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Navigating Cinematic Landscapes: The Notion of Space and Location in Agnès Varda's Films

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Norwegian University of Science and Technology
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Abstract

This thesis examines the interplay between spatial justice, identity formation, and collective memory creation in the cinematic works of Agnès Varda. Drawing on theories of spatiality by scholars such as Edward Soja and Gaston Bachelard, the study delves into Varda's unique cinematic approach to portraying spaces as repositories of identity and sites of social contestation. Through a comprehensive analysis of select films, including *La Pointe Courte* (1955), *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962), *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* (1977), *Vagabond* (1985), *The Gleaners and I* (2000), *Faces Places* (2017), and *Varda by Agnès* (2019), the research explores how Varda's films capture the lived experiences of individuals within specific spatial contexts, while also addressing broader socio-political issues such as gender inequality, marginalisation, and environmental justice. By examining Varda's use of spatial imagery, narrative techniques, and cinematic aesthetics, this thesis reveals how her films serve as powerful reflections of collective memory and spatial consciousness, inviting viewers to reconsider their perceptions of space, identity, and justice.

Sammendrag

Denne avhandlingen undersøker samspillet mellom romlig rettferdighet, identitetsdannelse og kollektiv minneskaping i de filmatiske verkene til Agnès Varda. Ved å trekke på teorier om romlighet fra forskere som Edward Soja og Gaston Bachelard, dykker studien inn i Vardas unike filmatiske tilnærming til å skildre rom som lagringssteder for identitet og arenaer for sosial kamp. Gjennom en grundig analyse av utvalgte filmer, inkludert *La Pointe Courte* (1955), *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962), *One Sings The Other Doesn't* (1977), *Vagabond* (1985), *Gleaners and I* (2000), *Faces Places* (2017), og *Varda by Agnès* (2019), utforsker forskningen hvordan Vardas filmer fanger individuelle livserfaringer innen spesifikke romlige kontekster, samtidig som de tar opp bredere sosio-politiske spørsmål som kjønnsulikhet, marginalisering og miljørettferdighet. Ved å undersøke Vardas bruk av romlig billedspråk, fortellerteknikker og filmatisk estetikk, avdekker denne avhandlingen hvordan hennes filmer fungerer som kraftfulle refleksjoner av kollektivt minne og romlig bevissthet, og inviterer seere til å revurdere deres oppfatninger av rom, identitet og rettferdighet.

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Introduction -The Multifaceted Nature of Cinematic Space

"Each life is an encyclopaedia, a library, an inventory of objects, a series of styles, and everything can be constantly shuffled and reordered in every way conceivable."

Italo Calvino

The exploration of space in cinema encompasses much more than its visual representation on screen; it involves a complex, multifaceted understanding influenced by a range of factors such as gender, socio-economic status, and cultural background. This nuanced perspective of space in cinema enables filmmakers to portray a wider range of characters and environments, thereby mirroring the diverse experiences and viewpoints found in the real world. Additionally, the temporal dimension plays a critical role in shaping viewers' emotional responses. Through the manipulation of time and spatial cues, cinematic narratives can guide audiences on a journey through different environments and settings, using space as a tool to evoke particular emotions and highlight key themes.

In the context of Varda's films, this approach is particularly significant, as her work often explores the intersection of personal and communal spaces, blending intimate and public realms to create deeply immersive narratives. Varda, renowned for her innovative contributions to French cinema,

masterfully applies a phenomenological approach to her cinematic works, transcending traditional narrative structures. Her films, such as *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962) and *Vagabond* (1985), invite viewers into a phenomenological journey through spaces that are not mere backdrops but dynamic entities influencing characters and viewers alike (Ince 2013).

Spatial Sensitivity and Emotional Resonance

I have chosen to focus on Agnès Varda because she stands as one of the most significant filmmakers of the century, celebrated for her innovation, creativity, and profound impact on cinema. Varda's approach to space in her films is unique and deeply meaningful, setting her work apart from conventional cinematic practices. In her films, space is not merely a backdrop but an integral element that completes her characters and narratives. The meticulous staging of her plots is rich with informative details, inviting a deeper exploration. In this thesis, I will decode these intricate details through the analytical frameworks provided by Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (2014) and Soja's *Seeking Spatial Justice* (2010).

In this master thesis, I delve into the nuanced understanding of cinematic space, steering away from the mere construction of spaces within films. Instead, it focuses on the dynamic interplay of spatial elements, such as buildings, streets, and houses, as temporal entities that shape cinematic narratives. Through the lens of spatial cues, this research seeks to unravel how the viewing of space in cinema becomes a powerful tool for evoking emotions and fostering a deeper connection with the audience.

Cinema, as a time-sensitive medium, possesses a remarkable ability to encapsulate the life cycles of spaces and places. Unlike static representations, cinema unfolds in a temporal dimension, allowing for the dynamic portrayal of spaces evolving over time. The medium acts as a temporal canvas, capturing the ephemerality of moments, the transformation of environments, and the progression of spatial narratives. By strategically utilising spaces, cinema becomes a conduit for delving into the memories and emotions encapsulated within buildings and various spatial settings (Pallasmaa 2012). It not only freezes moments in time but also unfolds them, offering a unique perspective on the temporal nature of spaces and their profound impact on human experiences.

Varda's pioneering use of innovative techniques exemplifies this transformative power of cinema to manipulate space and evoke profound emotional responses. In this exploration, I consider the

human spatial experience to be of paramount importance. I aim to demonstrate how viewers, as active participants, engage with cinematic space through their own lived experiences. This interaction not only enriches the emotional and cognitive dimensions of the narrative but also underscores the transformative power of cinema. By invoking the audience's kinaesthetic sense, cinema transcends traditional visual and auditory experiences, offering a more immersive and profound connection with the story.

Thus, the aim of this thesis is to capture the phenomenological impact of space in Varda's oeuvre. By analysing her films through the lens of spatial theory and phenomenology, this study seeks to unravel the intricate ways in which Varda utilises space to convey meaning, evoke emotions, and foster a deeper connection with the audience. Through a comprehensive examination of Varda's cinematic techniques, narrative strategies, and thematic concerns, this research aims to shed light on the transformative power of cinematic space in shaping human experiences and perceptions. In the following sections, I will discuss my methods for this investigation.

Phenomenology and Spatial Justice in Varda's Cinema

This temporal sensitivity, in my opinion, elevates cinema beyond a visual spectacle, turning it into a temporal journey that intricately weaves the past, present, and future of spaces within its narrative fabric. Therefore, cinema operates as a potent tool for mapping both space and time, incorporating elements as verbs and actions that embody emotions. The medium strategically employs spaces to convey memories and emotions, thus shaping a multi-dimensional narrative that enhances our comprehension of inhabited environments. I argue that Varda's cinema beautifully exemplifies this intricate interplay between time, space, and emotion. For instance, in her groundbreaking film *Cleo from 5 to 7* (1962), Varda employs real-time narrative structure to immerse the audience in the protagonist's experience as she awaits the results of a medical test. Through the use of Parisian streets and landmarks as the backdrop, Varda not only captures the essence of the city but also infuses it with Cleo's anxieties and reflections, blurring the lines between external space and internal emotional landscape. I will explore the use of city and its streets in this film in greater detail in Chapter 2 of this master thesis.

As I aim to show Varda's cinema serves as a testament to the transformative potential of film in capturing the essence of spaces and the passage of time, while also illuminating the complex

interplay between memory, emotion, and lived experience. Within her cinematic landscape, space is not merely a backdrop; it is experienced through sounds, motions, and emotions, creating an immersive environment where viewers process reactions and become active participants in the space. Spatial narratives emerge from the interplay between formal language, pattern language, and the events unfolding within these spaces. Space, plays multiple roles in her films whether it is to define the setting and backdrop, magnify the mood and context, or have often metaphorical representation of the character's state of mind (Attademo 2022).

I suggest that the experience of engaging with both cinematic narratives and physical spaces shares a profound resemblance. Similar to the inhabitant of a space, the film viewer must navigate and process a sequence of reactions in response to audio-visual information. In both instances, individuals comprehend and react to the stimuli presented. The act of viewing films transcends mere observation; viewers, akin to inhabitants of physical spaces, transform into active users of the cinematic environment.

Moreover, the concept of spatial narrative unfolds as a continuous interrelation and interaction between the formal and pattern language of space and the unfolding events within it¹. This dynamic relationship invites viewers to navigate and process a sequence of reactions, transcending mere observation to become active users of the cinematic environment. In this intricate dance between space and narrative, certain objects within the cinematic frame act as triggers, evoking sensitive experiences that are subsequently processed by our cognitive structures, leading to intellectual interpretations (Kaur 2022).

Another critical aspect intertwined with this interplay is the notion of "spatial sensation," defined as the ability to comprehend three-dimensional space through the senses (Macrae 2003). This concept finds resonance in environmental psychology, an essential research field within Film Studies. Visual representations and narratives within cinema play a pivotal role in shaping spatial configurations that align with the situational context of the user. It is within this context that the term "embodied

¹ A "pattern language of space" refers to a system or framework for understanding and organising spatial elements in the built environment based on recurring patterns of human interaction, behaviour, and experience. This concept draws from Christopher Alexander's theory of "pattern languages," which proposes that certain design solutions emerge from common human needs and can be expressed through interconnected patterns. In the context of space, a pattern language encompasses a set of design principles, guidelines, and configurations that address how people perceive, use, and interact with their surroundings. These patterns may range from the arrangement of rooms in a building to the layout of streets in a neighbourhood, and they reflect timeless qualities that contribute to the functionality, comfort, and beauty of spaces. By employing a pattern language of space, designers whether in cinema or in real life as well as other urban planners can create environments that are not only aesthetically pleasing but also responsive to the diverse needs and activities of individuals and communities. This approach emphasises the importance of context, adaptability, and human-scale interventions, fostering environments that promote well-being, connectivity, and a sense of belonging (Dawes and Ostwald 2017).

affective cues" gains significance (D'Aloia 2015). These cues serve as gateways to characters' subjective experiences, fostering a deep emotional connection between the narrative and the audience. I assume that technological advancements empower filmmakers to manipulate space innovatively, creating figurative representations that resonate on a profound level. As viewers transform into active users of the cinematic environment, the convergence of spatial narrative, spatial sensation, and embodied affective cues facilitates an immersive experience, where the emotional nuances of the cinematic space are not only witnessed but felt. Cinematic emotions are representational, and we can make sense of such representations through our own embodied understanding. This intricate interplay adds layers of depth to the exploration of space within films, establishing a rich tapestry that intertwines narrative, sensation, and emotional connection.

Previous Scholarly Works on Space in Agnès Varda's Films

Scholars have extensively explored the intricate relationship between space and narrative in the cinematic works of Varda, shedding light on the multifaceted ways in which spatial elements contribute to the overall thematic and emotional resonance of her films. Drawing from a diverse range of theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches, these studies offer valuable insights into Varda's unique treatment of space as a dynamic and integral component of her storytelling.

One significant aspect of Varda's cinema that scholars have examined is her innovative approach to spatial representation. Attademo (2022) discusses the representation of space as a narrative language in various media, including cinema, highlighting how filmmakers like Varda utilise spatial cues to evoke emotions and foster a deeper connection with the audience. Similarly, D'Aloia (2015) explores cinematic empathy and embodied simulation in the film experience, providing valuable insights into how viewers engage with cinematic space on a visceral level.

Furthermore, scholars have analysed Varda's films through the lens of feminist phenomenology, emphasising the ways in which gendered spaces intersect with broader socio-political themes. Ince (2013) examines the feminist phenomenology present in Varda's filmography, emphasising the importance of space in shaping the lived experiences of female characters. Ceuterick (2020) explores gender, space, and mobility in contemporary cinema, including Varda's works, highlighting how spatial configurations reflect and reinforce gender norms and power dynamics.

In addition to feminist perspectives, scholars have also drawn on phenomenological theories to elucidate the existential and perceptual dimensions of cinematic space in Varda's films. Pallasmaa (2012) discusses the existential image and lived space in cinema and architecture, offering insights into how Varda's meticulous staging of spatial environments creates immersive and emotionally resonant cinematic experiences. Similarly, Neubauer et al. (2019) examine how phenomenology can help us learn from the experiences of others, providing a framework for understanding the subjective engagement with cinematic space.

Moreover, scholars have explored the interplay between space and narrative in Varda's films within broader cultural and political contexts. Chabal (2016) discusses French political culture in the 1970s, highlighting how Varda's films engage with issues of liberalism, identity politics, and the role of the state. Portuges (2009) examines French women directors negotiating transnational identities, including Varda, and Salvaggio (1988) discusses the intersection of theory and space, particularly in relation to women's experiences.

Overall, the scholarly works on space in Varda's films offer a rich and nuanced understanding of her cinematic practice, highlighting the ways in which spatial elements contribute to the thematic, emotional, and socio-political dimensions of her storytelling. Through diverse theoretical lenses and interdisciplinary approaches, these studies continue to illuminate the significance of space in shaping the cinematic universe of one of the most celebrated filmmakers of the century.

In my master thesis however I propose a new framework for studying the role of space in Varda's films: I explore the notion of space within Varda's cinematic world, utilising the theoretical frameworks of Bachelard and Soja. Drawing on Bachelard's concept of the poetics of space and Soja's theory of spatial justice, I aim to delve into how Varda's films manipulate and reconfigure spatial environments, inviting viewers to engage with the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of the spaces depicted. By employing Bachelard's emphasis on the subjective experience of space and Soja's exploration of the power dynamics inherent in spatial organisation, my analysis seeks to uncover the intricate interplay between cinematic representation and lived spatial realities in Varda's works.

Theoretical Foundations and Framework

Analysing the notion of space in cinema is inherently intertwined with phenomenology, offering a lens through which the subjective experience of space within the cinematic realm can be comprehended. Phenomenology, as a philosophical approach, delves into the study of consciousness and experience, emphasising the direct examination of phenomena as they appear to individuals (Neubauer, Witkop and Varpio 2019). In the context of cinema, I contend that this involves exploring how viewers perceive and engage with cinematic spaces. Phenomenological inquiry into cinematic space goes beyond the mere observation of physical settings; it seeks to unravel the lived experiences and subjective interpretations of these spaces. By examining the intricate interplay between spatial elements, narrative structures, and the viewer's perceptual engagement, phenomenology provides a framework for understanding the deeper layers of meaning and emotional resonance embedded within cinematic spaces. I am convinced that through this philosophical lens, the analysis of space in cinema becomes a nuanced exploration of the viewer's phenomenological journey, unraveling the intricate dance between perception, emotion, and the transformative nature of cinematic spaces.

The application of phenomenology in the depiction of space in cinema unfolds as an immersive exploration into the subjective and lived dimensions of spatial experiences. Grounded in the philosophical principles that emphasise the study of consciousness and human perception, phenomenology becomes a powerful lens through which filmmakers can unravel the intricate interplay between physical spaces, emotional resonances, and the transformative nature of cinematic environments and Varda is a filmmaker who masterfully applies this phenomenological approach to her cinematic works.

Gaston Bachelard, a prominent French philosopher, provides a compelling theoretical framework for the analysis of space in cinema through his explorations in phenomenology. Bachelard's influential work, particularly in *The Poetic of Space* (1958), delves into the poetic and transformative dimensions of lived spaces. He contends that spaces are not mere containers but are imbued with subjective meaning and emotions. Bachelard introduces the concept of "topoanalysis," which involves the psychological study of lived spaces and their impact on human experiences. From this perspective, I am suggesting that cinematic spaces cease to be passive backdrops; instead, they become active participants in the narrative, influencing characters and viewers alike.

Bachelard's emphasis on the poetic and transformative aspects of space aligns seamlessly with the phenomenological approach to cinema. As viewers engage with cinematic spaces, Bachelard's insights encourage an exploration of the emotional resonances, memories, and imaginative dimensions that these spaces evoke. His notion of the "house" as a poetic space, where memories are housed and emotions are inscribed, offers a lens through which to examine the intricate interplay between physical spaces and the psychological dimensions of characters within the cinematic frame (Bachelard 2014, 36).

Varda's works, showcase a nuanced exploration of cinematic spaces that aligns with the principles of Bachelard's phenomenology. Varda's films transcend conventional narratives, inviting viewers into immersive experiences where spaces become dynamic entities with emotional and psychological resonances. In utilising Bachelard's theoretical framework, the analysis of space in cinema transcends traditional spatial considerations, delving into the poetics and phenomenology that shape the viewer's experience. This theoretical foundation invites a deeper exploration of how cinematic spaces, akin to the house in Bachelard's concept, serve as poetic vessels that house emotions, memories, and subjective experiences, enriching the cinematic narrative with layers of meaning and depth.

In the vein of Bachelard's emphasis on the poetic and transformative aspects of space, Varda's films unfold as poetic journeys through varied landscapes, both physical and emotional. Her phenomenological approach is evident in her meticulous attention to details within spaces, considering how they influence the characters' inner worlds and, consequently, the audience's perception. Varda's use of handheld cameras and documentary-style filmmaking adds in my opinion an experiential layer, inviting viewers to actively engage with the spaces as if they were participants in the narrative. In essence, Varda's films exemplify a cinematic phenomenology that aligns with Bachelard's exploration of the poetic and lived dimensions of space. Through her unique approach, Varda elevates the notion of space in cinema, transforming it into a rich and textured realm that not only serves as a backdrop but actively shapes and reflects the human experience.

Within the theoretical framework of this master thesis, a significant facet of the inquiry is dedicated to the exploration of Edward Soja's seminal theories on space. Soja, a renowned geographer and urban planner, introduces a transformative perspective through his concept of *Spatial Justice* (2010). This notion challenges traditional dichotomies between physical and mental spaces, offering

a more inclusive understanding of spatiality that encompasses material, mental, and imaginative dimensions (Soja 2010, 2). Soja contends that spatial justice is socially produced and experienced, emphasising the interconnectedness of diverse spatial facets. His critique of spatial injustices and advocacy for spatial justice resonates within the cinematic realm, where the analysis of space extends beyond physicality to encompass the mental and imaginative dimensions of cinematic environments. Soja's theories contribute to this master thesis by providing a theoretical foundation that explores the dynamic and interconnected nature of cinematic spaces. The application of Soja's ideas enriches my investigation, inviting a nuanced exploration of how cinematic spaces embody and transcend traditional spatial boundaries, aligning with the overarching phenomenological and poetic exploration within the study.

Soja's spatial justice emphasises the interconnectedness of spatial facets, and Varda's films exemplify this by going beyond traditional spatial representations. For example, in *Cleo from 5 to 7*, Varda employs innovative storytelling techniques and character perspectives, inviting viewers to engage with the mental and emotional dimensions of spaces within the narrative. The film's exploration of Cleo's internal thoughts and emotions transforms physical spaces into symbolic realms, resonating with Soja's idea that space is socially produced and experienced.

Furthermore, Varda's films often feature characters navigating diverse urban landscapes, embodying Soja's call for more inclusive and equitable spatial configurations. The spaces in her films become sites of social interaction, power dynamics, and lived experiences, echoing Soja's concerns about spatial justice. Fundamentally, viewing Varda's films through Soja's spatial justice lens provides a nuanced understanding of how cinematic spaces are socially produced, experienced, and transformed. The exploration of mental and imaginative dimensions within Varda's narratives aligns with Soja's theoretical framework, enriching the cinematic landscape with layers of meaning, social critique, and a transformative understanding of spatiality.

In conclusion, this introduction lays the theoretical groundwork for a comprehensive exploration of the notion of space in cinema, adopting a multidimensional approach influenced by phenomenology; Bachelard's insights, and Soja's theories. The emphasis on the transformative nature of cinematic space, coupled with the recognition of the mental and imaginative dimensions, invites a nuanced analysis of how filmmakers, particularly exemplified by Varda, craft dynamic and socially resonant environments within the frame. This exploration goes beyond traditional spatial representations, delving into the emotional, symbolic, and experiential layers that contribute to a

more profound understanding of cinematic spaces. As the study progresses, the integration of phenomenology and Soja's spatial justice provides a theoretical lens that not only considers physical settings but also explores the interconnectedness of lived experiences, spatial justice, and the transformative potential of cinema in shaping our perceptions of the spaces we inhabit.

Transitioning seamlessly from the exploration of poetic of space and spatial politics, this master thesis then embarks on a comprehensive journey through the chapters, each dedicated to unraveling different facets of Varda's cinematic language. In Chapter 1, titled "Setting the Stage - Introduction to Varda's Cinematic World," the focal point shifts towards providing an overarching introduction to Varda's distinctive style and thematic preoccupations. This initial section lays the foundation by providing an overview of Varda's unique cinematic style and thematic concerns. The reader is introduced to the selected films that will be subjected to in-depth analysis throughout the thesis, setting the stage for a nuanced exploration of Varda's artistic contributions.

Moving into Chapter 2, the focus turns to the "Phenomenology of Space in Varda's Early Works." Here, the analysis delves into Varda's early films, such as *La Pointe Courte* (1955) and *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962), unraveling the intricate ways in which spatial elements contribute to character development and narrative progression. Special attention is paid to Varda's deliberate use of real locations and non-professional actors, underscoring her commitment to authenticity in storytelling.

Chapter 3, titled "Gendered Spaces - Feminist Perspectives in Varda's Middle Period," undertakes an investigation into how Varda's films, including *Vagabond* (1985) and *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* (1977), engage with feminist notions of space. This chapter meticulously analyzes how female characters navigate and challenge societal spaces, thereby contributing to the broader feminist discourse that permeates Varda's body of work.

Transitioning to Chapter 4, the thesis explores the theme of "Memory and Place - Varda's Late Period and Autobiographical Exploration." Focusing on Varda's later works, such as *The Gleaners and I* (2000) and *Faces Places* (2017), this section examines how these films intricately weave personal memory with broader socio-cultural landscapes. The analysis further delves into Varda's incorporation of documentary elements and her deliberate inclusion of her own presence within the films.

