found such as mirror reflecting the face of the main protagonist (often herself). By this means she twisted the concept of “who is looking who” which is essential especially when we consider the “auteurism” within Feminist Film Theory. Does she propose a new base for the “logic of vision”? Could we talk about “auteur’s signature” though?

Varda also wrote an autobiography and made later a film based on that: *Varda par Agnès* (2019), where she explained some of the above-mentioned questions, particularly those related to “auteurism according to Varda”. I will use this film to answer some of these questions using her own words. Moreover, I will use mainly five books: *Film Theory: An Introduction* (2000) by Robert Stam, *Agnes Varda* (1998) written by Alison Smith a British film scholar; *Beyond French Feminism* (2003) edited by Roger Celestin, Eliane Dalmolin and Isabelle de Courtivron; *Agnes Varda’s Interviews* (2014) edited by T. Jefferson Kline; *Agnès Varda: le cinéma et au-delà* (2009) edited by Antony Fiant, Roxane Hamery and Eric Thouvenel. I chose these books in order to discover Varda’s feminist take as I think that the feminist take through the lens of her camera builds indeed a part of her “auteurism” or may be taken even as her “auteur’s signature”.

The main work in this dissertation, would be how to establish a link between “auteurism” and Varda’s “feminist take”? I would need to support this claim by using some articles that focus on “authorship” and “practical sides of it” in addition to other articles that review “different aspects of Varda’s narrative style” and “aesthetic elements” written by several authors: Chamarette (2015) (2017); Staiger (2013); Truffaut (1954), Vonderheide (2017); Chapman (2022) and Corbet (2013).

Theoretical framework

Auteurism approach

Auteurism historically is considered as an expression of an existentialist humanism with a glance on phenomenology. In fact, André Bazin and Jean Paul Sartre opened the debate at the same time, sharing a fundamental tenet, which according to Rosen (1990, 8) could be defined as: “the centrality of the activity of the philosophical subject, the premise of all phenomenologies” (Stam 2017, 83).

Besides, Astruc introduced the term “Camera-Pen” in an essay published in 1948. Shortly after, the “Camera-Pen” formula valorized the world of filmmaking where the directors gain on recognition as not being the servant of a pre-existing story anymore, but a creative agent who can imply his/her own point of view in the process of filmmaking exclusively (Stam 2017, 83). Later in 1954, François Truffaut would make an important share on flourishing this approach in filmmaking (84). Based upon such an approach, an open-ended adventure in a creative mise-en-

scène would valorize the work of a filmmaker. The claim would shortly gain political dimensions, manifesting itself being “anti-bourgeois” during the era of the left’s domination of the French culture and Sartrean “engagement” (84). Critic-directors like Truffaut and Godard, both were openly attacking the established system of rigid production within French intellectual milieu (85).

According to Stam (2017, 89) auteurism would later take a different turn when it has been introduced to the American world of cinema by an essay written by Andrew Sarris entitled “Notes on the Auteur Theory” in 1962. He had proposed three criteria for recognizing an auteur: “(1) technical competence; (2) distinguishable personality; (3) interior meaning arising from tension between personality and material” (89). Stam also claims (92) that “*by forcing attention to the films themselves and to mise-en-scène as the stylistic signature of the director, auteurism clearly made a substantial contribution to film theory and methodology*”.

However, according to Staiger, “authorship”-or as I call it in this dissertation: “auteurism”-encountered two major problems in the second half of the twentieth century: the victory of poststructuralist thinking from one hand and the victory of mass-mediated media on the other hand (Staiger 2003). From poststructuralist thinking the notion of the individual as agent cast is considered as a subject of doubt- the famous “death of the author” problem- while mass media is a production of multiple-authored collaboration, and it thrives on intertextuality problem. However, auteurism survived as it did matter though. According to Staiger, auteurism as an approach is used to cover the research question of causality for the films (28). She added that the power of creating belongs to auteurs and taking the auteur off the table might eliminate the political-, ethical- etc. related questions on the causality of texts and films especially when we are trying to answer questions which are essential to “auteurism” theory such as the subject and agency in the process of filmmaking or in the narrative for example (29). She believes that “auteurism” gain more importance, when it comes to feminist issues; also, that the “auteurism” theory is of advantage when there is discussion about “signature” (29).

