

## **Title: *Tout(e) Varda: The DVD Collection as Authorworld***

Abstract: In 2012, Ciné-Tamaris released *Tout(e) Varda*, a DVD boxset spanning filmmaker Agnès Varda's sixty-year career to that date. Although relatively unusual in the degree of control Varda seems to have had in curating the collection, this box set is a logical development of Varda's work of the 2000s in which she has increasingly interrogated her oeuvre and career. This article argues for the significance of the collection – and the paratextual material it includes – for an analysis of Varda and her work. But it also seeks to position the analysis within the wider context of DVD scholarship, where – despite a recurring concern with both the commercial and didactic functions of auteurism - the authorial collection has attracted little attention. An analysis of *Tout(e) Varda* points to the importance of considering the formal qualities of paratextual material as well as their thematic concerns. *Tout(e) Varda* offers not a definitive *commentary* on Varda's work, but rather extends its formal and thematic preoccupations, albeit in ways which are at times contradictory, constructing Varda as both an unreliable curator and unreliable narrator.

Keywords: Agnès Varda; authorworld; DVD authorship; DVD extras; DVD box sets; paratext.

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## Tout(e)Varda: The DVD Collection as Authorworld

### Introduction

In 2012, *Tout(e) Varda*, a DVD boxset spanning filmmaker Agnès Varda's nearly sixty-year career (Figures 1 & 2), was released. Author(is)ed by Varda through her production and distribution company Ciné-Tamaris,<sup>i</sup> the 24-disc collection comprises all 19 of Varda's feature films,<sup>ii</sup> 16 short films<sup>iii</sup> and *Agnès de ci de là Varda*, a five-part television series from 2011. There are numerous extras, many of which are also presented, implicitly if not explicitly, as Varda's work: made-for-DVD films, fragments of unfinished early work and advertisements from the early 1970s. The collection is completed by a small folder, the size of a DVD case, bearing the cartoon image of Varda (Figure 2) which contains *Album d'Agnès V.* - an approximately 120-page booklet of photographs, notes and credits - alongside postcards, a film strip, cat stencil, recipe card and two DVDs (in paper sleeves). These DVDs are: *inédits et inattendues*, which features Varda's "lost" television film from 1970 (*Nausicaa*) along with fragments of incomplete films; and *Les Trois Vies d'Agnès/ The Three Lives of Agnès* which includes a continuous film version of Varda's most celebrated gallery film along with short films about other installation work, her still photography, and a list of her film credits. Agnès's "three lives" – as photographer, filmmaker and gallery artist – are thus all included within the DVD collection.

[FIGURES 1 & 2 near here.]

[Captions: Figures 1&2: the *Tout(e) Varda* collection (Ciné-Tamaris, 2012): the playful, serious, domestic, commercial, feminised, auteur]

The box set is a collectable item and, retailing at 120 Euros, is a considerable investment. It is as close to a "complete works" as Varda scholars are likely to get and makes many of her less successful films commercially available for home viewing for the first time. However, in this article I read *Tout(e) Varda* not simply as a *collection* of Varda's (already existing) work, but also an *extension* of it. With many of the extras explicitly or implicitly presented *as* Varda's work, the collection opens up possibilities for extending scholarship on Varda herself, but also for rethinking debates about DVD authorship and the paratexts of DVD.

In this article, I propose the term "authorworld" as a way of thinking about *Tout(e) Varda's* engagement with – and (re)construction of – Varda as an auteur. This term owes an obvious debt to "storyworld" a term frequently used in discussion of the paratexts of film and television which focuses attention on how paratextual material extends the spectator's engagement with the fictional world of a featured text (Gray 2010). Work on cult fiction film – and television – has highlighted the extent to which fans make similar connections across cult texts on the basis of authorship (Hills 2002: 157). What the term "authorworld" offers to my analysis of Varda's DVD authorship in *Tout(e) Varda*, then, is a way of acknowledging the *multiplicity* of creative and interpretative roles she occupies in the collection whilst also – as in critical work on fandom and cult media – keeping in play questions of spectatorial engagement and consumption patterns. My focus is, after all, a commercially produced object (the DVD collection). This is a logical development of the focus on the commercial imperatives of auteurism and its use as a category of reception from the late 1980s

onwards (e.g. Corrigan 1990, Grant 2000), but takes a neglected object – the authorial DVD box set – as its focus.

Existing scholarship on DVD – when not focused on the format per se - has largely been organised around individual feature films, franchise films and television series (Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2002, 2005; Hight 2005; Skopal 2007; Grant 2008; Brown 2008; Evans 2010; Tompkins 2014). Thus, although the ways in which auteurism is mobilised in DVD paratexts has been a recurring concern, this has largely centered on the commercial value of the auteur relative to an individual film, franchise or series (Grant 2008, Johnston 2014), and/or their didactic role in shaping interpretations of specific storyworlds (Brookey & Westerfelhaus 2002, Hills 2007, Tompkins 2014). This is in keeping with a broader emphasis in DVD scholarship on the ways in which extras extend engagement with the storyworld, and what this means for both patterns of consumption and modes of spectatorship.

In contrast, I am concerned with how the DVD collection shapes – and extends – an engagement with the authorworld: with Varda as a filmmaker, photographer, artist and commentator occupying particular (political, domestic, creative) positions and offering her own (re)interpretations of her work. Of course, it is hardly unusual for film directors and other creative personnel to have their films “boxed up” by DVD distributors (Johnston 2014), or, indeed, to take an active role in paratextual DVD content (Grant 2008). That said, both Varda’s apparent involvement in every aspect of this collection and the particular form of her paratextual engagements *do* seem unusual. I will discuss Varda’s apparent crafting of this authorworld – reading *Tout(e) Varda* as an *authored* collection in itself – whilst noting the instabilities and contradictions it produces, allowing and indeed necessitating that the spectator become an active participant in interpreting the work and Varda herself.