Finally, Chapter 5, titled "Farewell to frames: Varda's Cinematic Odyssey in Reflection," zooms in on how Varda's films address socio-political issues through spatial representations. The analysis meticulously dissects how spaces within Varda's cinematic universe become symbolic arenas for exploring power dynamics, inequality, and social justice. This chapter seeks to illuminate the profound impact of Varda's spatial narratives in contributing to broader socio-political discussions through the lens of her cinematic artistry. Specifically, this chapter will delve into the spatial politics of the last film in Varda's oeuvre: *Varda by Agnès* (2019), examining how this work encapsulates her cinematic evolution and thematic concerns. In *Varda by Agnès*, we witness a reflective journey through her illustrious career, where she offers a unique filmmaker's perspective on feminism, philosophy, and life itself. This film serves as both a farewell and a tribute, allowing us to bid adieu to Varda while honouring her profound cinematic legacy.

Chapter 1- Setting the stage-Introduction to Agnès Varda's cinematic world

"I think people are made of the places.... I think environment inhabits us.... By understanding people you understand places better, by understanding places you understand people better. "

Agnès Varda

An Overview of Varda's cinematic style and thematic concerns

In the expansive terrain of cinematic artistry, Varda's career through 50' to the early 60s emerges as a pioneering force, crafting narratives that defy conventional boundaries and beckon audiences into unique, thought-provoking worlds. This chapter serves as the entry point, where I am intending to sketch the contours of Varda's cinematic universe. It delve into her distinct style, thematic preoccupations, and selected films that lie at the heart of my study. My ultimate aim is to unravel the intricate relationship between space, location, and narrative within Varda's compelling body of work.

Varda's outstanding films, like *The Gleaners and I* (2000) and the captivating *The Beaches of Agnès* (2008), have earned both wide acclaim and prompted deep reflections on her remarkable career. Her unconventional approach to filmmaking challenges the typical process of celebrating directors. In Varda's cinematic world, space serves as a powerful symbol, exploring concepts of human identity through ideas such as location, perspective, and our relationship with our environment.

Analysing the complex interplay between cinema and the spatial involves exploring various aspects of spatial representation in her films. Cities, as visceral experiences of city life, echo sensations of film spectators, creating a symbiotic relationship. In my opinion, while the modern cityscape, with

its dynamic elements like arcades, bridges, railways, and skyscrapers, engenders a new spatio-visibility based on movement and sight; other sites such as beaches embody the qualities of temporary stopping points, public intimacy, and moments of snatched leisure, mirroring the dynamics of the city. In Varda's cinema, this interplay between urban landscapes and more tranquil settings is masterfully captured, highlighting the multifaceted nature of human experience within these spaces.

Born in Brussels in 1928 and later moving to France, Varda's journey began with a B.A. in psychology and literature from the Sorbonne. Starting as a still photographer, she scraped together the funds for her micro-budgetal first feature. Based on my observations, I can say that photography maintained a central role in Varda's filmmaking career. Recurring motifs in her movies involve the interplay between documentary and fiction, a fascination with history and memory, and an engagement with left-leaning political themes (Tyrrer 2009), including the politics of the body. I view these elements as a contribution to an essential feminism that permeates her work.

While branded as a trailblazing female director and a major feminist filmmaker, these labels should not overshadow the depth and diversity of Varda's contributions. André Bazin's assertion that "Every film is a social documentary" underscores the narrative arcs and distinct points of view inherent in documentaries (2008). In my perspective, fiction films, too, are products and records of their social, historical, and cultural contexts. In essence, Varda's body of work transcends categorisation, weaving together fiction and documentary elements to offer profound insights into the human condition and the societies in which we live

Widely recognised as the mother of the New Wave, Varda's works, either fiction or documentary, showcase theoretical and conceptual sophistication, addressing phenomenology and feminist politics explicitly. History and memory, recurrent themes in her films, find explicit expression in her final work, *Varda by Agnès* (2019), as she revisits and reassesses participants and places featured in her productions.

Film Selection: An Overview

As I chart Varda's cinematic trajectory, her films transcend the confines of mere storytelling, evolving into profound reflections and catalysts that spark dialogue and introspection on a myriad

of subjects, ranging from feminism and politics to the intricate fabric of human connections. Anchored within the theoretical frameworks delineated by Gaston Bachelard's seminal work, *The Poetics of Space* (2014), and Edward Soja's seminal treatise, *Seeking Spatial Justice* (2010), Varda's distinctive cinematic style and thematic preoccupations take center stage, particularly in all seven seminal works *La Pointe Courte* (1955), *Cleo from 5 to 7* (1962), *One Sings the Other Doesn't* (1977), *Vagabond* (1985), *The Gleaners and I* (2000), *Faces places* (2017) and *Varda by Agnès* (2019). The selection of Bachelard and Soja's frameworks serves as a deliberate choice to delve deeper into the phenomenology of space within Varda's oeuvre. Through Bachelard's exploration of the poetic and transformative aspects of lived spaces and Soja's examination of spatial justice, the analysis aims to unravel the intricate interplay between physical environments and emotional resonances in Varda's films.

In my expansive exploration of Varda's filmography, the intersection of Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* and Soja's *Seeking Spatial Justice* remains a guiding thread, unraveling the layers of meaning within each cinematic creation. As I navigate through the diverse landscapes of Varda's narratives, I utilize a theoretical framework to provide a lens through which to interpret the symbolic and thematic significance of spaces in dialogue with the human experience. *La Pointe Courte* and *Cleo from 5 to 7* serve as prime examples for this exploration, as both films intricately probe the complexities of interpersonal relationships within the backdrop of spatial configurations, inviting viewers into immersive phenomenological experiences.

La Pointe Courte (1955), often acclaimed as a precursor to the New Wave, provides a unique perspective on Varda's exploration of spaces and identities. Through its documentary-look aesthetics (Jerslev 2002, 150), use of nonprofessional actors, and meticulous portrayal of the economic struggles of the working class, the film invites a nuanced analysis of the emotional and psychological dimensions embedded within its spatial dynamics. Furthermore, by interweaving the narrative threads of a couple in marital crisis and the challenges faced by residents in a threatened fishing village, Varda illustrates how spaces serve as intersections for social dynamics, economic disparities, and environmental concerns. In examining these themes, I will delve into how *La Pointe Courte* resonates with both Bachelard's and Soja's theoretical frameworks.

In *Cleo from 5 to 7* (1962), Varda invites audiences into the temporal realm of two hours in the life of a beautiful young pop singer awaiting the results of a biopsy. Anchored in real-time narrative, the

film traces a transformative arc for its protagonist. From an object of external gaze, Cleo evolves into an independent and thoughtful observer of the world. I am personally fascinated by how Varda deftly navigates the delicate balance between public persona and private introspection, creating, in my view, a poignant exploration of identity and self-discovery against the backdrop of impending uncertainty. This film, too, becomes a canvas where Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* resonates, as the spaces Cleo inhabits are imbued with emotional and psychological depth.

In this extended exploration of Varda's filmography, these works stand as testament to her ability to navigate the realms of emotion, identity, and societal dynamics through the lens of spatial representation. As I continue to unravel the layers of Varda's storytelling prowess, the intersections of space, identity, and human experience take center stage in this cinematic odyssey.

One Sings, The Other Doesn't (1977) unfolds as a captivating mix of musical and melodrama, capturing the essence of two women navigating their friendship and feminism against the backdrop of the transformative years of the women's movement. Varda actively engages with the contemporary feminist debates of her time, encapsulating Vardian themes² within an unexpected genre. I am suggesting that through a lens that challenges traditional norms, Varda synthesises socio-political issues, absurdity instead of seriousness, and frivolity instead of provocation. The film's globetrotting narrative ventures into Iran, featuring a key character who is a photographer, and consistently places the body at the forefront. I would add that I believe Varda masterfully confronts women with profound dilemmas of balancing family and personal autonomy, pushing the boundaries of mainstream expectations with daring choices that remain radical and controversial even for contemporary audiences. The film becomes a convergence of avant-garde intellectual debates and cinematic strategies, where image, word, and music work independently yet in tension, prompting critical reflections on societal realities beyond the cinematic frame (Novaczek 2015, 4).

In *Vagabond* (1985), Varda masterfully merges fiction with documentary style, navigating the tragic tale of Mona, a teenage drifter found dead in a ditch. The film retraces Mona's journey through long tracking shots, punctuated by recollections from those who crossed her path. Through this unique narrative structure, Varda not only invites the audience to witness the physical spaces traversed by

² Agnès Varda's films often explore themes of female solidarity, feminism, social justice, identity, and human connection. In *One Sings, the Other Doesn't*, these themes enrich the portrayal of two women's friendship and feminist ideals amidst the backdrop of the women's movement.

Mona but also prompts reflection on the societal spaces that contributed to her fate. I decided to include this film in the body of my master thesis because it serves as a poignant exploration of the intersections between individual agency and societal constraints, inviting us to ponder the complex relationships between characters and the spaces they inhabit.

In *Gleaners and I* (2000), Varda embarks on a temporal and spatial journey, wielding her hand-cam like a pen to craft an "essayistic film."³ As she wanders through time and space, Varda explores the practice of gleaning—both as a socio-economic activity and as a metaphor for her own artistic process. In my opinion, the film becomes a reflection on the act of collecting, salvaging, and reinterpreting, echoing the thematic concerns of space and identity that permeate Varda's body of work. Bachelard's poetic exploration of space intertwines with Soja's emphasis on spatial justice, as Varda prompts viewers to critically reflect on the socio-economic realities woven into the landscapes she traverses.

Besides urban aspects, vegetation, often prominently featured in Varda's films, becomes a thematic element symbolising the environment and space. This is especially evident in *The Gleaners and I*, where Varda's obsession with vegetal movement and growth is apparent. From my perspective, this serves as a critical commentary on the patriarchal association of the feminine with nature. The pursuit of liberation by her female protagonists involves discovering the vegetal freedom that underlies human freedom (Uhlin 2022). I perceive Varda's intention of staging human-vegetal encounters as a means of posing questions about living freely in society, linking discarded vegetal remnants to the marginalised individuals surviving off society's castoffs.

Faces Places (2017) unfolds as a cinematic journey through the rural landscapes of France, delving into the concept of "embodied spaces."⁴ Throughout this period, Varda continued to push the boundaries of cinema and art, solidifying her reputation as one of the most influential and innovative filmmakers of her generation. In this collaborative documentary with the artist JR, Varda embarks on a journey across the French countryside, capturing the essence of class, gender,

³ An "essayistic film" is a cinematic work structured like an essay, blending cinematic tools with personal reflection, observation and commentary (Gegisian 2014, 27). In *Gleaners and I*, Agnès Varda utilises this approach to explore themes and ideas while offering viewers a multifaceted perspective on the subject matter.

⁴ "Embodied spaces" refers to the active experience and interpretation of physical surroundings by our bodies (Low 2003). In *Faces Places*, the film explores how individuals engage with rural landscapes in France, highlighting the intimate relationship between people and their environment.

friendship, and the power of narratives within the spaces inhabited by individuals⁵. In *Faces Places*, JR collaborates with Varda to craft an intimate and visually striking documentary celebrating the power of art and human connection. Thus, the film serves as a canvas for storytelling, challenging traditional power structures, and underscoring the significance of spaces in shaping individual and collective narratives.

Transitioning from the collaborative efforts with JR in *Faces Places*, Varda's cinematic exploration extends to the dynamic urban landscapes and tranquil rural settings. As mobility takes center stage, the cityscape, whether the bustling streets of Paris or the serene beaches, assumes a secondary personified role in Varda's films. The city becomes a dynamic character, influencing and interacting with the human subjects in, I would say, a symbolic dance. Varda's cinema continually challenges traditional paradigms of feminine identity (Kwiatkowska 2018), and I think that this is most prominently expressed in her portrayal of women. Beyond mere representation, her films delve into the notions of the body, the gaze, and the experimental interaction with urban as well as rural spaces.

Varda's cinema emerges as a political act, introducing a "politics of walking" into the narrative (Turner 2012; Cimen 2024). Through the portrayal of political walking, Varda, in my opinion, not only depicts resistance to the sedentary inclinations of women's positions, but also imbues characters with transformative potential, both for themselves and the spaces they traverse. This intertwining of walking and landscape underscores the interconnectedness between physical movement and the socio-political environments they navigate, revealing the hidden layers of meaning within the urban and rural landscapes. Walking is a recurring motif in many of Varda's works, with protagonists traversing landscapes both urban and rural. For instance, in *Cléo from 5 to 7*, the titular character Cléo wanders the streets of Paris, contemplating her mortality. Similarly, in *Vagabond*, Mona embarks on a journey through the French countryside, confronting societal norms and her own existential questions. In *Happiness*, the protagonist François takes long walks in the countryside, pondering his happiness and the nature of love. Even in *Jacquot de Nantes* (1991), the young Jacques explores his passion for filmmaking and his memories of childhood through walks in

⁵ Jean René, publicly known as JR, is a French artist and photographer renowned for his large-scale public installations and photographic projects exploring themes of identity, community, and social justice. He garnered widespread recognition for his Inside Out Project, involving pasting large-format portraits of people onto various surfaces in public spaces worldwide. Blurring the lines between art, activism, and documentary, JR's work engages with diverse communities, amplifying marginalised voices.

the streets of Nantes. Lastly, in *The Beaches of Agnès* (2008), Varda herself takes walks along the beaches of her life, reflecting on her memories, art, and relationships. This motif of walking not only serves as a narrative device but also symbolises the characters' search for identity and autonomy within their respective environments.

In Varda's films, space is not merely a static, topographic entity, but a dynamic realm infused with embodied subjectivity. Through her cinematic gaze, the city is portrayed as composed of embodied spaces, with everyday urban life valorising these spaces and propelling Varda's female characters forward. Gillian Rose's assertion that "everyday life is the arena through which patriarchy is (re)created and contested" resonates in Varda's unique *modus operandi* (Cimen 2023). By turning urban spaces and cities into experimental spheres, I argue that Varda urges viewers to re-question and reconfigure contemporary urban life, challenging assumptions and subverting preconceptions of the city.

Moreover, in the realm of gaze and nudity, Varda's films offer a distinctive perspective. Unlike classical narratives influenced by the male gaze, she subverts voyeuristic pleasure by providing a "voyageur's look"⁶ (Bazgan 2008). Additionally, I would like to highlight Varda's use of haptic shots on the body, which discern texture rather than plunging into illusionistic depth, thus becoming a notable trademark of her cinematic language. This approach to the gaze, in my opinion, aligns with a politicised bodily sensibility, drawing from phenomenology and challenging conventional feminist perspectives.

As *Varda by Agnès* (2019) serves as the culmination of Varda's illustrious career, this final film also represents the culmination of my exploration into the spatial politics embedded within her cinematic oeuvre. Just as Varda reflects on her life's work in her final film, I delve into the intricate intersections of space, power, and identity throughout her films. From the urban landscapes of *La Pointe Courte* to the rural expanses of *Faces Places*, Varda's cinema has provided a canvas for probing the complexities of human experience within diverse environments. My aim through the exploration of this master thesis, is to offer a deeper appreciation of how Varda's unique cinematic vision continues to influence and inspire contemporary discussions on space and identity.

⁶ The term "voyageur's look" refers to a perspective in Agnès Varda's films that diverges from the traditional male gaze. It suggests a more exploratory and empathetic approach to viewing, focusing on understanding characters with depth and authenticity rather than objectifying them.

Chapter 2: Phenomenology of Space in Varda's Early Works

"I am rooted, but I flow."

Virginia Woolf

Varda's early works, marked by their innovative narrative structures and profound thematic depth, laid the foundation for her enduring legacy in cinema. André Bazin, one of Varda's earliest champions, praised her debut film, *La Pointe Courte* (1955), as 'an excellent example of what has become the genuine cinematographic avant-garde' and 'a film free and pure, a miraculous film' (Bazin, Radio-Cinéma-Télévision, 1955; Le Parisien libéré, 1956). In my research, the examination of phenomenology in Varda's early works serves as a gateway to a deeper understanding of the intricacies and nuances embedded within her cinematic universe. Phenomenology, as a philosophical approach, emphasises the subjective nature of human experiences and perceptions (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 26). In Varda's films, I contend that this emphasis on subjectivity is evident in the portrayal of space as more than a mere physical backdrop. Instead, space becomes a dynamic force that actively shapes the narrative trajectory and influences the emotional and intellectual responses of both characters and viewers alike.

Delving into the phenomenology of space within Varda's early works reveals a rich tapestry of meaning, where spatial dimensions become active participants in the narrative, influencing both characters and audience. While Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* offers a foundational framework for understanding the role of space in shaping human experiences and

perceptions (ibid., 289), Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (2014) delves deeper into the poetic dimensions of spatiality, aligning closely with Varda's cinematic exploration.

Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* will serve as my theoretical starting point. Bachelard intricately explores the profound relationship between human consciousness and the spaces we inhabit, proposing that spaces possess a poetic quality capable of evoking emotional responses and inspiring creative thought. His exploration of phenomenology emphasises the significance of lived experiences and imagination in shaping our perception of space, suggesting that our understanding of the world is deeply intertwined with our subjective experiences within it (Bachelard 2014).

I would posit that Bachelard's work emphasises the transformative power of imagination and memory within spatial environments, asserting that spaces are not just passive backdrops but active participants in the shaping of human consciousness. In this regard, Bachelard's phenomenological approach resonates particularly well with Varda's nuanced portrayal of space in her films, where spaces are imbued with subjective meanings and memories, inviting viewers to engage with them on an emotional and intellectual level. Through the lens of Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*, we gain a deeper appreciation of the rich tapestry of meanings embedded within Varda's cinematic landscapes, illuminating themes of identity, memory, and existential inquiry. I contend that in Varda's cinema, it becomes particularly evident as she infuses spaces with subjective meanings, thereby inviting viewers to engage with the environment on an emotional and intellectual level. Through a phenomenological lens, we can uncover the layers of significance embedded within the spatial compositions of her films, shedding light on themes of identity, memory, and existential inquiry. Therefore, I suppose that the investigation of the phenomenology of space in Varda's early works serves as a gateway to a deeper comprehension and appreciation of her artistic vision and narrative prowess.

I believe that within Varda's cinema, spaces are imbued with layers of subjective meanings and memories, inviting audiences to engage with them in a deeply personal manner. Whether it's a bustling street corner, a desolate countryside, or a cramped apartment, each environment becomes a canvas upon which the characters' lives unfold. Through the phenomenological exploration of these spaces, viewers are afforded glimpses into the characters' inner worlds, as their interactions with the environment reflect their desires, fears, and aspirations.

Furthermore, I am convinced that Varda's exploration of space often intertwines with existential themes that lie at the core of human existence. In my view, questions of identity, belonging, and mortality permeate her narratives, with space serving as both a reflection and a catalyst for these existential inquiries. I think it is through the lens of phenomenology that we can delve into these profound questions by examining how the characters navigate and make sense of the spatial landscapes that surround them. Whether it's the search for a sense of belonging in the vast expanse of the city or the confrontation with mortality amidst the tranquility of nature, space becomes a prism through which existential truths are refracted.

Understanding the phenomenology of space is essential for appreciating the depth of Varda's artistic vision and narrative techniques. Through meticulous attention to spatial composition, lighting, and sound design, Varda crafts immersive cinematic experiences that transcend the boundaries of traditional storytelling. By analysing how she constructs and utilises space, viewers gain insight into her unique storytelling proficiency and thematic concerns. I believe that each spatial element is carefully orchestrated in her films to evoke specific emotions and provoke profound reflections, enriching the overall cinematic experience.

In essence, the exploration of phenomenology of space in Varda's early works not only deepens our appreciation of her artistry but also offers profound insights into the human condition itself. Through the subjective lens of spatial experience, we are invited to journey alongside her characters as they navigate the intricate tapestry of existence, shedding light on the universal truths that bind us all.

Phenomenological Foundations: Unveiling the Theoretical Framework

As emphasised earlier in this chapter, *The Poetic of space* (Bacheard 2014) explore the ways in which space is experienced, imagined and constructed. Therefore the book serves to assert a phenomenological framework. Bachelard's phenomenological approach to the concept of space focuses on the lived experience of space and how it shapes human consciousness. He emphasises the subjective and psychological dimensions of space, arguing that our perceptions of space are not solely determined by adjective, physical characteristics but are deeply intertwined with our emotions, memories and imagination.

His exploration of the phenomenology of space offers a profound insight into the intricate relationship between human consciousness and the environments we inhabit. Through his multidimensional approach, Bachelard delves into the ways in which spaces shape our experiences, emotions, and memories. His theoretical framework encompasses various aspects of spatial engagement, which are manifested through poetic imagination (Bachelard 2014, 2) , the dialectics of inside and outside spaces (ibid., 12), and the concept of topoanalysis (ibid., xxxvi). These engagements shed light on the profound significance of space in shaping our perceptions and understanding of the world around us.

To introduce the three axes of the theoretical framework that will underpin spatial analysis using Bachelard's ideas, I provide a brief explanation here. Bachelard explores how people interact with space through poetic imagination. He identifies various typical spaces like corners, nests, shells (ibid., 105), and nooks (ibid., xxxiv) that evoke specific emotions and memories. According to Bachelard, these spaces become repositories of our experiences and contribute to our understanding of the world. He also discusses the relationship between inside and outside spaces. He suggests that our feelings of safety and intimacy are often connected with enclosed, internal spaces like a house (ibid., 15), while open, external spaces such as vast landscapes evoke feelings of freedom and expansiveness (ibid., 95). Additionally, he introduces the concept of topoanalysis (ibid., xxxvi), which involves the psychological analysis of the significance of different spaces in an individual's life. He argues that by examining the specific experiences associated with various spaces, one can gain insight into the individual's psychological makeup. Bachelard's concept of topoanalysis delves deeper into the layers of meaning embedded within our lived environments. By studying the symbolic significance of spaces like the house of our birth and the oneiric house (ibid., 136), topoanalysis uncovers the complex interplay between memory, imagination, and identity. Through topoanalysis, Bachelard seeks to unveil the intimate relationship between individuals and their surroundings, revealing how the spaces we inhabit shape our perceptions, emotions, and sense of self. In essence, topoanalysis serves as a tool for understanding the profound psychological impact of our spatial experiences, enriching our exploration of the poetic dimensions of space.

