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**AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION:  
HOW DID AGNÈS VARDA CHANGE MY WAY OF SEEING?**

Zeynep Demirhan  
119603003

Prof. Dr. Feride ÇİÇEKOĞLU

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Otoetnografik Bir Araştırma:  
Agnès Varda Benim Görme Biçimimi Nasıl Değiştirdi?

**Zeynep Demirhan**

**119603003**

<b>Tez Danışmanı:</b>	Prof. Dr. Feride ÇİÇEKOĞLU İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi	(İmza): .....
<b>Jüri Üyesi:</b>	Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Ebru Çiğdem Thwaites Diken İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi	(İmza): .....
	Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Colleen Kennedy-Karpat Ankara Bilkent Üniversitesi	(İmza): .....

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis uses autoethnography as the research method to explore how Varda's filmmaking has inspired the way I film and document my memories of the city. Agnès Varda's autobiographic eye and cinematic subjectivity in the nexus of the urban environment are significant in three respects. First, Varda represents her memories by mixing autobiographical narration with artistic experiments with form. Thus, this thesis will explore two documentaries, *L'Opéra Mouffe* (1958) and *Les Plâges d'Agnès* (2008), and an installation *Les Veuves de Noirmoutier* (2004) from her exhibition *L'île et Elle* (*The Island and She*) at the Fondation Cartier in Paris. Second, Varda's films are situated in certain places, which she deems important in constructing one's identity. Hence, this thesis argues that the term *genius loci* is central to her take on places. Third, Varda's filmmaking can be interpreted as a flâneusian activity. Thus, the focus will be on Varda's relation to the city in her selected films *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962), *Les Dites Cariatides* (1984), and *Uncle Yanco* (1967).

Whereas the first part of the thesis will emphasize Varda's experiences of the city and her relation to the spirit of places, the second part of the thesis will highlight the resonances between Varda's filmmaking and my way of recollecting my memories of the city in film, following the footsteps of Varda, and reflecting on my relationship with Istanbul after Ankara. In particular, the thesis will reveal the effects of Varda on my three short films *Survival* (Büyükkada), *Neighbor* (Dolapdere,) and *Faces* (my grandmother's gradual loss of memory).

**Keywords:** Genius loci, Flâneuse, Autoethnography, Autobiography, Documentary

## ÖZET

Bu tez, otoetnografik araştırma yöntemini kullanarak kentteki anılarımı belgeleme sürecimin Varda'nın film yapma biçiminden nasıl etkilendiğini inceler. Agnès Varda'nın otobiyografik gözü ve kentsel çevre ile olan bağlantısındaki sinemasal öznelliği üç açıdan önemlidir. Öncelikle, Varda anılarını, otobiyografik anlatım ve biçimiyle oynadığı sanatsal denemelerle karıştırarak sunar. Bu nedenle tez Varda'nın iki belgeseli *L'Opéra Mouffe* (1958) ve *Les Plâges d'Agnès* (2008), ve Paris'te Fondation Cartier'de düzenlediği *L'île et Elle* (*The Island and She*) sergisinde bulunan *Les Veuves de Noirmoutier* (2004) enstalasyonunu inceleyecektir. İkinci olarak, Varda'nın filmleri insanın kimliğini inşa edebileceği önemli bulduğu mekanlarda yer alır. Bu bağlamda tez, mekanın ruhunu kavramını onun filmlerinde yer aldığını öne sürer. Son olarak, Varda'nın film yapma biçimini flanözyen bir aktivite olarak tanımlanabileceği için, kentle olan ilişkisinin ön planda olduğu *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962), *Les Dites Cariatides* (1984) ve *Uncle Yanco* (1967) filmlerine odaklanılacaktır.

Tezin ilk bölümü Varda'nın şehirle ilgili olan deneyimlerini ve mekanın ruhu ile arasındaki ilişkiyi vurgularken, ikinci bölümü Varda'nın film yapımı ile onun izinden giden şehirle ilgili olan anılarımı toplama halim ve Ankara'dan sonra İstanbul ile olan ilişkiyi yansıtırma biçimim arasında bağlantı kuracaktır. Özellikle, üç kısa filmim *Survival* (Büyükada), *Neighbor* (Dolapdere,) ve *Faces* (anneannemin yavaş yavaş hafızasını kaybetmesi) üzerinde Varda'nın etkilerini ortaya çıkaracaktır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Genius loci, Flanöz, Otoetnografi, Otobiyografi, Belgesel

## INTRODUCTION

*I followed the feeling of eternal wholeness as I realized everything was temporary. With environmental awareness, my existence expanded and strengthened. I saw, wandered, and experienced; the world felt my presence.<sup>1</sup>*

The idea of observing my surroundings with my camera intrigued me to think about how and whether if at all, I view the world differently through the lens. As I walked around, I found myself recording the details of my environment, such as streets, buildings, facades, colors, and textures. The act of walking and the realization of my vicinity liberalized me, my thoughts, and the things I see. Pushing the camera's release button froze the moment's independence, making it permanent. Taking photography as an apparatus to experience the feeling of freedom and expressing myself became a meditative exercise. This has been one of the reasons as to why I started to think about the resonances between Varda's filmmaking as a flâneur's activity and my filmmaking.

By shooting on the street, I had set the boundaries between the people walking and me. The main reason is that walking on the road as a woman has been a worrying exercise among other people's glances, especially men's gazes. I constituted a new path similar to breathing space, which came from my instinct to escape the annoying stares on my body. Whereas I diverted my focus to the environment from the people, my visibility increased with the presence of the camera, and the gazes gathered on me more. Thus, rather than the crowd, the quiet places of Ankara, where I lived then, intrigued me more to shoot photography. The reason for hiding from people was that I did not want to contact men and encounter their gazes. Unfortunately, the inhabitants of Ankara were not used to seeing a woman shooting photography on the street; thereby, I drew their attention more to the existence of a professional camera.

Nevertheless, I maintained my shooting practices to feel a sense of relief in my inner world by leaving disturbing things behind. Through my neighborhood, even if the weather was foggy, snowy, or sunny, no sooner had I decided to go out to take photographs than I took my camera. Even though these streets were familiar, I seldom

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<sup>1</sup> From my travel notes.

realized the details of the roads, buildings, and facades after my walks. I began forming my story by creating a bond with those around me.

After several months, even if the places where I lived changed considerably, my approach remained the same. With my arrival in Istanbul for my master's degree in the department of film and television, my habits on the street did not change. Although the places of the metropolis enthralled me more deeply than Ankara and Aydın, the town where I was born, and where I had lived before Ankara, I walked the boundaries of the districts and desolated places where not many inhabitants live. These photographic journeys proceeded by interacting with my encounters through my personal experiences. With the excitement of settling into the new location, everything I witnessed at the university, in my neighborhood, and the city, inspired me. For instance, as part of our courses, we focused on places without humans in the narrative stories through the film *Homo Sapiens (2016)*, directed by Nikolaus Geyrhalter. With the thoughts resonating, I visited Prince Island to explore 16. Istanbul Biennial "*The Seventh Continent*." Throughout my journey, I wondered what would remain when humanity left. I took still and moving images by walking from inside to outside, outside to inside on the ferry. With attention to the details in the ferry, I focused on the leftover objects abandoned by the people. While capturing these items, I lost time as the ferry approached Prince Island pier.

With an eye from the outside, I explored the streets of the island while going to the exhibition locations. In fact, instead of arriving directly at these particular places, I gave my attention to the road, buildings, objects that I did not know whose, human-touched and abandoned homes, gates with chains forbidden to enter, and Trotsky's house. Even though the exhibition places gave me different perspectives generally, those items and areas of desolation on the island impressed me more at that time. However, when I met with my friends visiting the biennial, they tried to find out the departure time of the ferry to arrive in the city immediately. Was my interest in the island environment because I was the eye from the outside? Instead of answering the question in my head, I left these places and went back to the city center. After a while, the images I shot were transformed into my first video, *Survival (2019)*, whose journey the thesis will explore.

During the first months of arriving in Istanbul, I continued to follow my surroundings with my camera to discover the city's boundaries, memories, and thresholds, which belonged to different temporality and spatiality. Thus, it can be observed that my photographs and videos revealed the history, culture, and identity of urban life. After watching *Survival*, my professor realized these images revealed the spirit of the place as *genius loci*. It was a concept coming from architectural historian Christian Norberg-Schulz referring to the "protective spirit" myth in Roman Culture. It is still used today to describe the "distinctive atmosphere of the transformation of space to place." (Demirhan & Kennedy-Karpat, 2022, p.99) The spirit of the place can be explained as a key between existence, space, and architecture, identifying the relationship between natural and man-made places. In other words, *genius loci* is an energy field, authenticity, and a unique atmosphere that helps define locations valued culturally, ecologically, and historically. (Demirhan & Kennedy-Karpat, 2022) On one hand, I searched the different ways of visualizing the spirit of the places; on the other hand, the resembling topics were practiced within the main course of the master's department in cinema and television. If my undergraduate degree was not architecture, I might not have been interested by the spirit of the urban to such a degree. In those days, I met a woman director Agnès Varda who inspired me so far more than I expected. Later on, she would never leave my filming practices, and I would follow her steps.

Agnès Varda as a photographer, "cineaste," and visual artist, began her cinematographic career in 1954, with Alain Resnais editing her first film *La Pointe Courte*. (Benezet, 2014, p.9) After that, she maintained her shooting practices by expressing her subjective experiences in her filmography and exhibitions. Chamarette describes Varda's filmography as "a presentation of her self-shifts between an ethnographic, a personal, and a collective I." (Chamarette, 2012, p.37) Her filmography is characterized by several formats involving personal documentaries, short and long feature films, and installations. Representing her personal history through the different forms of media makes it possible to embody her feminine memories. As Jackson describes her artworks, even though all of them indicate genres, "themes of portraiture, observation, and the slippage between the real and the imaginary weave her work." (Jackson, 2010, p.122) She intertwines autobiographical

elements with her artistic and cinematic approach. Moreover, while documenting her subjectivity as a tool for making films, she joyfully fictionalizes them. Her filmography passes on to the audience as an individual and private content with her accumulative experiences. (Benezet, 2014) Thus, her subjectivity, memories, and encounters are contextualized in her artworks.

In our seminar courses, as a woman shooting the environment, meeting Varda's film *Cléo 5 to 7* made me feel more intimate with her rather than with other women directors. By means of the film, we focused on Cléo's feminine and subjective experiences as a woman walking on the street. Witnessing the journey of her reminded me that I was not alone while wandering in a city similar to *flânerie*. Analyzing Cléo's exploration of her inner life through the city resonated with my experiences in the streets of Ankara. At that time, I was in Istanbul; looking back on my experience in Ankara, I asked myself, how did I explore the urban places in the light of Varda's Cléo?

Approximately two months after my arrival in Istanbul, the frequency of my gentle urban wandering in the uncrowded places of the city without noticing the men on the street increased. I admired the layered history of the town, which prompted me to examine and shoot the details of everything. Even though the daily life of the city usually maintained its activities, it was so original and appealing that I could not ignore them. In each district of the urban, daily life flowed among the interwoven lives and superimposable communities. The texture of the urban demonstrates several stories belonging to different temporality. Each person could see the traces of the past and the possibilities of the future through urban detail. Between one street and another, a person coming for the first time can realize a completely distinct lifestyle of the street. Besides, after these observations, I interrogated the habitability of the city for each person.

My endless trips to the urban lives of Istanbul maintained with the excitement of seeing the various patterns of the city. Visiting various exhibitions was a significant routine during my journeys since several artworks and artists inspired me. Toward the end of the fall semester, I went to Dolapdere to visit Arter's new building, designed by London-based Grimshaw Architects. After swiftly wandering around and taking several photos of the interior places, I left the building to take a taxi. Although five or six empty taxis passed by, they did not stop. Ultimately, one of them stopped. When I

asked the driver, "why didn't these taxis stop?" he said, "at this time of day, there are drug dealers around, so the drivers do not want to stop."

I was shocked and interrogated myself, did I look like a drug dealer? How could I encounter these circumstances right after visiting the modern exhibition place? It was such a significant encounter that prompted me to explore the particular district and its community. After doing a little research on the area, it appeared that Dolapdere was the central district that sells mannequins, especially of the women, that can be displayed in the store windows. I mainly encountered men rather than women, and I realized that this region consisted of dead women and alive men.



*Figure 1, A man, selling the mannequins, is in his shop (Süleyman Kaman)*

Furthermore, I learned that when the art gallery Arter was opened, its architect and founder aimed to be a "good neighbor" to the inhabitants of Dolapdere. Could the building be a good neighbor? How did it affect the life of the local inhabitants? Did the architect's approach answer their purpose in real-life? My effort to comprehend the community began and I decided to go one more time.

While wandering, Varda's Parisian character *Cléo* came to my mind, and my experiences with the urban environment changed. One of the influential works of Varda was her second feature film, *Cléo de 5 à 7 (1962)*, focusing on the subjective transformation process of a beautiful and famous pop singer who is expecting a phone call from her doctor in a short period. While waiting for the results of a biopsy, Cléo got herself out of her rehearsal space, which was her home, and then, the connection between Cléo and her environment changed. As Cléo explored the city with a fear of

death, her perspective was transformed from herself to other people. While she was an "observed object" with her remarkable beauty, her experiences changed her position as "an observer" who analyzed everything around her. Like a *flâneuse*, she explores uniquely and independently the urban environment through the female gaze in two hours of the city. Chamarette describes Varda's fictional characters as "human subjects of her films and installations that are not raised above their environment nor do they transcend it; rather the filmed objects and environments are coeval to the subjects revealed in the filmmaking (which unavoidably also include Varda's own body and body parts)." (Chamarette, 2012, p.115) Even if the film is fiction, Varda interlaces her fragments of subjectivity, environment, and her filmic characters.

Although Cléo was a famous singer, she could not remain insensitive to her surroundings, instead of admiring her fans, fame, and popularity. Her effort to understand her neighborhood incentivized me to comprehend my environment fearlessly. Similar to Cléo's transformation, which evoked the feeling of being stuck among the unreal interest of fans, made recognizing her environment possible, I tried to break the boundaries with my camera in the urban environment. With an ethnographic gaze, at that moment, my gesture and behavior said in a manner, "I am recording you; mind your step!" Thus, a few weeks later, I finished *Neighbor*, focusing on gentrification and its effects on the settlement in Dolapdere. It was one of my turning points, transforming my attitude while shooting, simultaneously part of my journey.

My behavior on the street leveled up to a more comfortable feeling than my first arrival in Istanbul. While I was trying to find the closeness with the women wandering in the city, meeting with Cléo was an excellent opportunity to be inspired by Varda. The intimacy process with her was maintained by exploring her several installations after my submission for the Varda conference at my university, which aimed to commemorate her. My first version of the proposal title was "*Spatio-Temporal Relationality in Agnès Varda's L'île et Elle*," which related to two installations: *Le Triptyque de Noirmoutier* in her exhibition *L'île et Elle* and *Bord de Mer*. Containing various forms of representation: still and moving images, LED screens, mobile and static installation materials, and haptic objects, the exhibitions reflected her autobiographic and experimental side. My interest in the spatial

configuration of art spaces prompted me to think about the audience's perception and experiences. Through these interactive installations, I searched the relationality between object and subject and their spatiality and temporality. My interest in her installations comes from my shooting practices, which notice subject and object relationality. These installations will be explained as a part of my journey in the second chapter of my thesis.