In the context of Varda scholarship more broadly, this attention to Varda’s work *on* DVD is distinctive. Although the increasing availability of Varda’s work on DVD has facilitated a recent flurry of interest in her work, as Delphine Bénézet (2014) notes, the emphasis has largely remained on Varda’s most well-known feature films.<sup>iv</sup> Whilst this is something that Bénézet’s own work seeks to remedy, she does not address Varda’s work on and for DVD specifically. Yet Claudia Gorbman suggested as long ago as 2008 that Varda’s DVD bonus films exemplify not only Varda’s embrace of DVD but are also suggestive of “her impulse to elevate the DVD to the status of a new auteur medium” (2008, 27).

The authorworld explored in this article is that contained in the 52 hours of filmed material, plus photographs and physical objects, in the *Tout(e) Varda* collection, though with particular emphasis on packaging, presentation and DVD extras. The next section establishes a critical context for this intervention, outlining some key developments in work on DVD extras and authorship. I then consider the *Tout(e) Varda* collection, discussing its organisation and the contexts it provides for interpretation of Varda, as well as individual works, before turning my attention to selected extras – or, as Varda calls them, “boni” – highlighting the critical value of attending to the formal qualities of the DVD extra. However, the timing of the *Tout(e) Varda* release – at a time when DVD sales are in decline and the built-in obsolescence of the medium increasingly apparent – prompts further questions about the way in which Varda’s *commercial* identity troubles aspects of her *artistic* identity, in

particular in relation to environmentalism, as I briefly outline. Although the concerns raised here are, in some ways, specific to *Tout(e) Varda*, in concluding this essay I point to more general conclusions both about Varda's authorship and the study of (DVD) authorworlds.

### *The DVD extra and academic analysis*

In their 2011 book, *The DVD and the Study of Film*, Mark Parker and Deborah Parker are broadly optimistic about the possibilities of DVD for film scholarship and spectatorship. They argue that DVD “enforces a more self-conscious attitude on the viewer,” and that even a cursory engagement with bonus materials “encourages a more knowing audience, one more likely to interrogate the image than to submit to it uncritically, simply because they are more familiar with the process by which images are produced” (2011, 25). This familiarity is, at least in part, produced through the proximity of the bonus materials to the primary text. Whilst the production context provided by these materials is not new (Caldwell 2008), their presentation alongside – and, in the case of commentaries, on top of – the primary text reconfigures their relationship to become *intra* rather than *intertextual* (Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2002).

One of the reasons other critics have argued (counter to Parker & Parker) that DVD – and, specifically, the bonus-laden Special Edition of a film or TV series – has closed down possibilities for active spectatorship is because of the privileged position accorded to a commercialised auteurism, most manifest in audio-commentary tracks. In one of the most-cited academic analyses of DVD, Robert Alan Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus (2002) argue that the commentaries on the *Fight Club* DVD, by privileging the interpretations of the filmmakers, close down the possibilities for queer readings which had previously circulated around the film. Although criticising Brookey and Westerfelhaus for over-emphasising the importance of narrative interpretation to the commentary track, Catherine Grant (2008) is in agreement that the commentary becomes a privileged frame setting the terms for spectatorial engagement. In particular, Grant draws attention to the ways in which audio-commentaries fundamentally shift the status of the featured film, re-presenting its images as documentary evidence of processes, moments and relationships described in the audio-commentary. The authority of the commentary track is therefore bound up in its (often didactic) form and its proximity to the film itself. In addition to asserting an interpretative frame, these tracks are caught up in broader discourses around the film industry, authorship and cultural value which, as Parker and Parker suggest (2011, 25), might be understood as re-emphasising the project of film criticism from “what films *mean* to what they *are*”.

However, this ontological question is not as open as Parker and Parker suggest. Grant (2008) notes that “auteurism” has become a commercially significant and discursively productive frame for DVD releases, bestowing a status on filmmakers (and films) whose work would not previously have been considered in this light (also Brookey & Westerfelhaus 2005). Moreover, as Grant suggests, the foregrounding of the director-auteur in DVD marketing, plus his/her presence in bonus materials, becomes a validation of the primary text as a piece of work, worth the spectator's investment, of time or money – and, indeed, the financial investment involved in DVD production

(Johnston 2014). Extras on many mainstream DVD releases are essentially promotional materials, initially designed to sell the feature film to critics, and a potential audience, by facilitating positive critical reception whilst constraining open-ended interpretation (Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2005, Hight 2005, Caldwell 2008). Recontextualised by DVD, and by proximity to the feature, what such celebratory extras offer the DVD-viewer is therefore a validation of the time and money they have *already* invested.

As such, what mainstream (re)viewers expect and value from DVD extras is, according to Parker and Parker (2011, 121-2), privileged access to “fact and circumstance”, “an annotation of the film that sticks as closely to the plot as possible”, and “the recondite bit of insider knowledge, the striking detail that illuminates story and character, or explains the trick behind a memorable effect.” As Barbara Klinger (2006, 73) argues, these behind-the-scenes offerings do not demystify the production process, but rather work to produce “a sense of the film industry’s magisterial control of appearances”. This is enhanced – rather than demystified – by commentaries and other extras which are themselves typically didactic. DVD extras constrain the possibilities of *criticism*, not only through their typically celebratory content (Brookey and Westerfelhaus’s primary concern) but by their lack of formal inventiveness.

Whilst the commentary track renders the feature a historical document of its own production, the “making of” featurette usually positions the completed feature in the future. Retrospective documentaries – often found on “anniversary” editions – add another layer as the significance of the film is determined *across* time. That such extras do not (necessarily) avoid plot “spoilers” means that there is an implicit address to a viewer for whom the film is already known but for whom its meaning – or, more accurately, its significance - is under negotiation. Shifting between extras on a typical Special Edition DVD, the viewer is therefore presented with an illusion of mastery which is temporal as much as formal, as they access pre-determined “moments” which create (a) meaning(s) for the film in time.

Moreover, their proximity to the feature(d) film suggests a need to rework Timothy Corrigan’s (1990) arguments about the commercial circulation of discourses of authorship in the late 1980s. At that time, Corrigan was able to write about the possibility of an engagement with cinema – and particularly with the “authored” text – which was by no means dependent on actually seeing films but rather could be constructed through ancillary texts (such as director interviews). Here, the reverse is arguably true: the co-presence of the ancillary texts on DVD have meaning for viewers, and add value, whether or not viewers choose to engage with them. The identification of extras in reviews, on DVD packaging and on menus which provide the gateway to the feature(d) text, imply that this is not (just) a piece of entertainment but rather is worthy of extended consideration, time and money. This is true whether or not viewers watch the extras. Indeed, as DVD editions multiply (Skopal 2007), it is likely that only the most committed fan/scholar will watch everything about even one film.