Visualising Bachelardian Spaces: Cinematic Techniques in Agnès Varda's Work

By applying Bachelard's ideas to Varda's films *La Pointe Courte* (1955) and *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962), we can discern how spatial elements are intricately woven into the fabric of the narratives, serving as conduits for emotional expression and philosophical inquiry from the very beginning of her career.

In *La Pointe Courte*, Varda adopts an observational documentary approach. The film is often cited as an early example of the *cinéma vérité* style (Dancyger 2018, 216), characterised by its candid depiction of everyday life and its use of long takes, natural lighting, and non-professional actors to capture authentic moments. Varda's focus on the lives of the residents of La Pointe Courte, a small fishing village, reflects her interest in portraying real people and their environments without excessive intervention or manipulation. This observational approach aligns with the principles of documentary filmmaking, emphasising the direct observation of reality rather than staged or scripted scenes. While the film primarily captures the everyday lives of the residents of La Pointe Courte, it also incorporates elements of fiction through the narrative of a troubled couple visiting the village. This fictional storyline, featuring actors playing the roles of the couple, intertwines with the documentary footage, adding a layer of dramatic tension and emotional depth to the film. Varda's blending of documentary and fiction elements in *La Pointe Courte* reflects her innovative approach to storytelling and her interest in exploring the boundaries between reality and fiction in cinema.

In *La Pointe Courte*, Varda's choices of spatial compositions, lighting, and sound design serve to evoke a profound sense of phenomenological exploration, reflecting Bachelard's concepts of spatial poetics. Through meticulous attention to the visual and auditory elements of the film, Varda invites viewers to engage with the spaces in the film in a deeply immersive manner. The film's spatial compositions, characterised by long takes and wide shots that capture the sprawling landscapes and intimate interiors of the village, facilitate a sensory experience that transcends mere observation. Varda's use of natural lighting further enhances the film's evocative power, allowing shadows and reflections to play across the surfaces of the environment, imbuing each space with its own unique atmosphere and mood. Similarly, the film's sound design, which incorporates ambient sounds such as the lapping of waves, the chirping of birds, and the chatter of residents, envelops the viewer in the sensory richness of the village, amplifying the emotional resonance of the narrative. Through

these cinematic techniques, Varda not only portrays the physical spaces of the village but also delves into the psychological and emotional dimensions of place, echoing Bachelard's exploration of the intimate relationship between individuals and their surroundings. In doing so, Varda transforms the village into a metaphorical landscape of the mind, inviting viewers to contemplate the ways in which space shapes our perceptions, memories, and identities.

In *Cléo from 5 to 7*, Varda's deliberate choices in spatial compositions, lighting, sound design, and camera angles create a rich tapestry of phenomenological exploration, echoing again Bachelard's theories of spatial poetics. Through the film's intricate visual and auditory elements, Varda invites viewers to immerse themselves in the subjective experiences of the protagonist, Cléo, as she navigates the streets of Paris over the course of two hours. The spatial compositions in the film are carefully crafted to reflect Cléo's internal journey, with wide shots capturing the bustling cityscape and intimate close-ups revealing her innermost thoughts and emotions. Varda's use of lighting further enhances the film's evocative power, with natural light streaming through windows and casting shadows that mirror Cléo's fluctuating moods. The film's sound design is equally nuanced, incorporating ambient sounds such as traffic noise, street musicians, and snippets of conversation to evoke the sensory richness of urban life. Additionally, Varda employs a variety of camera angles, including handheld shots and long takes, to create a sense of immediacy and intimacy, allowing viewers to feel as though they are walking alongside Cléo through the streets of Paris. Through these cinematic techniques, Varda not only captures the physical spaces of the city but also delves into the psychological and emotional dimensions of place, echoing Bachelard's exploration of the intimate relationship between individuals and their surroundings.

In Varda's cinematic exploration, the dialectic of inside and outside becomes a central theme, echoing Bachelard's examination of the intimate relationship between individuals and their surroundings. Through her meticulous attention to both physical spaces and the psychological and emotional dimensions of place, Varda blurs the boundaries between inside and outside, inviting viewers to contemplate the fluidity of these concepts. In *Cléo from 5 to 7*, for example, the bustling streets of Paris serve as both a backdrop and a reflection of Cléo's internal turmoil, with exterior shots capturing the external chaos while interior scenes reveal her innermost thoughts and emotions. Similarly, in *La Pointe Courte*, the village itself becomes a metaphorical landscape of the mind, with Varda's exploration of both the physical environment and the psychological experiences of its inhabitants highlighting the interconnectedness of inside and outside. Through these cinematic

techniques, Varda illustrates how our perceptions of space are shaped by our internal states, blurring the distinction between the physical and the psychological, the external and the internal.

Through her nuanced portrayal of spatial elements in both films, Varda encourages viewers to engage with the environment on an emotional and intellectual level, inviting them to reflect on the ways in which spaces shape our perceptions, memories, and sense of self. Ultimately, *La Pointe Courte* and *Cléo from 5 to 7* serve as poignant examples of Bachelard's belief in the intimate connection between space, imagination, and the human experience, offering viewers a glimpse into the poetic depths of everyday life.

- *La Pointe Courte* (1954)

In *La Pointe Courte*, Varda's portrayal of the fishing village exemplifies, in my opinion, Bachelard's notion of the poetic imagination at work. The film tells the story of a young couple who visit the fishing village of La Pointe Courte while grappling with their own relationship issues. Interwoven with their narrative are sketches of the daily lives of the villagers, capturing the essence of the community and its struggles. Varda's innovative use of narrative structure and visual style offers a unique blend of documentary and fiction, exploring themes of love, identity, and social dynamics. From my perspective, *La Pointe Courte* showcases Varda's keen eye for human observation and her ability to infuse ordinary moments with poetic depth, establishing her as a trailblazing filmmaker in the realm of French cinema.

The village's physical landscape, characterised by narrow alleyways, weather-beaten houses, and expansive seascapes, becomes a metaphorical reflection of the characters' inner worlds. For instance, the juxtaposition of cramped, claustrophobic interiors with the vast expanse of the sea highlights the tension between confinement and liberation, echoing Bachelard's exploration of the dialectic between closed and open spaces. Furthermore, the villagers' interactions with their environment evoke a sense of nostalgia and longing, tapping into Bachelard's idea of the house as a repository of memories and dreams.

The film offers a rich canvas for a phenomenological analysis, as Varda's directorial debut intertwines the subjective experiences of characters with the intricate spatial dynamics of the fishing village. Through Bachelard's phenomenological lens, it is possible to explore how Varda's treatment of space, time, and perception immerses viewers in the intimate lives of the villagers, while simultaneously inviting reflection on broader existential themes.



Figure 2.1. Village's physical landscape in *La Pointe Courte* by Agnès Varda

At its core, *La Pointe Courte* intertwines two narrative threads: the ordinary yet deeply personal lives of the villagers and the looming threat of a potential cholera outbreak. I contend that through her phenomenological lens, Varda skilfully immerses viewers into the sensory world of the characters, allowing them to experience the joys, struggles, and fears encountered while navigating the labyrinthine streets and dilapidated houses of the village. This immersion aligns with Bachelard's exploration of poetic imagination in *The Poetics of Space*, where he elucidates how the human psyche engages with various spatial environments (Bachelard 2014, 5). Bachelard identifies archetypal spaces such as corners (ibid., 155), nests (ibid., 111), and shells (ibid., 125), which evoke specific emotions and memories, becoming repositories of our experiences and contributing to our understanding of the world. Similarly, Varda's portrayal of the village spaces reflects this notion, as they serve as more than mere physical settings but rather as embodiments of the characters' inner worlds and collective memories.

By employing non-professional actors, I believe that Varda further enhances this immersive experience, blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality because their authentic performances evoke a sense of immediacy and intimacy, allowing viewers to emotionally connect

with the characters and their surroundings on a profound level, akin to the immersive engagement described by Bachelard in his exploration of poetic spaces.

In my opinion, spatiality plays a central role in shaping the narrative and emotional resonance of the film, echoing Bachelard's exploration of the phenomenology of space. Bachelard's concept of poetic imagination (Bachelard 2014, 5) aligns with Varda's meticulous attention to spatial composition and cinematography, as both emphasise how spaces become imbued with symbolic meanings and emotional significance. One scene that exemplifies the central role of spatiality in shaping the narrative and emotional resonance of the film is when the camera pans across the village square, capturing the daily activities of the villagers. This scene reflects Varda's meticulous attention to spatial composition and cinematography, as it emphasises how spaces become imbued with symbolic meanings and emotional significance. The bustling yet intimate atmosphere of the square, with its intersecting paths and diverse interactions among the villagers, serves as a microcosm of the larger themes explored in the film, such as community, connection, and the passage of time. Through this scene, Varda demonstrates how spatial elements can evoke a sense of place and evoke emotional responses, echoing Bachelard's exploration of the poetic imagination and the phenomenology of space.



Just as Bachelard identifies various archetypal spaces, such as corners and nests, Varda transforms the village of *La Pointe Courte* into a character itself, with its narrow alleyways and bustling

marketplace serving as the backdrop for the unfolding drama. Through Varda's lens, viewers are invited to explore the intricate web of relationships and interactions that define life in the village, much like Bachelard's exploration of the psychological significance of different spaces.



Figure 2.3. Narrow alleys in La Pointe Courte By Agnès Varda

Furthermore, the juxtaposition of cramped, claustrophobic interiors with expansive vistas of the sea reflects not only the characters' internal conflicts and desires but also underscores Bachelard's notion of the dialectics of inside and outside spaces (Bachelard 2014, 227). This contrast highlights the tension between tradition and modernity, as well as the complex interplay between feelings of confinement and liberation within the human psyche, echoing Bachelard's insights into the emotional resonances of different spatial experiences. Bachelard's concept suggests that the tension between enclosed, internal spaces and open, external spaces influences our perceptions and emotions. Inside spaces evoke feelings of security and intimacy, while outside spaces evoke feelings of freedom and expansiveness. This dynamic interplay between internal and external environments shapes the characters' experiences and underscores the complexity of their psychological and emotional landscapes.



Figure 2.4. Scene from La Pointe Courte by Agnès Varda

In the movie, time, too, is fluid and subjective, a concept that resonates with Bachelard's exploration of temporality (Bachelard 2014, 14). Bachelard's ideas about the poetic imagination and the transformative power of memory align with Varda's seamless weaving between past and present, memory and reality. Just as Bachelard emphasises the role of memory in shaping our perception of space (ibid., 18), Varda's nonlinear narrative structure mirrors the fragmented nature of human consciousness, inviting viewers to engage in a form of cinematic introspection. Through the characters' recollections and reflections, we are confronted not only with the ephemeral nature of existence but also with Bachelard's notion of topoanalysis—the psychological analysis of the significance of different spaces in an individual's life (ibid., 30). As viewers navigate through the characters' memories and experiences, we gain insight into the elusive quest for meaning in the face of mortality, echoing Bachelard's exploration of the profound connections between space, memory, and existential inquiry.



Figure 2.5. Scene from La Pointe Courte by Agnès Varda

Moreover, existential themes permeate the film, resonating with Bachelard's exploration of the human condition in *The Poetics of Space*. Bachelard's concepts of identity, belonging, and mortality find echoes in Varda's probing of fundamental questions within *La Pointe Courte*. Just as Bachelard delves into the psychological significance of different spaces, Varda navigates the intricate web of relationships and interactions that define life in the village, touching upon themes of belonging and the human quest for identity. I am suggesting that the threat of the cholera outbreak can be seen as metaphorically representing the uncertainty and impermanence of existence. This theme, in my opinion, is subtly woven into the fabric of the film, reflecting Bachelard's exploration of the fragility of human life.

While the cholera outbreak itself may not be explicitly depicted in the film, its presence looms in the background, casting a shadow over the villagers' everyday lives and adding a sense of tension and urgency to their interactions and decisions. The threat of the outbreak serves as a reminder of the transient nature of life and the ever-present possibility of sudden upheaval or tragedy, echoing Bachelard's insights into the delicate balance between stability and instability in human existence (Seamon 2010). Yet, amidst the looming crisis, moments of beauty and tenderness emerge, reflecting Bachelard's notion of the transformative power of imagination and memory (Bachelard 2014, 95). I believe that these moments offer glimpses of hope and resilience, underscoring the human capacity to find meaning and purpose even in the face of adversity, echoing Bachelard's exploration of the poetic depths of everyday life.

I perceive that several key aspects of scenography and scenes in *La Pointe Courte* hold significant and profound implications for the phenomenology of space, greatly enhancing the immersive experience and facilitating the exploration of existential themes.

Firstly, the spatial composition within the fishing village of *La Pointe Courte* is deeply significant. The deliberate juxtaposition of contrasting spaces, such as the narrow, winding alleyways and the cramped interiors of the villagers' homes against the expansive vistas of the sea and sky, serves to mirror the characters' internal conflicts and desires. Through this spatial composition, I think the tension between tradition and modernity is vividly conveyed, contributing to the film's rich tapestry of existential inquiry.

Moreover, the incorporation of natural elements, such as the sea and the sky, assumes a poignant significance within the film's phenomenology. From my perspective, the vastness and

unpredictability of the sea symbolically represent the uncertainty and impermanence of human existence. The characters' interactions with the natural environment evoke a sense of awe and humility, prompting viewers to contemplate their place in the vast universe and ponder the transient nature of life itself.

The temporal fluidity embedded within the narrative structure further enriches the phenomenological exploration (Bachelard 2014, 31) in *La Pointe Courte*. The nonlinear progression of scenes, seamlessly interweaving past and present, serves to blur the boundaries between memory and reality. I suppose this temporal fluidity resonates with the fragmented nature of human consciousness, inviting viewers to engage in introspective reflection and contemplation.

Scenes depicting everyday life in the village offer significant insight into the phenomenological dimensions of the film. These scenes immerse viewers in the sensory world of the characters, allowing them to experience the sights, sounds, and textures of village life firsthand. Through the characters' interactions with their environment, I believe viewers gain profound insights into the subjective experiences of the villagers and the existential challenges they face.

Finally, the portrayal of crisis scenes, particularly the impending threat of a cholera outbreak, assumes paramount importance within the film's phenomenology. The looming spectre of the outbreak heightens the characters' awareness of their mortality and underscores the fragility of human life. These scenes evoke a palpable sense of existential dread, compelling viewers to confront the fundamental questions of meaning and purpose in the face of adversity.

In my interpretation, the scenography and scenes in *La Pointe Courte* are imbued with profound phenomenological significance, inviting viewers to immerse themselves in the sensory world of the characters and contemplate the existential mysteries of human existence. In addition, the movie exemplifies the power of cinema to evoke the rich tapestry of human experience through the interplay of space, time, and perception.

- *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962)

In *Cléo from 5 to 7*, by weaving together elements of space, time, and perception to immerse viewers in the subjective experiences of the protagonist and explore existential themes, Varda offers another compelling canvas for a phenomenological analysis. The film follows Cléo, a young singer,

as she anxiously waits for the results of a medical test that will determine if she has cancer. The film unfolds in real time, capturing Cléo's experiences over the course of two hours, from 5 to 7 p.m. as she navigates the streets of Paris. Through encounters with various characters and reflections on her own life, Cléo grapples with existential questions about mortality, identity, and the nature of happiness. Varda's innovative storytelling and use of cinematography, in my perspective offer a unique exploration of inner turmoil and self-discovery against the backdrop of the vibrant cityscape. Through a phenomenological lens, viewers can delve into the sensory world of Cléo and examine how Varda's treatment of space, time, and embodiment shapes the narrative and invites reflection on the nature of existence.

The film skilfully portrays Paris as a dynamic and multifaceted urban landscape, resonating with Bachelard's concept of topoanalysis. As Cléo navigates through the city streets, cafés, and parks, viewers immerse themselves in the sensory richness of her environment while engaging with the layers of meaning embedded within each space. For instance, as Cléo walks through bustling streets, quiet parks, and lively cafes, the film invites viewers to perceive Paris as a complex and evocative setting that shapes the characters' experiences and emotions. Each encounter contributes to the tapestry of the city's topography, emphasising its significance beyond mere backdrop.



Figure 2.6. Streets of Paris in a scene from *Cléo from 5 to 7* by Agnès Varda

I suggest here that, in *Cléo from 5 to 7*, the act of walking serves as a crucial narrative and cinematic device, offering a multifaceted portrayal of the protagonist's inner turmoil and her

relationship with the urban environment. The film meticulously depicts Cléo's journey through Paris, using varied modes of movement—walking, riding in a taxi, and taking a tram—to explore the phenomenology of space and align with Bachelard's concepts of spatial poetics.

When Cléo walks through the streets of Paris, the cityscape transforms into a dynamic and interactive space. Walking allows her—and the audience—to engage intimately with the surroundings. This mode of movement emphasises the textures, sounds, and rhythms of the city, bringing the environment to life through Cléo's sensory experiences. As Bachelard posits spaces hold poetic qualities that are often revealed through personal and subjective experiences (Bachelard 2014, 4). Cléo's walking sequences, in my opinion, invite viewers to share her immediate, unmediated interactions with the urban space, making the city a living entity that mirrors her emotional state.

Walking also allows Cléo to encounter various characters and situations directly, fostering a sense of immediacy and presence. These interactions are vital in portraying her search for meaning and connection amidst her existential crisis. The close-up shots and handheld camera work during these sequences enhance the feeling of intimacy and vulnerability, aligning with Bachelard's idea that spaces are repositories of memories and emotions.

In contrast, Cléo's journey through Paris in a taxi offers a more detached and observational perspective. The enclosed space of the taxi creates a physical and psychological barrier between Cléo and the external environment. Here, the city becomes a backdrop to her introspective moments rather than an active participant in her journey. The moving vehicle provides a sense of protection and isolation, allowing Cléo to reflect on her thoughts and fears without direct engagement with the city's vibrancy.

The camera work during the taxi scenes often includes long shots and frames through windows, emphasising the separation between Cléo and the outside world. This mode of transportation underscores her sense of alienation and disconnection, contrasting with the immersive experience of walking. According to phenomenology, this shift highlights how different modes of movement can alter one's perception and experience of space, revealing varying layers of reality.



Figure 2.7. Exploring Urban Landscapes: Walking, Riding in a taxi, Taking a tram Through City Streets in Cléo from 5 to 7 by Agnès Varda

Taking the tram introduces yet another spatial dynamic, positioning Cléo in a communal yet transient environment. The tram's movement is slower and more rhythmic than the taxi, providing a space for contemplation and shared experience with other passengers. In my perspective, this mode of transport blends elements of both walking and riding in a taxi—it offers a degree of protection and separation, yet it also maintains a connection to the external world through its large windows and the visible presence of other people.

The tram sequences often include medium shots that capture the interplay between Cléo and her fellow passengers, highlighting the communal aspect of urban life. This setting creates a sense of collective movement and shared destiny, subtly reinforcing Bachelard's notion that spaces are shaped by the confluence of individual and collective experiences (Bachelard 2014, XV). The tram, as a transitional space, symbolises Cléo's journey towards self-discovery and acceptance, reflecting her evolving relationship with the city and her own identity.

Varda's nuanced depiction of Cléo's movement through Paris in *Cléo from 5 to 7* exemplifies the phenomenological approach to understanding space. Each mode of transportation—walking, riding in a taxi, and taking a tram—offers distinct spatial experiences that shape Cléo's perception of her environment and her place within it. Bachelard's concept of spatial poetics is vividly illustrated as the city becomes a canvas for Cléo's emotional and existential exploration.

Walking immerses Cléo in the city's immediate reality, making her an active participant in its life. The taxi provides a reflective, almost introspective view, while the tram serves as a metaphor for transition and shared human experience. Together, these modes of movement create a rich tapestry of spatial interactions that deepen our understanding of Cléo's character and Varda's cinematic vision.

Through these varied portrayals of space, Varda not only captures the essence of Paris but also delves into the profound connections between space, movement, and human experience. The phenomenological depth of *Cléo from 5 to 7* invites viewers to consider how our interactions with space influence our perceptions, emotions, and ultimately, our understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

Not only is the mode of exploration important, but also the places Cléo visits throughout her journey hold significant importance. Through Cléo's journey, the film underscores the intricate relationship between space and human perception, echoing Bachelard's exploration of the profound connection between environment and consciousness. Bachelard's concept of topoanalysis involves the psychological analysis of the significance of different spaces in an individual's life. In this context, Cléo's journey through Paris becomes an exploration of her inner landscape, with each location reflecting her emotions, desires, and existential uncertainties. The bustling streetscapes and crowded cafes mirror Cléo's feelings of isolation and existential dread, while the tranquil parks offer

moments of introspection and self-discovery. Through the lens of topoanalysis, viewers gain insight into Cléo's psychological makeup as she navigates the urban labyrinth of Paris, shedding light on the complex interplay between inner experience and the external environment.

Furthermore, the film's exploration of temporality is central to its phenomenological inquiry. The narrative unfolds in real-time, spanning the two hours between 5 and 7 pm, as Cléo awaits the results of a medical test. This temporal constraint, in my interpretation, creates a sense of urgency and immediacy, heightening the viewer's immersion in Cléo's subjective experience. As time ticks away, viewers are drawn into the rhythm of Cléo's thoughts and emotions, blurring the boundaries between past, present, and future.