After a while, there was an announcement about creating a book *Global Varda* through each subject of a presentation in the symposium, and my advisor encouraged me to write an article by following my abstract proposal. Even though the initial proposal would have examined her installations, after several discussions with my professors, we decided to research how the urban environment and the spirit of the place were represented in her filmography. How did she constitute the intimate relationship between her surroundings and the screen, which I seek during my shooting practices? Thereby, the title of the article shifted to *Urban Environments and Agnès Varda's Genius loci* which Kennedy-Karpat progressed. Instead of Varda's installations, we explored her selected five films *L'Opéra-Mouffe (Diary of a Pregnant Woman, 1958)*, *Daguerréotypes (1976)*, *Les Dites Caryatides (The So-Called Caryatides, 1984)*, and *Uncle Yanco (1967)* and *Mur Murs (1980)*. The process of writing an article came across with the pandemic, and I turned my focus into myself. Besides, under the favor of associating with her particular films through the article enabled me to penetrate her modality profoundly into my thoughts. Hence, during the pandemic days, being alone without seeing my family for a long time and correlating with Varda prompted me to remember myself, my family, and my roots.

Whereas before the epidemic, I looked for collective memory in the city places, on my visit to my hometown after the pandemic, I realized my family was testimony to the loss of subjective memory via my grandmother. During the first week of my arrival near my family, I witnessed my mother's feelings unexpectedly. I understood that experiencing the loss of her mother was extremely heavy for her for several reasons. For fifteen years, my grandmother struggled not to forget her past experiences, consciousness, and intelligence. Her remembrance did not run properly, and her awareness quietly disappeared daily in front of our eyes. If the person's memories diminish, will her existence continue or dissolve? Or will her presence

completely disappear without anyone knowing or hearing about her memories? Can forgetting be a comforting action in some situations? By thinking about the answers to these questions, I spent time with her for a couple of days to discover my grandmother's mind, thoughts and behavior. At that time, I intended to seek identity maintained through the three generations of women in our family, my mother, my grandmother, and me. Through shooting the film, I aimed to heal my mother by portraying my grandmother's circumstances. However, among these experiences, I encountered my mother's traumas with her mother, and therefore I could not complete a film.

After one and a half years, I reconnected with Varda's artworks while writing the first chapter of the thesis. Remembrance of her after a long time resonated with me to re-finish the editing process of the film. Inspired again by her experimental filmic manner, I completed the short documentary *Faces*. In retrospect, it can be understood that in each encounter with Varda, I followed her gaze not only in filming but also in my lifestyle unintentionally.

In this thesis, I will explore my personal journey by using the methodology of autoethnography to find the relationality between my videos and Agnès Varda's particular films and installations. The initial purpose of the thesis is to enable me to understand how my gaze changed in the light of Varda's point of view. Through the exploration process of myself, I hope to become aware of which circumstances I cared about to shoot, how my photographic gaze progressed, and how Varda impressed me. For this reason, the first chapter of the thesis examines Varda's five films and one installation, in which I found a close relationship with my filming practices. By way of her autobiographical narration, artistic experiments with the image's form, and ethnographic eye, the first part of the thesis will primarily focus on *L'Opéra Mouffe* (1958), *Les Veuves de Noirmoutier* (2004), *Les Plâges d'Agnès* (2008). Besides that, the rest of it will research *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962), *Uncle Yanco* (1967), and *Les Dites Cariatides* (1984) to emphasize her intention in places where she found intimate relationships. After researching Varda's selected artworks, the second chapter of the thesis delves into my subjective story by exposing the road map of my essay films *Survival*, *Neighbor*, and *Faces*, which follow her traces.

Varda's highly autobiographic film *L'Opéra Mouffe* reflects her experiences during her pregnancy while living in Paris on Rue Mouffetard. Mainly focusing on her

feminine subjectivity, Varda experiments with a distinct way of representing her feelings by connecting the moments of the daily life of Rue Mouffetard. As Jefferson Kline epitomizes the subject of the film, "contradictions between the hope a pregnant woman feels and the hopeless spectacle that surrounds her in the Rue Mouffetard." (Kline, 2014, p.74) For Benezet, her filmic approach is "a collection of willingly enigmatic and ambiguous images rather than a set of straightforward representations." (Benezet, 2014, p.12) Rather than a traditional visual description, she exposes her bodily experiences and their resulting feelings subjectively by generating visual similarities in the film sequences. Besides, through autobiographical narration, she reveals the neighborhood features, which means The Rue Mouffetard's *genius*.

Based on personal visual storytelling, the first part follows Varda's installation *Les Veuves de Noirmoutier*, a part of the exhibition *L'île et Elle (The Island and She)* at the Fondation Cartier in Paris. In her impressive and extensive collection, which is part of *Les Plâges d'Agnès* as well, she represents several photographs, moving images, installations, and materials with interactive environments. In *L'île et Elle*, all of them are subjected to each installation work as her emotional landscape, the Noirmouiter Island, which is situated on the Atlantic coast of France near Nantes, which she often inhabited or visited with her late husband, Jacques Demy. The variety of representation styles depicts that Varda reconfigures the images' boundaries and limits in the light of autobiographical narration. In particular, *Les Veuves de Noirmoutier (The Widows of Noirmoutier)* depicts Varda's feminine memories by engaging interactive elements such as several video channels, headphones, and chairs in the exhibition area. The installation indicates Varda's ethnographic and autobiographic inclination and her connection with her environment in the gallery space.

*Les Plâges d'Agnès (2008)* is based on "mixing autobiographical narration with installation art and filmic and photographic montage." (Ince, 2013, p.609) Varda explores several ways of representing herself by juxtaposing still and moving images that reference her past works. Her fragmented memories and experiences were subjected to the sequences as a retrospective. Conway underscores the film as focusing on "creating a tapestry of Varda's work, incorporating a huge number of still and moving images from her long career into her life story." (Conway, 2015, p.112) Varda

brings together different fragments of personal materials: family videos, photographs, in other words, her history. In her photographic montage, she re-experiments the diversity of the portrayal of her landscapes and the boundaries of the images, which was a guiding spirit in the second editing process of my short documentary, *Faces*.

Another Parisian film of Varda, *Les Dites Caryatides* (1984), illustrates the nineteenth-century Parisian architectural style of caryatids. She concentrates on comparing female and male caryatids, which reflect gender roles in society. Furthermore, by emphasizing the historical contradiction between the sculpted bodies, the film highlights the different temporality of the urban environment. It emphasizes "how these markedly feminine monuments define the Parisian spirit of place, conserving the past and carrying new nuance into the future. (Demirhan & Kennedy-Karpat, 2022, p.107) Depending on geography, the temporality of the cities, and her lived body experiences, she has underscored the inhabitants' identity, culture, and history. Her attention to the urban environment, which becomes a filmic object, conveys the local spirit through her cinematographic gaze. On the other hand, meeting with these caryatids made me realize the closeness of my essay film *Neighbor* in their focal points. Whereas Varda underscored the difference between caryatids to epitomize the status of the city, I focused on the women's mannequins and men working unwittingly.

Although in her Parisian movies, Varda emphasizes her subjective feminine experiences in familiar environments, in *Uncle Yanco* (1967), which is Californian, she follows her ancestors' traces with her curious side. The last selected film of Varda *Uncle Yanco* is a colorful and joyful short documentary in Sausalito Bay, California. Her desire for an ethnographic approach rapidly makes it possible to find a tight connection between herself and Yanco's lifestyle. His settlement consists of several houseboats constituted many years ago by artists, hippies, and bohemians. While she recognized her family members and their past experiences, which she had never known, she witnessed their unique lifestyles through the particular environment. Even if in a different location, rarely does Varda unavoidably refuse to visualize her tendency to her roots, memories, encounters, and enclosing environment. In its totality, revealing her familial connection reinforces the sense of belonging. Thus, working on *Uncle Yanco* prompted me to look under the hood of my family and my identity.

In each film, Varda concretizes her immersive environment with a voyeuristic and ethnographic gaze based on her specific encounters and subjective representation through her feminine experiences. Her attention to the vitality of urban life demonstrates her connection between the surrounding environment and lived experiences. Even though her filming practice relates to subjective rather than objective representation, Varda portrays reciprocity between her individuality and the surroundings in which she films, and some of these identify her filmography. (Demirhan & Kennedy-Karpat, 2022) All selected films prioritize the connection between subject-subject, and subject-object relationality by redisplaying the people encountered, their lives, places, and objects, who reflect their traditions, cultures, and countries.

The engagement between the existential body and immersive environment resonates with Varda's filmmaking modalities from a feminine perspective. Varda, a storyteller of *genius loci* and her femininity, clarifies the cinematic subjectivity subtly by entering her films "as a subject-maker and subject-matter." (Andersen, 2019) The engagement between Varda's existential body and immersive environment resonates with her filmmaking modalities from a feminine perspective. Her filmography indicates that it is possible to make a film under any circumstances through inspiration, creation, and sharing. Thus, in particular, the first part of the thesis highlights Varda's documentarist manner and her relationship with the surrounding environment focusing on her experimental and joyful side.

Following Varda's filming approach, I researched the progressing process of my three essay films using autoethnography as a methodology. In literature, autoethnography is described as "an approach to research and writing which seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)" (Ellis & Adams & Bochner, 2011 cited in Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005). It is a method of exploring individual practices in particular memories, thoughts, and feelings in the specific context of cultural elements. That is to say, if the researcher comprehends her lived experiences and encounters, then engages them with society, the research will gain an autoethnographic approach. According to Ellis and Bochner, this methodology is "an autobiographical genre of

writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural." (Ellis and Bochner, 2000)

Integrating personal and cultural experiences enables finding sincere connections between self and the community. As a qualitative research method, within its uniqueness, autoethnography exposes the artist's journey in a particular period of her life, which is connected to the details of social life. Unless the researcher does not attach herself to the cultural context, the autoethnographic relationship cannot be constituted and stays at the autobiography level. Whereas autoethnography is related to social and cultural values, autobiography can be described solely as a technique of self-representation. (Russell, 1999) It allows the person to recognize herself and then express her individuality sincerely. The representation of self-exploration focusing on subjective memories is revealed by autobiographical diaries, personal films, and videos. In filmmaking practices, the autobiographical narration might be used as a muse. Moreover, if the artist examines herself in an autobiographical manner similar to exploring a particular community, she will look from an ethnographic point of view.

Russell defines the connection between self-representation and ethnography as "autobiography becomes ethnographic at the point where the film- or video maker understands his or her personal history to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes." (1999) If the researcher solely investigates others with no regard for the self, the process of searching will transform into an ethnographic manner. Ethnographers collect and analyze information about the community's culture, behavior, or daily life instead of the self to recognize them. Similar to ethnographers, auto ethnographers accumulate data not only on the cultural and social levels but also on their personal experiences. Chang emphasizes this connection as follows "Like ethnography, autoethnography pursues the ultimate goal of cultural understanding underlying autobiographical experiences. To achieve this ethnographic intent, auto ethnographers undergo the usual ethnographic research process of data collection, data analysis/interpretation, and report writing." (Chang, 2008, p.49)

Like ethnographers, auto ethnographers expose their autobiographical information with "critical, analytical, and interpretive eyes to detect cultural undertones of what is recalled, observed and told." (Chang, 2008, p.49) All in all, they gather collective and subjective data as a combination of the characteristics

of autobiography and ethnography. (Ellis and Bochner, 2000) Russell notes that "autoethnography invokes an imbrication of history and memory, the authenticity of experience functions as a receding horizon of truth in which memory and testimony are articulated as modes of salvage." (1999) Therefore, rather than a single subject, finding a relationship between individuality and communal life generates a deep exploration of self and culture. Additionally, one of the benefits of being aware of the self is that it creates a private sphere to transcend the researcher's boundaries through the inner self. As Chang emphasizes that autoethnographic writing is the "constructive interpretive process" that includes self-investigation and integration with the cultural status of the world. (Chang, 2008, p.149) Thereby, auto ethnographers can be mindful of their selves, their thresholds, behaviors, memories, and others'. By means of its spirituality and consciousness, the subjective environment is expanded in the objective context. According to Russell, "autoethnography produces a subjective space that combines anthropologist and informant, subject and object of the gaze, under the sign of one identity." (1999). I believe that this thesis makes it possible to comprehend myself, my gaze, and my cares, enabling me to generate my emotional journey through my lived experiences. Thus, after exploring Varda's fragmented film style, the second part of the thesis explores how my way of seeing has changed with Varda's filmmaking by looking at my personal history and photographic gaze. Through my photographs and videos shot, I will recall my memory and encounters during my self-realization process.

## 1. FOLLOWING VARDA'S FILMOGRAPHY

As mentioned in the introduction, being inspired by autobiography is a common guideline during creative processes in various art fields. Especially in auteurs' filmmaking, Chamarette claims that when analyzing works by one particular artist, self-representation is a widespread manner in which the audience could find traces of her. (2011) Even though the filmmaker does not display herself in front of the camera, she represents her presence behind the scenes. Describing Varda's cinematography, Chamarette claims that "the spectre of Varda haunts the image, whether the filmmaker is visible on screen or not, through complex processes of framing, repetition, citation, and movement." (Chamarette, 2011, p.33) From this viewpoint, it can be observed that personal feelings inspired Varda, and thoughts focusing on her past life story, and then conveyed them to the screen. Thereby, the autobiographical representation is materialized by utilizing virtual or actual presence instead of ignoring physical and mental lived experiences. While Varda passes on her individuality from behind the camera, she attaches to the physical surroundings through her framings. Thereby, she reveals her subjectivity and feminine experiences combined with the spirit of her environment. Her attention to the vitality of urban life prompts her to establish intimate relationships between the urban places and her lived body. Varda embodies her temporality as a woman through the spatiality of her immersive environment, associating her body, memories, and experiences with the place. Thus, the first chapter of the thesis will explore her filmmaking approach, in particular, two selected autobiographical movies, *L'Opéra Mouffe* (1958) and *Les Plâges d'Agnès* (2008), an autobiographic installation *Les Veuves de Noirmoutier* (2004), and three films that found an intimate relationship between herself and the urban life, *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962), *Les Dites Cariatides* (1984), and *Uncle Yanco* (1967). As well as exploring Varda's autobiographical narration and artistic experiments with form, the thesis elaborates on her connection between places and her in the mentioned films.