Staiger suggests that there exist seven approaches within “auteurism” (2003, 30). Some of them are relevant for this present work: Auteurism as origin, Auteurism as personality, Auteurism as signature and Auteurism as technique of the self.

In “Auteurism as origin”, we look on the auteur’s “writings, interviews and recollections to support ascribed meanings” with a glance on how we can tie up the auteur’s thought and behavior to his/her

works in order to make a psychological unity out of that (Staiger 2003, 31). While in the case of Auteurism as personality, Staiger refers to Andre Bazin and Alexandre Astruc (34); Bazin as the one who “promoted attention to the revelation of phenomenal reality and paid significant attention to technical aspects of the cinematic medium” (34) and Astruc as the one who talked about “cinema becoming a language” and evoked the concept of “camera-stylo” (34). She argued that “Bazin’s preference for revealing phenomenological relations through specific constructions of *mise-en-scene*” highlights the expressiveness of auteurism (37).

In the “Auteurism as signature” approach, auteur makes him/herself to be known through repetition of some features which are traceable across a set of films (Staiger 2003, 43). There is assumed here as well that a unity ties up all parts of the narrative together (45) that is auteur’s signature.

In “Auteurism as technique of the self”, widely used by feminist filmmakers (Staiger 2003, 49), the point is, claimed Staiger, “to rescue the expression of the self as a viable act. ... Thus, the auteur is reconceptualized as a subject having an ability to act as a conscious analyzer of functionality of her/his choices” (49). This approach is more concerned about the morality as a mean which shows how an individual obeys or resists a standard of conduct. Hence, ethics becomes “the manner in which one ought to form oneself as an ethical subject acting in reference to the perspective elements that make up the code” (50). In this regard, auteurism becomes an action of “self-as-expresser” (50). From this point of view, breaking the norms or respecting them depends on the message that auteur is looking to transfer.

Many issues in “auteurism” are in accordance with film-phenomenology as film-phenomenology attempts to validate the subjective position of the filmmaker rather than trying to pretend an omniscient position of “I” creator. Another point within the film-phenomenology which is relevant to this study is that the film-phenomenology attempts to discuss the ways in which bodies are depicted and viewed in films. The way bodies are situated in a narrative in a specific environmental and cultural context for example, is very important as it will necessarily permeate any account, description or analysis of it. Hence, phenomenology manifests itself in the study of cinema and considers a film as an object that can be decoded or “read” as a text. Feminist perspectives on film-phenomenology is concerned first and foremost about the “logic of vision” as following: the subject as who looks is the cinematic spectator while the object is: the thing which is looked at, in

other words the film. The question of “who is looking who” is more complex within feminist-phenomenology theory as it suggests there is no kind of clear distinction between a subject and object and they are both part of a whole continuum, rather than two distinct and separate things or people (Chamarette 2017).

Analysis

a. Varda’s auteurism as emphasized by herself- an origin approach within auteurism

Varda started her career as the filmmaker at the age of twenty-five, while she didn’t know much thing about cinema: “...*J’atteignis l’âge de faire mon premier film à vingt-cinq ans, sans avoir vu vingt-cinq films, ni même dix.*”² (Smith 1998, 12)

La Pointe Courte (1954) was the announcement of Varda’s entry into the world of cinema (Smith 1998, 6). Thus, it worth to look for the answer of “What meant cinema?” to 25 years old young photographer and artist when she made her first film. According to her own words, her approach to filmmaking was not formed neither by learning from the professionals as that was somehow the norm of the time at 50’s, nor from the practice of film watching and then taking part in discussions and criticizing debates as was the case with the *Cahiers* group. She discovered the cinema little by little by first being impressed by surrealists such as Kafka then by the narrative style of Faulkner and finally being influenced by the novelist Nathalie Sarraute (Smith 1998, 12).