Figure 2.8. The notion of time is tightly bound to the space in Cléo from 5 to 7 by Agnès Varda

The embodiment of Cléo's experience in the film aligns with Bachelard's exploration of the dialectic between inside and outside spaces in his phenomenology of space. Bachelard discusses how our experiences of safety and intimacy are often associated with enclosed, internal spaces, while open, external spaces evoke feelings of freedom and expansiveness (Bachelard 2014, 110). Through Varda's use of close-ups, POV shots, and subjective camera techniques, viewers are not only invited to inhabit Cléo's body but also to perceive the world through her senses, blurring the boundaries between inner and outer experiences. This intimate engagement with Cléo's embodied perspective reflects Bachelard's notion of inside spaces as repositories of safety and intimacy. Cléo's interactions with her reflection, her wardrobe, and the people she encounters further underscore the ways in which embodiment shapes her perception of herself and her surroundings, highlighting the

intricate interplay between inner experience and external environment. Through the lens of Bachelard's dialectic of inside and outside spaces, viewers gain insight into the profound connections between embodied existence and spatial perception, as exemplified in Cléo's journey of self-discovery throughout the film.

Moreover, the depiction of safety in *Cléo from 5 to 7* varies significantly across different settings, reflecting the shifting dynamics of Cléo's emotional state and her sense of security. In her own apartment, Cléo experiences a semblance of safety and control. As I see it, this private space, filled with personal belongings and familiar objects, acts as a sanctuary where she can momentarily retreat from the external world's uncertainties. However, this sense of safety is also tinged with isolation, as the enclosed space amplifies her feelings of loneliness and existential dread. In contrast, the apartment of the fortune teller represents someone else's private space, which introduces a sense of vulnerability and unease for Cléo. Here, the intimate act of seeking insight into her future in a stranger's domain heightens her anxiety, making the space feel both intrusive and unsettling.

Public places such as cafés and bustling streets offer a different dynamic. While these spaces are open and communal, they paradoxically intensify Cléo's sense of exposure and disconnection. The constant movement and presence of others in cafés make these places feel impersonal, contributing to her feelings of alienation. Similarly, the city streets, despite their openness, do not provide Cléo with a sense of safety; instead, they underscore her solitude amidst the urban crowd.

The modes of transportation Cléo uses also play a crucial role in her perception of safety. The taxi, a semi-private space, offers a temporary refuge where she can observe the city from a distance, creating a barrier between herself and the chaotic urban environment. However, this sense of safety is superficial, as the confinement of the taxi reminds her of her lack of control over her fate. In contrast, taking the tram represents a more communal experience, where Cléo is part of the public yet remains somewhat detached. The tram's movement through the city symbolises her journey and transition, providing moments of introspection amidst the routine passage of urban life.



Figure 2.9. Cléo in different sets (her own apartment, the fortune teller's apartment and in a café) manifesting different emotional state in Cléo from 5 to 7 by Agnès Varda

Through these varied depictions, Cléo's sense of safety is most prominently felt in her private apartment, despite its accompanying feelings of isolation. This highlights the duality of private spaces as both protective and confining, embodying Bachelard's concept that inside spaces offer comfort and intimacy yet can also impose a sense of entrapment (Bachelard 2014, 142). In contrast, public spaces and transient modes of transport emphasise her vulnerability and existential uncertainties. These open, external spaces evoke a sense of freedom and expansiveness but also expose her to the unpredictability of the outside world, aligning with Bachelard's notion that external environments are associated with liberation yet can heighten one's sense of insecurity.

By examining these different environments, viewers can better understand the nuanced ways in which Cléo navigates her fears and seeks moments of security throughout her journey. This intricate portrayal of safety and vulnerability directly engages with Bachelard's exploration of the dialectic between inside and outside spaces (ibid., 227). It offers a deeper insight into Cléo's inner world and her quest for self-discovery, illustrating how her experiences within these spatial dynamics reflect broader existential themes. Varda's film thus becomes a canvas where the interplay between internal comfort and external exposure is vividly rendered, echoing Bachelard's phenomenological insights and enhancing our understanding of Cléo's complex emotional landscape.

I contend to add also that based on my interpretation of the film, existential themes permeate the film, as Cléo grapples with questions of identity, mortality, and the search for meaning. As she confronts the possibility of illness and death, Cléo's existential crisis becomes a catalyst for introspection and self-discovery. Through the phenomenological exploration of her subjective experience, as suggests Bachelard (Bachelard 2014, 26), viewers are invited to contemplate their own mortality and the fleeting nature of human existence. Throughout the film, it is evident that several scenes and aspects of scenography carry significant meaning within the context of phenomenology, contributing to the exploration of subjective experience and existential themes.

Firstly, the opening scene in which Cléo consults a fortune teller sets the stage for the film's exploration of temporality and perception. As Cléo anxiously awaits the results of a medical test, her encounter with the fortune teller highlights her preoccupation with the future and her desire for reassurance. The spatial arrangement of the fortune teller's apartment plays a crucial role in conveying the atmosphere of the scene and reflecting Cléo's state of mind. The dim lighting and eclectic decor create an aura of mystery and ambiguity, mirroring Cléo's feelings of confusion and

anxiety. The cramped quarters of the apartment further emphasise, in my opinion, the sense of claustrophobia and vulnerability that Cléo experiences as she grapples with the unknown. Through the careful manipulation of spatial elements, Varda invites viewers to inhabit Cléo's psychological landscape, experiencing her sense of disorientation and existential angst firsthand.

The interaction between Cléo and the fortune teller highlights the complex relationship between perception and reality. As Cléo seeks guidance and validation from the fortune teller, it becomes evident that her perception of the future is influenced by her hopes, fears, and insecurities. As I view it, the fortune teller's cryptic responses and ambiguous predictions serve to blur the boundaries between truth and illusion, leaving Cléo—and the audience—questioning the reliability of perception and the nature of fate.



Figure 2.10. Fortune telling scene from Cléo from 5 to 7 by Agnès Varda. Note that this is the only scene in color.

In essence, the opening scene of *Cléo from 5 to 7* serves as a powerful introduction to the film's central themes of temporality and perception, resonating with Bachelard's concepts of poetic imagination of space, the dialectic of inside and outside, and topoanalysis. Through the spatial arrangement of the fortune teller's apartment and the interaction between Cléo and the fortune teller, Varda initiates a contemplation on the nature of time and the uncertainty of the future. Bachelard's poetic imagination of space comes into play, to my mind, as viewers are drawn into the mystical atmosphere of the fortune teller's surroundings, evoking a sense of wonder and curiosity about the passage of time and the mysteries of fate.



Figure 2.11. Cléo in a scene inside the fortune teller's apartment in Cléo from 5 to 7 by Agnès Varda

The spatial arrangement of the apartment, with its dim lighting and eclectic decor, contributes to the intimate and introspective mood of the scene, reflecting Bachelard's exploration of inside spaces as repositories of safety and intimacy (Bachelard 2014, 26). The interaction between Cléo and the fortune teller prompts viewers to reflect on the ways in which perception shapes our understanding of reality, echoing Bachelard's notion of topoanalysis—the psychological analysis of the significance of different spaces in an individual's life.

Throughout the film, Cléo's interactions with her surroundings provide profound insights into the phenomenology of embodiment of the space, a concept closely tied to Bachelard's exploration of lived space (ibid., 117). In each and every scene, Cléo's body serves as the focal point within the space she inhabits, allowing viewers to navigate her subjective experience of the world. From the way Cleo scrutinises her reflection in mirrors to her meticulous selection of wardrobe and accessories, each of her interactions with the objects in the space, underscores the intimate relationship between self-exploration and spatial surroundings. These moments of bodily depiction, captured through close-ups and intimate camera angles, in my estimation, invite viewers to inhabit Cléo's corporeal/spatial reality and perceive the world through her senses. By immersing audiences in Cléo's embodied perspective, the film echoes Bachelard's idea of lived space as a dynamic interplay between subjective experience and physical environment (ibid., 95). Through Cléo's journey of self-discovery, viewers are prompted to reflect on the ways in which our bodies shape our understanding of the spaces we inhabit, and how these spaces, in turn, influence our sense of self and identity.

For instance, in the park scene, Cléo encounters a stranger soldier. This marks a pivotal moment in her emotional journey. The foggy background creates an ethereal atmosphere, symbolising the uncertainty and introspection that envelop Cléo. As she walks through the park, her body language initially conveys tension and apprehension, reflective of her earlier isolation and anxiety. However, upon meeting the soldier, her bodily expression softens; she begins to relax and engage more openly.



Figure 2.12. Cléo's change in emotional state in Cléo from 5 to 7 by Agnès Varda

Walking side by side with the soldier, Cléo's sense of safety transforms. While public spaces previously heightened her vulnerability, the soldier's presence provides a newfound sense of security and companionship. This shift in the notion of safety aligns with Bachelard's dialectic of inside and outside spaces (Bachelard 2014, 186). The park, an external space, becomes a zone of intimate connection and emotional shelter, contrasting with the earlier depiction of external spaces as sources of existential dread. Through this interaction, Varda illustrates how the presence of

another person can alter the perception of space, turning an open, uncertain environment into a realm of shared human experience and introspective discovery.

Cléo from 5 to 7 offers a rich phenomenological exploration of subjective experience and existential themes, echoing Bachelard's insights into the poetic dimensions of space and the human psyche. Bachelard's notion of topoanalysis, the psychological analysis of the significance of different spaces in an individual's life, finds resonance in the film's portrayal of space as a repository of memories, emotions, and existential inquiries. To my mind, as viewers accompany Cléo on her journey through the labyrinth of Parisian streets, cafes, and parks, they are invited to reflect on the nature of perception, temporality, and the search for meaning amidst uncertainty. Ultimately, *Cléo from 5 to 7* serves as a poignant reminder of the profound connections between subjective experience, spatiality, and the human condition, inviting viewers to embark on a transformative journey of self-discovery and existential reflection.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Agnès Varda's early works, notably exemplified in *La Pointe Courte* and *Cléo from 5 to 7*, vividly showcase the profound presence of spatiality from a phenomenological perspective. In this regard, Bachelard's insights into the poetic imagination of space, the dialectic of inside and outside, and topoanalysis offer valuable lenses through which to analyse Varda's exploration of space, time, and human experience in these films.

In *La Pointe Courte*, Varda's keen sensitivity to spatiality is evident as she juxtaposes different spaces within the fishing village. Bachelard's notion of topoanalysis, the psychological analysis of the significance of different spaces, resonates here as viewers are offered a multifaceted glimpse into the lives of the villagers. The contrast between the narrow alleyways and cramped interiors of the villagers' homes and the expansive vistas of the sea and sky reflects Bachelard's exploration of the dialectic between enclosed, internal spaces and open, external spaces. As I see it, these spatial compositions become integral to the characters' lived experiences, shaping their perceptions and interactions in profound ways.

Similarly, in *Cléo from 5 to 7*, Varda masterfully utilises spatiality to immerse viewers in the subjective world of the protagonist, Cléo. Bachelard's concept of the poetic imagination of space

comes to the forefront here as viewers experience the sensory richness of Cléo's environment. The bustling crowds, traffic noise, and colourful street scenes evoke a palpable sense of the lived experience of urban life, inviting viewers to reflect on the ways in which space shapes perception and experience. Through Cléo's interactions with her surroundings, viewers gain insights into the intricate interplay between inner experience and external environment, echoing Bachelard's exploration of the dialectic between inside and outside spaces.

In my view, Varda's upbringing in Belgium and her subsequent move to Paris likely played a significant role in shaping her keen awareness of spatiality in filmmaking, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s. Through the lens of Bachelard's concepts, viewers are invited to engage in a deeper exploration of the temporal and perceptual dimensions of Cléo's journey in *Cléo from 5 to 7* as well as the couple's journey in *La Pointe Courte*. These films navigate the complexities of existence and self-discovery, offering rich insights into the interplay between space, time, and identity.

Bachelard's insights into the poetic imagination of space and topoanalysis provide a framework for understanding how Varda's multicultural upbringing and experiences as a young artist in Paris shaped her sensitivity to the visual and spatial dimensions of human experience. I conclude that, through her nuanced portrayal of space, Varda invites viewers to contemplate the ways in which our environments shape our perceptions, interactions, and sense of self, echoing Bachelard's belief in the profound connections between subjective experience and spatial perception.

Chapter 3: Gendered Spaces - Feminist Perspectives in Varda's Middle Period

"I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will."

Charlotte Brontë

The exploration of space within cinema is a multifaceted endeavour that goes beyond mere physical settings. It involves the dynamic interplay between the characters, their surroundings, and the broader socio-cultural milieu in which the narrative unfolds. In this context, space becomes more than just a backdrop; it serves as a canvas upon which societal constructions of gender are both portrayed and contested.

I contend that spatial settings in cinema often carry symbolic significance, reflecting societal norms and expectations concerning gender roles and identities. For example, domestic interiors may symbolise the private sphere traditionally associated with femininity, while urban landscapes or workplaces may represent the public sphere associated with masculinity. These spatial dichotomies not only reflect but also reinforce gendered divisions within society.

Moreover, the way characters navigate and interact with these spaces can reveal power dynamics and the negotiation of identity (Portuges 2009). For instance, the freedom of movement and agency afforded to male characters within certain spaces may contrast sharply with the constraints experienced by female characters. These power differentials, from my perspective, manifest in various forms, such as spatial segregation, surveillance, or the imposition of societal norms.

Furthermore, the cinematic depiction of space can also challenge and subvert traditional gender norms, offering alternative narratives and perspectives (Gaines 1987, 357). Filmmakers often use spatial elements creatively to disrupt conventional binaries and highlight the fluidity of gender identities (Ceuteric 2020, 2). As I view it, this can involve characters occupying unconventional spaces, defying spatial boundaries, or reclaiming traditionally male-dominated spaces for themselves.

Overall, the exploration of space within cinema provides a rich tapestry through which to examine the intricacies of gender dynamics. I am convinced that by delving into the spatial configurations of cinematic narratives, viewers can gain insights into the ways in which power, identity, and agency are negotiated within society. Thus, spatial analysis in cinema offers a nuanced lens through which to engage with feminist discourse and interrogate societal constructions of gender. In this chapter, I delve into the feminist perspectives embedded within Varda's middle-period films, particularly focusing on *Vagabond* (1985) and *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* (1977). Through the lens of feminist theory and spatial discourse, I will be trying to unravel how Varda's cinematic narratives engage with and challenge conventional notions of gendered spaces. In both films, Varda intricately weaves narratives that subvert traditional gender roles and challenge societal expectations. I am suggesting here that through the journeys of her female protagonists, she navigates a diverse array of spatial landscapes, from the open road to domestic interiors, each imbued with symbolic significance. As I delve into these narratives, I will examine how Varda's characters negotiate and resist the gendered constraints imposed upon them, ultimately contributing to a broader feminist discourse on space and identity.

In this chapter, I seek to unravel the complexities of gendered spaces within Varda's cinematic tapestry, employing a multi-dimensional framework that draws from Bachelardian poetics and Sojian spatial justice. Through this analysis, I aim to illuminate the ways in which Varda's films challenge and reshape societal perceptions of gender, offering poignant insights into the lived experiences of women within spatial contexts.

I am particularly interested in Varda's middle period in this chapter, a time in her career marked by a pronounced dedication to gender equality and an activist's life. Throughout this period, Varda demonstrated a heightened sensitivity to issues of gender and social justice, reflected in her filmmaking choices and thematic explorations. By proceeding in chronological order, I aim to

unravel the evolution of her approach to depicting gendered space in each film. Through a detailed examination of these works, I seek to uncover the ways in which Varda navigated and portrayed gendered spaces, shedding light on the complexities of female experiences and societal constructs within them.

Exploring Feminist Perspectives: The Theoretical Landscape of Gendered Spaces

The concept of gendered space offers a profound lens through which to understand the intricate relationship between social constructs of gender and the spatial environments we inhabit (Soja 2010, 14). It recognises that spaces are not neutral entities but are deeply imbued with societal norms, expectations, and power dynamics related to gender (ibid., 14). I would conclude that such acknowledgment extends beyond the mere physicality of architecture or urban planning, delving into the nuanced ways in which individuals perceive, experience, and navigate these spaces based on their gender identities.

Meanwhile, Bachelard's insights offer valuable perspective, particularly for women, revealing how societal norms and cultural expectations shape their interaction with space (Bachelard 2014, 104). I argue that women frequently navigate spaces laden with gendered meanings and restrictions, whether it's the domestic sphere associated with nurturing or public spaces where they may encounter surveillance, harassment, or exclusion. These gendered divisions within spatial environments, in my view, both reflect and perpetuate broader power imbalances and inequalities within society.

Bachelard's exploration of the psychological dimensions of space underscores how individuals, including women, construct their identities through their interactions with space (ibid., 135). As I view it, women may negotiate spaces historically dominated by men, seeking to assert agency and autonomy within these patriarchal landscapes. Additionally, Bachelard's concept of the "poetic image" (ibid., 2) emphasises the subjective and imaginative dimensions of space, suggesting that individuals, including women, have the agency to challenge and reshape spatial narratives through their lived experiences and creative interpretations.

Essentially, Bachelard's insights offer a nuanced perspective on gendered space, revealing how spatial environments carry gendered meanings, power dynamics, and symbolic associations. I argue

that by drawing on Bachelard's insights, we can enhance our understanding of how women navigate and reshape spatial landscapes, challenging gendered norms and inequalities. This exploration offers new opportunities for critique and transformation within feminist discourse, prompting us to examine and dismantle gendered biases in both real-life environments and cinematic representations. Furthermore, Bachelard's emphasis on the interplay between lived experience and imagination opens avenues for reimagining and reclaiming space in ways that transcend traditional gender binaries. Just as Bachelard urges us to explore the poetic potential of space, feminist theorists can harness his concepts to interrogate and subvert dominant narratives that marginalize women's experiences. In doing so, we can cultivate a more inclusive and equitable understanding of spatial dynamics, one that acknowledges the multiplicity of gendered perspectives and the complexities of spatial identity. Through this synthesis of Bachelardian theory and feminist critique, we can move towards a more holistic and empowering vision of spatial justice, one that celebrates the diverse ways in which individuals inhabit and shape the world around them (Salvaggio 1988, 262).

Soja's idea provides a powerful framework for understanding the socio-political dimensions of spatial configurations and their impact on marginalised communities, including women (Soja 2010, 25). Soja argues that spatial justice encompasses not only the distribution of physical space but also access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making processes within spatial contexts (ibid., 27). By foregrounding the experiences of marginalised groups and interrogating the unequal distribution of space and resources, Soja's framework encourages us to critically examine the structural inequalities embedded within spatial arrangements.

To my mind, one key aspect of Soja's framework is its emphasis on the spatialisation of social relations and power dynamics (ibid., 19). Soja contends that spatial configurations are not neutral but are shaped by social, economic, and political forces that often perpetuate existing inequalities (ibid., 21). This perspective allows us to analyse how spatial boundaries and divisions reflect and reinforce broader systems of oppression and marginalisation, including gender-based discrimination and exclusion.

Furthermore, Soja's concept of spatial justice extends beyond mere access to physical space to encompass broader notions of social and economic equity (ibid., 42). This entails not only addressing spatial inequalities in terms of distribution and accessibility but also challenging the

underlying power structures that perpetuate these disparities. In my opinion, for women, this may involve advocating for policies and interventions that promote gender equality in urban planning, housing, transportation, and public services.

Moreover, Soja highlights the importance of grassroots mobilisation and community activism in seeking spatial justice (ibid., 68). He argues that marginalised groups, including women, play a vital role in contesting and reshaping spatial boundaries to assert their agency and advocate for social equity (ibid., 69). From where I stand, this can involve organising protests, community meetings, and advocacy campaigns to challenge discriminatory policies and practices and demand greater inclusion and representation in decision-making processes.

Additionally, Soja emphasises the interconnectedness of spatial justice with other forms of social justice, such as racial, economic, and environmental justice (ibid., 81). He argues that addressing spatial inequalities requires a holistic approach that considers the intersecting oppressions and vulnerabilities experienced by marginalised communities. It seems to me that for women, this intersectional perspective is crucial in recognising the ways in which gender-based discrimination intersects with other forms of oppression to compound their experiences of marginalisation and exclusion within spatial contexts.

Varda's Crafting Feminist Cinematic Techniques

In my view, Varda's contribution to feminist cinematic spaces is profound, characterised by her unique ability to capture the intricacies of human experience while foregrounding marginalised voices and perspectives, as I have already discussed in relation to *Cléo from 5 to 7*. Throughout her middle-period films, such as *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* (1977) and *Vagabond* (1985), Varda delves deep into themes of autonomy, agency, and belonging against the backdrop of societal norms and expectations regarding gendered spaces.

One Sings, the Other Doesn't follows the intertwined lives of two women, Pomme and Suzanne, over the course of a decade in 1970s France. Despite their differing backgrounds and personalities, they form a deep bond through their shared experiences of womanhood, friendship, and activism. The film explores themes of feminism, motherhood, and reproductive rights against the backdrop of the women's liberation movement in France. Through their journey, Pomme and Suzanne navigate

personal and societal challenges, ultimately finding strength and solidarity in their sisterhood. By centering the experiences of these two women, Varda invites viewers to reconsider traditional notions of femininity and womanhood, challenging the patriarchal structures that seek to confine and limit women's autonomy. Scenes set in the countryside portray moments of liberation and solidarity for Pomme and Suzanne, particularly during their gatherings with other women. As I see it, these rural spaces offer opportunities for women to forge connections and cultivate alternative modes of existence outside traditional gender roles, aligning with the claim that rural landscapes provide moments of liberation and solidarity for female characters.

