

## **Gender Equality and Sustainability: Agnès Varda's Sustaining Legacy**

Istanbul Bilgi University (Istanbul, Turkey)

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### **Paper Proposal**

The Architecture or the Landscape: Varda's Formalist Feminism

#### **Abstract**

To fully understand the image ecology of Agnès Varda, we must attend, as Rebecca DeRoo suggests, to the lasting impact that Varda's art historical training had on her. Many excellent scholarly monographs on Varda have already focused on her auteurism as female filmmaker or on the rich complexity of her female characters. This analysis focuses instead on what I am calling the formalist feminism of Agnès Varda—in other words, her methodological approach of privileging the stylistic modalities, iconographies, and corporalities of gender equality and sustainability over their contexts.

In a parcours through Varda's filmmaking, from her early masterpiece *Le Bonheur* (1965) to a mid-career short like 1984's *The So-Called Caryatids* and ending with *The Beaches of Agnès* (2008), I demonstrate that the classical Renaissance trope of representational space as female is the immutable foundation of Varda's art. At times, Varda's films iconify women in the art historical tradition of the *odalisque* or the recumbent female nude—with and of the landscape, replete with the soft power of emplaced sensuality. More frequently, however, Varda depicts femininity as silent, vertical suffering, a kind of architecture of frozen social labor and emotional burdens.

Although her narratives unflinchingly probe the problematic aspects of this dualism, they also present it as eternal, just as they present gender and sex as unquestionably fused. Do Varda's films ever blur or expand this formalist feminist dualism? Does Varda ever create an "expanded field" for the feminine between and beyond architecture or landscape? Only in the self-reflexive moments when her films showcase her own female gaze through the viewfinder. The paradox of Varda's famous *cinécriture* is that its "feminist phenomenology" celebrates the feminine at the same time as it reinscribes its figural boundaries. Our challenge as Varda's twenty-first century audience is to watch her films with an eye toward the potential of the feminine to be formless.

#### **Bibliographical Sources**

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**Keywords**

Formalism

Feminism

Odalisque

Caryatid

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EDUCATION

- 2010           **Ph.D. degree**, History of Art and Film Studies. Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. May 2010.
- 2000           **B.A. degree with honors**, French and Art History. Grinnell College, Grinnell, Iowa. May 2000.

MANUSCRIPT

*With and Against: The Situationist International and the Social Space of Cinema*  
(Under peer review for a university press publication contract, October 2019.)

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- 2019           **“Female Material: *Invisible Adversaries and the Intermedial*,”** *On Women’s Films: Across Generations and the World*, edited by Ivone Margulies and Jeremi Szaniawski. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019, 215-232.
- 2018           **“*Détournement*, Social Space and the *Cinétracts* in Paris,”** *Architectures of Revolt: The Cinematic City circa 1968*, edited by Mark Shiel. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018, 35-65.
- 2017           **“The Delinquency of the Script: Corneliu Porumboiu’s *Police, Adjective* (2009),”** “Special Issue: New Romanian Cinema,” edited by Alina Haliliuc and Jesse Schlotterbeck. *Film Criticism*, 41:2, October 2017, 1-13.
- 2016           **“Private Looking and Collective Memory in *The Danube Exodus* (1998),”** *Watersheds: The Poetics and Politics of the Danube River*, edited by Matthew Miller and Marijeta Bozovic. Brighton: Academic Studies Press, 2016, 120-143.
- 2014           **“*Détournement* as Optic: Debord, Derisory Documents and the Aerial View,”** *Philosophy of Photography* 5:1, Winter 2014, 19-34.
- ‘History is What’s Happening’: 59th Annual Flaherty Film Festival, 13–21 June 2013. Programmed by Pablo de Ocampo.** *The Moving Image Review and Art Journal*, April 2014, Volume 3, Issue 1, 124-132.

**“The Paradigms of Nicolas Bourriaud: Situationists as Vanishing Point,”** *Evental Aesthetics* 2:4, February 2014, 23-54.

- 2013 **“Riverboat Europe: Interim Occupancy and Dediaporization in Goran Rebić’s *Donau, Duna, Dunaj, Dunav, Dunarea* (2003),”** *European Cinema After the Wall: Screening East-West Mobility*, edited by Leen Engelen and Kris Van Heuckelom. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013.
- 2012 **“Cut and Spark: Chris Marker, André Bazin and the Metaphors of Horizontal Montage,”** Winter 2012, volume 12, issue 1. *Studies in French Cinema*, 35-46.

#### SELECTED INTERVIEWS, TRANSLATIONS AND CRITICISM

- 2019 **“Agnès Varda (1928-2019),”** Commemoration commissioned for *Texte zur Kunst*, Issue no. 115, September 2019.
- 2018 **“Unreconciled Social Spaces,”** Film criticism commissioned for *Docalogue* online forum featuring *Faces Places* (Agnès Varda, 2017), October 2018. <https://docalogue.com/october-faces-places/>.

#### SELECTED LECTURES AND CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- 2018 **“Agnès Varda’s *Jane B. for Agnès V. (1988)*”.** Femme Film Fridays screening program, Bullock Texas State History Museum, Austin, Texas, June 8, 2018.
- “‘This Place is Not About Us’: *La Pointe Courte* and Asocial Space,”** Panel: Agnès Varda’s Documentary Politics. Society for Cinema and Media Studies Annual Conference. Toronto, ON, Canada. March 14 - 18, 2018.
- 2017 **“Split Screen/Superimposition: Political Anamorphosis In Contemporary Experimental Documentary,”** *Documentary After Farocki*: Annual Documentary Theory/Practice Symposium. School of Theater, Film and Media Arts, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. September 22, 2017.
- “In the Dark: Cinema as Spectacle’s ‘Privileged Figure.’”** *Beyond Spectacle/Spectacle of Fascism* hybrid residency and conference, Institute for the Humanities, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, BC, Canada. April 7 – 9, 2017.