## 1.1. Varda's Autobiographical Films

### 1.1.1. *L'Opéra Mouffe* (1958)

In the late 1950s Paris on Rue Mouffetard, while Varda was pregnant with her first child, Rosalie, she visualized her subjective and feminine experiences in 16 minutes in *L'Opéra Mouffe*. In this autobiographical documentary, she highlights the senses of the pregnant woman by focusing on the urban environment. With 16 mm shot and monochrome cinematography, the experimental movie begins with a title that announces that this is the “filmed journal of a pregnant woman.” (Conway, 2015, p.32) Throughout the film, Varda juxtaposes still and moving images with a short part of George Delerue's music instead of dialogue to describe her emotions during her specific and feminine period. Varda fictionalizes sequences “as a series of ten tableaux introduced by the French chapter titles” with a black background, indirectly providing some clues about the following images. (Kline, 2013, p.4) Among the vignettes, the pregnant woman's feelings are served by emphasizing the relationship between Varda and her surrounding environment. She associates the feminine experiences with Rue Mouffetard's inhabitants, their daily lives, streets, markets, and foods. In her interview with Uytterhoeven, she explains which circumstances resonate with her to shoot this connection:

“In the case of *L'Opéra Mouffe*, I pushed this sense of objectivity by adding a specific kind of subjectivity—pregnancy— which is a kind of super-sensitivity which chooses to see the world in a particular way to the degree that the woman's interest in the child she will bear causes her to see the people around her as former babies whom some mother was expecting.” (Kline, 2013, p.5)

Her pregnancy prompts her to look at the world surrounding Rue Mouffetard, where she will bring forth her baby. The history of the street traces to Roman times, which existed more than 2000 years ago. (*Devour*, 2019) After several decades, when Baron Haussmann designed the urban plan for Paris, some parts of Rue Mouffetard could escape from “full-scale remodeling of the city.” (*Devour*, 2019) Bearing traces of Medieval times, Mouffetard gets its name from the French word

“Mouffette” (Skunk) since the street was the “prime location for animal skinners, filled with the overwhelming stench of rot and decay” in the 18th century. (Devour, 2019) Even though several centuries passed, the pedestrians and cars avenue of Rue Mouffetard, described as an open-air market for a long time, survived “poor living conditions” in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Conway, 2015, p.32) Although in this commercial area, taverns, houses, and restaurants are defined as unsanitary and crowded places, many Parisians prefer the area to supply their needs owing to their cheapness. Among these situations, Varda embodied “a dark vision of pregnancy, erotic pleasure, and hardship” by sitting on her chair with her camera in the middle of the street every day. (Conway, 2015, p.33) Thereby, this subjective and objective association is inevitably used as a tool for the structure of the documentary. Even La Mouffe’s pedestrians’ daily life has unhappy characteristics, filming as a tool to represent Rue Mouffetard’s *genius* reveals the identity of the place, in a sense. (Demirhan & Kennedy-Karpat, 2022) Demirhan and Kennedy-Karpat highlight the spirit of Rue Mouffetard;

“The Rue Mouffetard’s *genius* bursts forth in visions of quotidian activity, in all its ambivalence and even its unpleasantness; interspersed among documentary vignettes, Varda also includes fictional sequences that reflect her physical and mental states.” (2022, p.102)

In *L’Opéra Mouffe*, with a loud voice, the first sequence begins with the naked woman who sits facing back to the audience. After, Varda demonstrates the mysterious pregnant woman’s belly, likely to be the last month of pregnancy. In the following sequence, Benezet explains that there exist “striking juxtapositions: a pumpkin being cut open at a market stall which evokes the woman’s pregnant belly.” (Benezet, 2014, p.12) In particular, Varda highlights the violence of childbirth through the visual resemblance of various food and their forms, which is one of the most powerful features of the combination of her storytelling and experimental cinematographic choices.



Figure 2, *The visual juxtaposition of the pregnant woman's belly and food in L'Opéra Mouffe*

In her interview with Uytterhoeven, she explains this relationality “A person who has eaten a lot has a big stomach; a person expecting a child has a big stomach. There’s lots of confusion between food and pregnancy. That’s why the film is located in a market; the heroine is constantly obsessed by food, vegetables, meat, and tripe.” (Kline, 2013, p.7) Varda intensifies her complex feelings about the effects and consequences of pregnancy through an abstract portrait of vegetables. From this point of view, these visual juxtapositions intersect with the feminine subjectivity and its surrounding environment. Varda’s experimental manner of representing moving images maintains throughout the movie.

After this quick introduction to the movie, in the first chapter heading “*Des Amoureux*” (The Lovers), the spectator witnesses the delighted young lovers having a time together with their remarkable nudeness. Varda continues to highlight the process of becoming pregnant through the couple’s relationship nature. Although she draws a portrait of a happy couple primarily, after the titles in the following sequences, “*Quelques uns*” (Some People) and “*De L’ivresse*” (On Drunkenness), depict environmental images of the inhabitants’ lifestyles, behaviors, and faces such as; women wearing 50’s style hats, people talking, salesmen, elders, drunk or poor people lying on the ground. Conway describes the images “as a portrait of the river of humanity moving along the street.” (Conway, 2015, p.33) Varda emphasizes the lack of humanity in Rue Mouffetard with various close-ups of the local people’s desperate lives by shooting their behaviors corporeally. This tacit visualization of the unpleasant and overwhelmed social world of the rue Mouffetard represents the “local genius” of the place.

In the rest of the film, Varda uses various metaphors to evoke her fear of pregnancy and its physical and mental results. Particularly, the second to last chapter, “*Des angoisses*” (Anxieties), begins with the men closing windows’ shutters follows “by images of a hammer violently smashing light bulbs, and then, a hatchling struggling to get out of its shell.” (Benezet, 2014, p.14) This narrative depicts that Varda prompts the audience with the same feeling that takes shape when the pumpkin cuts at the film's beginning. The following sequence demonstrates the woman walking slowly, holding two food-full bags in both hands. According to Benezet, “her slow physical progress is miles away from the picture of velocity and youth projected by the young woman running earlier.” (Benezet, 2014, p.15) Thus, the representation of a woman emphasizes the pregnant woman’s challenges and changeable subjective temporality. Waiting for the baby influences the rhythm and flow of the pregnant woman’s life.

Demirhan and Kennedy-Karpat explain the last chapter of the film “*Des Envies*” (On Cravings), which emphasizes the food consumption in the pregnancy “with close-up framing of a butcher’s offal, and a woman enthusiastically munching rose petals straight from the stem.” (Demirhan & Kennedy-Karpat, 2022, p.103) These sequences display “Varda’s experience of pregnancy with her day-to-day encounters” through her paradoxical emotions. (Demirhan & Kennedy-Karpat, 2022, p.104) She visualizes her uneasy and subjective experiences experimentally. All in all, through the spatiality of the street, she embodies her temporality as a pregnant woman. Beyond the idealized and traditional representation of pregnancy, Varda feels free to demonstrate her realities without fear. Thus, with great intimacy, she reveals the intersubjective relationship between the particular places and her lived body experiences.

### **1.1.2. Les Veuves de Noirmoutier (2004)**

Although the multi-layered representations of subjectivity were associated with her filmography, she re-explores herself with several mediums in art gallery spaces. From June to October 2006, *Paris* Varda extends “her self-reflexive documentary practice to the three-dimensional exhibition spaces.” (DeRoo, 2017, p.115) Her

interest in different portrayals of images expands her boundaries in various ways. At the Fondation Cartier, in the exhibition *L'île et Elle (2006)* (The Island and She), Varda exposes her relationship with the Noirmoutier Island, where she spent a lot of time with her late husband, Jacques Demy. This autobiographical and impressive exhibition consists of various representation styles of artworks: still and moving images and haptic materials. In each installation, Varda combines Noirmoutier's inhabitants and landscapes with her subjective experiences, in a sense. In her article, Chamarette depicts the intimate connection between Varda and her installations:

“Fragments of Varda's personal memories are ‘archived’ in the installation, and exist alongside the memories and records of real and fictional lives in and around Noirmoutier. The island, *L'Île*, and Varda, *elle* maintain a continually developing and expanding relationship with one another, a process of mutual engagement which the exhibition equally seems to invite from its spectators. Even in the sounds of the word *Île*, are the echoes of *il* – he – inevitably connoting the late Demy.” (Chamarette, 2011, p.35)

After her loss in 1990, Varda memorializes him through the landscape of Noirmoutier island with intense feelings. In the past, geographically on the Vendée coast of western France, Noirmoutier connected the mainland Beauvoir-sur-Mer with the Passage du Gois, a public memorial. (Au Passage du Gois, n.d.) Reaching the island by passing the salty road was possible at low tide twice a day, which means a particular time. After several years, in 1971, due to the danger of a sudden high tide-low surge and the risky side of Passage du Gois to the island visitors, the bridge Pont de Noirmoutier was constructed from the Fromentine coastline. Through the fact of nature, Varda shapes a powerful and emotional connection between the places of Noirmoutier and her personal memories. In her experimental exhibition, through her interest in spatiality, she creates new boundaries of exhibiting materials regarding the island by interacting with audiences physically and emotionally. The first installation may give some light on this point. The entrance of the exhibition in the basement begins with *Le Passage du Gois* (The Gois Causeway), a three-dimensional collage composition that uses bright lights to invite visitors charmingly. It is a projected 6-minute time-lapse video on the shorn plastic curtain, accompanied by photographs and a natural electric barrier. After waiting 6 minutes, an electric barrier lifts, and

spectators can pass among the plastic curtains. Varda carries the physical world to the exhibition hall as an observational and experimental place. DeRoo claims that the first floor cultivates an atmosphere of tourism on Noirmoutier. (DeRoo, 2017)

Thereby, the character of Noirmoutier Island reveals the favor of her attention to documenting the genius of the environment. Chamarette explains that without any recreation, the connection between her and her touching landscapes displays “a spatial specificity with relation to the geography of Noirmoutier” and “spatial fixity in terms of the means by which the viewer enters the installation space.”

(Chamarette, 2012, p.132) this cinematic installation re-evokes the entrance of the Noirmoutier island to each spectator. Thus, the visual and spatial configurations merge with the viewer’s presence in the actual and virtual spaces.

Through the physical features of the exhibition, whereas in the entrance of space, *Le Passage du Gois*’s lights are charming for the audience’s entry, in the main installation *Les Veuves de Noirmoutier* (2004), the lights are dimmed. It invites the visitor to slow down and maybe sit for a while, as in a theatre. In the installation, in the light of Noirmoutier’s widows, Varda revitalized her feminine experiences by combining her emotional landscape, *plâges*. Whereas the beach is often associated with joyful holidays or romantic encounters, the widow’s slow procession and resolute silence make the scene both mysterious and emotional. Particularly, through her ethnographic gaze, she directly reveals her attention to the other women who live in the same situation as Varda.

The interactive installation consists of several monitors with chairs and headphones at the end of the Cartier exhibition. Varda combined her two lines of work: the middle screen represents images filmed in 35 mm by Eric Gauthier, women walking around a long rustic kitchen table, changing places, and moving silently on the beach. (Delamarre, 2012) Around it, there are 14 monitors which display each widow’s interview, including Varda’s. Although they are listened to by own headphones on one chair, through the central frame, the sounds of a calm sea overlaid with “the monotonous violin music of Ami Flammer endow the footage with a meditative, melancholy quality.” (Jordan, 2009, p.585) In the moving images, they repeatedly describe their experience of widowhood in terms of “lack, absence, loss, and great emptiness.” (DeRoo, 2017, p.125) Among other screens, Varda represents

herself sitting on a chair with an empty chair near her to emphasize the loss of Jacques Demy without saying something. Jordan epitomizes “Varda as not just the artist here, in a gesture of ethnographic reciprocity, she includes herself as one of the widows.” (Jordan, 2009, p.585) She exposes her individual mourning feelings by collaborating with Noirmoutier’s women who lost their partners. From Varda’s point of view, “extreme melancholy and sadness are portrayed in *The Widows of Noirmoutier*.” (Delamerre, 2012) Embodying the fourteen widows’ intense feelings generates “a powerful feminist meditation.” (DeRoo, 2017, p.118) The installation displays and allures “the ritual exercise of grief while also questioning the reductive construction of an entire social category.” (Jordan, 2009, p.585) Varda sincerely invites the audience to witness the inner world of widows. She mentions her thoughts through a particular installation in her interview with Thomas Delamarre:

“It was a very interesting experience in terms of how the public sees the work and approaches it. There were lots of people, but they waited and there were some who had spotted a particular screen, so there was a line for each screen. They waited for someone to leave and they took the headphones. And all the wires were attached in the middle. That was the point of what we wanted to do. There was solitude but togetherness in this room and in this piece.” (Varda, 2012)

While Varda experiments with the boundaries of spatiality, she emerges with spectators' physicality and emotions. The physical arrangement of the installation both generalizes and individualizes the widow’s loss and feelings. Each of their subjectivity engages with each audience’ in a particular way. Chamarette explains the multi-dimensional relationality as “the spectral presence of intangible other passes between filmic and spectatorial spaces, via gestures of sitting, the modalities of silence, and the presence of a chair.” (Chamarette, 2011, p.43)

Overall, DeRoo epitomizes the exhibition as “the self-reflexive forms of installation to remind us of the limits of what we can see and know about the represented subjects, including herself.” (DeRoo, 2017, p.122) Varda’s desire to expose the lost object inspires several films and artworks. Chamarette indicates *Les Veuves de Noirmoutier* is “one of the many works collected and recorded in *Les Plâges d’Agnès*”. (Chamarette, 2011, p.43) Chamarette maintains that in the next movie of

the thesis *Les Plâges d'Agnès*, “the doubling continues: the subjects within Varda’s installations, and those watching the installations, are further embedded within and between multiple spaces, in the screen time of *Les Plâges*, in the filmic time of the installation, and the recorded past of the island of Noirmoutier.” (Chamarette, 2011, p.44)

### 1.1.3. Les Plâges d’Agnès (2008)

Whereas she constructs the physical and virtual spaces concerning her subjectivity in the exhibition hall, another representation of this spatial arrangement exists. Including the candid installation mentioned, *Les Plâges d'Agnès* is an autobiographic and intimate documentary consisting of Varda’s memories and feminine experiences. By ignoring the conventional structure of the documentary, she focused on her past essential events via her subjectivity. Throughout the film, she visualizes her lived experiences which were to “make a tentative, humorous, and self-reflexive portrayal of Varda.” (Benezet, 2014, p.59) Varda exposes her personality and its effects on her life as “part autobiography, part documentary, part cinematic essay.” (Kline, 2013, p.193) After shooting several films, she turns the camera to expose her own existential body with her awareness of aging, telling in her interview with David Warwick. (2013) Her approach is remarked from the beginning of the film with Varda’s monolog:

“I’m playing the role of a little old lady, pleasantly plump and talkative, telling her life story. And yet it’s others I’m interested in, others I like to film. Others who intrigue me, motivate me, make me ask questions, disconcert me, fascinate me. This time, to talk about myself, I thought: If we opened people up we’d find landscapes. If we opened me up, we’d find beaches.” (Varda, 2008)

In the first sequence, we can understand that although Varda describes her craving to examine people with an ethnographic approach, she underscores her request to reveal and explore her life. While turning the camera to herself, she connects her identity with her places, particularly beaches. Benezet claims that “Varda presents her own identity as determined by the ever-shifting relationships that she has had with the beaches of

her life.” (Benezet, 2014, p.94) As mentioned in her previous artworks, she identified personal experiences associated with her emotional landscape, beaches which are “timeless spaces.” (Ince, 2013, p.609) Thus, as the title of the film, she provides some clues about the narrative of the film, which demonstrates the layered of her life since Varda associates with beaches.

In the film’s first sequence, she walks among her workmates and navigates them to put several mirrors on the beach. Fragmented and decorative, she combined them with vintage frames she found in her backyard. Her choice of material gives us some clues; during the film, the spectator witnesses her instinctive and specific memories reflected in different perspectives, like looking at a mirror. In the sequence, Varda demonstrates people around her joyfully looking from the mirrors with a handheld camera. DeRoo describes the feeling of the scene “through these frames, we see isolated portions of the landscape from multiple perspectives instead of a single comprehensive view. The visual fragmentation of the landscape serves as a metaphor for the film’s focus on decontextualized details from the past.” (DeRoo, 2017, p.145) By doing so, she offers various angles to look at one place or person from one perspective. Her interest in the boundaries of the frame increases a range of distinct presentation styles.