Similarly, in *Vagabond*, Varda presents a stark portrayal of Mona, a young woman living on the margins of society. The film follows the story of Mona, a young woman who chooses to live as a vagabond, wandering through the French countryside during the winter months. The film unfolds as a series of encounters with various characters who offer glimpses into Mona's enigmatic life. As the narrative unfolds, Mona's past and present are gradually revealed, painting a complex portrait of a woman who defies societal norms and expectations. Through Mona's journey, the film explores themes of freedom, independence, and the search for meaning in a world that often marginalises those who do not conform. Through Mona's journey, Varda confronts viewers with the harsh realities faced by marginalised individuals, particularly women, as they navigate a world that often denies them agency and opportunity. Mona's character embodies a defiance against societal constraints, challenging conventional narratives surrounding gender and space as she traverses both physical landscapes and societal expectations.

From my perspective, central to Varda's feminist cinematic spaces is her distinct cinematic language and empathetic storytelling. Varda's use of innovative techniques creates a sense of intimacy and immediacy that allows viewers to deeply empathise with her characters' experiences. By eschewing traditional linear storytelling, in my interpretation, Varda creates a dynamic narrative framework that mirrors the complexities of human experience. This approach enables viewers to engage with the storyline in a more interactive and participatory manner, as they piece together fragmented narratives and draw connections between different moments in the characters' lives.

One of the techniques that prominently highlights the gendered space in these two films is non-linear storytelling. Varda often disrupts conventional narrative structures, presenting events out of chronological order or weaving together multiple storylines. This approach creates a sense of

fluidity and openness in the exploration of gendered spaces, allowing for a more dynamic and multifaceted representation of the characters' experiences. Another key technique is documentary realism. Varda incorporates elements of documentary filmmaking into her work, capturing the authenticity of everyday life and human experiences. Through techniques such as handheld camerawork and on-location shooting, she brings a sense of immediacy and intimacy to her narratives, blurring the line between scripted fiction and real-life observation.

I would further argue that Varda's adoption of a documentary-like aesthetic adds an additional layer of authenticity and immediacy to her storytelling. In conjunction with this approach is her examination of gendered spaces within the framework of her narratives. By erasing the distinctions between fiction and reality, Varda encourages viewers to explore the concept of gendered space in a more nuanced and immersive manner. She accomplishes this through a range of techniques, each contributing to the overall fusion of fiction and reality. Perhaps most notably, Varda blurs the lines between fiction and documentary by seamlessly integrating elements of both into her films. This interplay enables her to capture the authenticity of real-life experiences while also embracing the imaginative possibilities of fiction, constructing a cinematic realm where the boundaries between reality and representation are intentionally obscured.

Varda also adopts a subjective perspective (point of view shots) in her filmmaking, allowing viewers to experience the narrative through the eyes of the characters. This subjective approach fosters a deeper understanding of the characters' experiences within gendered spaces, highlighting the complexities of human identity and relationships.

Through the use of point-of-view shots, subjective camera angles, and intimate framing, Varda invites audiences to see the world through the eyes of her protagonists in *One Sings, the Other Doesn't*. For instance, the subjective perspective allows viewers to empathise with the struggles and triumphs of the two female protagonists as they navigate the challenges of womanhood, motherhood, and friendship in 1970s France. Varda's use of close-ups and subjective camera movements enables viewers to intimately connect with the characters' emotions and inner thoughts, fostering a deeper understanding of their experiences within gendered spaces.

Similarly, in *Vagabond*, Varda employs a subjective perspective to delve into the complexities of female identity and societal marginalisation. Through the use of handheld camera work and

naturalistic performances, Varda immerses viewers into the harsh realities faced by Mona, a young woman living on the margins of society. The subjective perspective in this film allows viewers to witness the world through Mona's eyes, experiencing her sense of alienation, rebellion, and freedom as she traverses the French countryside. By adopting a subjective perspective in both films, Varda not only highlights the gendered spaces that her characters inhabit but also underscores the universal struggles and aspirations of women navigating a patriarchal world.

In relation to non-linear storytelling, I would further add that in *Vagabond*, Varda employs non-linear editing patterns and long tracking shots to intricately depict the settings and mise en scène, particularly in relation to the gendered nature of space. Through non-linear editing, Varda disrupts traditional narrative structures, presenting fragmented glimpses of the protagonist's journey and allowing viewers to piece together the narrative puzzle. This approach not only mirrors the disorienting experiences of the film's central character, Mona, but also emphasises the fluidity and ambiguity of the spaces she inhabits. Long tracking shots further enhance the immersive quality of the film, capturing the vast landscapes and intimate details of Mona's environment in a single, uninterrupted take. By lingering on these spaces, Varda invites viewers to contemplate the significance of each setting and the ways in which gendered dynamics are inscribed within them. Through meticulous attention to detail in the mise en scène, including the arrangement of objects, architectural features, and natural elements, Varda subtly communicates the gendered nature of space. For example, the contrast between urban and rural settings, public and private spaces, and the interactions between Mona and the people she encounters all serve to reinforce societal norms and power dynamics related to gender. Through the non-linear editing pattern and long tracking shots, Varda constructs a cinematic space that is both visually arresting and thematically rich, offering insights into the ways in which gender shapes our perceptions and experiences of the world around us.

In *One Sings, the Other Doesn't*, Varda utilises exotic locations as more than mere backdrops; she intricately intertwines them with the gendered dynamics of the narrative. Through cinematic means such as framing, lighting, and the characters' interactions with the environment, Varda depicts space in a way that reflects and reinforces gendered qualities. For instance, in scenes set in bustling urban areas, the camera often focuses on crowded streets and bustling marketplaces, where women navigate through the throngs of people, their movements constrained by societal expectations and patriarchal structures. Conversely, in tranquil rural landscapes, Varda captures moments of solitude

and introspection, highlighting the characters' agency and connection to nature. By juxtaposing these contrasting environments, Varda underscores the gendered divisions within spatial settings, illustrating how societal norms shape the experiences of women in both public and private spheres. Through her careful manipulation of space and location, Varda brings to light the inherent gendered qualities of the world her characters inhabit, prompting viewers to reflect on the ways in which space is imbued with gendered meaning and power dynamics.

Overall, Varda's use of these techniques enhances the immersive quality of her films and facilitates a deeper exploration of gendered spaces. In my view, Varda's contribution to feminist cinematic spaces is unparalleled. Continuously challenging and redefining the boundaries of gender and space, she employs compassionate storytelling and innovative filmmaking techniques. By centering the experiences of marginalised individuals, especially women, Varda prompts viewers to reconsider their perceptions of gender, power, and agency. Ultimately, her work inspires a renewed commitment to feminist ideals of equality and justice.

- *One Sings, The Other Doesn't* (1977)

One Sings, the Other Doesn't is a poignant tale of friendship, womanhood, and the pursuit of freedom set against the backdrop of 1970s France. The film follows the intertwined lives of two women, Pauline (Pomme) and Suzanne, who form a deep bond that transcends social norms and expectations. Pauline, a young aspiring singer, and Suzanne, a mother of two struggling with her marriage, navigate the complexities of womanhood and activism during a time of social and political upheaval. As their paths diverge and intertwine over the years, they support each other through various challenges, including abortion, motherhood, and the fight for women's rights. Through their journeys, Varda explores themes of sisterhood, resilience, and the enduring power of female friendship. With its vibrant cinematography, evocative soundtrack, and heartfelt performances, "this film is a celebration of the strength and resilience of women in the face of adversity."

In *One Sings, the Other Doesn't*, Varda explores the intersections of gender and space, offering a lens through which to understand the characters' experiences within the socio-spatial context of France in the 1970s. In the socio-spatial context of France during the 1970s, significant social and political changes were underway. The decade was marked by a period of social upheaval and activism, with movements advocating for gender equality, civil rights, and environmental

conservation gaining momentum. France was undergoing a process of modernisation and urbanisation, leading to rapid changes in its urban landscape and social fabric. Additionally, the feminist movement was gaining traction, challenging traditional gender roles and norms and advocating for women's rights and empowerment. Against this backdrop, filmmakers like Varda were exploring themes of gender, identity, and social justice in their work, reflecting the zeitgeist of the era and contributing to broader conversations about societal change and progress (Chabal 2016).

Throughout the narrative, the characters navigate various spatial environments that reflect and reinforce gendered power dynamics. For instance, the urban spaces where Pomme and Suzanne reside are imbued with patriarchal structures that limit their agency and autonomy. Despite their aspirations for independence and self-realisation, they encounter barriers imposed by societal norms and expectations, constraining their mobility and freedom within these spaces. Varda effectively depicts these barriers through the use of dense settings, where cluttered and confined urban environments visually represent the oppressive societal norms.

In the abortion rally scene, a powerful depiction of dense settings stands out that highlights the film's themes of women's liberation and the struggle for reproductive rights. Set in the bustling streets of Paris, this scene is packed with protestors, banners, and a cacophony of voices advocating for women's rights. The crowded streets symbolise widespread support for the cause and the intensity of the social movement. Vibrant banners with slogans like "Liberté, Égalité, Sororité" (Freedom, Equality, Sisterhood) and the diversity in protestors' attire enhance the visual density, reflecting the broad spectrum of women involved in the movement. The soundscape is equally rich, filled with synchronised chanting, speeches, and protest songs, creating an immersive auditory experience. Varda's cinematic techniques, including a mix of close-ups and wide shots, rapid editing, and natural lighting, weave through the crowd, fostering a sense of participation and urgency.

This dense setting not only provides a vivid backdrop but also serves as an active participant in the narrative, emphasising the collective struggle and solidarity of the women's liberation movement. The scene effectively illustrates how public spaces can be transformed by collective action, challenging traditional patriarchal control and showcasing the power of women's voices in the public sphere. Through this immersive environment, Varda conveys the intensity and importance of

the feminist movement, making the audience feel the weight of the issues at stake and the collective power of those fighting for change.



Figure 3.1. Dense setting in a demonstration scene in One Sings The Others Doesn't

Additionally, the power dynamics are portrayed through disturbed mise-en-scène, with elements in the frame arranged to create a sense of imbalance and tension, reflecting the unequal gendered power structures. One particular scene that effectively illustrates disturbed mise-en-scène to convey gendered power dynamics is the courtroom scene where Suzanne faces trial for her abortion. In this scene, Varda arranges the elements in the frame to create a palpable sense of imbalance and tension, highlighting the oppressive nature of the patriarchal legal system.



Figure 3.2. A scene which evokes a sense of imbalance and tension in One Sings The Other Doesn't. It demonstrates the power dynamic in the narrative as well.

Varda orchestrates a poignant convergence of visual and auditory elements in the rooftop scene in southern Iran, employing the camera's movement, Pomme's actions, and a voiceover to deepen the

thematic resonance and emotional impact of the moment. As Pomme walks on the round rooftops, the camera gracefully follows her, mirroring her movements and drawing viewers into her solitary journey. Bachelard offers insights into the symbolic significance of architectural features and their impact on human experience in this regard (Bachelard 2014, 120). In this scene, the roundness of the rooftops embodies a sense of containment and protection, echoing the curves of the pregnant body. Bachelard's notion of the intimate, protective space finds expression in the circular form of the rooftops, suggesting a womb-like enclosure that envelops Pomme in a sense of comfort and security.

As Pomme walks on the rooftop, the camera's fluid movement mirrors the circular contours of the architecture, emphasising, in my opinion, the cyclical nature of life and the interconnectedness of human experience. With each step, Pomme's presence becomes more pronounced, her silhouette framed against the expansive sky. The camera's intimate perspective invites viewers to share in Pomme's contemplative journey, experiencing the rooftop space through her eyes and senses.



Figure 3.3. A selected frame from south Iran in One Sings The Other Doesn't. The forms are tightly related to the narrative about the conceiving a baby.

As Pomme lies down on one of the rooftops, the camera lingers on her figure, capturing the vulnerability and introspection of the moment. Simultaneously, a voiceover emerges, blending seamlessly with the visuals as Pomme reflects on the prospect of having a baby. The juxtaposition of Pomme's physical actions with her internal dialogue creates a poignant contrast, underscoring the complexity of her emotions and the weight of her decision.



Figure 3.4. Pomme and Darius in One Sings The Other Doesn't.

Through the embodied affective cue of the round rooftops and the interplay of camera movement, Pomme's actions, and voiceover narration, Varda crafts a multi-dimensional tableau that resonates with themes of femininity, motherhood, and the cycle of life. In accordance with Bachelard's ideas, Varda transforms the rooftop space into a poetic realm where the physical and the metaphysical converge, inviting viewers to contemplate the transformative power of space and the timeless beauty of the human experience.

Moreover, in the same scene where Pomme walks on the rooftop and reflects on the prospect of having a baby, another layer of narrative significance unfolds as Darius sits nearby, observing her contemplations. Darius's presence adds depth to the scene, serving as a silent witness to Pomme's inner turmoil and the complexities of her decision-making process. This dynamic evokes a powerful contrast between Pomme's active engagement with her thoughts and future plans and Darius's passive role as an observer. What I call here the passive/active dynamic present in the scene can be related to Soja's ideas, where he emphasises the importance of spatial dimensions in understanding social justice, highlighting how space can both reflect and influence power dynamics (Soja 2010, 18). In this context, Pomme's active movement and reflective stance on the rooftop signify her assertion of agency and control over her personal space and future, embodying a quest for spatial justice in her own life. She actively seeks to navigate and reshape the spatial constraints imposed upon her by society.

Darius's passive observation, on the other hand, underscores the persistent inequalities and the often passive roles that men can play in the face of women's struggles for autonomy. His silent presence highlights the gendered dynamics of space and agency, where Pomme must actively claim her space and voice, while Darius remains a passive spectator. This contrast reinforces the film's exploration of women's fight for spatial justice and the assertion of their rights and identities in a patriarchal world. Through this interplay of passive and active elements, I suggest that Varda underscores the broader themes of the film, illustrating the various ways women assert their autonomy and navigate their personal and societal challenges. The rooftop becomes a symbolic space where these dynamics play out, reflecting the complex interplay of action, contemplation, and the ongoing quest for self-determination and spatial justice.

Through these cinematic techniques, Varda effectively portrays the oppressive dynamics at play, making the audience acutely aware of the societal constraints and gendered injustices that Pomme faces. By emphasising the spatial dimensions of Pomme's struggle, Varda highlights how space can both reflect and influence power dynamics, further enriching the narrative with layers of meaning and social commentary. The cluttered mise-en-scène not only serves to highlight the imbalance of power but also evokes a sense of discomfort and critique of the patriarchal structures that control and judge women's bodies and choices.



Figure 3.5. A tight frame which illustrates the patriarchal structures in the narrative in One Sings The Other Doesn't.

Furthermore, patriarchal structures are depicted using tight framing, which confines the characters within the frame, visually restricting their space and movement, symbolising their limited agency and autonomy within these patriarchal urban landscapes. In the narrative, Pomme and Suzanne

traverse a spectrum of spatial contexts, each laden with distinct gendered power dynamics that shape their experiences and interactions. Soja's spatial theories shed light on this phenomenon, highlighting how urban spaces often serve as arenas where dominant power structures manifest and reinforce themselves (Soja 2010, 11).

However, the urban environment acts as a nexus where gendered power differentials are palpably felt. Streets, buildings, and public spaces serve as stages upon which these dynamics play out, with women like Pomme and Suzanne negotiating their identities and aspirations amidst a landscape shaped by patriarchal hegemony. Soja's insights underscore the importance of recognising how spatial configurations contribute to and reflect broader patterns of gender inequality and discrimination (ibid., 67).

I should mention here that the rural landscapes depicted in the film offer moments of liberation and solidarity for the characters. These spaces provide opportunities for Pomme and Suzanne to forge connections with other women and cultivate alternative modes of existence outside traditional gender roles. However, even in these ostensibly liberating environments, gendered inequalities persist, manifesting in the unequal distribution of labor and resources among men and women.



Figure 3.6. Pomme and her music group in One Sings The Other Doesn't.

These spaces offer respite from the constraints of patriarchal urban environments, allowing the characters to explore their identities and aspirations more freely. Soja's framework can help us

recognise the importance of recognising how rural spaces can serve as sites of resistance and agency for marginalised groups, including women seeking to challenge societal norms and expectations (ibid., 91).

However, despite the apparent liberation offered by rural landscapes, gendered inequalities persist within these environments. Soja's analysis highlights how patriarchal power structures can permeate even seemingly egalitarian spaces, leading to the unequal distribution of labor and resources between men and women (ibid., 92). In the film, this disparity is evident in the division of labor along gender lines, with women often relegated to domestic and caregiving roles while men occupy positions of authority and control over resources. Scenes depicting Suzanne's life as a mother and homemaker underscore the unequal distribution of labor and resources among men and women. Suzanne's portrayal as the primary caregiver for her children reflects the gendered inequalities that persist even in ostensibly liberating environments like the countryside, as discussed in the analysis of rural landscapes. Soja's thesis on gendered space provides a lens through which to analyse these dynamics, emphasising how spatial configurations intersect with gender dynamics to shape social relations and power structures (ibid., 68).

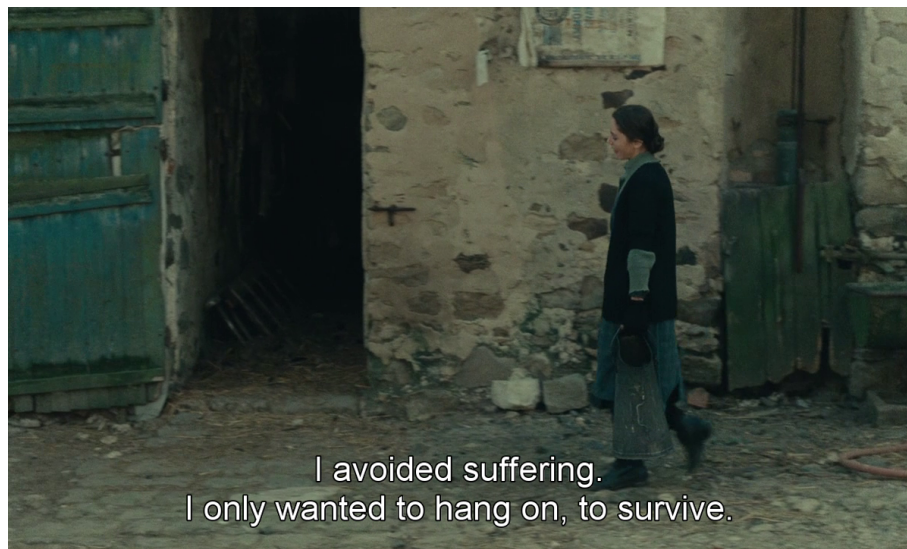


Figure 3.7. Suzanne working in her father's farm in *One Sings The Other Doesn't*.

The notion of movement is pivotal to the narrative in *One Sings The Other Doesn't*, signifying both physical and emotional transformations in the lives of the characters. Pomme's decision to sing in a group and travel around France marks a significant shift in her life, symbolising her embrace of freedom and self-expression. This movement through the various regions of France contrasts

sharply with the static and confined life she previously led in Iran, underscoring the liberating potential of mobility and artistic expression.

Similarly, Suzanne's move from her parents' farm to the city represents a crucial turning point. This transition from the rural, restrictive environment to the dynamic urban setting symbolises her quest for autonomy and a better life for herself and her children. I am suggesting here that, the city with its opportunities and challenges, becomes a space where Suzanne can redefine her identity and reclaim her agency.

Relating these changes to the notions of safety and safe places, we see a dialectic of inside and outside at play. According to Soja, the physical spaces the women inhabit reflect and influence their access to power and autonomy (Soja 2010, 199). Pomme and Suzanne's movements from restrictive to more liberating spaces illustrate their search for justice and equality, challenging the patriarchal constraints that seek to confine them.

Bachelard, on the other hand, enriches this understanding by exploring how spaces, both intimate and vast, shape our experiences and sense of self (Bachelard 2014, 106). I conclude then, the countryside, initially a place of safety and familiarity for Suzanne, becomes a site of oppression and limitation. In contrast, the city, though initially daunting, offers a new kind of safety—a space where Suzanne can assert her independence and create a life on her own terms.

In my view, movement in *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* is not merely a physical journey but a profound symbol of the characters' search for freedom, identity, and justice. Through the lens of Soja and Bachelard, I see how spaces and movement intertwine to shape the women's experiences, highlighting the transformative power of stepping beyond the familiar and venturing into new realms.

- *Vagabond* (1985)

Vagabond is the story of a young woman named Mona, who is found dead in a ditch in the French countryside. Through a series of flashbacks and interviews with people who encountered her in her final days, the film pieces together Mona's journey as a drifter and vagabond. Mona rejects societal norms and chooses a nomadic existence, wandering through various landscapes and encountering different people along the way. As the narrative unfolds, it explores themes of freedom, alienation,

and the complexities of human connection. Mona's character challenges conventional notions of identity and autonomy, embodying a sense of defiance and independence while also grappling with the harsh realities of life on the margins of society. Through Varda's unique storytelling approach, the film offers a poignant meditation on the nature of existence and the pursuit of individual freedom.



Figure3. 8. One scene of the harsh life of Mona in Vagabond.

Central to understanding Mona's journey, to my mind, is the portrayal of gendered spaces throughout the film. The narrative intricately weaves together landscapes, from rural expanses to urban centres, each laden with its own gendered implications. In rural areas, Mona faces marginalisation and isolation, struggling for acceptance amidst harsh conditions. Conversely, urban spaces offer anonymity but expose her to exploitation and alienation.



Figure 3.9. Mona's journey in Vagabond.