There is a tension here between a scholarly recognition that DVD extras add both commercial and interpretative value and the relative *lack* of attention which film scholars have devoted to this content. Much of the scholarship outlined in this section

does not pay close attention to the extras themselves and certainly not to their formal qualities. As Nicola Evans (2010, 589-90) notes: “Running through such studies is the assumption of a clear hierarchy between the creative work of the feature film and the purely promotional status of its satellite extras.” This also means that the *kinds* of extras which have attracted most attention have been those which do have a clearly promotional – and often auteurist - function.

*Tout(e) Varda* is interesting in this respect for what it excludes as much as for what it includes: there are no commentary tracks or conventional “making of” featurettes. Of course, the filmic and material extras of *Tout(e) Varda* still add value independent of the spectator/consumer’s actual engagement with these texts, and the box set collection provides a specifically authorial context in which to place and understand Varda’s work. But I will argue that the version of authorship constructed through *Tout(e) Varda* uses the DVD format not to extend Varda’s authority over her work, but rather to open up questions of authorship and authority in ways which create space for a more active mode of spectatorship than that traditionally associated with DVD in academic criticism. This is consistent with existing analysis of Varda and spectatorship (e.g. Conway 2015: 35-55). Whilst the scholarship discussed in this section has largely taken the feature film as its organising principle, this authorial collection instead privileges the authorworld of the ageing filmmaker. Varda’s ageing – a visible and thematic concern across much of her later work (including DVD extras) - is central to both the sense of completeness and instability that this collection fosters. It is “complete” in the sense that it comes towards the end of a long and eclectic career,<sup>v</sup> but “unstable” in the sense that the meaning of that career – and the work it has spawned – is very much under (re)negotiation, not least because of the instability of memory, a formal as much as a thematic concern in this collection. Varda, as we will see, is both a playfully unreliable curator and an unreliable narrator. In the discussion that follows, I first address these themes in relation to the organisation of the collection before moving on to discuss the formal qualities of her bonus films. Finally, I return to the materiality of the DVD collection to instil a note of caution about obsolescence, production and consumption in the context of the authorworld.

### ***Tout(e) Varda: the unreliable curator***

The *Tout(e) Varda* collection is a logical development from Varda’s autobiographical features of the 2000s. As Rona Murray notes (2015: 87), in the autobiographical *Les Plages D’Agnès/ The Beaches of Agnès* (2008), Varda interrogates her own position, most notably in relation to the French New Wave, and recognises “it is up to her to ensure that her oeuvre is seen as a body of work” (also McFadden, 2014: 38). Whilst *Beaches* is by no means Varda’s first or only re-construction of her authorship (Varda 1994) it is in many ways the ur-text of *Tout(e) Varda*. The collection repeatedly returns to, revises and recycles elements (both formal and thematic) from this film, as well as (to a lesser extent) from *Les Glaneurs et la Glaneuse/ The Gleaners and I* (2000).

Varda’s body of work begins with her 1954 feature *La Pointe Courte* and ends – for the purposes of *Tout(e) Varda* – with *Agnès de ci de là Varda* (Arte France 2011), a five-part television documentary. It includes features, shorts, gallery work,

documentaries and fiction, though it is a characteristic of Varda's work to mix fictional and documentary modes. Varda is a visible – and audible – presence not only in the DVD extras, but in both fiction and documentary films. Her family and home of 50 years, on Rue Daguerre in Paris, also feature on-screen in fictional(ised) and documentary modes.

Looming large in this is the figure of Varda's husband, Jacques Demy (1931-90) whose life and work is the focus of no less than three of Varda's features - *Jacquot de Nantes* (1991), *L'Univers de Jacques Demy* (1993-95), *Les Demoiselles ont eu 25 Ans* (1992) - with Demy's own first short film (*Le Sabotier du Val de Loire*, 1955) featuring as a bonus on the *Jacquot* DVD. The authorworld constructed by the collection is thus a familial as much as a thematic or creative one: Demy dominates Varda's output after his death and shapes the later-Varda's preoccupation with ageing, memory and commemoration.

As Murray (2015) notes, Varda's later work also engages with the performance of authorship, drawing attention to both gender and age: she is the "petite vieille"/ little old lady telling the story of her life and work. The interrelationship of life and work is central as is the sense of both as stories to be (re)told. Thus, while this collection is underpinned by a fairly traditional understanding of the filmic auteur as individual creative force, it nevertheless feminises this discourse through its repeated situation in spaces and narratives which are domestic and local, establishing an authorworld that is both intertextual and materially located.

Certainly, *Tout(e) Varda* gives a (commercial) visibility to Varda as a filmmaker and invites a reading of her films as a body of work. Given the enduring marginalisation of women within the film industries, the *literal* visibility of the female writer/director is something feminist critics continue to invest with political significance (Tasker 2010). In this respect, the title of the collection requires comment. By placing the "e" of the feminine form (toute) in brackets, the collection immediately draws attention to Varda's gender as something which troubles the categorisation and marketing of the authorial collection. She is visible from the outset as a feminine form, in a context in which the masculine is assumed. The use of the bracket keeps both in view, expressing a doubleness but also, arguably, a hesitation: the identity of the coherent authorial presence is one which Varda holds at something of a distance, but also one invested with political (feminist) significance. The "death of the author" might be an interesting critical project, but it does nothing to destabilise male-dominated versions of film authorship which continue to dominate film discourse, not to mention festivals, awards and histories.