In the following sequences, she continues with her childhood memories by demonstrating several black-white photographs that reminded her of the beaches she spent a lot of time on. After hanging with her emotional landscape, she visits her childhood house in Ixelles, Belgium. Her journey to the place of birth, in which she had a lovely time, evokes her memories. Encountering her memorial places reenactments of her past experiences with her mother in the backyard and her immaturity room. After her childhood dreams, Varda meets La Pointe’s inhabitants, characters of the first film *La Pointe Courte*. Varda’s meeting with her elderly actresses who were children in the 1950s emphasizes the connection between the past and the present time. Although the inhabitants performed in a narrative structure of *La Pointe Courte*, in *Les Plâges d’Agnès* in a documentarian manner, Varda narrates their experiences between 1954 and 2007. With verbal information familiarizing the audience, Varda juxtaposes images from *La Pointe Courte* and the inhabitants’ present life to expose their different temporality resonating with the spectator’s own time.

Therefore, even in two-dimensional visual materials, this time warp brings the spectator's memories and Varda's memories together in the same place.

In the rest of the film, Varda maintains to visualize her memories with her old footage in filmography or exhibitions to revitalize those days. One of her memories is that when she was young, she decided to leave her house and learn how to make a fishing net which she felt close to. She mentions that it was a turning point in her life, exposing her boundaries and starting new beginnings. After shaping her life, the impressive step that followed, at seventeen, Varda went back to Paris to study photography and took classes at Sorbonne and the Ecole du Louvre. She frequently spends her time remaking several old photographs without permission entering to the darkroom. After several years passed, she exhibited her few photography collections at Avignon Festival 2017 in Saint Charles Church. While describing the pictures of people who are not alive anymore, reminding her of the loss of Jacques Demy, "Naturally I think of Jacques. All the dead lead me back to Jacques." (*Les Plâges d'Agnès*, 2008) The film usually reflects her relationship with Jacques Demy, several moments of her life, in particular, remembering the feeling of loss and love. After that, Varda demonstrates Noirmoutier island, where they went camping and wrote stories with him when they were young. As Chamarette indicates that "*Les Veuves de Noirmoutier* and *Les Plages d'Agnès* beyond the body of the artist, and indeed beyond the representations of Varda's own mourning." (Chamarette, 2011, p.46) Her self-attention allowed her to disburden the tragic memories and contextualize her experiences to the audience by showing empathy towards them.

In the following sequences, when Varda went to Hollywood in 1968, the town was surrounded by the hippy movement that immediately seduced and fascinated her. She filmed *Lions Love* (1969) and, ten years later, filmed *Mur Murs* (1981) and *Documenteur* (1981). *Documenteur* demonstrates her personal and emotional path with Jacques Demy. DeRoo describes Varda and her circle as "previously suppressed the circumstances of Demy's death; directly addressing the audience, she acknowledges that he died of complications from AIDS in 1990." (DeRoo, 2017, p.146) To indicate their complicated marriage Varda represents her film *Documenteur* which describes her breaking up process. She chooses her film editor Sabine Mamou as the main character, the mother of Martin, played by Varda's own son, Mathiue

Demy. (DeRoo, 2017) In a sequence, they walk on the beaches of Los Angeles with their filming names, Emilie and Martin. After a while, Emilie answers the telephone from a friend and tells her about separation from her husband, like Varda. She describes an intersubjective connection with Sabine with her voiceover, “In retrospect, I see she was another me.” (*Les Plâges d’Agnès*, 2008) DeRoo explains Varda’s manner in the narrative structure; “She publicly acknowledges her marital separation during this period, while she protects her privacy by relying on fiction films and contributes to the continued distortion of the relationship between artist and oeuvre.” (DeRoo, 2017, p.147) By replacing herself with the film’s main character, Varda invites the spectator to reevaluate fact and fiction.



Figure 3, Varda's experimental manner in choosing the frame of the scene

Overall, in *Les Plâges d’Agnès*, Varda’s family is subjected to the structure of film through different representation forms such as; photographs, collages, moving images, exhibitions, and frameworks. By beginning with her childhood, the film reveals distinct perspectives and memories from her other artworks and movies, which are highly autobiographic. Varda’s approach to the self-reflexive and nonfictional film indicates her desire to remember her memories and exposes them to audiences with

intense feelings. In one of the sequences of the film, Varda says that “Memories are like flies swarming through the air bits of memory, jumbled up.” (*Les Plâges d’Agnès*, 2008) She gathered her memories in a hundred and twelve minutes to re-experience them through her family, identity, and landscapes. Her retrospective film finished with her words, “Family is a somewhat compact concept. We mentally group everyone and imagine them as a peaceful island.” (*Les Plâges d’Agnès*, 2008) Her voiceover indicates her tremendous connection with Noirmouiter island, her family, landscapes, and Jacques Demy.

### **1.2. Being Flâneuse in Cléo 5 to 7 (1962)**

After her first film *La Pointe Courte*, at the beginning of the 60s in Paris, *Cléo 5 to 7* is Varda’s second feature-length fiction film which portrays feminine subjectivity through Cléo’s feelings relying on her encounters. Cléo is a lovely pop singer who waits for a phone call for her result of analysis of whether or not she has cancer. The film profoundly penetrates the audience by emphasizing the feeling of death and feminine subjectivity. The spectator witnesses her changeable perspective when she encounters the truth of death. Besides, the narrative structure consists of several coincidences and fortune, which primarily provokes the turning point for Cléo.

The film begins with a conversation between Cléo and the fortune-teller, who provides clues about what will happen in her future. After their small talks, Cléo’s journey commenced in rue du Rivoli in the 1<sup>st</sup> arrondissement and moved south, across the Seine, to her apartment in Montparnasse. (Conway, 2015) She walks through the places of the city; streets, cafés, houses, and parks, and encounters the city’s daily life. Throughout the film, Varda constitutes Cléo’s emotional landscape on her trip, starting with the fortune teller studio and ending with a park. By doing so, Varda generates the connection between the main character of the film and the dynamic life of the urban environment. Her journey continues with her assistant by walking around her neighborhood for a while, and then they take a taxi. After a time, when the woman taxi driver turns on the radio broadcasting, they hear about the final situation of Algeria, which has fought with France for its independence since 1954. (Elkin, 2017) Although the economy of France progressed in those days, Varda emphasized the upcoming end

of the war, in which several people died. (Elkin, 2017) Cléo witnessed the political issue with her suffocative and informative taxi journey while she followed her neighborhood's street life from the car's window. She falls into observing the images and hearing the sounds, that is, realizing her environment. After tasting the freedom and captivity of the city, she returns to her studio, and her attention suddenly shifts. Through her behaviors and gestures, it can be understood that she feels stuck via the coming of her lover Jose to her bedroom. The spectator gradually witnesses Cléo's wish for liberation in these studio scenes. Soon after, Cléo sings a song created by her composer Bob instead of her writings, which is her first turning point. After that, Cléo removes the wig covering her head, takes on a black hat, and then angrily leaves her apartment. At that time, she roams without going to any specific location. (Elkin, 2017) By going further from home, Cléo wants to leave all popstar stereotypes which adhere to her.

After moving around the streets, she goes to the café where she decides to go to the sculptor studio where her friend Dorothee works. Her visitation there indicates that Cléo starts to look around with awareness and become a neighbor. In the film, at that moment, Varda shifts the camera angle to Cléo's perspective, which looks around instead of observing her like a stranger, similar to the taxi scene. Even though she encounters different experiences from her past life, she moves out alone like a "*flâneuse*" to the feeling of freedom beyond herself.

In the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term *flâneur* emerged from Paris to describe men who are "wandering in the city without any aim." (Elkin, 2017, p.13) After a decade, the female version of *flâneur* occurs as *flâneuse*, which cannot find in every French dictionary. (Elkin, 2017) In those days, the term *flâneur* was associated solely with men because, according to society, if a woman roams alone without any purpose in the city, she is accepted as a whore. However, Elkin expressed the differences between being whore and a *flâneuse* through their liberty in the city. (2017) Whereas *flâneuses* walk around freely under any circumstances, whores have more limitations in the places of the city. (Elkin, 2017) They cannot walk whenever and wherever they want. Through the title of the film, which depicts their restricted time, Varda sarcastically highlights that not every woman wandering around in the street can be regarded as a whore.



*Figure 4, The unknown man stares his eyes on Cleo's body*

The film maintains with Cléo's encounters with a street performer who swallows the vital frogs in his mouth, among the people's curious eyes on him. Meeting the performer's show affects Cléo not only indirectly but also profoundly. Varda defines the city as the essential environment in shaping a woman's personality is a remarkable scene. (Mouton, 2001) After the moment with a street performer, Cléo, being fascinated by her beauty, changes her intention once again. Conway indicates that "instead, the performance suggests obliquely the beginning of Cléo's shift in attention from herself to others and, perhaps, her growing association of the human body with abnormality, illness, or surgery." (Conway, 2015, p.38) No sooner had her interaction with the urban environment shifted directly than her voyeuristic gaze emerged instead of being an object desired. While her body was an observed object, she became an observer of the urban spaces and people. To describe the relationship between the subject and its immersive environment, Varda says, "people are defined by their surroundings." (Kline, 2013, p.16) In her interview with Pierre Uytterhoven, she outlines that the character of the city defines the boundaries of human life. (2013) It is the nature of going with the flow, and in Cléo's circumstances letting the transformation is a primary thing before ignoring the possibility of her death.

Penetrating herself into a city enables the “profound transformation of her being.” (Mouton, 2001) Whereas Cléo cannot realize what is happening around her, after her experiences, she begins to look at the state of things around her; a man is swallowing frogs and a familiar naked body in the art studio. Varda describes the narrative as “the growing awareness of an internal evolution,” at the same time, externally progress. (Kline, 2013, p.18) Mouton describes that by shifting her attention from anxiety to curiosity, urban life’s continuous diversity resonates with her transformation process. (2001) Benezet explains the relationality between them;

“The changing interaction between Cléo and her environment and the discussions (open or veiled) about time and death can be regarded as the two founding principles of the film. Thus, looking at the dialectic between the varied landscapes and Cléo’s evolution provides the audience with a better understanding of the emotional landscapes that Varda’s films construct.” (Benezet, 2014, p.91)

Although the filmic representation of Paris is traditionally described as “the city of light” through its landmarks, fortunes, monuments, churches, and statues, Varda’s Paris representation is drastically different. Through Cléo’s circumstances, Elkin claims that Varda exposes the non-visible layers beneath the urban environment: ruins, patterns, coincidences, and unexpected beginnings. (2017) In this context, she demonstrates the places of the city as a chaotic environment to expose Cléo’s anguish and apprehension. Whereas in *L’Opéra Mouffe*, Varda illustrates the contradictions of the pregnant woman through her neighborhood’s daily life, at this time, in *Cléo*, she reveals her fictional character’s feelings of anxiety and fear upon going around private and public spaces. Owing to the fact that Cléo’s individuality is the central issue of the film, through her experiences, the audience follows her subjective time rather than her objective time. Although the title of the film provides a clue that accompanies Cléo for two hours, we experience her personal time, which is sometimes longer than the standard time, sometimes shorter. Varda visualizes her point of view of the city through her fictional characters with ellipses, virtual time, and exaggerated gestures. At the same time, it can observe that Cléo’s mental chaos defines in a particular century the troubles and problems that occur due to modern life, which affect human mental and psychological psychology. For Varda, to convey a certain feeling of confusion, chaos,

and the climate of fear that infects our lives, filming in Paris. (Kline, 2013) While thinking about her definition of Paris, she felt scared of feeling since the dangers of the big city, being alone, and being misconceived. (Elkin, 2017) She had already met with Cléo's encounters in the urban environment in the 60's ambiguous fear of cities created and tangible fear of death. As seen throughout the film, Varda "accompanies her female protagonist and relieves her" regarding her statues. (Elkin, 2017, p.286) By drawing all attention to Cléo's existence passes over, Varda underlays her autobiographic side and the character of the city under several circumstances. According to Mouton, it is a fascinating experience to look at how Varda filmed Paris and combined Cléo's way of looking at the same places. (2001) The audience accompanies their feminine gazes among their surrounding environment where they look, what they are concerned about, and which circumstances they encounter while walking on the street.

Towards the end of the film, Cléo encounters Antoine, who is a soldier, on the last day of three-week military permission and needs to go back to Algiers, in Montsouris Park. It is such a milestone moment that she enters the park by singing just for herself instead of the existence of somebody. (Elkin, 2017, p.284) Owing to Antoine's last day in Paris and Cléo's feelings after her experiences with the places of the city, they console each other. She exposes her emotions to Antoine without any boundaries or limitations. After a while, she arrives at the hospital and learns that she should recover from the illness after two months of chemotherapy.

All in all, upon a protagonist's transformation, the film is conceived as a "documentary on a woman" with Varda's words. (Kline, 2013, p.16) She exposes Cléo's intricate feelings with the help of her changing bond with the urban surrounding. Cléo's experiences triggered her to realize her vicinity from a different perspective through her "flâneuristic activity." (Mouton, 2001, p.14) By regarding her feminine individuality, Varda portrays Cléo's awareness of her position in the community with the help of Parisian encounters.

### 1.3. The Power of Figures, *Les Dites Cariatides* (1984)

In *Les dites Cariatides* (1984), for 12 minutes, Varda underscores the male and female figures constructed in the streets of Paris through her attention to body representation. She examines the form of these monuments through their relationship with their surroundings and the city inhabitants. Her emphasis on the historical city places via these nonvital bodies, mainly focusing on the female, generates an intimate relationship with the environment's history and identity.

Throughout the film, with Baudelaire's poetry and Offenbach's music, Varda's voiceover is adapted as a narrator, and the sculpted bodies are demonstrated with slow camera movements. In the credit sequences, "after hearing the piano version of Jean-Philippe Rameau's '*Gavotte et 6 Doubles*' (1727)," Varda demonstrates the woman caryatid carrying a street lamp upon her head with a vertical tilt up throughout her body. (Demirhan & Kennedy-Karpat, 2022, p.105) Then, the camera follows behind a naked man who goes out from the entrance of the building and walks among the women caryatids. With this visual juxtaposition, she primarily portrayed the contradiction between the male and female bodies; he is displayed as alive, and she is demonstrated in a carrier position in the urban spaces. Ross indicates that the opening scene highlights the historical discrepancy: men are free to walk completely naked, whereas women's existence is not ordinary in public spaces. (2018) In the following sequences, upon the representation of female and male figures, Varda epitomizes their differences by emphasizing the caryatid's posture. Whereas the female bodies are displayed nearly naked, carrying a building, the male caryatids are presented as a symbol of power and strength with their flashy muscles.