Varda employs long tracking shots to immerse viewers in the rural landscapes traversed by Mona, emphasising her solitary journey and detachment from societal norms. These shots showcase the physical landscape while conveying the gendered space Mona occupies. The expansive vistas underscore Mona's marginalised status as a woman navigating male-dominated spaces, accentuating her outsider status within rural communities. Moreover, the long tracking shots accentuate the transient nature of Mona's existence, highlighting her outsider status within the rural communities she encounters. Thus, through the use of long tracking shots, Varda evokes a poignant portrayal of gendered space in *Vagabond*, illuminating the challenges and vulnerabilities faced by women like Mona in rural environments.



Figure 3.10. Mona in countryside versus Mona in city a in Vagabond.

Mona's journey reflects the complexities of femininity within different socio-spatial contexts. In rural areas, her experiences mirror spatial injustices faced by women, highlighted through interactions with villagers and farmers. Conversely, Mona's urban journey embodies a distinct form of spatialised femininity, influenced by the intersection of gender, class, and geography. Despite the anonymity of bustling streets, she remains vulnerable to exploitation and alienation, evident in

encounters with exploitative men. However, Mona's journey through urban spaces embodies a distinct form of spatialised femininity. The anonymity provided by urban centres offers a reprieve from traditional constraints, echoing Soja's concept of spatial justice (Williams 2018, 54). Yet, urban environments also expose Mona to new challenges, including exploitation and alienation, reflecting the power dynamics governing gender relations. In this context, I believe that Mona's femininity is influenced by the intersection of gender, class, and geography, revealing the intricate interplay between spatial justice and gendered experiences within urban landscapes. Despite the anonymity of bustling streets, Mona remains vulnerable to exploitation and alienation, evident in her encounters with exploitative men.

The distinction between public and private spaces is another key aspect of Mona's journey. Public spaces symbolise freedom but also vulnerability, as Mona faces dangers from both nature and society while traversing roadsides and highways. On the other hand, private spaces provide temporary shelter but are often unwelcoming and restrictive, reflecting Mona's transient existence. In Soja's conceptualisation of spatial justice, the distinction between public and private spaces plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' experiences and identities within the urban fabric (Soja 2010, 141). This framework can be applied to analyse Mona's journey in the film, particularly in relation to her experiences of gendered space. Mona's existence is characterised by her movement through transitory spaces, such as highways, fields, and makeshift shelters. These spaces serve as temporary refuges but also symbolise the impermanence of her lifestyle. Mona's nomadic existence reflects the precariousness of her position as a woman without a fixed home or identity, emphasising the gendered dimensions of homelessness and displacement.

Public spaces, such as roadsides and highways, represent potential freedom and opportunity for Mona. However, they also expose her to various forms of vulnerability, both from the natural environment and societal forces. In Soja's framework, public spaces are often contested territories where power dynamics and social inequalities are enacted and reproduced (Soja 2010, 145). Mona must navigate these public spaces by negotiating her femininity in relation to the patriarchal structures that govern her interactions. She contends with inherent dangers and risks associated with these spaces as a woman, highlighting how gendered vulnerabilities are spatially constructed and perpetuated. While public spaces symbolise freedom, they also expose Mona to danger and vulnerability. In contrast, private spaces, such as abandoned buildings or the interiors of strangers'

homes, offer temporary shelter but lack warmth and security, emphasising Mona's transient and precarious existence.



Figure 3.11. Three frames of Mona in private, on way and in public in Vagabond.

In summation, Soja's ideas on spatial justice provide a lens through which to examine Mona's experiences of public and private spaces in *Vagabond*. By considering the ways in which gendered

vulnerabilities are spatially constructed and negotiated within these different realms, we gain insights into the intersections of gender, power, and space in shaping Mona's journey and identity. Throughout the film, Mona encounters various gendered work environments that underscore societal attitudes towards women in the workforce. From farm labor to odd jobs, her experiences highlight economic inequalities and gender biases prevalent in different occupational settings. Mona's interactions within male-dominated spaces further illuminate the patriarchal power structures inherent in society. These spaces, such as construction sites and truck stops, serve as microcosms of gendered oppression, where Mona faces harassment, exploitation, and violence.



Figure 3.12. Mona at different work spaces in Vagabond.

The film also explores the dichotomy between spaces of freedom and confinement in Mona's journey. While she seeks liberation from societal norms and expectations, her freedom is often constrained by socio-economic circumstances and gendered constraints. Despite her yearning for emancipation from societal conventions, Mona frequently finds her autonomy curtailed by socioeconomic limitations and gender-based restrictions. This exploration resonates with Soja's thesis on gendered space, which underscores how spatial configurations reflect and perpetuate societal power dynamics (Soja 2010, 114). Mona's quest for freedom unfolds within a spatial context where patriarchal norms and economic inequalities intersect, constraining her agency and perpetuating her marginalisation. This dichotomy between spaces of freedom and confinement illuminates the complex interplay between gender, power, and space, highlighting how spatial configurations both enable and impede individual autonomy and self-determination.

Varda's use of a nonlinear narrative structure further disrupts traditional spatial and temporal boundaries, mirroring Mona's fragmented identity and the instability of her nomadic lifestyle. Through its portrayal of gendered spaces, *Vagabond* offers a poignant commentary on the intersecting forces of gender, class, and geography that shape Mona's experiences as a marginalised woman in French society.

Conclusion

Comparing Agnès Varda's seminal films, *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* (1977) and *Vagabond* (1985), offers a fascinating journey through the evolution of her cinematic exploration of gendered space and societal claims. These two masterpieces, created nearly a decade apart, reflect Varda's shifting perspective on the roles of women within society and the spaces they inhabit.

By examining the distinct portrayals of gendered spaces and the challenges faced by female protagonists in each film, I believe that viewers uncover the nuances of Varda's storytelling prowess and her keen observations of the human condition. This comparative analysis not only sheds light on Varda's artistic evolution but also offers profound insights into the broader cultural and societal shifts occurring between the late 1970s and mid-1980s. I suggest that, through the lens of gendered space, she invites her audience to delve into themes of agency, autonomy, and resilience, revealing how women navigate and negotiate their identities within patriarchal structures.

Undertaking this comparative journey, I unravel the complexities of Varda's cinematic universe, exploring how her storytelling techniques and thematic concerns intersect with larger debates surrounding feminism, social justice, and human rights. By analysing the gendered spaces depicted in *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* and *Vagabond*, I seek to illuminate the enduring relevance and timeless resonance of Varda's work in shaping our understanding of gender, society, and the human experience.

In *One Sings, the Other Doesn't*, Varda presents a hopeful and empowering vision of gendered space, focusing on the transformative potential of female solidarity and collective action. The film depicts spaces where women come together to support each other, challenge societal norms, and assert their autonomy. Through the characters of Pomme and Suzanne, Varda explores the possibilities of liberation and self-realisation within both public and private spaces. Despite facing obstacles and gendered constraints, the characters navigate these spaces with resilience and determination, ultimately advocating for women's rights and reproductive freedom.

In public spaces, such as streets, theatres, and political rallies, Pomme and Suzanne find solidarity and strength in their shared experiences and aspirations. These spaces become platforms for them to voice their desires, advocate for women's rights, and challenge the status quo. Varda underscores the significance of public spaces as arenas for collective action and resistance against patriarchal structures.

In private spaces like homes, bedrooms, and communal gatherings, Varda explores the intimate bonds forged between women as they navigate the complexities of their lives. These spaces serve as sanctuaries where women can express themselves freely, seek solace, and strategise for change away from societal scrutiny. Varda emphasises the importance of private spaces in fostering intimacy, trust, and mutual support among women.

Despite numerous obstacles, including societal expectations and reproductive challenges, Pomme and Suzanne navigate these spaces with remarkable resilience and determination. I conclude that their journey exemplifies the power of women to assert their agency, challenge injustice, and advocate for their rights in both public and private spheres. Varda's portrayal of gendered space in

One Sings, the Other Doesn't offers a compelling vision of hope, solidarity, and empowerment, highlighting the potential for transformative change when women confront inequality and injustice.

In stark contrast, Varda's *Vagabond* presents a more sobering and critical examination of gendered space, shedding light on the harsh realities faced by marginalised women in society. Varda exposes the vulnerabilities and dangers that permeate public spaces, offering a searing indictment of the systemic injustices that disproportionately affect women like Mona.

From the outset of Mona's journey, Varda paints a bleak picture of the challenges awaiting her. As Mona traverses the rural landscapes and urban environments of France, she encounters obstacles that highlight the precariousness of her existence. Public spaces, such as roadsides, fields, and abandoned buildings, become fraught with danger and uncertainty for Mona, who must navigate a hostile landscape marked by exploitation, violence, and social exclusion.

Through Mona's interactions with various characters, Varda exposes the underlying power dynamics and social hierarchies that govern spatial experiences. From encounters with farmers and migrant workers to interactions with affluent landowners and urban dwellers, Mona's experiences underscore how gendered norms intersect with broader social and economic forces to perpetuate inequality and marginalisation.

Varda's portrayal of private spaces in *Vagabond* further emphasises the stark realities faced by women like Mona. While private spaces traditionally offer a sense of security, Mona's experiences reveal the limitations of such sanctuaries for marginalised women. Whether seeking shelter in abandoned buildings or relying on the generosity of strangers, Mona's transient existence underscores the fragility of private spaces in providing protection and stability for those on the margins of society.

Varda's depiction of gendered space in *Vagabond* serves as a powerful critique of the systemic injustices that shape the lives of marginalised women. To my way of thinking, through Mona's journey, Varda confronts viewers with the harsh realities of poverty, exploitation, and social exclusion, urging audiences to reckon with the structural inequalities that underpin spatial experiences and to confront the urgent need for social change.

One more point that deserves our attention is, the nature of movement in the lives of Mona and Pomme. Movement, in fact, serves as a central narrative and thematic element in both films, though it manifests in distinctly different ways. By examining these differences through the lenses of Bachelard and Soja, I can offer a deeper understanding of the characters' journeys and the societal structures they navigate.

Mona's movement in *Vagabond*, in my opinion, is characterised by aimlessness and isolation. She roams the French countryside as a drifter, detached from the societal norms and structures that typically define one's place in the world. Her movement lacks direction and purpose, reflecting her disconnection from both society and herself. Bachelard's exploration of intimate spaces contrasts starkly with Mona's experience; she lacks a safe, intimate space that provides comfort and identity (Bachelard 2014, 186). Instead, her transient existence emphasises the vulnerability and precariousness of her situation. Soja's concept of spatial justice also highlights Mona's marginalisation. Her constant movement through inhospitable spaces underscores her lack of access to stable, empowering environments. I conclude that Mona's journey is one of exclusion and disenfranchisement, illustrating the harsh realities faced by those on the fringes of society.

In contrast, Pomme's movement in *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* is purposeful and transformative. Her travels with the singing group around France symbolise her quest for self-expression, autonomy, and a sense of community. Pomme's movement is dynamic and filled with intention, reflecting her active engagement with the world around her. Bachelard's ideas about the importance of intimate spaces resonate here as Pomme creates and inhabits spaces of creativity and solidarity, fostering a sense of belonging and identity. Soja's spatial justice is evident in Pomme's narrative as she navigates and reshapes the spaces she inhabits, challenging patriarchal constraints and seeking empowerment. To my mind, her movement is a journey towards personal and collective liberation, contrasting sharply with Mona's solitary wandering.

The dialectic of inside and outside further illuminates the differences in their experiences. In my opinion, Mona is perpetually outside, both physically and metaphorically, never finding a place of safety or acceptance. Her movement is a rejection of traditional societal structures, yet it offers no alternative sense of security or justice. Pomme, however, moves between inside and outside spaces in a way that redefines them. Her travels take her outside traditional roles, yet she actively creates new, inclusive spaces that reflect her values and aspirations.

In summary, the nature of movement in *Vagabond* and *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* highlights contrasting experiences of space and agency. Mona's aimless wandering through hostile environments reflects her marginalisation and lack of access to intimate, empowering spaces, as discussed by Bachelard and Soja. Pomme's purposeful travels, on the other hand, symbolise her active pursuit of spatial justice and personal liberation, creating new spaces of creativity and solidarity. Through these journeys, Varda explores profound themes of autonomy, identity, and the societal structures that shape women's lives.

In my interpretation, Varda's position evolves from a focus on empowerment and solidarity in *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* to a nuanced examination of oppression and resistance in *Vagabond*. Through these films, she engages with societal claims related to women's rights, bodily autonomy, and gender equality, offering a complex and multifaceted exploration of gendered space and its implications for individuals and communities.

Chapter 4: Memory and Place - Varda's Late Period and Autobiographical Exploration

"The memory of a place is more vivid than the memory of an event."

Patrick Modiano

In the realm of phenomenology, memory is not just a passive recollection of the past; it actively shapes our perception of reality. Memory intertwines with our present experiences, influencing how we understand and engage with the world around us. For Varda, memory holds a profound significance in her cinematic narrative, serving as a bridge between the past and present, the personal and the collective. I claim that Varda's films often delve into the depths of personal and historical memory, using it as a tool to explore identity, place, and social justice.

The importance of memory in Varda's work lies in its ability to bring depth and resonance to her storytelling. I believe that, through memory, Varda connects with her characters and viewers on an intimate level, allowing her to address broader themes such as the passage of time, the impermanence of life, and the persistence of social and cultural histories. Her films, like *The Gleaners and I* (2000) and *Faces Places* (2017), blend personal recollections with documentary footage, creating a rich tapestry that reflects the complexity of human experience.

In my opinion, when studying Varda's work, the concept of memory should be reviewed because it is a fundamental element that informs her artistic vision and narrative style. Memory in Varda's

films is not static or monolithic; it is dynamic and multifaceted, reflecting the fluid nature of human consciousness and social reality. I argue that, by examining how Varda employs memory, viewers gain insight into her approach to filmmaking as a deeply reflective and transformative practice. This, in turn, allows them to appreciate the ways in which her films challenge conventional narratives and offer new perspectives on history, identity, and justice.

I decided to incorporate memory into the analysis of Varda's work, because it reveals how she uses the past to comment on the present, how personal histories intersect with larger socio-political contexts, and how the act of remembering itself can be an act of resistance and empowerment. Thus, memory is not only a thematic concern in Varda's films but also a vital methodological tool that shapes her distinctive cinematic language.

In cinema, memory is often depicted through various techniques such as flashbacks, dreams, and visual metaphors. These cinematic devices aim to evoke emotions and trigger personal memories within the audience, creating a profound connection between the viewer and the narrative. By immersing audiences in the subjective experiences of characters, filmmakers can explore the depths of human memory and consciousness through the artistic medium of film. In the early 2000s, Varda's career entered a new phase marked by a renewed focus on personal memory, socio-cultural landscapes, and the intertwining of the two in her films. This late period is exemplified by works such as *The Gleaners and I* and *Faces Places*, where she combines documentary elements with autobiographical exploration. Varda herself becomes an integral part of the narrative, guiding viewers through her intimate journey.

At the time of *The Gleaners and I*, Varda was in her early 70s and had already established herself as a leading figure in the French New Wave and international cinema. She had been recognised for her innovative approach to filmmaking and her ability to blend fictional narratives with documentary techniques. Varda often blurs the boundaries between fiction and documentary, employing a nonlinear storytelling style that mirrors the fragmented nature of memory itself (Philip 2019). In this film, Varda examines the tradition of gleaning—collecting leftover crops from fields—as a metaphor for exploring how she and others collect memories and experiences from the world. The film is filled with intimate details and autobiographical elements that invite viewers to reflect on their own memories and experiences. Her distinctive use of handheld cameras and natural lighting

gives it an intimate, spontaneous feel, creating a cinematic world where memory is not just a passive recollection but a living, breathing entity that shapes our understanding of the present.

I believe that Varda's innovative use of cinematic language and storytelling techniques challenges viewers to reconsider their own perceptions of memory and experience. Through her films, Varda encourages audiences to engage with memory as a dynamic and transformative force, capable of shaping our identities and relationships in profound ways. In essence, Varda's cinema is a testament to the power of memory as a lens through which we can navigate the complexities of human existence. Varda's late works such as *Beaches of Agnès* (2008) and *Varda by Agnès* (2019) also exemplify her autobiographical approach, as she frequently includes herself as a central figure in her films. However, it was in *The Gleaners and I* that she appears for the first time on screen, exploring her aging body and her own reflections on gleaning. I am convinced that this personal touch allows Varda to connect her own experiences with broader societal themes, creating a layered narrative that is both personal and universal.

When considering Varda's autobiographical approach in evoking memories related to spaces, the ideas of Bachelard and Soja provide valuable context. Bachelard emphasises the importance of the intimate and emotional aspects of environments, particularly in relation to memory and identity (Soja 2010, 106). In Varda's films, she often captures spaces that hold personal significance, intertwining them with her own experiences and memories. This approach aligns with Bachelard's view of the intimate connection between individuals and their surroundings, highlighting how phenomenology and memory are deeply intertwined in her work.

On the other hand, Soja's theories on spatiality offer another lens through which to view Varda's work. Spatial justice represents an integral and formative component of justice, focusing on how justice and injustice are socially constructed and evolved over time (ibid., 1). In this sense, a concept of memory of justice takes form that can be further elaborated in this chapter. Varda's films, such as *Faces Places*, embody this concept by weaving together her interactions with different people and places with her own internal reflections and memories. This creates a rich, multifaceted narrative that explores the ways memory, identity, and spatial perspectives are intertwined.

To examine the connection between spatial justice and both memory and place, it is essential to consider the realm where physical spaces and mental perceptions intersect, reflecting how social

justice is created, maintained, and challenged. This intersection serves as a focus for democratic social actions. In *Faces Places*, Varda and artist JR embark on a journey across rural France, capturing the stories of everyday people and their connection to local environments. This journey serves as a manifestation of Soja's idea of spatial justice, as it highlights the interplay between physical spaces and mental perceptions, or memories (ibid., 68). By focusing on the lived experiences of individuals within their unique contexts, Varda and JR illuminate the profound connections between space, memory, and social justice.

In sum, Varda's late period showcases her mastery of blending documentary elements with personal storytelling, creating films that are as much about her own journey as they are about the broader human experience. By engaging with themes of memory, place, and identity, Varda's work resonates deeply with audiences and continues to be celebrated for its innovative approach and profound impact on cinema. I argue that both *The Gleaners and I* and *Faces Places*, masterfully intertwine personal memory with broader socio-cultural landscapes, offering rich narratives that explore the connections between individual experiences and the collective world around us. Bachelard and Soja's ideas will help me to contextualise Varda's approach in these films.

Theoretical Framework

In examining the intricate interplay of memory and space in Varda's works, particularly *Gleaners and I* and *Faces Places*, the theories of Bachelard and Soja provide essential insights.

Bachelard's phenomenological approach on memory and space emphasises the intimate and emotional aspects of environments, exploring how spaces influence our memories and identities. Bachelard posits that spaces, especially those that hold personal significance, are not merely physical locations but are imbued with emotional and experiential resonances (Bachelard 2014, 201). This concept is particularly relevant in Varda's cinema, where spaces are often depicted as carriers of personal and collective memories.

In Varda's films, the interplay between physical spaces and personal experiences reflects Bachelard's idea that our surroundings are deeply intertwined with our internal worlds (ibid., 202). This connection between space and memory enables a deeper exploration of identity, as characters navigate environments that mirror their internal states. Bachelard's assertion that the house, for

instance, is a reservoir of memories (ibid., 74) is mirrored in Varda's intimate portrayal of spaces that evoke personal and shared histories, thereby enriching the narrative with a profound sense of place.

On the other hand, Soja offers a complementary perspective, focusing on the social and political dimensions of space. Soja introduces the concept of spatial justice, which examines how spatiality—socially produced space—shapes and is shaped by social justice (soja 2010, 98). This framework is crucial for understanding Varda's exploration of socio-cultural landscapes and the ways in which memory and identity are influenced by spatial dynamics.

Soja underscores the importance of viewing space as a dynamic and integral component of social relations and justice (ibid., 63). In Varda's works, the depiction of various landscapes and environments is not merely aesthetic but serves to highlight issues of social equity and the lived experiences of marginalised communities (Bell 2019). By documenting these spaces and the people who inhabit them, Varda engages with Soja's idea of spatial justice, revealing how spaces can both reflect and perpetuate social inequalities.

Phenomenology, Memory, and Space in Varda's Cinema

Integrating Bachelard's and Soja's theories allows for a nuanced analysis of Varda's cinematic treatment of memory and space. Phenomenology, with its focus on lived experience, memory, and the subjective perception of reality, serves as a bridging concept (Ferencz-Flatz and Hanich 2016). As I said also above, Varda's films often blur the lines between documentary and fiction, creating a space where personal memory and broader social realities coexist. This approach resonates with phenomenological ideas by emphasising how individuals experience and interpret their environments (Colusso 2015).

In *The Gleaners and I* and *Faces Places*, Varda, from my perspective, employs a phenomenological lens to explore the relationships between people and their surroundings and how this relates two memories. The use of handheld cameras and natural lighting fosters an intimate, immersive experience that aligns with Bachelard's notion of space as lived and emotionally resonant (Bachelard 2014, 27). Simultaneously, Varda's focus on diverse landscapes and communities aligns

with Soja's emphasis on spatial justice, revealing the complex interplay between space, memory, and social dynamics.

By adopting Bachelard's poetic sensitivity to space and Soja's critical lens on spatial justice, this theoretical framework provides a comprehensive understanding of how Varda's films navigate the interconnectedness of memory, identity, and space. Through her distinctive cinematic language, Varda invites viewers to reflect on their own experiences and perceptions, making her exploration of memory and space both deeply personal and universally relevant.

Phenomenological Cinematic Techniques in Varda's Exploration of Place and Memory

In her films, Varda employs a variety of cinematic techniques to reflect places from a phenomenological point of view, effectively immersing the audience in the lived experiences and emotional landscapes of her subjects. I contend that Varda's approach is rooted in capturing the essence of spaces and their significance to those who inhabit them, making her depiction of places deeply resonant and multifaceted.