The image of Varda which dominates the packaging of the collection is a cartoon of the older Varda of *Beaches* with her distinctive two-tone hair, oversized glasses, colourful clothing and a bag and camera strung around her neck (Figures 1 & 2). On the inner half of the box, cartoon Vardas are interspersed with cartoon cats. The cat is a symbol of the interconnectedness of Varda's personal and professional lives: her company logo; the stand-in for her filmmaker-friend the notoriously camera-shy Chris Marker; and the beloved domestic cat, featured in *Gleaners* and herself the focus of a commemorative bonus film, *Hommage à Zgougou* (2002), within the collection.<sup>vi</sup> Another side of the exterior is dominated by a black and white photograph of Varda, the filmmaker, alongside an apparently hand-written, signed, description of some of

the contents of the collection. Although this gives top billing to Varda's features, the handwritten form – as well as other contents included (such as a recipe card for leeks au gratin) - echoes the utilitarian, domestic shopping list. Varda's – or, as she signs herself here, Agnès's - authorship is figured as playful, accessible and non-authoritative, and as intimately related to other marginalised forms of women's creative labour. This also holds, in somewhat uneasy tension, the commercial imperative of the object (this is what consumers get for their money) with a domestic, hand-crafted version of creative labour. It offers us both Varda's oeuvre, and Agnès herself, for our consumption.

There is a second list on the box of *Les Films*, organised as *Longs* and *Courts*. However, rather than providing an authoritative list of contents, the miscategorisations within and across these two lists establish a certain instability in the collection. The handwritten note, for instance, claims that the box contains 22 DVDs: it actually contains 24 (including the 'bonus' discs *inédits et inattendues*, and *Les Trois Vies d'Agnès*). It tells us that there are 20 "longs": the more detailed film list has 21. This includes *Agnès de ci de là Varda* - a five-part documentary series for television presented within the collection in its original episodic form – and *Quelques Veuves de Noirmoutier*, originally a gallery installation over multiple screens re-presented here as a continuous documentary. As distinctions between medium are collapsed on the basis of duration ("longs" or "courts"), the box itself points to the difficulty of boxing Varda into particular categories. This kind of miscategorisation (or recategorisation?) is a feature of the internal packaging too, with documentary reclassified as fiction (*Jane B. par Agnès V.*) and vice versa (*Les Créatures*) and different dates given for the same film outside and in (*Jacquot de Nantes*, *Les Plages d'Agnès*). Of course, these may simply be errors, but they are nonetheless coherent with the argument I am developing here about the productive and playful instability of Varda's authorworld: with even the status and origins of the texts in question, Varda is something of an unreliable curator, not an uniquely authoritative one.

The emphasis in a number of the bonus films on sources of inspiration, collaborators and viewers also lends a sense of locatedness and contingency to both production and consumption practices. In this way, Varda's boni recall Catherine Grant's (2014) analysis of the video essay as a form which both cites and sites: the boni cite specific films and artworks in order to establish a creative context for Varda's oeuvre, but also site her work in the context of her life, home and family (as well as in relation to the work of her contemporaries and collaborators, and the experiences of her viewers). It is the more expressive form of the video essay – rather than the didactic form of the commentary track or the promotional "making of" – with which Varda's boni most clearly engage. As such, both at the organisational level and in individual bonus films, *Tout(e) Varda's* authorworld is an extension of the thematic and formal preoccupations which critics like Conway (2015), Bénézet (2014), Smith (1998) and Flitterman-Lewis (1996) have associated with Varda's filmmaking: digression, repetition, circularity, simultaneity, contradiction, the destabilising of fictional and documentary modes, the interweaving of multiple textual voices, a concern with space and time.

In the context of the collection as a whole, the repetition of elements in different contexts reinforces the serendipity of curation. There are multiple inter-connections, different places a scene – or film – might fit. This is most notable with the shorts:



collected together as *Varda Tous Courts*, selected shorts also (re)appear as boni alongside feature length films. For example, *Les Dites Cariatides* (1984) (re)appears on the *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961) disc, and both *L'Opéra-Mouffe* (1958) and *Le Lion Volatil* (2003) sit alongside *Daguerréotypes* (1975). In both instances, the shorts *are boni*, *and* have different boni of their own in each context : the material is not simply repeated, it is recontextualised. The boundary between text and paratext is blurred, and it is Varda's authorship – not the feature(d) film – which provides the conceptual link.

The (re)use of film clips within a number of contexts makes it even clearer that repetition can be a productively destabilising device in the context of Varda's authorworld. Later I will develop this point further in relation to temporality, but here I want to note that multiple citations produce different sites for constructing meaning. It is not the multiplicity in and of itself which is distinctive here: mainstream releases often offer multiple extras and, indeed, the addition of new extras legitimates multiple DVD releases and encourages over-consumption (a theme I will return to). However, this strategy is typically aimed at offering a more complete account of the film (its production, promotion and critical reception) and/or of its storyworld (e.g. by revisiting source materials such as real-life stories, novels or television shows). As Parker and Parker (2011, 121) suggest, this is the DVD as “annotated copy”, producing – as Klinger (2006, 73) argues – a sense of the film industry's magisterial *control* of appearances, which can only be enhanced by further behind-the-scenes revelations.

Viewing *Tout(e) Varda* – with its repetitions, echoes and contradictions - has a different effect. Varda's boni demand critical engagement, individually and collectively. Partly this is because the change in mode that Grant (2008) argues accompanies the reframing of fiction films on DVD is always already complicated by the mixing of fiction and documentary characteristic of Varda's work. Instead, the boni author(is)ed by Varda *extend* the formal and thematic preoccupations of the features they accompany. This includes an interest in time, memory and commemoration as cyclical rather than linear processes which – in turn – means that any interpretations offered are clearly marked as specifically-located and, so, contingent, as the examples in the next section will demonstrate.

### ***Memory is a bonus: the unreliable narrator***

In this section, I want to work through the more general arguments made above in the context of two specific extras within the *Tout(e) Varda* collection which are differently positioned within the DVD architecture and appear to offer different kinds of authorial engagement: a nine-minute introduction to *La Pointe Courte* and the more extended *Souvenirs et Anecdotes/Memories and Anecdotes* (2005), a thirty-six-minute bonus film on the *Cléo de 5 à 7* disc. My concern is less with *what* these extras claim about the feature(d) films, than with the formal qualities of the films themselves.