*Figure 5, Whereas the female bodies are displayed nearly naked, carrying a building, the male caryatids are presented as a symbol of power and strength with their flashy muscles.*

In the past, constructing the caryatids was a common way to support the building in Greek architecture. Named by Vitruvius, the first Rome architect, the caryatids were mainly used as replicas of the female body in Ancient Rome and Greece. Besides, they figured them in a different purpose in the structured years in Paris. Demirhan and Kennedy-Karpat explain that after the Peloponnesian War, the Greeks punished the enslaving of both men and women for taking revenge on Karyatian, who took a stand on the Pers' side. (2022) Moreover, architects who lived in those days, built columns shaped by human forms rather than classic columns to demonstrate their punishment. (Demirhan & Kennedy-Karpat, 2022, p.105)

It can understand that the architecture of the city is affected by its social, cultural, and gender statements. Moreover, the discrepancies between these caryatids constructing by male architects reflect the minds of men. Varda highlights the inequality of the builder's manner between female and male figures. Even though by holding a load, the figures of men are represented powerfully as atlases without effort on their faces, women are displayed without visibly bearing strain on their bodies or expressions. (Ross, 2018) Especially after her California journey in the early 1970s, Varda experienced "the Civil Rights Movement and second-wave feminism." (McIlvanney & Cheallaigh, 2019, p.81) Despite a decade past, women's rights have not changed sufficiently in France's politics, culture, and media. Varda's inclination toward portraying female bodies in city space, which began in her early career, was exposed more after this social, political, and cultural situation. (McIlvanney & Cheallaigh, 2019) Varda underlays that these statues are part of the earlier pattern,

ignoring women's contributions to society and their humanity. (Ross, 2018) Besides, the female caryatids whose nudity surprises nobody represent women's value and identity in the urban environment. Demirhan and Kennedy-Karpat explain that Varda "refers to the caryatids as "so-called," which challenges the official history and emphasizes that their main purpose has been to expose women's bodies in public spaces." (2022, p.105)

Thus, Varda draws attention to the continuing gender disparity in the urban environment. Filming the historical and non-living figures emphasizes the temporality of city places. Demirhan and Kennedy-Karpat epitomize Varda's point as "the differences in how gender roles are reflected in city spaces and how their resonance can shift across time." (2022, p.105) Through these conserved authentic elements on the building facades, she defines the spirit of the place, which conveys the past to the future.

The film continues with various close-ups of the distinct places from the caryatid's bodies, other buildings, their facades and balconies, and Parisian streets. Whereas most caryatids are represented by supporting the construction or carrying a basket with one or both hands, the enormous female caryatids sculpture stands adhering to the facades of the building with its independent hands-on two sides. In Turbigo street, it covers the three flats of the building vertically, and her wings support the heaviness of the balcony. Toward the end, the caryatid is cleaned by seven people on the surrounding terraces. However, while Varda asks the inhabitants what they think about this vast statue, it can be comprehended that through their words, nobody realizes it is standing there. (Elkin, 2017)

Ross recently discussed Varda's cinematographic choices that make the sculpted bodies lively through the still shots and soft panning by exploring the Parisian monuments. (2018) Capturing the sculpted bodies changes their meaning as a cultural heritage instead of solely decorative and ornament. By doing so, she allures the audience to reconsider the historical attitudes and values shown to women, which are based on social norms. While indicating the apparent discrepancy, she guides the inhabitants, whose daily roads are filmed, to look around and analyze these architectural elements. Thereby, they realize in which circumstances the urban

environment is designed and affected by what and how it represents the society, history, and culture.

#### **1.4. Searching for Identity, Uncle Yanco (1967)**

At the beginning of 1967, while Varda was at the San Francisco Film Festival, she heard about Yanco Varda, her father's cousin, from Tom Luddy. After organizing her schedule to go to her Greek uncle's home in California, she witnesses his daily life for her first Californian documentary *Uncle Yanco (1967)*. During the three-day shooting process, Varda emphasizes her Greek uncle's lifestyle, interests, attitudes, and houseboat settlement by focusing on their shared history. Based on personal and familial experiences, the film demonstrates her encounters with Yanco in California, which indicates how Varda strengthens her family connection and searches for her identity.

Yanco Varda, a painter, sea-lover, and hospitable person, reminded Varda of their warm relationship. After their meeting, Varda praised her uncle with her words, "this father of my dreams that I discovered very late on." (Kline, 2013, p.86) Throughout the film, the audience witnesses their intimate past family stories with an intimate feeling. Demirhan and Kennedy-Karpat indicate that:

"Exploring their shared family history, she filmed Yanco's life on his houseboat as a working artist, noting how his Greek Orthodox roots emerge in his paintings of holy cities. The film invites the audience to take a joyful and conceptual journey from a pleasant if distinctly patriarchal perspective." (2022, p.106)

The first sequences demonstrate a remarkable and catchy reunion moment repeatedly, "in various languages, through colorful, heart-shaped filters" after several separate past years. (Demirhan & Kennedy-Karpat, 2022, p.106) The film continues upon Yanco's guidance, and Varda testifies to the hippies' communal lives, cultures, and lifestyles, highlighting love, art, and music. Testifying their perspective on life resonates with the hippie movement, which began in California in those days. Benezet explained this community as "the hippie culture rejected materialism, competition, militarism in favor of communal love, illegal drug-induced ecstasy, and non-Western

philosophies and spiritualities.” (Benezet, 2014, p.116) Demirhan and Kennedy-Karpat describe the connection between Varda and hippies that

“Her ethnographic gaze addresses the counter-cultural community’s history and living conditions: their relationships, their communal habits, their activism, and their traditions—like the weekly Sunday meal in Yanco’s floating home.” (2022, p.106)

Varda portrays the community’s environment shaped by their culture and ideology through various close-ups of their houseboat settlement which was built as an expression of their activist counterpart. In those days, the aura of the city affected the inhabitants and urban life in cultural, historical, and economical ways. In the 1940s and 1950s, tons of wood, metal, scrap, lumber, and unfinished boat materials remained on the Sausalito shoreline from World War II. Harper explains that Don Arques, the son of a prominent waterfront property manager, invited artists, writers, musicians, hippies, and bohemians to create an alternative lifestyle and make houses with these remaining materials. (2015) In the 60s, reflecting the history of the bohemian American West, the houseboat settlement attracted a lot of interest, and the new inhabitants built an “unregulated houseboat community which today consists of more than 400 houseboats. This vernacular, recycled settlement represented the communities’ respect for their natural environment and the variability and transience inherent in place-making above the water.” (Demirhan & Kennedy-Karpat, 2022, p.106) Despite their commune life, “the utter cultural chaos of the 1960s and 1970s” caused conflict between a particular community and the surrounding neighborhood who were landholders, due to “living rent-free.” (Isabella, 2015)

Varda reveals the urban *genius* with visible pleasure by being impressed by the collaborative or cooperative living arrangements. Her inclination to her family connections, roots, and memories enabled new encounters in a different location and its inhabitants. Expressing Yanco’s aura makes it possible to generate a genuine

connection with the spirit of the place. Thereby, throughout her filming experiences, Varda embraced the dynamic role of spatial relationships with human activity.



*Figure 6, Uncle Yanco explains their family tree to Varda.*

Beyond the Parisian counterpoints, the film is based on Varda's alien encounters and urban genius with not only its objectivity but also subjectivity. Although Varda was not acquainted with the environment, her experimentation with family members catalyzed her to identify herself with the place. Varda never impedes understanding the counter-cultural community's lifestyle and culture; on the contrary, she accompanies her origins history, perspective, and beliefs with a sense of belonging.

## **2. IMAGES OF MEMORY**

In the second chapter of the thesis, I will expose my journey by recalling my memories and past experiences regarding how my way of seeing changed with Varda's artworks and filmography. Through my interest in her, I will follow several questions which encouraged me to research myself: how I encountered the camera, which circumstances triggered me to shoot, who influenced me, how and where my creativity emerged, what I discovered, and how my relationship with the city and people was, and what topics got my attention. By seeking answers to all these questions, the second part of the thesis will mention how my connection with Varda's filmography and my experiences with visualization has begun.

### **2.1. In a Small Circle, Ankara**

My journey began by leaving my family to study in the department of architecture at TOBB Economics and Technology University in Ankara. It was such an exciting experience that I moved to another city away from my family living in Aydın. Although I went to Ankara once with my family to meet my relatives, it was not similar to this travel. At those time, I could not generate a connection with the city since I was too young to leave my family. Besides, developing an emotional bond with those places was not my priority earlier instead of hanging out with my friends or cousins.

From Aydın to Ankara, changing the urban environment was an unusual circumstance with which I had been familiar. My connection with the places of the city shifted when my living places changed. It was not like living in Aydın with my family; I had to stand on my own feet in Ankara. For instance, whereas in Aydın, my father was as close as a phone to take me in his car, in Ankara, I had to go somewhere by using the city map by walking or by bus. Moreover, there was a difference between the two urban environments: glances at my body. I remember that when I went to Kızılay, the most crowded and central place in Ankara, even though I wore not nearly naked t-shirts or shorts, the men in the city gazed at me. Rarely did I encounter the male gaze in Aydın throughout my adolescence. I realized this when I was 18 because it was the first time I inhabited another city far away from my family, who protected

me. Thereby, I kept the attention of patriarchy with my lonely body, similar to each woman wandering alone in the city. Considering the circumstances was uncomfortable and sickened me extremely. After a while, I realized that I had to change my outfit depending on the city's different districts. It was a humiliating awareness for me, and there was nothing I could do to alter that.

In Ankara, my university education system differs from other universities. There are three semesters per year, and between each semester, instead of long breaks, just two weeks holiday exist. Although the highly intense education system was not fair in other universities and took the whole time of the students, now I realize that I learned how to study in a disciplined. On the other hand, studying architecture was a great major, which I would say today I was glad to know. However, the beginning of architecture was a bit challenging as its education system was not similar to that of high schools. Instead of regular lessons in high school; mathematics, chemistry, physics, and biology, we learned art fundamentals from a different perspective. Day after day, we got used to thinking from another point of view, and I realized that we were at the beginning of exploring one field of art. Some features of architecture got my attention, for instance, creating an alternative living arrangement for humans, which gives clues to look around and understand their lifestyle. Constructing virtual spaces was so captivating that we combined design principles with real urban life. Before the internships in particular architectural offices, the creation process of the complex for the commune life was so astonishing in my imaginary world. Another thing stimulating me was that we regularly organized several tours to visit special exhibitions and biennials in Istanbul with our department. Observing the art places increased my curiosity and interest in being an artist since they created physical and mental, in other words, multifunctional experiences. The artist could generate a connection between its participants with different representation styles in the exhibition spaces. I dreamed about doing creative things to affect people with my works, as being an artist was not wholly different from being an architect. With several images, I dived into architectural education.

Before graduation, I had to observe the architectural industry; luckily, our university served the students working experiences in the education system. After the second year, each student had to do three internships for four months until graduation

to gain various occupational experiences. Thereby, my internship places were three architectural offices; one of them was a design office preparing architectural competition, the other one drew construction projects such as hotels and airports, and the last one was more creative than the others, which attended several exhibitions and biennials. Being inspired by these experiences in different architectural styles provided some clues about how I wanted to maintain my career. However, after that, I realized that architectural education was not similar to working experiences. In the university, when we created a project in our design studios, thinking abstractly and planning on virtual spaces were more essential than technical details. For instance, being a part of the architectural jury, our professors confirmed our project, which they admired its design principles even though our buildings lacked safety. On the contrary, in the architectural industry, there was less value in the design approach, which I experienced during my internships in Ankara. It was such a disappointing moment that I changed my decision to proceed to work in this field.

Towards the end of my graduation, I realized the field of architecture was not satisfying enough in terms of my interests exactly. When I studied at university, even though my grades were higher than the department average, my intention was on architectural visualization and exhibitions instead of drawing architectural projects. For instance, analyzing dystopic fiction films, photographs, and documentaries consisting of urban life and spaces satisfies me rather than learning the construction of architecture. However, in the past, I never distinguished the field in which I wanted to continue. So as to find it, I took a master's degree lesson, "Architecture and Different Modes of Representation" taught by Ayşen Savaş from the department of architecture at the Middle East Technical University. By beginning with the history of art, the lesson focused on the distinct representation styles of architecture. Even though it was a challenging period owing to the class subjects, I noticed that it captivated me throughout the semester. Learning how to represent architecture in various ways was a productive period to comprehend the connection between myself and the field. Throughout the lectures, we discussed multiple paintings from different eras and then reinterpreted them using their compositional elements through videos, photography, illustration, installation, model, and drawings. Once, we discussed the painting "*Las Meninas*" by Diego Velazquez in 1656 through the relationality of particular terms;

subject and object, audience and model. When I saw the picture, some questions confused my mind: who and where were the observer and the painter, and who watched us from the painting? All our discussions prepared the students for the exhibition focusing on how to represent the architectural faculty of METU at the end of the course.

After a while, in one of the lectures, Savaş organized a competition among students called "Do's and Don'ts" in the architecture faculty. The content of the competition was to use signs instead of words. The submitting competition material could consist of whatever we wanted to represent, so I attended with my photographs taken with my iPad in the architecture faculty. These photographs illustrated several faculty details, and I added a few digital notes. When the jury evaluated the visual materials for the competition, the dean of the faculty of architecture, Güven Arif Sargin, said by indicating my photographs: "the person who took these photographs has a distinctive photographic gaze." Although before the lesson, never had I thought that my artwork would win, it ranked among the top three. At that moment, this achievement truly helped me develop the self-confidence to take photographs. Even though I did not notice my interest and talent until this day, it was such an impressive moment for me. If nobody had recognized my ability in photography, I would not have been able to discover the field in which I wanted to continue. To decide on the career field and devote myself, did I expect any validation or honoring?

After a while, I bought a second-hand camera, a Nikon D5200 with a kit lens F3.5-5.6, 18-55 mm., from a friend of mine. Though I had no technical idea about taking photographs in a DSLR camera with manual settings, following my skills made it possible to begin recognizing myself. To learn the camera adjustments, I requested my classmate, a professional photographer, to teach me the technical details, such as how to work with a diaphragm, shutter speed, iso, and lenses. After practicing with him for a while, by walking around my neighborhood, I tried to understand in which circumstances I needed to regulate the setting and how I should decide to frame the picture. Wandering alone in the places of the city and capturing images became a ritual in my daily life. It was such a meditative exercise that I found an intimate connection. However, when I was an "observed object" trapped by the male gaze, with the presence of the camera, the focus point shifted to the lenses from my body. At that time, being

watched surrounded them, and I became a disturber with my photographic equipment. Their tension could perceive from a distance through their annoyed gestures. In fact, they encountered women's emotions while walking in the city. Depending on the geography of the world, women cannot feel safe due to the annoying male gazes and their verbal and sexual abuse. Unfortunately, as social, cultural, and political problems in my country, the diseased perspective on the female body has existed for several years. We cannot constitute healthy relationships with each other in our society due to our social and cultural traumas. I observed the impact of this circumstance on me in my photographic practices. Instead of forming relationships with others, I preferred to explore the texture, the pattern, the color, and the tiny details of the places without humans in the uncrowded locations. Since I did not live with my parents in the same city anymore and was alone, I maintained my practices in the specific places of the town where I felt more comfortable in the daytime.

In the past, while diving into the connection between photography and architecture, I encountered the workshop "The Atelier of Minimalist Photography in Izmir" given by Yener Torun, an architect, and photographer. His colorful photographs concerning shadow, light, golden ratio, and composition captivated me immediately. During his presentation, once, it was such a surprising moment that two pictures were shot in my hometown. I knew these buildings: one of them is the old cinema we visited in my childhood, and the other is the additional building of my primary school, which I had not seen during its construction period. After his presentation, we went to Alsancak to shoot photographs with all the workshop participants. That we acted



*Figure 7, Several shootings from Ankara*

together and shared our experiences in the shooting activity was extremely educatory and delightful.

Through the things I learned, I explored my environmental elements more carefully to make the main subject of my photographs. Instead of the traditional architectural representation of buildings and their elements, I enjoyed shooting them by playing with the frame. Inspired by Torun, my interest was shaped to shoot the colorful surfaces, signs, patterns, and textures of buildings. I threw myself outside to create several compositions of objects as a distinct representation of the architecture. In those days, these walking practices did not resonate with me as a "*flâneusian*" behavior. Even though we had not met with Varda yet, it was clear that I followed her with an urge coming from my inside.