In her late career period, particularly in *The Gleaners and I*, one of the primary techniques Varda employs is the handheld camera. This choice fosters an intimate and organic connection between the viewer and the film's subjects, allowing for a more personal and subjective experience of space. The handheld camera moves with a sense of fluidity and spontaneity, mirroring the natural rhythms of life and the act of gleaning itself. This technique not only provides a sense of immediacy but also invites viewers to perceive places through Varda's exploratory gaze, aligning with the phenomenological emphasis on lived experience and personal perception, i.e., memory.

Additionally, Varda's use of natural lighting further enhances the phenomenological authenticity of the film. I suggest here that, by relying on the ambient light of the environments she captures, Varda ensures that the portrayal of places remains genuine and unembellished. This approach allows the textures, colours, and atmospheres of the spaces to emerge organically, reflecting their true essence and the ways in which they are experienced by those within them. The natural lighting thus contributes to a sense of realism and emotional truth, making the spaces in *The Gleaners and I* feel immediate and tangible.

Varda also employs close-up shots and detailed visual compositions to draw attention to the often-overlooked elements of the environments she explores. That is the case in *Faces Places*. These meticulous visual details, whether they be the weathered hands of a gleaner or the texture of a discarded object or the face of factory workers, serve to highlight the intimate relationship between individuals and their surroundings. In my way of thinking, through these close-ups, Varda emphasises the significance of small, everyday moments and objects, illustrating how personal and collective memories are intertwined with the physical spaces we inhabit.

Moreover, Varda's inclusion of her own presence in the film, both as a narrator and as an on-screen participant, adds another layer of phenomenological depth. Her reflections on her aging body and her own experiences of gleaning create a personal connection between the filmmaker and the subject matter. This approach also generates memories that are linked, in one way or another, to places. This autobiographical element encourages viewers to engage with the film not just as passive observers but as active participants in a shared human experience. By foregrounding her own subjective perspective, Varda underscores the idea that our understanding of place is always mediated by our individual experiences and emotions.

In essence, Varda's cinematic techniques serve to create a phenomenological exploration of place and memory. Through the use of handheld cameras, natural lighting, detailed visual compositions, and autobiographical elements, Varda immerses the audience in the lived realities of her subjects, offering a profound and intimate portrayal of the spaces they inhabit. This approach aligns seamlessly with the phenomenological focus on subjective experience and the emotional resonance of environments, making her work a powerful meditation on the interconnectedness of place and memory.

- *The Gleaners and I* (2000)

The Gleaners and I explores the tradition of gleaning, and uses it as a metaphor for gathering memories and experiences. Varda embarks on a journey across France, meeting and documenting the lives of various gleaners, including farmers, urban foragers, and artists. Through her encounters, she captures the resilience and resourcefulness of these individuals, while also reflecting on her own aging and the passage of time. I do believe that the film blends Varda's personal narrative with broader themes of environmental sustainability and social justice, creating a poetic and intimate portrayal of the interconnectedness of memory, identity, and place.

As mentioned in last chapters, Bachelard's notion of the "poetics of space" emphasises the intimate and emotional relationship between individuals and their environments and it also resonates deeply with Varda's main approach in *The Gleaners and I*, as she emphasises the intimate and emotional relationship between individuals and their environments. Varda captures the resilience and resourcefulness of the gleaners as they navigate the challenges of their surroundings, finding sustenance and community in unexpected places. This sense of the poetic is enhanced by Varda's focus on the ordinary yet profound aspects of gleaning, from the tactile experience of picking up discarded produce to the camaraderie and solidarity among the gleaners. This creates, in my opinion, a sense of the poetic, as Varda highlights how individuals navigate and find meaning within their spaces, transforming them into sources of memory and identity.

As Varda documents the lives of these individuals, she intertwines their stories with her own reflections on aging and collecting memories. Her introspection adds depth to the film, as she contemplates the passage of time and the ways in which people, I would say, navigate their physical and emotional landscapes. This dual narrative creates a rich, multifaceted portrait of gleaning as a practice that not only sustains the gleaners but also connects them to their heritage, the land, and each other. I argue that by highlighting how individuals find meaning within their environments, Varda showcases the unique relationships that people develop with the spaces they inhabit. This poetic portrayal of gleaning and memory underscores the interconnectedness of personal and collective experiences, revealing how the act of gathering both tangible and intangible remnants of the past shapes identity and community.

However, *The Gleaners and I* features scenes that reflect both Bachelard's and Soja's ideas, creating a complex narrative that intertwines personal memory with broader socio-cultural landscapes. Varda uses specific scenes to explore the relationship between gleaning, memory, and the poetics of space, providing viewers with a vivid and intimate portrayal of these themes. One of the most memorable moments in the film is when Varda discovers a heart-shaped potato while gleaning in a field. I contend this potato as a poignant symbol of the personal connections gleaners form with the objects they collect. Varda's decision to keep the potato and cherish it reveals her own emotional attachment to the simple yet profound act of gleaning.



Figure 4.1. Heart-shaped potato in The Gleaners and I

This scene also embodies Soja's concept of spatial justice, which involves the intersection of distributional inequalities and subjective experiences (Soja 2010, 87). By this, I mean how spatial justice encompasses both objective disparities in the distribution of resources and opportunities, as well as the subjective perceptions and experiences of individuals within those spaces. In the context of this film, I argue that the intersection can be seen in various ways. Firstly, there are clear distributional inequalities present in the film, as Varda documents the lives of gleaners who scavenge for discarded food and objects in the countryside and urban areas of France. These gleaners, often marginalised individuals, rely on what others discard, highlighting broader socio-economic disparities and issues of resource allocation within society.

Secondly, there are subjective experiences that shape how individuals interact with and perceive these spaces of inequality. Varda's own reflections and encounters with the gleaners, as well as the gleaners' own stories and perspectives, provide insight into the subjective experiences of navigating these spaces. For example, the heart-shaped potato symbolises not only the material sustenance gleaners seek but also the emotional and symbolic value they find in unexpected places.

By highlighting both the objective distributional inequalities and the subjective experiences of individuals within these spaces, I believe that Varda illustrates the complex interplay between social structures and personal agency. The concept of spatial justice thus encompasses not only the physical distribution of resources but also the ways in which individuals navigate and make

meaning of the spaces they inhabit, shedding light on broader issues of social inclusion, empowerment, and resistance.

The heart-shaped potato serves also as a symbolic convergence of Varda's material surroundings and her internal reflections on aging and memory. This blending of the physical and emotional realms creates a multidimensional space where different layers of reality and personal interpretation merge. The scene also illustrates how Varda's film embodies Soja's theory by presenting a narrative that intertwines the physical world with subjective experiences (ibid., 102), ultimately providing a rich exploration of the complex relationship between space, memory and identity.



Figure 4.2. Market leftover scene in The Gleaners and I

In another scene, Varda visits a market where individuals gather discarded produce left behind by vendors. Through her interactions with these market gleaners, Varda captures their resilience and resourcefulness, as they find sustenance in what others consider waste. What strikes me the most in this film is the camaraderie and solidarity among the gleaners, highlighting how they navigate their surroundings and create a sense of community. This scene embodies the poetics of space by emphasising the intimate and emotional relationships gleaners form with their environment and with one another.

Varda's interactions with the market gleaners demonstrate the intimate relationship they have with their surroundings. As they gather discarded produce, they navigate the space with a sense of resourcefulness and solidarity. Bachelard's focus on the poetic qualities of space is evident in how the gleaners transform a seemingly ordinary marketplace into a space of sustenance and community (Bachelard 2014, 66). This scene highlights how the gleaners find beauty and meaning in their daily experiences, embodying Bachelard's emphasis on the emotional and poetic aspects of the environment. In the marketplace, Varda documents the physical act of gathering produce while also capturing the gleaners' personal stories and motivations. This scene represents spatial justice as a dynamic realm where the physical reality of the market intersects with the subjective experiences of the gleaners (Soja 2010, 102). Varda's ability to connect the external world with the internal lives of her subjects embodies Soja's concept of a hybrid space that transcends traditional spatial boundaries (Soja 2010, 23).



Figure 4.3. Varda filming herself while collecting leftovers in The Gleaners and I

In one scene, Varda visits a vineyard where a landowner allows gleaners to gather grapes from his fields. The landowner's willingness to share his resources with others reveals a connection to the history and tradition of gleaning, and, I believe, a sense of generosity and community. Varda's documentation of this scene illustrates how individuals find meaning and sustenance within their environments, bridging the gap between past practices and contemporary needs.

The scene at the vineyard where the landowner allows gleaners to gather grapes from his fields showcases Bachelard's idea of space as a source of intimate connections and memories. The landowner's generosity bridges the past and present, linking the tradition of gleaning with modern practices. This scene reflects the emotional bond between the land and the people who work it, emphasising in my opinion the poetic relationship between individuals and their environments. The vineyard scene illustrates Soja's notion of spatial justice as a space where the material and mental converge (Soja 2010, 19). Varda's documentation of the landowner's willingness to share his resources with gleaners creates a space where physical and social dimensions merge. This scene emphasises the complex relationships between people, places, and practices, reflecting Soja's view of spatial justice as a multidimensional space that encompasses both the tangible and the imagined (ibid., 102).



Figure 4.4. Vineyard scene in The Gleaners and I

Moreover, these scenes demonstrate how Varda captures the personal stories and motivations of different gleaners, intertwining their experiences with her own reflections on memory and aging. Through her exploration of these intimate and emotional moments, Varda highlights the profound impact of gleaning on individuals and communities, revealing how they navigate and find meaning within their surroundings.

Simultaneously, Soja's concept of spatial justice is evident in *The Gleaners and I* as Varda explores the hybrid realm where physical spaces and subjective experiences converge. I argue my claim by bringing to the forefront the fact that she documents the materiality of gleaning—the fields, markets, and dumpsters—while also delving into the personal histories and motivations of those involved. This blending of the tangible and the introspective creates a multidimensional narrative that connects personal memory with broader socio-cultural issues such as food waste and economic disparity.

Let's consider now another scene, the scene where Varda interviews a man who collects discarded objects from junkyards. In this scene, Varda's depiction of memory and space, intertwined with phenomenological elements, is profound. The junkyard is a space filled with discarded objects, each holding its own memories and stories. Through close-up shots and detailed visual compositions, Varda captures the textures and histories embedded in these objects, inviting viewers to reflect on their own memories and associations with material artefacts. This approach resonates with Bachelard's idea that spaces hold layers of memory, shaping our perceptions and identities.



Figure 4.5. Varda encounters an artist in *The Gleaners and I*

Additionally, Soja's concept of spatial justice comes into play as Varda navigates the junkyard, highlighting the socio-economic inequalities inherent in spaces of discard. The juxtaposition of the man's resourcefulness in salvaging objects for survival and the neglect of these objects by society underscores the spatial injustices present in the landscape. Varda's portrayal of the junkyard as both a physical space and a repository of collective memories speaks to Soja's emphasis on the intersection of material conditions and subjective experiences in shaping spatial dynamics (ibid., 102).

Phenomenologically, Varda's use of the handheld camera and natural lighting immerses viewers in the lived experiences of the man and the junkyard environment. Through Varda's exploratory gaze, viewers witness the tactile and sensory aspects of the space, engaging with it on an emotional and visceral level. This phenomenological approach emphasises the interconnectedness of memory, space, and lived experience, inviting viewers to contemplate their own relationships with the material world. Through this scene, Varda adeptly depicts memory and space through a phenomenological lens, which I believe that resonates with concepts from Bachelard and Soja, to illuminate the rich complexities of human experience within the landscape of discard.

- *Faces Places* (2017)

Faces Places is a collaborative documentary film by Varda and artist JR that follows their road trip across rural France. As they travel, the duo creates large-scale portraits of the people they meet, placing the images on buildings and other structures in the local communities. The film explores the lives and landscapes they encounter, highlighting the personal stories and memories of the individuals they engage with. Through Varda's intimate narration and JR's artistic vision, the film captures the deep connections between people and their environments. It is a celebration of human experience, creativity, and the power of art to bridge generations and bring communities together.



Figure 4.6. Varda and JR in Faces Places

I argue that in *Faces Places*, Varda's narration is deeply personal and intimate, reflecting her unique perspective and experiences as both a filmmaker and a human being. Her voice serves as a guiding thread throughout the film, weaving together the stories of the people they meet and the landscapes they traverse. One poignant example of Varda's intimate narration is when she reflects on her own aging body, specifically her thumbs and feet. She speaks candidly about the changes she has noticed



Figure 4.7. Varda's foot, photo by JR in *Faces Places*

over the years, remarking on the wrinkles and imperfections that come with age. This moment is intimate not only because it reveals Varda's vulnerability but also because it invites viewers to reflect on their own bodies and experiences of aging.

Varda's narration takes on a deeper significance when her musings about her thumbs and feet are transformed into an artwork by JR. The photograph of her hands and feet, wrinkled and weathered, becomes a larger-than-life mural adorning the side of a building. Through this transformation, Varda's personal reflection becomes a public statement, inviting viewers to contemplate the passage of time and the beauty of imperfection.

Overall, Varda's intimate narration in *Faces Places* serves to connect viewers to the film's themes of human experience, creativity, and community. From my perspective, by sharing her own thoughts and experiences, she invites us to see the world through her eyes and to empathise with the people and places she encounters along the way. It is through her voice that the film becomes not just a documentary but a deeply personal and transformative journey. In this film, Varda's interactions with the people she meets and the places she visits embody picturesquely Bachelard's poetics of space, as she captures the intimate and emotional essence of these environments (Bachelard 2014, 257). By engaging with her subjects' personal stories and memories, Varda reveals how spaces hold meaning and influence individual identities. She crafts a visual and narrative journey that emphasises the poetic qualities of the spaces she and JR visit, revealing the profound impact of these environments on the people who inhabit them.



Figure 4.8. Varda and JR encounter factory workers in Faces Places

As Varda and JR travel through different regions, they engage with the personal stories and memories of the people they meet, exploring how their experiences and memories are intertwined with the places they call home. Varda captures the uniqueness of each location, from a farming



Figure 4.9. Different landscapes in Faces Places

community to a small coastal village, highlighting how the physical environment shapes the residents' identities and way of life. This alignment with Bachelard's ideas shows how Varda emphasises the intimate and often unspoken relationships between people and their immediate surroundings.

Through these encounters, I believe that Varda demonstrates how spaces hold meaning beyond their physical attributes. The film features a variety of locations, including rural fields, quiet villages, and

urban settings, each with its own distinct atmosphere and cultural context. Varda's sensitivity to these nuances reveals the depth of her understanding of how places can evoke memories, emotions, and connections to the past.

In the film, Varda and JR also engage in artistic collaborations with the people they meet, creating large-scale portraits and installations that reflect their subjects' lives and environments. These projects allow Varda to delve deeper into the identities and histories of the individuals they encounter, further highlighting the poetics of space by visually representing the intricate bonds between people and their surroundings.

Varda's ability to capture the intimate essence of the places she visits and the personal stories of those she meets creates a powerful narrative that showcases the richness of human experience. Her approach aligns with Bachelard's focus on the emotional and poetic aspects of space, as she brings to life the profound connections between individuals and the landscapes they inhabit. Through *Faces Places*, Varda invites viewers to reflect on the beauty and complexity of the world around them, emphasising the importance of preserving the memories and stories that shape our identities and our sense of place.

I would argue that the film also aligns with Soja's concept of spatial justice by weaving together Varda's internal reflections with her external journey. As she interacts with her subjects and their local contexts, Varda transcends traditional boundaries, blending the physical reality of the places she visits with her subjective interpretations. This fusion creates a rich narrative tapestry that explores how personal memory and socio-spatial dialectic are intertwined (Soja 2010, 5). Varda's collaboration with JR allows her to transcend traditional boundaries and merge her internal reflections with the external journey. Soja's concept of spatial justice is evident in the way Varda weaves together the physical reality of the places she visits with her own subjective interpretations, creating a space where different dimensions of experience coexist and influence one another (ibid., 15).

As Varda and JR travel through rural France, they engage with the people they meet in a variety of contexts, including farmers, factory workers, and villagers. By capturing their stories and their relationships with the landscapes around them, Varda emphasises the interconnectedness of personal memory and socio-spatial dialectic. This approach enables her to reveal the complexity and

diversity of the lives of those she encounters, highlighting how their environments shape their identities and perspectives.

The film's use of art installations—such as large-scale portraits on buildings and other structures—serves as a tangible manifestation of spatial justice, blending the subjective and objective aspects of the locations Varda and JR visit (ibid., 104). I suggest that these installations not only create a visual dialogue between the subjects and their surroundings, but they also provide a means for Varda to express her own internal reflections on the people and places she encounters.



Figure 4.10. Varda and JR with families in a small village working together for an artistic project in Faces Places

I contend that Varda's narration throughout the film serves as a bridge between her internal reflections and the external world she explores with JR. Through her voiceovers, Varda shares her thoughts, memories, and observations, offering viewers a glimpse into her inner world and personal experiences. For instance, at the same scene where she reflects on her own aging body (See figure 7), she muses about the changes she has noticed over the years, such as the wrinkles and imperfections that come with age. This intimate reflection not only adds depth to the narrative but also allows viewers to connect with Varda on a personal level.

Furthermore, Varda's narration provides context and insight into the people and places they encounter during their journey across rural France. She shares stories from her past, anecdotes from her filmmaking career, and reflections on the significance of art and creativity in everyday life. These insights enrich the audience's understanding of the individuals they meet and the landscapes they traverse, creating a deeper sense of connection and empathy.

By blending her personal perspective with the external journey, Varda, to my mind, invites viewers to see the world through her eyes and understand how she connects with the people and places she encounters. This fusion of internal and external worlds not only enriches the film but also enables viewers to generate shared memories with Varda, forging a meaningful and lasting connection between filmmaker and audience.

Ultimately, *Faces Places* showcases Varda's mastery of creating a multidimensional narrative. The film reveals how personal memory and socio-spatial landscapes are intertwined, offering viewers a profound and intimate exploration of the human experience. Through her unique approach, Varda highlights the ways in which individuals and communities navigate and find meaning within their environments, which I conclude that by doing so, she creates a film that resonates deeply with audiences and invites them to reflect on their own connections to the spaces they inhabit.

Conclusion

In both *The Gleaners and I* and *Faces Places*, Varda navigates the intersection of personal and collective experiences with remarkable skill, crafting films that resonate deeply with audiences by exploring the complex relationships between memory, identity, and place. These works embody Varda's deep engagement with Bachelard's and Soja's ideas, allowing her to create narratives that blend her own reflections with the stories and lives of the people she encounters.

I believe that Varda's philosophy of living is grounded in her profound appreciation for the beauty and complexity of memories as they contribute to shaping human identity. Through her films, she exemplifies a keen understanding of the interplay between individuals' memories and their environments, and the rich narratives that unfold from these dynamic relationships. Her keen eye for capturing the intimate essence of spaces and the personal stories of those who inhabit them aligns closely with Bachelard's poetics of space, which emphasises the emotional and poetic aspects of our environments. Bachelard suggests that individuals find solace in revisiting memories of security and protection. He implies that there is a need for certain spaces to preserve our memories, maintaining their original significance as images. According to him, memories associated with the familiar and intimate environment of home possess a distinct emotional quality that cannot be replicated by memories of the external world (Bachelard 2014, 28).

Simultaneously, Varda's capacity to intertwine her internal reflections with the external world aligns with Soja's notion of spatial justice, wherein tangible realities coalesce with the imagined in a dynamic hybrid space (Soja 2010, 23). This concept underscores the interconnectedness of memory and place, highlighting how individuals' recollections shape their perception of and relationship with their surroundings. I believe that in Varda's films, memory serves as a lens through which characters navigate and interpret their environments. Places become imbued with personal significance, as memories intersect with physical spaces, influencing how individuals interact with and inhabit them. For example, in *Faces Places*, Varda and JR create large-scale portraits of the people they meet, embedding these images within the local communities. These portraits serve as visual reminders of the individuals' stories and experiences, transforming public spaces into repositories of memory and identity.

Furthermore, Varda's incorporation of her own memories into her cinematic narratives underscores the intimate connection between memory and place. Her reflections on past experiences, both joyful and painful, inform her understanding of the world around her and shape the stories she chooses to tell. I suggest here that by intertwining her personal memories with the landscapes she traverses, Varda blurs the boundaries between the internal and external, highlighting the fluid and symbiotic relationship between memory and place.

Overall, Varda's exploration of memory and place resonates with Soja's concept of spatial justice, as it emphasises the importance of acknowledging the subjective experiences and perceptions that inform individuals' relationships with their environments. By recognising the significance of memory in shaping our understanding of place, Varda's films invite viewers to contemplate the multifaceted nature of spatial justice and the ways in which memory contributes to the richness and complexity of human experience. This approach allows Varda to transcend traditional boundaries, creating multidimensional narratives that reveal the ways in which personal memory and socio-cultural landscapes intersect and shape one another.

In *The Gleaners and I*, memory holds a deeply personal significance for Varda as she explores themes of resourcefulness, resilience, and the passage of time. The film delves into the lives of gleaners who harvest for discarded food and objects, highlighting their resourcefulness and ability to find value in what others have cast aside. I contend that memory in *The Gleaners and I* is often tied to the objects and artefacts that Varda encounters, as she reflects on the stories and histories

they carry. For example, she muses on the significance of a heart-shaped potato or a broken clock, linking these objects to broader themes of love, loss, and the transience of life.

In contrast, *Faces Places* places greater emphasis on collective memory and the power of storytelling to preserve and celebrate human experiences. Through her collaboration with artist JR, Varda creates large-scale portraits of individuals and places them within their communities, transforming public spaces into repositories of memory and identity. Hence, memory in *Faces Places* is not just individual recollections but also shared histories and cultural narratives that shape our understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

Overall, I claim that while both films explore the significance of memory in shaping human experience, they do so in different ways. *The Gleaners and I* focuses on personal memories and the ways in which objects can evoke nostalgia and reflection, while *Faces Places* highlights the importance of collective memory and the role of art in preserving and honouring our shared stories.