Short filmed introductions in which *Agnès présent le film* preface all of Varda's less well-known features and short films within this collection. As Keith Johnston has argued (2014), menus play an important role in orientating expectations and on the

discs I am discussing here the menus establish the centrality of the *Agnès présente le film* to the experience, positioning them as the first interactive option, a gateway to *le film* below. The menus are typically set against a film still and often handwritten, in lower case, encouraging an engagement with the DVD both as a means of capturing film, and as a more personal, hand-crafted object. The familiar and intimate address is reinforced in the *Agnès présente le film* introductions which are rarely didactic, but instead play with the intimacy and artificiality which Varda so often holds together in her work.

The introductory films are typically less than two minutes long and are all staged in Varda's Rue Daguerre courtyard. The Rue Daguerre courtyard is a deliberately *liminal* space: outside the more intimate, private spaces of the home (hidden, if occasionally glimpsed, behind doors and curtains); but also separate from the public world of the street. We are frequently reminded of the worlds inside and out: curtains waft in the breeze; it starts to rain; a door opens into the courtyard; the noise of voices and traffic drifts in from the street. This gives a documentary quality to a *mise-en-scène* which is otherwise very deliberately staged.

In the introductions to most of the features, posters for Varda's films are strung on a washing line, slowly parting to reveal Varda sitting at a garden table. In introductions to the short films, Varda is again seated in the courtyard, this time framed by houseplants and positioned in front of a wooden screen which is differently decorated each time: with empty frames; still photographs; or objects associated with the diegetic world to follow. In some of the short film introductions she appears to be wearing a housecoat over a silk blouse, as though protecting her clothes from the evidence of her labour. Through the use of the washing line and housecoat – alongside film posters, still photographs and material objects – the introductions offer domestic labour, as much as Varda's other films and her work as a photographer, as intertext. The theatricality of the *mise-en-scène* seems to place everything in quotation marks but does so – at least in part – through placing Varda and her films in a gendered domestic setting at a particular moment in time.

This is made most explicit in Varda's introduction to her first feature *La Pointe Courte - Agnès présente le film en dialogue avec Mathieu Amalric*. Running to some nine-minutes, it is significantly longer than the other *Agnès présente* films but serves as a kind of introduction to the collection as a whole. It begins with Varda's voice-over and an image of her familiar courtyard. Yet, the staging for the purpose of filming is made immediately explicit: Varda's voice-over tells us that the courtyard has been set up as it was in 1954, the year of *La Pointe Courte*. It is the older Varda who now occupies this space as she describes how she wrote her debut: aged hands filmed in close up, turning the pages of the script which bears the mark of a younger hand, the completed film playing silently behind her on a superimposed window/screen.

This filmed introduction thus re-stages (and, in the context of the viewing experience, anticipates) the liminality for which *La Pointe Courte* is most famous: the in-between of public and private worlds, documentary and fiction. But with its visual layering of time – rendering simultaneously visible the young Varda's handwriting, the 1954 film of *La Pointe Courte* (clearly itself a visual effect), and the older Varda's account of the filming - it thematises the older Varda's concern with temporality and memory.

The liminality of *La Pointe Courte* thus takes on a temporal dimension. It is presented as a fictionalised document of a time, place and people which have long gone, establishing a retrospective continuity across Varda's oeuvre.

However, this sequence is also interesting in the context of debates about the spatiality of DVD as Varda's commentary is situated adjacent to – not over – the film. Varda is in the front right of the frame, sitting at the garden table with her script. The film is superimposed on the top left of the frame, playing silently as Varda remembers: "I tried to imagine what a man and a woman might say after living together several years as time takes its toll on their relationship." At this point, the courtyard scene is frozen and the *La Pointe Courte* soundtrack takes over. Varda is in freeze-frame, looking downwards at her script, as the film continues to play (now with sound) in the top left of the frame. It resembles a thought bubble in a cartoon strip: *this* is what Varda tried to imagine.

Parker and Parker (2011, xvi) claim that DVD enables a form of film criticism which shares the medium of its object. However, their examples – primarily commentary tracks – "share" the medium of their object only in their physical proximity: the audio track may exist *within* the medium, but it does not *replicate* it (it is an audio track, laid over an audio-visual form). Varda's *boni do* share the medium in both of these senses. Moreover, the sequence discussed above makes this explicit, using the freeze-frame to draw attention to the incompatibility of the audio-commentary with a full engagement with the audio-visual qualities of the text. This sequence also highlights multiple processes involved in filmmaking (and interpretation) – writing (and reading); imagining (and watching); narrating (and listening) – and positions the filmmaker and viewer alike as active agents: able to freeze, rewind, rewatch, mute. This has more in common with the critical project of the video essay than with the typical DVD interview or commentary track: through its own craft, it offers a critical and historicising take on *La Pointe Courte* in the context of Varda's authorworld and invites an attentive spectatorship.

Varda is not the only one offering a frame for understanding *La Pointe Courte* here. The second part of this featurette takes the form of a filmed conversation between actor/director Mathieu Amalric and Varda in the same Rue Daguerre courtyard. Amalric's relationship to *La Pointe Courte* is never explained (he was born a decade after it was made) and so he appears to be a surrogate for the contemporary spectator, gleaning *La Pointe Courte* for historical, biographical and aesthetic significance. As the two filmmakers share memories of making their first films a central concern with the "real" underpins their exchange: are these films autobiographical or fantastical? In the contradictions which emerge in this short exchange it would seem they are both, but it is the way in which the staging of their conversation seems to echo their stated concerns which marks the Varda *boni do* as distinctive. Varda welcomes Amalric into her world, but also holds him at a distance, playfully refusing his reading of her filmmaking process with a "cut, costume change" direction at a moment of dissent. Varda's control of the encounter is also signalled in her movement: at one point moving in front of the camera, blocking our view of Amalric; at another, the camera moving in closer to underscore her stated fascination with filming faces. In other words, the formal choices of *this* film are rendered explicit in a way which is unusual for the bonus film.

Read in the context of the collection as a whole, there are further layers to this with Varda's filmed introduction itself apparently borrowing from her discussion of *La Pointe Courte* in her feature film *The Beaches of Agnès*: a connection the spectator is more likely to make thanks to their physical proximity in the collection (the *La Pointe Courte* and *Beaches* discs are paired in a plastic sleeve). The Varda of *Agnès présente* and the Varda of *Beaches* each carry the memory of the other: there is no sense of an "original". This short film thus echoes – and anticipates – the older Varda's preoccupation with memory and its fallibility, and also points to the contingency of interpretation: repeated in different contexts, the same set-ups make different claims and demands.