To keep my photographs, I opened an Instagram account to share my architectural pictures solely. At that time, my way of seeing changed; for instance, catching the shadow, color, and symmetry became significant properties in my photographs. After a while, while I was surfing on Instagram, I encountered the announcement of another atelier, "Labyrinth 7," which emphasizes a multidisciplinary perspective by focusing on cinema, literature, music, photography, and exhibition at KA Photography Development Atelier. Focusing on different fields in a short time expanded my vision of art to the next level, and then several hidden stories in my mind came to light.

The instructor of the atelier, Fazlı Öztürk, suggested the film *Ulysses Gaze*, directed by Theodoros Angelopoulos, consisting of themes of death, migration, seeking, and being on the road. The main character, a director, coming to his hometown for the premiere of his last film follows the first reel of Balkans shot by the Manaki brothers. This film's themes of taking or being on the road have always influenced me since I was seeking my path apart. I tried to shape my journey and recognize my interests. By thinking multidisciplinary, I comprehended that cinema, photography, and architecture are connected to each other. Thereby, I needed to find a way consisting of the combination of these fields. After noticing my passion for interdisciplinary working, Ankara became smaller and more insufficient than my first coming five years ago. I understood that my connection with Ankara was temporary, but also, creating the links between me and the city felt unthreatening and peaceful.

In those days, while the atelier continued, I searched for a master's degree to find the relationship between cinema, architecture, and photography. After a while, I encountered the two master's degree programs at Bilgi University: Photography and Video, and Cinema and Television. Although my intention was higher to photography and video than cinema and television, there was no master's degree program in the department of photography and video. After that, I communicated with the master's degree coordinator Feride Çiçekoğlu, an architect, scriptwriter, writer, and lecturer in the cinema and television department. In a short period, I submitted my proposal and prepared myself to change my surrounding environment. No sooner had I taken a scholarship than I moved to Istanbul to academically explore the relationship between architecture and cinema.

## **2.2. The Urban Eye from Outside, *Survival (2019)***

After my internship in the architectural office So? Architecture and Ideas, it was my second arrival to inhabit Istanbul. The urban environment captivated me more than it did during my first arrival; thereby, I correlated with it differently. My awareness of the city's landscape expanded, and I realized the differences in how my perspective changed before and after photography. Moreover, the city did not look similar to where I lived; for example, there are differences in population density, multi-layered settlements, unplanned urbanization, and cultural diversity. Although this positive and negative side of the city prompted me to seek it intimately, I could not throw myself into the city's center with my camera. Unless women live in a hometown or familiar places, being at ease could be difficult on the street. Thus, I have searched for several shelters metaphorically, such as art galleries, alleys, passages, and bridges. Instead of shooting the daily life of people, my attention was always on catching various details of the buildings, their facades, and streets. I allocated all my free time to recognizing the different neighborhoods in which I live, Fulya.

All these behaviors increased my intention of belonging somewhere without annoying glances. While wandering in the figures of urban spaces, I constructed a new identity in my new habitat. The environment I constitute in my vicinity has an immense effect on defining my subjective identity. Feeling that I belonged somewhere was

essential since we created unique spaces for each person in the building complex while studying architecture. Through the design principle of housing, everybody should feel comfortable and embrace their own house. Hence, I tried transforming the city into a familiar place like home.

From this point of view, people should choose their habitat by considering who they want to be and which life they desire to live. The surrounding elements, such as buildings, facades, streets, neighborhoods, and people, form the human character. All subjects and objects impact human life differently, providing a deep exploration of self. From this point of view, I have identified my existence and way of seeing through my bodily movements in the thresholds and boundaries of urban places. With the help of the spatiality of the urban landscape, I maintained my walking and shooting practices without a specific destination. Instead of interacting with people directly, my focus generally was on places without humans in a multi-layered city. In fact, I had not realized yet that these places had a more intense and extensive side.

In the fall semester of 2019, at the beginning of our seminar course FTV 505 Colloquium I, our advisor contextualized the course with thesis and project topics according to our interests. A week later, we discussed the storytelling of the films, which seemed to have no stories. In those days, when we debated the features of classical drama, one of the questions that influenced me was, "Conflict and action are the essential aspects of the classic drama: How are these subverted in narratives and films with empty spaces duration?" Do we need an apparent classical drama structure for telling stories?

These questions were answered with the film *Homo Sapiens (2016)*, directed by Nikolaus Geyrhalter. The movie contains several images of the remarkable abandoned places where humanity had left, then predominated by nature over the past decades. Without dialogue, the narrative is behind these images, demonstrating a possible vision of the future after the human touch. What will remain of us once humanity is gone? He showed probable future scenarios after humanity has disappeared through the connection between artificial structures and nature. What is the story behind these traces in *places without a human*? Inspired by these references and questions in my mind, my way of seeing things began to shape. Instead of dynamic cinematography, the scenes of the film consisted of long and stable shots, similar to

still images though some elements in the mise-en-scene moved. For this reason, his cinematographic choice was not sound unfamiliar to me. The story was behind these images. Although he displayed a post-apocalyptic world via the places not suitable to live in, such as abandoned roller coasters, hospitals, or concert saloons, the film directly emphasized the humans who were not living there anymore. It was such a visual and acoustic journey that I could comprehend that a feature film did not have to have a traditional scenario with dialogues and camera movements. Thereby, I was filled with admiration through these abandoned places telling stories beyond their spatiality.

In my spare time, I continued to shoot around my apartment. Once, an abandoned building waiting to be demolished captivated me to take its photographs. I entered the area, and suddenly a man came near me. He asked why I shot this place, and I tried to tell him something about my shooting and walking practices, but he did not seem to understand me. He threatened to complain to the police if I did not leave immediately. After a while, I realized he was a real estate agent, and clearing the ruins of the two buildings was his responsibility. Due to his fear of being punished by the police, could he set boundaries between me and the urban environment? As a society, we approach each other with restrictions and forces. With vague feelings, I walked away and put my camera in my bag.

At about the same time, in the city, there was 16. Istanbul Biennial "*The Seventh Continent*" spread across seven different city areas. Experiencing various places constitutes a particular connection between each visitor of the exhibition, the exhibition itself, and its urban environment beyond the usability of the street of daily life. One of the places of the exhibition was on Prince Island, and my friends living in Ankara came to visit the exhibition. After deciding to go together to Prince Island, unfortunately, I could not catch the same ferry with them, and I had to take the next ferry on my own.

On the second month of my arrival in Istanbul, it was the first time that I was alone with my camera on the ferry. The weather was cloudy but not cold. After sitting and looking around me, instead of shooting several foreign tourists, my attention was on the ferry's tiny details: a water-flowing pipe, a reflection hitting the ceiling, a teacup someone left, and a mop. Shooting the manmade or second-hand objects in the boat

made me realize that Geyrhalter's filmic approach was wandering in my mind. After getting off the ferry, we shared the live location with my friends. They had already visited the biennial places. Before entering the first exhibition location, the images of the island attracted my attention more than the biennial places.

Walking among those places readily created an intimate relationship between me, my camera, and the island. There were several housings and their objects, which were built many years ago, not inhabiting anymore, instead of new modern buildings. While losing myself among these images, my friends called me to say their tour was over. Did they not find an intimate relationship between these expressive places and themselves? Or their tour was not their first arrival to Prince Island, maybe their second or third. Could seeing the same areas several times kill our enthusiasm for what we see? Is it possible to look at the world like a child when visiting anywhere? My journey ended with an unfinished curiosity; I met with my friends to arrive at the ferry.



*Figure 8, From Prince Island*

The effects of our seminar course on me were clearly seen in my journey to Prince Island. Beyond the objects, I searched for the lived experience and stories

behind the ruins and traces. For this reason, my videos demonstrated the specific details of the humanmade structure, such as a sculpture in the gardens of local houses, the windows, facades, the signboards of the streets, empty alleys, thrown refrigerators, and pools. Who were the owners of these leftover objects and places? Was their owner a family or an old lady living alone? How many years have passed since their first usage? Or who swam in the pool filled with water which has turned green? With all these questions surrounding my thoughts, I continued my little trip far from the center of the city.

Moreover, some of the natural parts of the island accomplished to be more potent than artificial sculptures, such as Trotsky's house, which is surrounded by immense trees and thickets. All these distant leftover objects and places made me more imaginative, and I seek the story of these memorial elements. Though they seemed as non-living things, they included extensive meaning beyond their physical existence. Exploring places on the island from a different perspective triggered me to fictionalize memories of the objects. Without displaying the traditional images of Prince Island, I visualized my experiences with the environment. With the images of my journey to Prince Island, I edited them to create my first essay video, *Survival*, which focused on the boundaries, and details of surviving objects and places. By telling a story through several things, no characters existed in my video footage. The composition of the frame and the tiny shaking camera movement giving a taste of being on the boat, relocated the audience as a protagonist. The assembly of this footage was adequate to demonstrate my roadmap from the city center to Prince Island, similar to travel notes. Instead of writing, I shot the things I saw to convey my explorations during our meeting with the untouched, unrenewed, and poetic places of the island. I recorded the videos and photographs of the places after their usage through the concept of places without humans.

On the one hand, many professors, students, and directors watched my video essay while our courses continued. Primarily my professors Çiçekoğlu and a few others mentioned that these moving images consisting of long and stable shots gave some clues about the places, which means the spirit of place, in other words, *genius loci*. If we assemble in our minds the whole footage of the video, it helps to identify the island places. Showing landscapes without any dialogue helped to imagine, which

was a closer aspect rather than a complete narrative script. Thereby, I examined the concept of *genius loci* which reveals identical, geographical, historical, and cultural information about the place. The film was a chance to expose my way of seeing, which has progressed recently. People's interest in seeing my still and moving images fostered me to be more aware of my surroundings. Even though my connection with the community gradually shaped, my process of identifying myself continued.

### 2.3. Urban Space as an Image, *Neighbor (2019)*

During my identification process, I communicated with the communities and their settlements as an observer. I realized that while the inhabitant was going to work or friends, their gazes generally were on their phones. Their life was passing without realizing their environment, similar to having blinkers in their eyes. Walking in the same or distinct street every day was quite unpleasant and dull for them. On the contrary, with my curiosity, I observed the circumstances of the city what was told and displayed.

At about the same time, after our first exploration of the essence of cinema in the colloquium course, our discussions maintained the topics of city, movement, and image. Searching the moving images by considering the city places was an attractive concept I could find in my shooting practices. In our courses, through being a woman in the city, we analyzed *Cléo 5 to 7* from Varda's filmography. It was my first meeting with her and her filmic approach to which I could find an intimate connection.

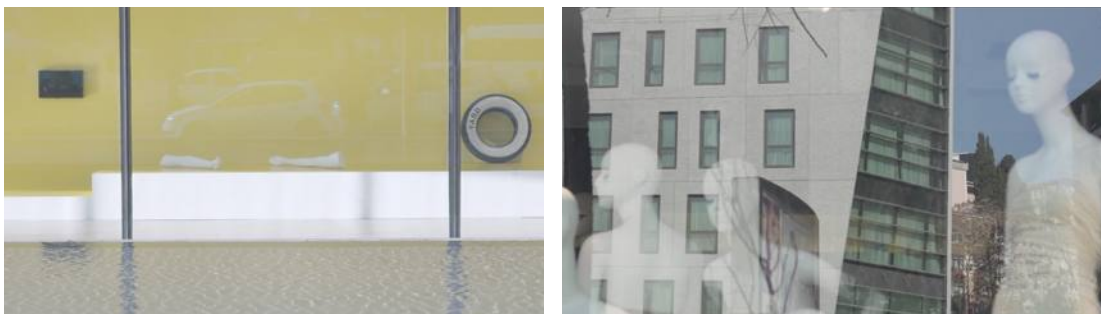


Figure 9, The left showcase from the gallery, the right one from mannequin shops

As mentioned in the introduction, I was influenced by various urban elements and was inspired by our conversation with the taxi driver in Dolapdere. When I walked

in front of the Arter Gallery, I encountered two arms of the mannequin in the showcase of the exhibition places. Right across, there was a shop selling several mannequins for merchandise. On the same street, these two buildings were located reciprocally, and their purpose was completely different from each other. That urban image of the contradiction of the settlement in Irmak Street was my priority on my roadmap. On the one side of the road, there were lots of shops selling mannequins, paint shops, vehicle mechanics, construction materials, and industrial areas; the other side of the road consisted of modern buildings such as a university campus, residences, and art galleries.

Since Dolapdere was in the city center and comprised distinct cultures, the municipality wanted to transform the urban environment for preferable living conditions. This gentrification issue I had never encountered in Aydın was an urban discussion for many years in Istanbul. Fundamentally, gentrification is changing the demographic and urban structure of an area to make it wealthier and more privileged. With the municipality's help, the neighborhoods that create security problems through the rising tide of crime are altered into a settlement with high welfare levels. To increase the standard, middle- or high-class society purchases districts with low living conditions to renew the urban environment by ignoring those who accommodate there. While the local inhabitants are obliged to change their living places to other regions without resistance, the culturally advantaged population settled there after constructing modern buildings. Thereby, this situation causes displacement primarily, that is, social and cultural problems in local's personal and communal life. Dolapdere is a neighborhood that has not been successful in this regard yet and has been stuck in between. Thus, the imperfect urban transformation process in this area exposed discrepancies between the two distinct communities through visual and urban contrast.



*Figure 11 The environment of Dolapdere*



*Figure 10, The urban differences in Dolapdere*

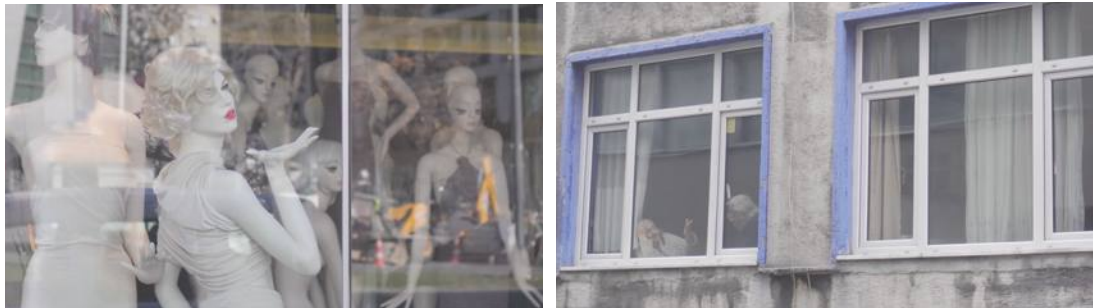
During my walking experiences, I searched the pattern of Dolapdere with the help of the facades of early and modern buildings. The identity and culture of the place were complex and intertwined. To reveal the cultural diversity, I filmed distinct streets around the Arter. Among these superimposable lives, could the collective memory have been primarily mentioned in this particular area? When individual and collective memory were constituted simultaneously, they were destroyed by demolishing and remaking the urban places. Thereby, I communicated with several people to investigate their living conditions. Most of them were not satisfied with these urban regulations.

For instance, the mannequin shop owner, which I mentioned right across from the art gallery, suggested that instead of renewing buildings to use for art places, they could organize dinner for free for all Dolapdere residents. It can be understood that there existed two different communities; one of them was the inhabitants, and the other was the visitors of the art gallery. When they arrived and went there in their luxury cars, there was no connection between each other. It can be comprehended that the bond between the community and the building could not generate productively. Even though I wanted to expose the status of the settlement by recording his voice and images of his face, he did not permit me to film his face. On the contrary, some of the shop owners I interviewed said there was no problem with being in the short documentary.