Varda claims herself that the cinema, as viewed by her at the beginning of her career, was more concerned about the problems which didn’t exist, totally ignoring the “living things”: “*J’avais la sensation que le cinéma s’était fourvoyé dans une fiction cinématographique et qu’il n’abordait ni les problèmes traités par le roman, ni les problèmes de l’existence... J’avais la sensation qu’on ne parlais pas de choses vivantes, importantes, que d’autre part le cinéma n’était pas libre, surtout dans sa forme, et ça m’énervait.*”³ (Smith 1998, 6)

2 “I reached the age when I made my first film at 25, without having seen twenty-five films, nor even ten.”

3 “I had the feeling that the cinema had got lost in cinematographic fiction and that it didn’t approach either the problems which the novel did, or the problems of existence...I had the feeling that living, important things weren’t discussed, and on the other hand that the cinema wasn’t free, especially with regard to its form, and that irritated me.”

It should not be neglected that such a question as “What is cinema?” requires anthropological and philosophical reflection. This means, back in history or even may be still today, that the answer to this question could be considered so important and needs to be reflected on from different perspectives: depending on who is posing the question, a man or a woman? which point of view are we interested in? cinema according men’s point of view? or women’s?

Sexual difference has been considered as a reality at once natural and instituted, from that time in 50’s up to now. From feminism perspective of that time- much like from today feminism perspective- for Simone de Beauvoir and all women who were standing alongside with her such as Varda, the gendered-based hierarchy which they were fighting against, could not be solved simply by letting women to take a part in societal actions equally as men. Thereby, women’s social, practical and political problems regarding their place and status in the society, could not be solved by their accession to a world built and thought by men, because in this case all male/female hierarchy was still there and problems remained unsolved (Célestin, DalMolin and de Courtivron 2003, 20).

In that strongly gendered society, Varda alongside with active engagement with feminist activism, was looking for a cinematic language proper to women. The quest toward finding such a language, brought her to the introduction of the term “*cinécriture*”. (Jefferson kline 2014). “*J’ai lancé ce mot et maintenant je m’en sers pour indiquer le travail d’un cinéaste. Il renvoie à leurs cases le travail du scénariste qui écrit sans tourner et celui du réalisateur qui fait sa mise en scène. Cela peut être la même personne mais la confusion persiste souvent. J’en ai tellement assez d’entendre : C’est un film bien écrit, sachant que le compliment est pour le scénario et pour les dialogues.*”⁴ (Smith 1998, 14)

She applied her “*cinécriture*” not only in her fiction films but also in her documentaries as her career marked an alternance between these two forms, while some films hovered between them. *La Pointe Courte* (1954), *Cleo de 5 a 7* (1961), *Le Bonheur* (1964), *L’Une chante, l’autre pas* (1985), *Jacquot de Nantes* (1991) that might be considered as the landmarks of Varda’s career, confirm this alternance between forms (Smith 1998, 2). Varda herself tells Andrea Meyer in an

⁴ “I invented the word and now I use it to mean the film-maker’s work. It puts the work of the scriptwriter who writes but does not film, and of the director who does the mise-en-scène, back in their respective boxes. The two may be the same person, but there’s often lasting confusion. I am so fed up with hearing: It’s a well-written film, when I know that the compliment is meant for the scenario and the dialogue.”

interview: *“I am a woman working with her intuition and trying to be intelligent. It is like a stream of feelings, intuitions, and joy of discovering things. Finding beauty where it’s maybe not.”* (Jefferson kline 2014)

I would say that there are not so many people who know the full range of her work who could doubt that Varda has succeeded in her quest. For example, the famous Peter Bradshaw, the editor on chief of film critic at The Guardian says: *“She is not grandmotherly, but godmotherly, granting wishes and making the business of film-making seem as magically straightforward as writing words on a page.”* (Bradshaw 2019). Anthony Oliver Scott, the American journalist and chief film critic for The New York Times, shares the same opinion on Agnès Varda and her films: *“Her discussion of her philosophy and her methods- the way and the how of her movies- is incisive and instructive. She helps you think about her art, which in turn helps you think about everything else.”* (Scott 2019).

b. Varda the feminist as a personality approach within auteurism

Varda started her career where the film industry was highly dominated by men, in a world where rules were pre-established from masculine point of view. In 1975, she had made an eight-minute short film about women as a recommended project for French television channel Antenne 2: *“What is like to be a woman?”*. Instead of addressing the question from socio-historical perspective, she focused on the body. She later would say that she was looking for to evoke the women’s body as an affirmation and not an exhibition. Hence clearly, she was looking for to change the way women were looked at. Question of body and its various expressions would haunt the author all along her career (Jefferson kline 2014).