The apparent contradiction in my description of the temporal dimension of this – both echoing something which has gone before, and anticipating that which is to come – is deliberate. As suggested above, this temporal confusion is by no means an unusual feature of Special Edition or Anniversary DVD releases. However, Varda's use of the capacities of DVD becomes both a formal and thematic extension of the fascinations of her film work and so creates a coherent authorworld, even as it destabilises the possibility of authoritative interpretation of any of the individual elements within it.

My second example - *Souvenirs et Anecdotes* on the *Cléo de 5 à 7* disc - provides further evidence of this. This film is not accessed from the main menu but from the "les boni" menu. Given the organisation of the collection discussed above, it is perhaps no surprise that many of Varda's bonus films are similarly titled: they are "memories", "notes", "fragments", "returns", "evocations", foregrounding their tentativeness and incompleteness. Within these bonus films, Varda's organising role is typically explicit: Varda herself chooses the objects she places in front of the camera, she operates the camera and is often seen to do so, asks questions of her cast and crew, and provides the voice-over or commentary. However, the unfolding accounts of the feature(d) film which she produces are never linear, chronological or fixed. Instead, they are digressive, at times contradictory, at others uncertain and aware both of the passing of time and of the moment in which they are produced. If the organisation of the box set suggests Varda may not be an entirely reliable curator, these extras collectively mark the (often playful) unreliability of her authorial narration.

The opening seconds of *Souvenirs* are reminiscent of the standard director's commentary: Varda's voice (from the present tense of the DVD) is heard over *Cléo*'s title sequence. Ambient sound – including birdsong – positions the voice in a different temporality than the image and foregrounds the materiality of the voice-in-space. Varda falls silent and the *Cléo* soundtrack is allowed to briefly dominate. However, the film then cuts to Varda, in medium close-up, as she continues her account audio-visually. The mise-en-scène of Varda's commentary is clearly very composed: she is outdoors, sitting on a wooden bench, against a very textured backdrop of painted plaster and weathered wood, with foliage creeping in at either side of the frame. This is also one of the set-ups for Varda's account of *Cléo* in *Beaches*, and she again appears to be in her Rue Daguerre courtyard.

Both the echo of *Beaches* and the editing of *Souvenirs* itself means that we are aware not only of Varda's physical distance from the object she discusses (and the work which lies between) but of the filmic construction of her commentary. The almost-

domestic setting, the discussion of the intersection of family and filmmaking, and Varda's vocal performance suggest a conversational intimacy which is not uncommon for directorial audio-commentaries. Yet, our visual interest is reoriented - from *Cléo* to Varda, from then to now. Varda is no longer imposed *onto Cléo*, but rather reappears adjacent to it.

As Varda's discussion moves on to the question of objective and subjective time (a key theme of *Cléo*), on screen we see a series of on-set photos of a much-younger Varda on the *Cléo* shoot. At this point, the qualities of Varda's voice change. No longer firmly located in the ambient-sound of her courtyard, this voice has the distant, clean quality associated with studio recording. The juxtaposition of different treatments of the same voice occurs frequently in Varda's work (including her work for DVD), drawing attention to its varied carnal qualities, to proximity and distance, time and editing. This coheres with the bonus film's interest in the fallibility of memory, itself a recurring theme in Varda's later work, though not in *Cléo* itself. Thus although *Souvenirs* covers some fairly conventional ground in terms of the DVD extra - offering answers to frequently asked questions, providing behind-the-scenes gossip, technical information and interviews with the stars - it is a very authored text which contributes to the broader project of establishing continuity in Varda's oeuvre.

However, these interpretations are clearly marked as constructed, and so, contingent. For example, when Varda interviews actors Corinne Marchand (*Cléo*) and Antoine Bourseiller (Antoine), the formal choices she makes in filming their conversation makes us aware of the staged nature of these memories and interpretations. Marchand and Bourseiller sit side-by-side, facing the camera, with Varda's voice issuing from behind it. However, after a cut to a tight close-up of weathered news clippings relating to *Cléo*'s Cannes premiere, a change in sound quality makes us aware that this conversation is not continuous. As Varda's words to Marchand and Bourseiller foreground the uncertainty of memory - "I don't know if you remember..." - the use of a studio recording of her voice creates both a spatial and temporal distance between Varda and her interviewees, her voice taking on a speculative, dreamy quality.

Following the Cannes' clippings, there is a cut to a medium close-up of Varda herself, re-anchoring her voice. However, the reverse shot structure which could have reinstated her spatial relationship to her stars is disrupted. Varda looks right, placing her adjacent to her stars (rather than behind the camera) and further undercutting the illusion of a free-flowing conversation. She is also dressed differently: the multiple costume changes and locations in the boni - as well as explicit comments about the making of the DVD - reinforce the sense that this is a *crafted* piece of work which has, itself, taken time and been pieced together from other sources. This is (bonus) filmmaking as gleaning: reusing, repurposing, recycling, reinterpreting.

### ***Gleaning***

Although I have so far argued that the *Tout(e) Varda* collection extends the thematic and formal concerns of Varda's work - commenting on Varda's work by being Varda's work - there is nevertheless an inherent contradiction which is best explored with reference to Varda's documentary feature *The Gleaners and I* (2000). A film

which has become “emblematic of an environmental cinema and/or cinematic environmentalism” (Bozak 2011, 222), in *Gleaners* Varda makes use of a lightweight digital camera to explore both the history of gleaning (gathering up the detritus of the harvest) and its contemporary and artistic manifestations.