To sum up, in this evocative exploration of memory and place, Varda's lens unveils the hidden narratives embedded within the landscapes of our lives. Through the interplay of space and memory, she invites us to navigate the depths of human experience, transcending the confines of materiality. In the realm of phenomenology, Bachelard's poetics of space intertwines with Soja's concept of spatial justice, illuminating the interconnectedness of personal and collective histories. As we journey through the contours of forgotten spaces, we are reminded of the transformative power of perception and the enduring resonance of memory within the fabric of existence.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Farewell to Frames-Varda's Cinematic Odyssey in Reflection

"Do not be satisfied with the stories that come before you. Unfold your own myth."

Rumi

"به قصه‌هایی که پیش روی تو می‌آیند، راضی نباش. افسانه خود را بازگو کن."

مولانا جلال‌الدین محمد بلخی (رومی)

Agnès Varda's films offer a unique and impactful perspective on socio-political issues through her distinctive spatial representations. By using spaces as symbolic arenas, Varda explores power dynamics, inequality, and social justice within her work, providing nuanced commentary on the structures and relationships that shape society. Varda's mastery in utilising spatial representations allows her to highlight how societal structures manifest within physical environments, drawing attention to the complex interplay between individual lives and the broader context in which they unfold. Her films often focus on the marginalised or underrepresented, bringing their stories to the forefront and questioning established norms and power dynamics. This nuanced approach to spatial politics creates a rich tapestry that invites audiences to consider how spaces influence identity, memory, and social interactions. Moreover, her films often feature unexpected or unconventional settings, challenging viewers to reevaluate their understanding of place and its impact on human experience. By presenting spaces that are simultaneously physical, emotional, and psychological, Varda pushes the boundaries of traditional cinematic storytelling.

Varda's approach to depicting socio-political issues through spatial representations is also marked by her ability to imbue her films with empathy and intimacy. This personal touch enables her to connect deeply with her subjects and audiences alike, fostering a sense of shared humanity and a deeper understanding of the world around us. Through her lens, spaces become not just settings for stories but vital components of the narratives themselves, shaping and reflecting the lives of those who inhabit them.

In exploring these themes, Varda's work stands as a testament to her commitment to social justice and her desire to give voice to those who are often unheard. Her films serve as both a critique and a celebration of the spaces and people she encounters, making her a pivotal figure in the landscape of world cinema. By intertwining her distinctive spatial approach with socio-political commentary, Varda creates a body of work that resonates across generations and geographies, offering audiences a profound and transformative viewing experience.

Throughout her career, Varda continued to push the boundaries of traditional filmmaking, often exploring themes of feminism, memory, and identity in her work. Her imagery language evolved over the years, moving from a more structured, narrative-driven approach to a more experimental and autobiographical style. This evolution is evident in her last work, *Varda by Agnès* (2019), where she combines personal reflection with broader socio-political commentary. Varda's ability to intertwine her own experiences with the experiences of others allowed her to create films that resonated deeply with audiences and brought a fresh perspective to world cinema.

In this chapter, I will review how Varda's career may have started with a philosophy aligned with Bachelard's poetics of space, emphasising the intimate and emotional connection between individuals and their environments. I will also examine whether her career concluded with an alignment with Soja's concept of spatial justice, which explores the intersection of physical spaces and subjective experiences in a complex and dynamic way. Through this analysis, I aim to understand the evolution of Varda's work and its impact on socio-political discourse in cinema. As I embark on this journey through the tapestry of Varda's cinematic legacy, I am filled with a profound sense of gratitude for her unparalleled contributions to the world of film. Like a gentle whisper carried by the wind, her spirit continues to inspire and illuminate, guiding us through the labyrinth of existence with wisdom and grace. With each frame of her farewell manifesto, *Varda by Agnès*, she bids adieu to her beloved audience, leaving behind a legacy that transcends time and space. In

paying homage to her remarkable oeuvre, I bid farewell to this chapter with a heartfelt tribute to the visionary artist who will forever dance among the stars

Navigating the Tapestry of Time: An Intimate Farewell Through the Lens of *Varda by Agnès* (2019)

In *Varda by Agnès* (2019), a retrospective documentary that she revisits her life and career, Varda offers a comprehensive overview of her filmmaking journey and thematic focus. The film reflects her evolving perspective on socio-political issues, as she revisits the spaces and moments that defined her approach to cinema. Varda's narrative demonstrates her lifelong commitment to exploring the complex interplay between individuals and their environments, i.e. the space they inhabit.

I believe that throughout *Varda by Agnès*, she reflects on the socio-political context of her upbringing and experiences, highlighting the ways spaces embody power dynamics and social hierarchies in her works. She revisits key moments from her films, examining how specific places and the people who inhabit them reveal larger issues of social justice and inequality. This reflection allows Varda to provide insight into her evolving approach to exploring spatial politics through her films. Varda's retrospective journey through her life and career reveals a filmmaker deeply attuned to the socio-political nuances of the spaces she captures. Her reflections on her upbringing and the environments she navigated showcase her lifelong awareness of how spaces can embody power dynamics and social hierarchies. By revisiting key moments from her films, Varda offers insight into how her work engages with larger issues of individuals' identity formation and social justice and inequality. This engagement with identity and justice is central to my own work, which is why I chose to use *Varda by Agnès* for the conclusion chapter. By analysing Varda's reflective journey, I aim to underscore the profound impact of spatial politics on personal and collective identities, reinforcing the significance of these themes in both her work and my research.

Varda's reflection on her body of work also illustrates her commitment to exploring the intersection of spatial politics and human experiences. Her ability to weave personal narratives with broader social commentary demonstrates her nuanced understanding of how spaces influence and reflect societal structures. This ongoing exploration throughout her career showcases Varda's enduring dedication to using cinema as a means of addressing complex socio-political issues. As Varda

revisits scenes from her films such as *Cléo from 5 to 7* and *The Gleaners and I*, she demonstrates her evolving approach to spatial politics. For instance, in *Cléo from 5 to 7*, Varda's exploration of Paris highlights the contrast between the bustling city and the protagonist's personal crisis, capturing the isolation and vulnerability that can exist within urban spaces. This juxtaposition of the character's internal struggle with the external cityscape reveals how place can shape individual experiences. In *The Gleaners and I*, Varda examines the socio-economic disparities present in different settings, from rural fields to urban markets. Her focus on the act of gleaning serves as a metaphor for the broader issues of resource distribution and waste in society. By documenting the lives and stories of those who glean, Varda reveals the resilience and resourcefulness of people navigating systemic challenges.

The opening scene of *Varda by Agnès* is a masterful invocation of Varda's cinematic philosophy, encapsulating the essence of her work through a poetic and phenomenological lens. The scene begins with Varda herself, seated in a grand theatre, addressing her audience. The vastness of the space around her, juxtaposed with her solitary figure, immediately draws attention to the relationship between the individual and the environment, a central theme in both Bachelard's poetics of space and Soja's concept of spatial justice.

As Varda begins to speak, her voice carries a warmth and intimacy that fills the empty seats, transforming the cavernous theatre into a space of personal reflection and connection. This transformation of a public space into a realm of introspection echoes Bachelard's idea that spaces are not just physical locations but also containers of our memories, emotions, and dreams (Bachelard 2014, 258). The theatre, as I see it in this context, becomes a metaphor for the mind, a place where Varda's thoughts and creative visions are projected and shared, eventually becoming memories. The uniqueness of her filmmaking lies in this aspect of memory; she creates a shared memory with her audience, a memory that is irreplaceable.

Furthermore, in the context of spatial justice, the theatre represents a democratic space (Soja 2010, 7) where Varda's cinematic journey is laid bare for all to see. Her presence in this communal yet intimate setting speaks to the accessibility of her art and the inclusivity of her narrative. By choosing this setting, Varda underscores the importance of shared cultural spaces in fostering dialogue and understanding, aligning with Soja's belief in the critical role of spatial dynamics in social justice (ibid., 5).

The choice of a theatre also resonates with the phenomenological perspective, emphasising the experience of space as lived and felt rather than merely seen. Varda's interaction with the space—her movement, her gaze, her voice—imbues the theatre with life, making the viewers acutely aware of the spatial relationships at play. This interplay between the physical and the emotional, the seen and the felt, draws viewers into a deeper engagement with the film from the very first frame.

As the camera lingers on Varda, capturing the nuances of her expressions and the subtle shifts in lighting, it creates a sense of intimacy that bridges the distance between the filmmaker and her audience. This initial shot, in my opinion, serves not only as an introduction to Varda's reflections but also as an invitation to explore the layers of memory, space, and identity that define her work. The theatre mirrors the boundless creativity and profound humanism that characterise Varda's films for me.

In this opening moment, Varda sets the tone for a journey through her artistic legacy, blending personal introspection with broader social commentary. It is a testament to her unique ability to transform ordinary spaces into realms of profound meaning and to use her art to connect deeply with her audience, creating shared memories. Through the lens of spatial justice, the poetics of space, and phenomenology, the opening scene of *Varda by Agnès* becomes a rich tapestry of visual and emotional storytelling, inviting viewers to engage with the world through Varda's perceptive and compassionate eyes.

In another scene in this film, Varda reflects on her iconic film *Vagabond* (1985) and the way she used spaces to explore socio-political issues. She discusses the powerful opening shot, which shows the lifeless body of the protagonist, Mona, lying in a ditch. This striking image immediately sets the tone for the film, introducing the audience to the harsh reality of Mona's life as a drifter. Varda's reflection on this scene highlights her deliberate choice to film in desolate and barren landscapes, such as fields, forests, and isolated roads, to convey Mona's sense of displacement and marginalisation. These spaces underscore Mona's lack of connection to any particular place or community, illustrating her struggle to navigate a world that offers little support for those on the fringes of society. In my interpretation, through the character of Mona, Varda gives a new definition to loneliness: it is not just about having nobody, but rather about not belonging to anywhere. Additionally, she challenges stereotypes about women, touching on one of the most important issues within feminist film theory: voyeurism (Wild 1990).

Varda chooses to reflect on how she used space to highlight Mona's marginalisation and alienation from society. The abandoned houses serve as powerful symbols of Mona's precarious and unstable situation. The dilapidated state of these structures mirrors Mona's disconnection from the world around her. Soja's concept of spatial justice offers valuable insights into the complex relationship between Mona and her environment. Spatial justice, as Soja conceives it, is a hybrid realm that merges the physical and mental dimensions of space, creating a dynamic interplay between the tangible world and subjective experience (Soja 2010, 104). Varda closes her reflection on *Vagabond* with Mona's death scene on a beach. After a jump cut, Varda is now on the same beach, sitting in the same seat in the theatre, talking about her filmmaking to paper birds. This metaphor illustrates her gratitude for her audience, with whom she has shared so much throughout her long career. "How sad it would be to speak in an empty theatre" she says.



Figure 5.1. Varda in front of an empty theatre in *Varda by Agnès*

Through her retrospective, Varda provides audiences with a deeper understanding of her evolving approach to spatial politics, highlighting her capacity to blend personal storytelling with incisive social critique. One notable example Varda reflects on is her encounter with various gleaners, in *The Gleaner and I*, across different settings, including rural fields and urban markets. She discusses the personal stories of the people she meets, such as a man who collects discarded vegetables to feed his rabbits and an artist who uses gleaned objects in her sculptures. Varda's choice to focus on the practice of gleaning allows her to shed light on the resilience and ingenuity of those living on the

margins of society. I argue that, through this she not only creates memories but also teaches her viewers how to make and share memories with her.

Varda's approach in this film reflects Soja's notion of spatial justice as a realm of possibility and transformation (Soja 2010, 93). By documenting the ways in which the gleaners create new meanings and uses for discarded materials, Varda showcases their ability to transcend traditional boundaries and challenge societal norms. Through this approach, Varda demonstrates how spaces can serve as arenas for social critique and transformative experiences. She emphasises how gleaners' actions reveal broader issues of food waste, economic disparity, and the ways individuals navigate these challenges within their environments. Varda's ability to blend personal storytelling with incisive social critique is demonstrated in her compassionate portrayal of the gleaners' lives and the struggles they face.

However, Varda's body of work is characterised by her keen awareness of the symbolic and emotional resonance of spaces. By focusing on the spatial dimensions of her subjects' lives, she reveals how power structures operate within different environments. Her nuanced attention to spatial politics allows her to address larger socio-political issues in a deeply personal and impactful manner.

In *Varda by Agnès*, she offers a poignant reflection on her final collaboration with photographer and street artist JR in the film *Faces Places*. A central theme of the film is the celebration of the lives and stories of everyday people, capturing their portraits and displaying them in large-scale installations across rural France. These installations transform public spaces into vibrant tributes, honouring individuals often overlooked by society. This serves not only to commemorate those who are forgotten but also to immortalise their memories. Through her inclusion of these scenes in *Varda by Agnès*, Varda underscores her belief in art's profound ability to elevate marginalised voices and create visibility for those living on the periphery. I suggest that this is another way she creates shared memories with her audience, weaving a tapestry of collective remembrance and connection.

As Varda speaks, the camera lingers on her expressive face, capturing the twinkle in her eyes and the subtle movements that convey her deep affection for the project. The scene seamlessly transitions to footage of JR and Varda traveling through picturesque villages, meeting locals, and

transforming everyday spaces into monumental works of art. This journey through diverse landscapes evokes a sense of wonder and discovery, aligning with Bachelard's idea that spaces hold emotional and imaginative significance.

In discussing the impact of their work, Varda touches on themes central to Soja's concept of spatial justice. She highlights how their art brings visibility to marginalised communities, creating a dialogue between the physical environment and the social dynamics within it (Soja 2010, 79). The murals in *Faces Places* are more than just artistic expressions; they are acts of reclamation and empowerment. Varda's reflections emphasise the transformative power of art to bridge social divides and foster a sense of belonging and recognition. Throughout the scene, Varda's gentle, reflective tone invites viewers to share in her joy and nostalgia. I argue here that the interplay of past and present, memory and place, creates a rich tapestry of experiences that resonate on both a personal and universal level. By revisiting *Faces Places* within the context of *Varda by Agnès*, she underscores the continuity of her artistic journey and the enduring relevance of her work.

This scene is not just a look back at a previous film; it is a meditation on the themes that have always been central to Varda's oeuvre: the exploration of human connections, the celebration of everyday life, and the interplay between the artist and the world. Through her lens, the landscapes of *Faces Places* become a canvas for shared memories and collective experiences, illustrating the profound connection between place, memory, and identity.

One notable scene finds Varda discussing her creative process while exploring a dilapidated building. I argue that, as she narrates her thoughts, she delves into the layers of history and emotion embedded within the space, evoking Bachelard's concept of the poetic imagination (Bachelard 2014, 7). Through her lens, viewers are transported into a realm where the physical and metaphysical intertwine, inviting them to engage with the space on a deeply emotional level.

In another moment, Varda engages in a conversation with residents of a low-income neighbourhood undergoing urban redevelopment. Here, she sheds light on the socio-economic disparities shaping the landscape, echoing Soja's exploration of spatial inequalities (Soja 2010, 77). Through intimate interviews and observational footage, Varda captures the complexities of gentrification and displacement, amplifying the voices of those affected by these forces of change.

Amidst lush landscapes and serene countryside, Varda reflects on the passage of time and the fleeting nature of memory. Through her lyrical narration and visual poetry, she transports viewers into realms of reverie and nostalgia, embodying Bachelard's notion of the intimate connection between individuals and their environments (Bachelard 2014, 141). Each frame becomes a canvas upon which the essence of existence is painted, inviting contemplation and introspection.

The closing scene of *Varda by Agnès* is a poignant and introspective farewell that beautifully encapsulates Varda's cinematic legacy. As the film nears its end, Varda and JR are seated on a beach, surrounded by swirling sands carried by strong winds. The image is obscured by the foggy atmosphere, lending an ethereal quality to the moment. In this transformative setting, Varda makes a profound decision—to disappear into the sands, symbolically returning to the primal essence of life found on the beach where waves meet the shore. This act evokes notions of memory, as Varda's presence fades into the sands, becoming a part of the landscape and echoing the impermanence of human existence. It also evokes the dreamlike quality of the scene, where reality and metaphor intertwine, inviting viewers to contemplate the boundaries between the tangible and the ephemeral. Through the lens of phenomenology, this closing scene invites reflection on the subjective experience of space and time, as Varda's disappearance blurs the lines between past, present, and future. Moreover, the scene resonates with the concept of spatial justice, as Varda chooses to dissolve into a space that symbolises the interconnectedness of humanity and the natural world, challenging conventional notions of borders and boundaries. The beach, an expansive space where land meets water, serves as a powerful metaphor for the boundaries between life and art, reality and imagination. This setting evokes Bachelard's idea that the natural world becomes a canvas for memory and introspection (Bachelard 2014, 28). The ebb and flow of the waves echo the rhythms of life, each wave a reminder of the passage of time and the continuity of existence. In this way, the closing scene of *Varda by Agnès* serves as a fitting conclusion to Varda's cinematic journey, inviting viewers to ponder the complexities of memory, dream, phenomenology, and spatial justice long after the credits roll.

In her reflections, Varda touches on the themes of community and connection that have permeated her work. She speaks of the people she has met, the places she has explored, and the stories she has shared. This narrative of interconnectedness resonates with Soja's concept of spatial justice, which emphasises the significance of social spaces and the relationships that define them. The beach, a public yet deeply personal space, symbolises a place of convergence where individual experiences

and collective histories meet. I suggest that the notion of the beach serving as both a shared public space and a deeply personal one, where individual and collective experiences intersect, serves to blur the boundary between internal and external realms.

The camera captures wide shots of the vast horizon, blending the elements of earth, sea, and sky into a harmonious whole. This visual composition underscores the unity and balance that Varda has sought in her films, a testament to her belief in the inherent beauty and complexity of the world. As the sun dips below the horizon, the fading light suggests a sense of closure and peace, yet also the promise of new beginnings beyond the visible spectrum.

Varda's final words are infused with gratitude and a sense of wonder at the journey she has undertaken. She acknowledges the impermanence of life and art, yet celebrates their enduring impact. I contend that this closing scene, with its evocative imagery and contemplative tone, encapsulates the essence of Varda's artistic vision. In this serene farewell, Varda invites us to pause and reflect, to appreciate the delicate interplay between the tangible and the intangible. The beach becomes a space of reflection and renewal, a fitting conclusion to a film that is both a personal memoir and a universal meditation on the human experience. Through the lens of spatial justice and the poetics of space, the closing scene of *Varda by Agnès* leaves us with a sense of calm and a deeper appreciation for the rich tapestry of life that Varda so lovingly wove through her films.

In concluding this exploration of Agnès Varda's transformative cinematic journey, it is essential to reflect on the evolution of her epistemological approach to filmmaking. I intend to argue that Varda's career, spanning over six decades, reveals a dynamic shift in the way she perceives and portrays space entangled with memory and identity.

Varda's early works, such as *La Pointe Courte* (1955) and *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962), exemplify her phenomenological approach to cinema. In these films, Varda meticulously constructs spaces that are not merely backdrops but integral components of the narrative. *La Pointe Courte*, presents a vivid depiction of a fishing village, where the physical environment is inextricably linked to the emotional landscapes of its inhabitants. Similarly, *Cléo from 5 to 7* captures the bustling streets of Paris, transforming the city into a living, breathing entity that mirrors the protagonist's existential journey. Varda's camera lingers on everyday details, inviting viewers to experience the world

through a heightened sense of awareness and presence, aligning with Bachelard's ideas on the poetics of space.

As Varda's career progressed, her films began to incorporate a more explicit feminist perspective, focusing on gendered spaces and the experiences of women within them. *Vagabond* (1988) and *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* (1975) are seminal works in this regard. In *Vagabond*, Varda explores the harsh realities of a woman living on the margins of society, using the desolate winter landscape as a reflection of her isolation and resilience. The film's fragmented structure and raw, unflinching portrayal of Mona's journey underscore the intersection of gender, space, and social justice, resonating with Soja's concept of spatial justice. *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* navigates the lives of two women over several decades, highlighting their struggles and triumphs within the socio-political context of the feminist movement. The film's portrayal of diverse environments—from rural villages to urban centres—emphasises the ways in which space can both constrain and liberate, shaping the characters' identities and destinies.

In her later years, Varda's work increasingly delved into the themes of memory, emotion, and the intimate connection between people and places. This shift is poignantly illustrated in *Varda by Agnès* (2019), where she revisits her own oeuvre with a reflective and introspective lens. Varda's narrative weaves together personal anecdotes, memories, and cinematic analysis, creating a tapestry that celebrates the symbiotic relationship between the filmmaker and her subjects. Each space Varda explores is imbued with personal and collective memories, transforming mundane locations into repositories of emotion and history. Her phenomenological approach evolves to encompass a broader, more inclusive view of human experience, where memory and space are deeply intertwined.

I contend that throughout her career, Varda's epistemological approach to filmmaking transitioned from a focus on the phenomenological experience of space to a nuanced exploration of feminist perspectives and gendered spaces, ultimately culminating in a profound meditation on memory and the human condition. Her films remain a testament to the power of cinema to capture the complexities of life, inviting viewers to see the world through a lens that is both deeply personal and universally resonant.

As we reflect on Varda's legacy, it is evident that her work transcends the boundaries of traditional filmmaking, offering a rich and multifaceted exploration of space, memory, and identity. Her ability to seamlessly integrate these elements into her narratives has left an indelible mark on the world of cinema, inspiring future generations of filmmakers to approach their craft with the same curiosity, empathy, and poetic sensibility that defined Varda's remarkable career.



Figure 5.1. Goodbye Agnès.

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