In the era where Varda came out with her *“embodied vision of the world”*- as claimed by Bénézet, the corporeality was of essential meaning for Varda’s cinécriture. Based upon phenomenological approach, Varda reinvented the standardized language of cinema, which so far appealed more to narrative identification than to bodily identification (Vonderheide 2017).

Often in her works, her direct gaze to the camera and the bodies of the people on screen just like in *Les Plages d’Agnès* or her offscreen voice in *Les Glaneurs et La Glaneuse* call our attention (Vonderheide 2017). The effectiveness of images, editing and mise-en-scène as well as voices and close-ups are often melted with the recollection of bodily presence in these two films, and this is

the way she impressed her spectators as soon as the films start. This revisiting of impressions combined with an appeal to spectators' senses, not only highlight her cinécriture based on an embodied vision with use of corporeal images but also make a sort of double dialogue between the audience and the world of her films from a feminist phenomenological perspective (Vonderheide 2017). It seems that there is a dialectic between corps, location, shooting and time especially whenever she poses herself in front of the camera abruptly in the middle of the narrative taking our attention on her aging in *Les Glaneurs et La Glaneuse*. Hence, she creates a collective portrayal of the filmmaker and her films. She is a filmmaker who engages fully with the film's participants but also with spectators.

From Phenomenology point of view, in general the origins or roots of the event or concepts are not so important, instead phenomenology is interested in the "now" which means what we see and how we perceive it, moreover to the way that those perceptions shape "us" (Chamarette 2017). It turns to be more complex, particularly in the study of gender and cinema. Phenomenology enhances the discussion on the ways that film relates or affects the spectators on many levels such as viewer's entire bodily experience (Chamarette 2017). The feminist perspective on film-phenomenology first and foremost focuses on the subject who looks and the object that is looked at, then it is engaged in discussion about the adopted ways of depicting bodies in specific context, which according to feminist film-phenomenology, is as important as the film itself. It often permeates in parallel an account or an extra description within the narrative. For example, in *Les Glaneurs et La Glaneuse*, the filmmaker as the subject who looks is often melted with *La Glaneuse* Varda herself as the object that is looked at for example when she refers to her age spots on her hand. By this means, it seems that she adds her set of "logic of vision" to support her cinécriture with more phenomenological feministic take.

c. Cinécriture as a signature approach within the auteurism

"Un film bien écrit est également bien tourné, les acteurs sont bien choisis, les lieux aussi. Le découpage, les mouvements, les points de vue, le rythme du tournage et du montage ont été sentis et pensés comme les choix d'un écrivain, phrases denses ou pas, type de mots, fréquence des

adverbes, alinéas, parenthèses, chapitre continuant le sens du récit ou le contrariant, etc. En écriture c'est le style. Au cinéma, le style c'est le cinécriture."⁵

Varda's educational background and her cultural references were literary and artistic. The power of the image seems pervasive in all her films. Still image and moving image often meet in Varda's film (Smith 1998, 13). But images aren't there in hazardous way. She constructed her films, she said, as a writer constructs her texts. Cinécriture for Varda means every aspect of any of her films was chosen with a view to an intended effect, message or meaning (14). Each shot, the way shots are joined, the change of rhythm between shots, the choose of actors, locations, mise-en-scenes etc., they all have the implications of their own (15). The photographs figure in various of Varda's film. We as spectators witness how much the introduction of still images into the stream of her films, interested her, to the point where it seems that she adopted it as an aspect of her cinécriture (18). She also frequently associated images with mythology as their role in her films was somehow the extension of the function of that myth (46). Barthes for example claimed in his study of the modern myth, that the function of a mythological model is to negate time and context and to present itself as universal (47).

In addition to her use of images, her voice-over could also be recognized as her cinécriture (Smith 1998, 47). The use of voice-over with her own voice, not only valorizes the stories and their attractiveness but also emphasizes the links between images and the stream of the narrative (47).