In this film Varda uses the figure of the gleaner to provide an extended metaphor for her authorship. “La glaneuse” (or female gleaner) is Varda herself, made explicit in the “I” of the English translation. However, *La Glaneuse* is also a painting by Jules Breton which Varda briefly recreates in the film with herself in the title role of the peasant woman carrying sheaves of wheat. In the film, Varda drops the wheat and picks up her digital camera, moving from the object gleaned to the one who gleanes. In *Gleaners*, Varda occupies a variety of roles. She is a filmmaker, but she is also the object of cinema and a commentator on it. She is one who gleanes: she labours, putting her films – and her DVDs - together bit by bit, with a fascination for what is conventionally left behind. She is herself “gleaned”: rendered an object of art, a series of images to be gathered and organised; and, in the context of *Tout(e) Varda*, to then be drawn, photographed, filmed, marketed, collected and displayed. And she also gleanes in the interpretative sense. She is the viewer, making sense of Breton’s painting, but also of her own relationship to it. And she is the filmmaker, gleaning her own film in discussion with spectators who contextualise its personal significance in the feature-length follow-up, *Deux Ans Après/ Two Years Later* (2002). In a further twist, although *Two Years Later* was originally made for DVD, it enjoyed both a theatrical release and television broadcast (Conway 2015: 81). This unusual trajectory for a “bonus” feature supports my argument about the boni *as* Varda’s work and Varda’s foregrounding of her various “gleaning” roles and the processes attached to them means that the contingency of vision – and interpretation – is consistently kept in view.

*Gleaners* has been rightly celebrated for its creative and accessible approach to authorship, something which is particularly significant for female filmmakers for whom building up a body of work remains a challenge in a system in which the default director is still assumed to be male. In Conway’s (2015: 82) archival research on *Gleaners*, she notes that the proposal for the film (originally envisaged as a four-part television documentary) makes explicit Varda’s goal to “create and nourish curiosity for ‘others’”. Whilst this speaks most obviously to Varda’s concern for the ‘others’ her film profiles, it is also suggestive of an active – creative and curious – spectatorship. This is folded back into the follow-up film *Two Years Later* in which spectators offer their interpretations of the film and their own experiences of gleaning, presenting Varda with both crafted and gleaned objects (e.g. letters, potatoes) suggesting a participatory and shared creative/gleaning practice.

However, as Bozak points out (2011, 224), the film is not without its contradictions given the built-in obsolescence of its means of production:

Indeed, the digital camera, such as the one that Varda wields, is not so light, its cost not so cheap, once rendered obsolete, discarded, and the burden of what we know call electronic waste is factored in.

In the context of the DVD collection this has additional resonance: as consumers, we are purchasing an object with an obvious shelf-life.

Thematically, the collection certainly reuses and recycles discarded elements and – on occasion – comments explicitly on questions of preservation in ways which resonate with Bozak’s analysis. For instance, the 4-minute film *Histoire de la Vieille Dame/ Story of an Old Lady* (not dated) uses 16mm film, which has gone mouldy in storage, as the basis for a short film about Marthe Jarnais, the 84-year-old woman Varda cast in her short film *7P., cuis., s.de b...* (1984) and subsequently in *Vagabond* (1985). DVD reanimates the long-dead Jarnais and renders digital the mouldy film print, extending its life whilst still bearing visible traces of its decay. With a voice-over provided by an ageing Varda – now closer in age to Jarnais than to the mouldy younger-self on screen – this short film extends the fascination with ageing and preservation already identified as integral to Varda’s later work and to the project of *Tout(e) Varda*. Similarly, the inclusion of fragments of incomplete films *Christmas Carole* (1966) and *La Mélangite* (1960) and the “lost” film *Nausicaa* (1970) provides Varda scholars (and fans) with material previously unavailable and draws attention both to the challenges Varda faced in making and financing her films (title cards and/or voice over situate the sequences and the conditions of their production) and to the precariousness of their preservation (images are scratched and grainy).

Yet, whilst *Tout(e) Varda* presents the most complete versions of Varda’s visions for these films available, some of this material had already been reused by Varda in *The Beaches of Agnès*. This recontextualising of film clips (and, indeed, entire films) is a feature of the collection, as I have already noted. But the material processes of gleaning involved in the making (and purchasing) of this collection require comment. By the time of *Tout(e) Varda*’s release, DVD was already a format heading towards (planned) obsolescence (Benzon 2013).<sup>vii</sup> Whilst much of Varda’s work was *not* easily accessible prior to the release of this collection, the preceding 10 years *had* seen the release of a number of collections as well as individual titles, meaning that for many in the potential audience for this collection, *Tout(e) Varda* promotes a material over-consumption which has long been inherent to the marketing of film for home viewing (Klinger 2006). The collection of short films, *Varda Tous Courts* had, for instance, been released by Ciné-Tamaris in 2007. Many of the bonus films were originally made for Criterion’s *Four by Agnès Varda* collection, or for DVD releases of her more well-known feature films in different territories. In the UK, some of these appeared in Artificial Eye’s two-volume, eight-feature *Agnès Varda Collection* (UK, 2008-09). Whilst the involvement of a range of different media companies in these collections arguably points to the difficulty of mapping DVD authorship across different territories, nevertheless the proliferation of DVD-Vardas is not an uncomplicated cause for celebration. Indeed, there is something excessive about the notion of “complete works” in and of themselves: the investment of both time and money they demand, the one legitimating the other and lending weight to the claims of authorship. *Tout(e) Varda* is, therefore, something of a contradiction: a highly authored collection which is not authoritative in imposing meaning. A recycling of elements (many previously discarded) in a form already in decline, and arguably on its route to obsolescence.

## Conclusion

Whilst I would not want to deny the possibilities the *Tout(e) Varda* collection opens up for reading Varda's oeuvre in quite conventional ways – identifying formal and thematic preoccupations, focusing on the writer-director as the organising principle and gifted agent - Varda's acts of "gleaning" on screen and in the organisation of the collection, eschew authoritative interpretations. Gleaning is speculative, creative, purposeful, but serendipitous. As a filmmaking – and DVD-making - practice, it therefore makes particular demands on the spectator: it is up to us to make the connections, to connect (consciously or unconsciously) the palimpsests of one text in another, to find meaning in (between) interpretations from different times and spaces, and across different media. In other words, despite their authorial presentation, the DVDs do not present an authoritative version of Varda's featured work but rather – collectively – produce a self-consciously crafted version of Varda as a *gendered* auteur occupying a particular time and milieu. Varda's longevity, success and ownership of her back-catalogue may be unusual, but here she creates a version of authorship which is accessible and so seems replicable. For instance, we learn – in more than one context – of Varda's lack of formal film training, of the pragmatic and familial considerations which shaped her film choices, and of the light-weight equipment she uses on her later films. The formal qualities of the DVD extras enhance this sense of filmmaking as a grounded, contingent and accessible process, suggesting that films (and their meanings) are never entirely finished or polished but are rather open to continual reworking, including by Varda herself. *Tout(e) Varda* places the author in an ongoing conversation with/alongside her work – and with other viewers of her work - rather than as an authoritative or defining presence on/over it.