*Figure 12, The facades of one of the mannequin shop in Dolapdere*

I realized that something had changed when they saw the camera. Although they were inhabitants of the region, they mentioned their pleasure from the transformation of the urban environment thanks to the municipality. The existence of the camera and the feeling of being on the screen shifted their behaviors and gestures.



*Figure 13 The women representation of the daily life of Dolapdere*

(Neighbor, 2019) They would have revealed their identity if they had displayed their faces and voices. In this case, their fear made me delighted secretly and, at the same time, made me think.

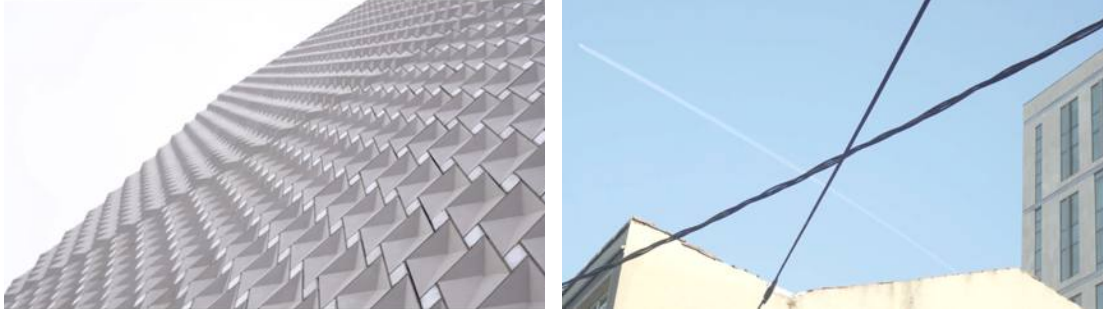


Figure 14 By inspiring from *Les Plages d'Agnès* the form similarities between sequenced in *Neighbor*

During my search, I remembered that I wandered in the same urban area with my camera three years ago. On my first arrival to Istanbul, which I mentioned earlier when I was an intern in an architectural office, I lived in Harbiye, two streets over from Dolapdere. Although the area I was living in was in the vicinity of the particular area, I never walked around to keep myself safe. From this point of view, even if the place is identical, the feeling of being there can change differently. Through my urban practices, owing to my interest in the varieties of sameness, I shot nearly 300 videos in a week with my camera while visiting the streets of Dolapdere, Kurtuluş, Osmanbey, and Taksim. With a great curiosity about capturing the present time of the district, I visualized the contradictions between the lifestyles and settlements of the two communities. Instead of being an observed object, I was exploring their daily lives.

By following Varda's traces, my experiences on the road were inspirational to maintaining my shooting practices. That year, our university announced the Agnès Varda conference in March to mourn the first anniversary of her passing away. With admiration for her particular films, I thought there was an opportunity to recognize her fragmentary artistic approach. In light of my quest, I submitted an abstract paper, "*Spatio-Temporal Relationality in Agnès Varda's L'île et Elle*," which was related to two installations: one of them was *Le Triptyque de Noirmoutier* in her exhibition *L'île et Elle*, and the other one was *Bord de Mer*.

The first selected installation was *Le Triptyque de Noirmoutier* which comprised three collapsible led screen panels and displayed three ten-minute video footages. These moving images demonstrated daily activities in Varda's kitchen and

outside beaches. By juxtaposing three video channels, she interrogated the relationship between the inside and outside of the house. While she framed the truth of daily activities, three distinct temporalities were triggered through the triptych. Furthermore, the installation gained new viewpoints for the audience with interactive elements: two hinged screen panels on the right and left sides. Similar to the windows of the room, this haptic connection between the installation and the spectator offers to observe beyond what we see. Through the fragmented visualization style, Varda emphasized the relationship between the on-screen and off-screen in a small installation space. She described her feelings on this representation

"I was inspired by the religious triptychs of the 15th century. I love the triptych shape; the opening and the closing of the panels. We can see three things at the same time; something we cannot do in a film. I was very excited to see where the people go when they go out of the scene." (Kouguell, 2017)

Her mobile installation influenced the audience in an artwork space. This spatial configuration allowed spectators to be part of the exhibition and interfere with their subjective temporality. Thus, with the visual and haptic experimentation with mobile panels, the observer could find an opportunity to change the content and the meaning of the observed objects. Considering before and after the moment and the connection between inside and outside of the place helped me in *Faces's* editing process.

The other installation was *Bord de Mer*, representing the beach through three distinct mediums: still and moving images and material in Blum and Poe Gallery in Tokyo. From up to down, one part of this fragmentary installation comprised a still image of the sea, the next one was a video loop of the sea wave, and the last was the sand on the floor. By using a different visual combination of the beach, she emphasized the temporality of the scene. Whereas the still images represented the past, the moving image portrayed the transformation process, and the sand qualified the present. This fragmentation made the divergent beings of the object visible. Through these elements, Varda aimed to expand the spectator's perception. Moreover, when they arrived at the exhibition area, their condition of being in the world increased with a haptic element on the ground. She accumulated the virtual and actual world by regarding the human existence in the installation space.

At the same time, I submitted this abstract for another course, Architecture and Time, taught by Şafak Uysal. In our sessions, we discussed several topics around the form-generating capacity of time. Beginning with the past, present, and future relationality, we combined architectural theory and practice to form a historical perspective of time. Among the subjects of the course, the methodology of phenomenology influenced me, and I researched Varda's particular installations through the perception of Merleau-Ponty. Focusing on phenomenology helped me generate an intimate connection with myself. My interest in autoethnography came from there.

In one of our courses, I was impressed by Hande Çayır, whose thesis topic was *"Documentary as autoethnography: A case study based on the changing surnames of women."* Regarding her personal and feminine experiences, she conveyed her journey of self-discovery to the academic level. By documenting her condition with her ex-husband, she made an essay film and connected it to cultural status. Witnessing the method of her thesis, which is both filming and writing the filmmaking process, provides a stimulus to research the methodology of autoethnography. Moreover, I was better at visual representation than verbal, so this methodology was proper for my skills. Through my urban videos, we decided to reveal the process of making films in the thesis with my advisor.

In March 2020, in the second semester of my master's grade, the pandemic process began and broke everything. As a woman meditating herself by walking on the street, it was a tremendous disaster since there was no life outside. Although documenting the status of city life was attractive, we heard that if the person got out of their home, she would catch an illness, then die. It sounded terrible, and I could not change this chaos into an opportunity. Staying in one place for a long time without seeing any friends or family increased my self-despair and intrigued me a lot. When I was identifying myself in the places of the city, at that time, I had to figure it out in one place. Reorganizing my environment and habits helped me find myself during those challenging times. I did yoga practices for a while to connect the deep stillness of my body and mind. By realizing the physical existence of my body, I recognized myself and my thoughts closely.

For the symposium *Global Varda*, after a small conversation with Kennedy-Karpat, we decided to research the genius loci and urban environment in Varda's selected films. My affinity for filming the urban environment by revealing its spirit and Varda's filmography resonated with me, examining more from this angle. In the article, there were five films by Varda; *L'Opéra-Mouffe* (Diary of a Pregnant Woman, 1958), *Daguerréotypes* (1976), *Les Dites Cariatides* (The So-Called Caryatides, 1984), and *Uncle Yanco* (1967) and *Mur Murs* (1980). Although it was beneficial for me in terms of discovering her filmmaking approach in detail, sometimes it challenged me since I had never had any experience writing a thesis before. With excitement about the possibility of publishing the article, the writing process came right to the pandemic. Focusing on the relationship between the urban environment and her presence showed how she represents a place with its *genius*. In her filmography, a place was a fundamental approach to establishing relationality between her feminine experiences and her landscapes. With Colleen, we separated her movies into two; Parisian and Californian movies. In her Parisian movies *L'Opéra Mouffe*, *Daguerréotypes*, and *Les Dites Cariatides*, Varda focused on the daily life of particular locales and environmental objects through her personal and embodied experience. In contrast, depicting her encounters on the Pacific Coast far away from her home, *Uncle Yanco* and *Mur Murs*, she externalized the identity of local characters by framing the spirit of place. Depending on geography and her lived body experiences, she underscored the surrounding inhabitant's identity, culture, and history.

Even if I could not be outside, I was inspired by her filmmaking manner, which resonated in my mind's mazes in similar ways to my journey. Writing an article was, on the one hand, educatory, on the other exhausting as being on lockdown in a small space stressed me. I stayed with my friend at home, and there were several problems due to being stuck. However, observing Varda's autobiographic and feminine side in her filming practices encouraged me to look at my individuality instead of diving into the outside world.

#### 2.4. Getting Lost in Memory, *Faces* (2022)

After the end of the article and the first wave of the pandemic, we separated houses with my friend and broke up our relationship. Leaving my friend, who we came together to Istanbul, caused me to grab on to me more. I went near my family for a while as I felt overwhelmed by Fulya. After several upsetting experiences, I decided to rest my head and spend time joyfully with my family. Although I intended to reveal my depressive thoughts, which no longer served me, I perceived some awkward things in my inner world. The result of feelings that happened in six months influenced me, similar to being stuck in a small box and unable to breathe.

These circumstances placed me in a dilemma in the creative process of my photographic and filmic works. While searching for methods to expose my inner independence, potential, and peace for shaping my notions, I encountered an event that I did not expect. When chatting with my mother on the first Tuesday after my arrival, she began to cry in the middle of the conversation. She mentioned that she had to take care of her mother because my grandmother's caregiver had a day off every Tuesday.

Fifteen years ago, her doctor diagnosed my grandmother with Alzheimer's disease. In the first years of her disease, she started to forget her short memory, and after several years, she could not do her daily routine activities on her own. Even though my mother and uncle had arranged a caregiver for their mother, they had to take care of her for one day a week without a care worker. In those days, I seldom considered my grandmother's status and how her disease affected my mother's psychology. From my perspective, they were lucky as my grandmother, Sevim, was not grumpy like other patients with Alzheimer's disease. I understood that beyond my mother's feelings, there should have been another thing beyond her crying. Did my mother feel similar to that every Tuesday?

On the other hand, seeking her roots for Varda through *Uncle Yanco* was in my mind. How did Varda follow her roots through her uncle Yanco? Besides, how did she convey her feminine subjectivity through her surroundings during her pregnancy? I reconsidered her attention to her memories, experiences, feminine subjectivity, and surroundings. It was an affecting moment in which I witnessed the loss of personal memory affecting my loved ones. How did I not document Sevim's life until that time

rather than focusing on collective memories of the city? Well, most of the time, human searches the things further away instead of seeing what is in front of them. I decided to visualize her process of memory loss and her surroundings by using an apparatus to discover my potential. Moreover, documenting her circumstance, which got worse each passing day served us to remember her cheerful times in those days.

Similar to Varda's Parisian familiarity, she visualized her surroundings and feelings to identify herself with the specific geographical locations. She embodied her particular time and spatiality to reveal the relationship between her and the genius loci. Her awareness of her own body and substantial environment prompted me to witness my grandmother's daily life experiences and her connection with each subject and object of the house. In doing so, the film discovers the spirit of the place through her physical existence. Moreover, Varda's corporeal representation in *L'Opéra Mouffe* led me to how I visualized my grandmother's body.

Before my shooting process, by following Varda's pattern to plan the scenes of the documentary, I sought the camera location and the right camera angles in her house. To portray my grandmother's emotions and form of thoughts, I interviewed her by asking personal questions. By doing so, the audience would find the connections between her past and now through the fragments of her memory. Contrary to Varda, I shifted the attention to the subject; instead of conveying the director's personal history to the audience, there existed distinct memories from me. On the other hand, her observation of her body's aging compelled me to focus on my grandmother's senescent body and missing past.





*Figure 15. A feminine body representation from Faces*

A week later, I spent my whole time one day with my grandmother, and she was so delighted with my presence near her in her house. It was a much different experience from my previous meeting with her from morning to night. I observed and filmed her every movement after her awakening. The daily activities which we used to be able to do on our own were not easy for her. Her caregiver Lale helped her to continue her daily routines, such as washing her face, eating her meal, taking her pills, and bathing. With my presence behind the camera, I witnessed how she spent her time during the day. For her, the meaning of passing the time was a distinct concept rather than the perception of someone not having Alzheimer's or dementia. For instance, after breakfast, she stayed in the living room for a while without any reaction. How did her mind process when she encountered the new day?

During the day, my mother and uncle asked several fundamental questions about her life, children, age, and wedding, and I filmed my grandmother's answers and attitudes. Sometimes, although rare she remembered some parts of her memories. How did she recall each moment of her past when we asked questions about her

experiences? Her practice of remembering did not work correctly, and her mind was frequently confused among these questions. Even though she spent time with my mother or uncle coming to her house every day, she could not always recall their names.



*Figure 16, Inside and outside of my grandmother's bedroom*

Experiencing her behaviors made me realize their compulsory circumstances. Witnessing her loss conjured up images of her memories that would vanish, so I delved into our family album to find answers to the questions in my mind through the old photographs. I wanted to reveal how she spent her time, which house she lived in, and who was in her surroundings in her past experiences. After a remembrance of her life, unless my family kept these photographs, there would be no existing memories left of her. Instead of searching for the identity outside the house, I felt about it through my ancestors' memories. Furthermore, even if her presence was still in the house

physically, nobody could remember those lived experiences. Could we think about the existence of the human who forgets memories?

During my visit to her, it was such a compassionate moment that I could not keep it inspiring in the editing process in my mind. After our shooting, towards midnight, suddenly, my grandmother cried for a while in her living room when we sat near her. Through her gestures, I observed that she wanted to find the meaning of her status, and then she suddenly laughed with her lovely side. Her emotions fluctuated every moment depending upon her notions. No sooner had she concreted her memories than she forgot all her thoughts.

Her intermittent journey in her mind, similar to researching the right way in the labyrinth, compelled me to title the film *Losing in Memory*. It was an observation of her daily life with the resultants of her disease. The audience witnessed her routine; she woke up, washed her face, waited, ate her breakfast, took pills, and waited again. The emotion of waiting was critical for me due to her overall status. With the help of her caregiver and my mum, she pursued her routine. Although my presence was behind the camera, I shot my mother solely without displaying her face and grandmother's.

There was a distinct representation of women in three generations, as my professor Çiçekoğlu said. In a visual context, without noticing, I used Varda's presentation of feminine subjectivity as a framework for the film. However, there were missing things when the editing process was completed. I had difficulty being satisfied owing to some non-cohesive parts between the scenes. I decided to dive into it more personally by thinking about why I wanted to film her disease. There should be something else which affected my mother's emotions.

Moreover, as a director, I should offer a statement through the film's narrative. Despite all, after the first rough cut, it could be depicted that the audience would witness her daily life solely. There was no contradiction or conflict since I edited the footage by observing her day to night. Nevertheless, it did not satisfy me, and to approach it more personally, I examined the relationship between my mother and her mother.

Through my mother's childhood memories, it can be understood that my mother could not live as a child and feel maternal instincts. She lived with her family in the countryside until the age of education. Then, my grandmother sent her to have

an education near my aunt since she lived in a town. Growing up with three daughters of my aunt until her marriage, my mother did not feel the pure love of her mother. After many years, she married and could not come together in a house with my grandmother. When my mother learned about my grandmother's disease, she found an apartment nearby in the same neighborhood. Even though they met again at the particular location, my grandmother's behaviors began to resemble a child day after day. In this instance, my mother had to take care of her mother. For this reason, she suffered from not experiencing motherly love enough, and our conversations enabled her to acknowledge her deprivation.