The use of still images for not saying photographs would also give certain degree of dynamism to the narrative. A photograph represents a "frozen instant" of time, preserved within the moving world of the film that gives some depth or parallel level to the narrative (Smith 1998, 49). There is a need to uncover the realm behind each photograph she had used in her films.

As claimed by Chapman (2022), film is regarded as a therapeutic tool since its genesis because through watching a film, we can speak directly to the human soul. Some of Varda's films are realized upon such an approach (Chapman 2022). According to Chapman, Varda used the therapeutic filmmaking in her works via documentary, sharing the intimacy with spectators. The

⁵ "A well-written film is also well filmed, the actors are well chosen, so are the locations. 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 sentences, the type of words, number of adverbs, paragraphs, asides, chapters which advance the story or breaks its flow, etc. In writing it's called style. In the cinema, style is cinécriture."

art therapy which includes the therapeutic filmmaking, is known to be able to improve the lives of individuals in the face of adversity. J. Lauren Johnson, who coined the term therapeutic filmmaking, reported that this model could help among all via visual and aural storytelling that differs from other expressive art forms because of long-lasting qualities of film (Johnson 2015). In several films, Varda evokes some existential themes by mixing documentary with real-time videos and photos, particularly in *Les Plages d'Agnès* to come over with her childhood traumas, death of her father, fleeing Belgium, living invasion of Nazis during second world war, etc.

Her use of close-ups could be part of her cinécriture. Close-ups in her films signify the expression of a certain emotion, the importance of a moment in the story, capturing nuances on the actor's face that audience might otherwise miss in longer or wider shots, establishing her protagonists' characters, the ambiguity of some relationships and maybe the plot development (Chapman 2022). When she films potatoes in form of heart in *Les Glaneurs et La Glaneuse* evoke an emotional state: the nature's love for human; in *Les Plages d'Agnès* when she fixes the lens of her camera on the mirror and we see in close up a caricature image of herself while saying: "*s'imaginer très vieille est amusant comme une sale blague.*"⁶ she is sharing an intimate moment with spectators.

Another aspect of her cinécriture might be the editing process of Varda's work. The way Varda placed the scenes, the chronological order and the pace, where the films start regarding the story line, the reenactment of the story by protagonists in most of her films could be taken as her signature (Chapman 2022). For example in *Les Plages d'Agnès*, when she evoke aging, the cuts in editing present an rhythmic order from close-up to wide shot of an old naked women sitting on a chair staring at us spectators.

She had the talent to place herself within her films, even when the film was not necessarily about her, particularly in *Les Glaneurs et La Glaneuse* (2000) when she expresses her playfulness by trying to take the big trucks in her hand while the main question of the film is "the waste"

d. Issue/Advocacy documentary as a technique of the self-approach within auteurism

The issue/advocacy documentary is defined by Corbet (2013) as a film that sets out to examine, explore or expose a social, cultural, and/or economic issue that in turn advocates either explicitly

⁶ To imagine herself really old is funny, as funny as a sick joke.

or implicitly a perspective or an action related to the selected issue. The advocacy then could take form of an “activism” and hence it could be also called as mode-documentary-as-social-mission (Corbet 2013). Based upon this point of view, many films released during the 1960s and 1970s were born of the massive social, cultural and economic transformations of the time but the tendency resisted the transition to the twenty-first century as many contemporary films reveal how much their narratives involve social, economic, or political issues (Corbet 2013). Many of Varda’s film could be classified in this category among all *Les Glaneurs et La Glaneuse*.