The spatial hesitations in the previous sentence are deliberate and speak to a rather different set of possibilities around DVD than those which have previously been analysed by scholars, but which echo with more recent scholarship on the video essay. Of this latter form, Pam Cook (2014) writes: "the video essay constitutes an event; it transforms existing material to fashion an open-ended process of re-reading and re-writing." Varda's DVD work presents the ageing filmmaker engaged in this process of re-reading and re-writing, not in order to construct a didactic account of a storyworld, but rather to produce an extended body of work which is itself open to re-reading (and, as the re-purposing of materials in different contexts suggests, re-writing). Varda may be relatively unusual in the level of creative involvement she takes in the production of bonus materials, but this analysis has nevertheless pointed to the value of paying attention to *how* this kind of material constructs meaning and not only to *which* meanings are verbally articulated. As such, it makes the case for considering packaging, DVD architecture and bonus films – alongside curatorial and commercial practices – in the study of DVD. For Varda scholars specifically, it points to an extended – and hitherto neglected - canon of authored work worthy of critical attention.

Clearly, I have only scratched the surface here. One potentially fruitful area for further enquiry would be the intersections of Varda's authorworld with that she constructs for Demy, both in her films (features and extras) about his life and work, and in the Ciné-Tamaris DVD re-releases of Demy's films. Although Demy has, in many ways, become Varda's muse, especially since his death (King 2015: 93), there are silences in her portrayals of their relationship – not least in relation to their lengthy separation in the 1980s (Conway 2015: 71). A fuller engagement with



Varda's repackaging of Demy's work - commercially, aesthetically and thematically - may in turn add complexity to existing scholarship on Varda's feminism, her portrayal of gender and sexuality, and her position within French cinema history.

DVD may be a medium in decline, but the questions around the possibilities and constraints of curated and paratextual content are unlikely to go away in relation to newer forms of criticism (e.g. the video essay) and content delivery (e.g. subscription video on demand, streaming services). This analysis of Varda's authorworld offers an entry point into these debates which can potentially allow us recognise different access to power, to production, and to value, whilst also insisting on the possibility of re-purposing, re-producing and re-valuing as both a creative and critical process. Indeed, it stresses the possibility of keeping the process and contingency of meaning in view even within an authorworld which appears relatively tightly controlled – in this case, through Varda's Ciné-Tamaris and its presentation of *all* Varda.

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<sup>i</sup> Ciné-Tamaris was formed in 1954 (as Tamaris Films), to produce *La Pointe Courte*. It became Ciné-Tamaris in 1975 and has been involved in production and distribution of Varda’s films ever since. Ciné-Tamaris also oversees the restoration and distribution of the films of Jacques Demy, Varda’s husband, who died in 1990. See [www.cine-tamaris.fr](http://www.cine-tamaris.fr)

<sup>ii</sup> The features: *La Pointe Courte* (1954), *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961), *Le Bonheur* (1964), *Les Créatures* (1965), *Lions love (...and lies)* (1969), *Daguerréotypes* (1975), *L’Une*

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*Chante l'autre pas/ One sings, the other doesn't* (1976), *Mur Murs* (1980), *Documenteur* (1980/1), *Sans toit ni loi/ Vagabond* (1985), *Jane B par Agnès V.* (1987), *Kung-fu Master* (1987), *Jacquot de Nantes* (1991), *Les Demoiselles ont eu 25 ans* (1966 & 1992), *L'Univers de Jacques Demy* (1993/95), *Les Cent et un Nuits/ 101 Nights* (1994), *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse/ The Gleaners and I* (2000), *Deux Ans Après/ Two Years Later* (2002), *Les Plages D' Agnès/ The Beaches of Agnès* (2008).

<sup>iii</sup> The shorts: *Ô saisons, ô châteaux* (1957), *Du côté de la côte* (1958), *L'opéra-Mouffe* (1958), *Les Fiancés du pont MacDonald* (1961), *Salut les Cubains* (1962/63), *Elsa la rose* (1965), *Oncle Yanco* (1967), *Black Panthers* (1968), *Réponse de femmes* (1975), *Plaisir d'amour en Iran* (1976), *Ulysse* (1982), *Les dites Cariatides* (1984), *7 p., cuis., s. de b.* (1984), *T'as de beaux escaliers, tu sais* (1986), *Le Lion volatil* (2003), *Ydessa, les ours et etc...* (2004).

<sup>iv</sup> There are exceptions, of course. Among recent Varda-scholarship, discussions of various of Varda's short films appear in Conway (2015), Gorbman (2012) and Blatt (2011), whilst Conway (2015) also analyses Varda's installation work.

<sup>v</sup> Varda was 84 when the collection was released and had repeatedly stated that 2008's *The Beaches of Agnès* was to be her last feature (Conway 2015: 108). However, in 2017, her first feature in nearly a decade – *Visages, Villages*, codirected with young photographer JR – appeared at Cannes. Her short film *Les 3 Boutons* (2015) ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mkuSTzf\\_Pw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mkuSTzf_Pw)) also post-dates *Tout(e) Varda*. Made for an online “Women's Tales” series funded by fashion house Miu Miu, the film has its own “making of” film (not, this time, written and directed by Varda herself, but by Marian Lacombe) which features Varda as the familiarly reflective and reflexive raconteur

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJWNrEH25Q8>). Following these links on YouTube of course creates its own authorworlds.

<sup>vi</sup> Kelley Conway (2015: 74) notes that the film about Zgougou was part of Varda's 2006 installation *L'île et elle*, a further example of the way Varda recycles and reuses material in different contexts.

<sup>vii</sup> Between 2008 and 2013, the number of retail DVDs sold to consumers in France fell from 85.1 million to 60.7 million (<http://www.statista.com/statistics/372525/number-of-retail-dvds-sold-to-consumers-in-france/> accessed 25 February 2015).