Upon reflection, we are three generations and three women; I, my mother, and my grandmother have strong characteristics. My grandmother ventured to keep away from her daughter for her education, my mother took my grandmother nearby to take care of her, and I paid attention to my mother's emotions, which helped her accept. All





*Figure 17, Recalling my grandmother's memories through her old photographs, like Varda's experimental manner in Les Plages d'Agnes.*

experiences I had since the beginning of filming penetrated me a lot; hence, I could not link my mother's memories and traumas with the video footage. Besides, since I started working at a film production company as a producer assistant, I have left the film behind.

Being an assistant to a producer, who orchestrated human relations, made a budget, and organized all filmmaking processes, in a film production company did not satisfy me exactly. Generally, we improved the relationship with digital platforms to sell the scenarios of the feature film or the series. However, there was no agreement, and we could not progress with the shooting process. On the other hand, I took an opportunity to get experience being a producer assistant in a feature film. However, it was such a disappointing period that I encountered the system of the filming industry in Turkey. Besides, I could not progress my creativity in my work as a director or a



*Figure 18, The first sequence of Faces.*

photographer. After deciding to leave the job, taking a step was long. One and half years later, I took a break for a month to write a thesis first, and then I quit the job.

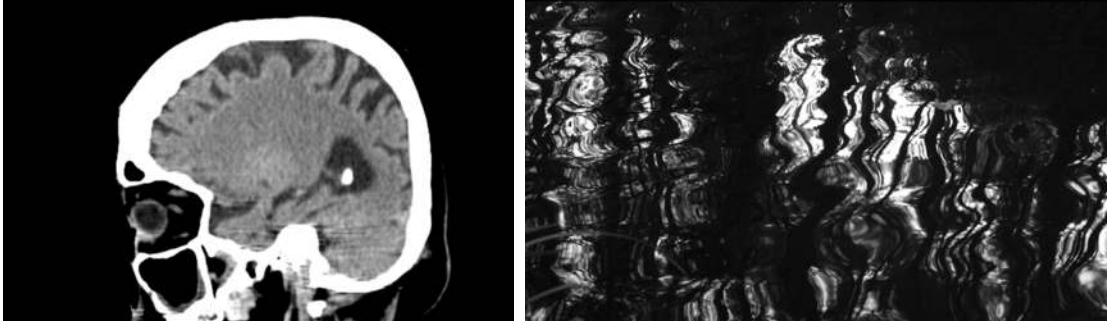


Figure 19, *The experimental sequences of Faces*

By writing a thesis, I returned to examine Varda's artistic approach. At the end of chapter 1, instead of proceeding with chapter 2, I decided to re-edit my grandmother's film. By recalling Varda's *Les Plâges d'Agnès*, the multi-media representation, and the aspect of remembering her lifespan, I changed the flow of the film. Essentially, the conflict I could not find after the first rough cut was inside the situation and my grandmother's mind. To refer to the confusion, I reorganized the footage shooting and added different mediums such as old photographs, videos, and my grandmother's tomography. Focusing solely on her memories, I regulated videos to visualize her physical and mental experiences. I was pleased to complete unfinished cases and listen to my inner self instead of believing others.

## CONCLUSION

This autoethnographic thesis that gave me the possibility to integrate academic and practical perceptions enabled me to comprehend my path following Agnès Varda's art pieces—instead of a traditional thesis structure, gathering distinct working fields allowed for a unique representation of my art practices and a deep exploration of her works. In addition, the methodology of the thesis provided an opportunity to find the balanced relationship between the visual and textual in an academic framework.

In the emergence of this thesis, while I maintained my shooting and walking practices, encountering an impressive protagonist, Cléo, was a turning point for me, transforming my behavior on the street. To escape the male gaze, which began in Ankara, I focused on the details of daily life, buildings, and facades, in other words, the texture of the city, with my camera. My intention of visualizing the spirit of the places allowed me to edit the still and moving images taking in Prince Island, *Survival*. After familiarizing myself with Cléo, I perceived her femininity as a *flâneuse* which became a daily pattern for me in several places. Although wandering with my camera had become a habit before encountering Cléo, I progressed my relationality with my surroundings after that. Through my encounters, feeling intimate with the protagonist Cléo activated me to follow Varda's traces instinctively. Thus, by means of this thesis, I could discover how my way of seeing changed under the influence of meeting with Varda. When I reconsidered the beginning of my journey, I felt delighted about exposing an exclusive relationship with her and my encounters with the method of autoethnography.

In this thesis, I mainly rely on Chamarette's reading of Varda to explain how Varda's self-representation and memories and the transition between filmic and spectatorial spaces have been significantly central to her filmmaking. As a result, her analysis has inspired me to think about the resonances between my work and how Varda's filmmaking has influenced it as a flâneusian activity, which embodies the memories of the landscape she has wandered. As in her filmography, she integrates virtual and actual by objectifying her subjectivity in the places with the help of various mediums. Through her self-examination consisting of her feminine lived experiences, she reinterpreted her memories autobiographically in her creation process. By visualizing her subjectivity, her memorial and intimate places also engaged the

audience's mental and physical world. She presented individuality as a filmed subject instead of paying too much attention to objects as a filmmaker. The first chapter of the thesis is based on her filmmaking approaches and my admiration for her.

In her filmography, Varda makes the spirit of places visible with the help of the power of images by not isolating her particular environment in the filmmaking process. In *L'Opéra Mouffe*, Rue Mouffetard's characteristics are exposed via the daily life of Varda's living place. She invites the audience to witness her feminine subjectivity through the intricate background of the film consisting of the awareness of childbirth. The assemblage of the pregnant women's temporality and Mouffetard's spatiality as a guide enables Varda to represent the encounters and worries of expecting a baby. The combination of the inside and outside world of her presence emerges quintessentially from her emotions of pregnancy and the *genius* of the vulnerable residents of Mouffetard. In a similar context, the embodiment of her feelings with her autobiographical aspect can be observed in the installation *Les Veuves de Noirmoutier*. As part of the *L'île et Elle* exhibition, by generating her emotional landscape, she portrays her feelings after losing someone with the help of Noirmoutier island women who experience the same situation. She revives her memories and emotions through unforgettable experiences with Demy. Not only the autobiographical but also the ethnographical installation comprises a multi-layered spatial arrangement in the exhibition place. While the widows' mourning is within living memory, Varda exposes several intimate moments which will be permanent in the audience's perception.

Using multiple visual ways to convey her memories, which encapsulate the places, *Les Plages d'Agnès* resonated with me through the editing process of the short documentary *Faces*. I searched my grandmother's traces through her old photographs in the family album and video footage, which expose her character, attitude, beliefs, tradition, and places, like my grandmother's retrospective. From a similar point of view to *Les Plages d'Agnès* which Varda changed the position of the camera to herself after her consciousness of growing old, I revealed the film to sustain my grandmother's losing presence, memories, and experiences. Displaying the past events of human beings keeps them alive even if they vanish from the world. Besides, by recalling her lived experiences, Varda immortalized herself through her life story.

Although Varda's autobiographic side was highly emphasized through her sentimental places in her filmography, she revealed femininity with the help of the fictional film *Cléo 5 to 7*. In light of Cléo's encounters with various turning points, she could not acknowledge herself and others before her intimate relationship in her neighborhood. Since she cares about other people's thoughts, minds, and gazes, neither will she hear nor see herself as she is. I interrelated this particular point with my attitude toward city places and my life before Cléo. Although coming from a little town could affect me before, knowing I was not alone in the city encouraged me a lot. With the power I received from this point of view, *Neighbor* examines the problematic city center instead of uninhabited places. As a *flâneuse*, I felt Cléo and other women wandering close to me in a manner; I wish I would walk her filmic road and stay in that neighborhood in Paris for a while.

Varda's tendency to document women in the city continued with the *Les dites Cariatides*. By both focusing on women and men, Varda manifested the gender roles in social, cultural, and historical contexts in Paris through lifeless bodies. The definite differences between them can be observed throughout the film solely by examining their posture. By emphasizing the female and male monuments, she reflected the spirit of the urban environment. While the architecture of her surrounding was a fundamental and substantial feature for Varda, she contextualized the caryatids of the city at different times. Her tendency toward others prompted her to analyze their spatiality and temporality deeply. After examining *Les dites Cariatides*, I realized that *Neighbor* could also expose the density of gender discrepancy through the women mannequins and the men who sell the inanimate female bodies of this neighborhood.

While she researched the collective identity and memory, she encountered her roots through *Uncle Yanco*, highlighting their mutual family history. Varda's ethnographic gaze enabled her to appreciate Yanco's neighborhood, composed of the counter-cultural community and their settlement. With her originality, rather than focusing solely on her filmic character, she dived into their local spirit as identity, culture, and history. Moreover, when she recognized Yanco, she amplified her subjective identity and strengthened her family relationships which went back a long way.

As a key point, combining common ground between Varda's artistic manner and my filming practices was a powerful experience that made me aware of my potential. Associating with her works soared my creativity in thinking about cinematic subjectivity and the urban environment. By taking my power from my instinct and surroundings, I constituted my path in the light of her. In that way, using the autoethnographic research method has significantly contributed to my personal growth. Due to containing in itself autobiographical and ethnographical approaches, my awareness of myself and others improved to a higher level. It was both generative and meditative, enhancing my maturity level. Focusing on the personal journey for a while increased my belief in myself on the road to being an artist and filmmaker. Thus, I could comprehend my point of view and tendencies toward visual storytelling.

Toward the end of the thesis, *Faces* was screened as a part of several film festivals and Base Istanbul young artist collective in Akaretler. Displaying the film in different environments was an exciting experience through which I distinguished the relationship between the medium and the spectator. For example, in the exhibition hall consisting of other artists' artworks, I could come across the audience's feelings right after watching. This experience was so intense and intimate. They shared similar circumstances, which comprise the loss of memory in their family with moist eyes. At that time, Varda's *Les Veuves de Noirmoutier* came to my mind, as her emotions through the audience's perception. Leaving traces of my perspective on people I did not meet was an impressive moment that I will never forget.

Through this thesis, while interrogating my decisions, cares, and worries about my quests not becoming a reality, I encountered events that were happening, luckily. Before the thesis and my art practices, I seldom accepted myself for who I am; after this work, I grabbed my thoughts and cared with both hands. Besides, by analyzing my attitudes and recognizing my surroundings, I could constitute several relationships between the community and me, the neighborhood, and urban life. My feelings that I belong in a place and attention to the past attracted me to wander and observe. Thereby, it reconstructed my subjective identity and then gave me a chance to find relationality with the objective one. The reciprocal identity development reveals comprehending both sides and interpreting the story of the self and its association with the environment. Through the autoethnography, my connection between the inside and

outside of my physicality became stronger. During this process, collecting my memories and putting them in a cultural context reminded me of my personality, where I came from, and the environment I lived in.

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## FILMOGRAPHY

**1954**

*La Pointe Courte*

Length: 89 mins

Director: Agnès Varda

Screenplay: Agnès Varda

Editing: Alain Resnais

Music: Pierre Barboux

Leading Cast: Philippe Noiret,

Silvia Monfort

Production Company: Tamaris Films,

France

Editing: Janine Verneau, Pascale

Laverrière

Music: Michel Legrand

Leading cast: Corinne Marchand,

Antoine Bourseiller, José Luis de

Vilallonga, Sami Frey, Michel

Legrand

Producer: George de Beuarrgard,

Carlo Ponti

Production Company: Ciné-Tamaris

**1958**

*L'Opéra Mouffe*

Length: 17 mins

Director: Agnès Varda

Screenplay: Agnès Varda

Editing: Janine Verneau

Music: George Delerue, Agnès Varda

Leading cast: Dorothee Blank, André

Bourseiller, José Valera, André

Rousselet

Production Company: Ciné-Tamaris

**1967**

*Uncle Yanco*

Length: 22 mins

Director: Agnès Varda

Screenplay: Agnès Varda

Editing: Jean Hamon

Leading cast: Jean Varda, Agnès

Varda, Rosalie Varda, Tom Luddy

Production company: Ciné-Tamaris

**1974**

*Daguerréotypes*

Length: 80 mins

Director: Agnès Varda

Screenplay: Agnès Varda

Editing: Gordon Swire

Cinematography: Nurith Aviv

**1961**

*Cléo de 5 to 7*

Length: 90 mins

Director: Agnès Varda

Screenplay: Agnès Varda

Production company: Ciné-Tamaris,  
INA, ZDF

**1980**

*Mur Murs*

Length: 81 mins

Director: Agnès Varda

Screenplay: Agnès Varda

Editing: Sabine Mamou, Bob Gould

Leading cast: Juliet Berto, Mathieu  
Demy

Production company: Ciné-Tamaris

**1980-81**

*Documenteur*

Length: 63 mins

Director: Agnès Varda

Screenplay: Agnès Varda

Editing: Sabine Mamou

Music: George Delerue

Cinematography: Nurith Aviv

Leading cast: Sabine Mamou, Mathieu  
Demy, Lisa Blok, Tom Taplin

Production company: Ciné-Tamaris

**1984**

*Les Dites Caryatides*

Length: 13 mins

Director: Agnès Varda

Screenplay: Agnès Varda

Editing: Hélène Wolf

Production company: Ciné-Tamaris

**1995**

*Ulysse's Gaze*

Length: 176 mins

Director: Theo Angelopoulos

Screenplay: Theo Angelopoulos,

Tonino Guerra, Petros Markaris,

Giorgio Silvagni, Kain Tsitseli

Editing: Yannis Tsitsopoulos, Takis

Koumoundouros, Yankis Chalkiadakis

Music: Kostas Yannidis, Manfred

Eicher

Leading cast: Harvey Keitel, Maia

Morgenstern, Erland Josephson

Production company: Paradis Films,

La Générale D'images, Arte France

Cinéma

**2004**

*Les Veuves de Noirmoutier*

Length: 69 mins

Director: Agnès Varda

Photography: Éric Gautier

Editing: Agnès Varda, Baptiste Filloux  
and Jean-Baptiste Morin

Music: Ami Flamer

Production company: Ciné-Tamaris

**2008**

*Les Plages d'Agnès*

Length: 110 mins

Director: Agnès Varda

Screenplay: Agnès Varda

Editing: Jean Baptiste Morin, Agnès  
Varda, Baptiste Filloux

Music: Isabelle Olivier

Leading cast: Agnès Varda, Rosalie

Varda, Mathieu Demy, Stéphane Vilar

Production company: Ciné-Tamaris,  
Arte France Cinéma

**2016**

*Homo sapiens*

Length: 90 mins

Director: Nikolaus Geyrhalter

Screenplay: Abir Ahmed

Editing: Michael Palm

Music: Peter Kutin, Florian Kindlinger

Production company: Nikolaus  
Geyrhalter Filmproduktion

**2019**

*Survival*

Length: 2 mins

Director: Zeynep Demirhan

Screenplay: Zeynep Demirhan

Editing: Zeynep Demirhan

Music: Bugra Baran

**2020**

*Neighbor*

Length: 4 mins

Director: Zeynep Demirhan

Screenplay: Zeynep Demirhan

Editing: Zeynep Demirhan

Music: Zeynep Demirhan

**2022**

*Faces*

Length: 7 mins

Director: Zeynep Demirhan

Screenplay: Zeynep Demirhan

Editing: Zeynep Demirhan

Music: Bugra Baran

Leading cast: Sevim Çaycı