Varda in her advocacy documentaries, not only looked for examining or depicting a class of people or a set of norms within societies, but also emphasized her own personal connection to those people and their stories. These films are considered in general as highly self-reflexive. Like many other of her films, voice-over is an inevitable element of narrative in *Les Glaneurs et La Glaneuse*. When in the film, she poses in front of the Jules Breton painting “La Glaneuse” with a bundle of grain over her shoulder, we hear her voice saying: “*L’autre glaneuse, celle du titre de ce documentaire, c’est moi.*”⁷ She might follow her French New Wave roots by involving herself playing with the camera and all she found interesting around her in the film, but she perfectly managed to connect her “playful” self to her “self-reflexive” character as she described how parts of her body and memories are taking place and making up the corps of this film. This marks her signature, and this is what distinguishes her film from other “traditional” issue/advocacy films where the narratives are concentrated exclusively around the economic, political or cultural circumstances (Corbet 2013). She has the intelligence to make a film composed of many segments each around the major subject of “gleaning” but in different fields and from different perspectives in a way that these segments would make the whole film look like an expose of “gleaning” images of a social issue (Corbet 2013). The same method i.e. “gleaning” images has been used in *Les Plages d’Agnès* where we see the filmmaker doing herself a flash back to her childhood by gleaning memories from here and there, family photos as well as the family history.

Conclusion

⁷ There is another woman gleaning in this film, that’s me.

The cinema of Agnès Varda always invited the spectators to think about “others” via her “issue/advocacy documentaries”. A neighbor, foreigners, strangers who pass by in a street, homeless people, vagabonds... they all attracted her attention to the point that she fixed the lens of her camera on them to tell their stories. Her choice of subjects was special for not saying unique. This interest in marginality was more evoked where she depicted rats, leftovers, trash, molds and wastes in close-ups, a challenging and risky theme that many filmmakers would avoid but not Varda because she possessed, as claimed before in this dissertation, a certain unique “regard”. She is a filmmaker who dares where most don’t. The singularity of her “regard” stands out as nowhere in her films she emphasizes the contrast between different social status only to better welcome diversity. “The other” acquires in her films an indisputable feature of existence, a feature of humanity which give them back the dignity most often flouted. But “the other”, is above all a body in her films. It is not hazardous that she mentioned Jean Leplanche famous quote in *Les Glaneurs et La Glaneuse*: “le sujet trouve son origine d’abord dans l’autre?”⁸. She otherizes her own body following the same argument when she says in the same film: “*Filmer d’une main mon autre main. Rentrer dans l’horreur. J’ai l’impression que je suis une bête. C’est pire : je suis une bête que je ne connais pas.*”⁹

The singularity of her filmmaking does not stop here. She manifests her interest in painting and photography very significantly in her films, to the point that it could be remarked as an aesthetic element in her films. In *Les Plages d’Agnes*, she is thumbing her childhood photos, in *Les Glaneurs et La Glaneuse* she fixes the lens of her camera on several famous paintings on “gleaning” and in *Varda par Agnes* she skims images of her films while she is talking about them. Thereby, she creates an extra level of dynamism by bouncing between the frozen time in images and the actual time where she is living a new experience right in front of our eyes.

Her approach on filmmaking is supported by a political willing to renew creative forms and visual codes, in a perspective that critics have described as feminist. Before feminist theories posed in the 1970s the fundamental questions of “logic of vision” and the underlying ideology of dominant cinema narratives, also suggesting the alternatives of a cinema made by women, Varda diverted

⁸ The subject finds its origin first in the other?

⁹ Filming with one hand my other hand. Going back to horror. I feel like an animal, even worse: I’m an animal that I don’t know myself.

the characteristics of this cinema from the center and proposed other perspectives as this is the case in *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962).

A twisted logic of vision is often present in her films. It seems that Varda defines two different fields, one for her camera as substitute for her eye, and one for mirrors that reflect her gaze, as much different as it could be portrait of actors-considered as models- and the filmmaker's self-portrait as revealed by her own images. This shows the degree of control she had over the signifying power of every element of the image, in a way that an author controls his words, where the term cinécriture comes from.

Her films were at some degree very personal in the sense that it sprang from her individual vision mainly about her desires, her interpretations and her preferences. But at some point, they had a universal message to propagate: the recognition of humanity with all its defects, weakness and fragility as well strength and beauty. Her films were honest, just like their creator.

In *Varda par Agnès*, we recognize a woman who does not reject any of her films. On the contrary, the film emphasizes to what extent she was still preoccupied by her earliest ventures. Thereby, she encloses a coherent whole by *Varda par Agnès*; a whole life of an extraordinary filmmaker whose richness of interpretation of art, photography and cinema undoubtedly gave into the recognition to "feminist phenomenology auteurism according to Varda".

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