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## Against House Arrest: Digital Memory and the Impossible Archive

NARBONI: Even though at the beginning *Destroy* [*She Said*] seemed to be a sort of potential work, that might just as well have been thrown away, or filmed, or played onstage, or read, a potential work that was made real by the use to which it was put, so to speak...

DURAS: Yes: the use to which it was put by the reader or the spectator. This is the only perspective I can work within now.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Remembering in the Future Anterior

This article is committed to interrogate the relation between memory and creation—between the persistence of the past and the irruption of the new—as it emerges in contemporary audiovisual works involving the adoption of digital technology and, at the same time, the direct appropriation of film materials. Among the many examples, I will remember: Chris Marker’s CD-ROM *Immemory* (1997), Monica Bonvicini’s video installation *Destroy She Said* (1998), Douglas Gordon’s video installation *left is right and right is wrong and left is wrong and right is right* (1999), the DVD-ROMs which the art collective Labyrinth Project designed in collaboration with filmmakers Pat O’Neill (*Tracing the Decay of Fiction: Encounters with a Film by Pat O’Neill*, 2002) and Peter Forgacs (*The Danube Exodus: The Rippling Currents of the River*, 2002), and Agnès Varda’s film *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000). Despite their stylistic differences, these multimedia texts can be traced back to what Hal Foster has identified as the “archival impulse” presently at work in international art, a mode of production that, while certainly not unprecedented, has now come to assume the distinctive and pervasive character of a tendency.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, I maintain, these works not only exemplify but also contribute to defining a

notion of “archiving” as intervention—not systematic preservation of film materials but creative re-elaboration of cinema’s aesthetic and ideological complexities. In their being gestures of re-inscription rather than neutral recording, they not only expand but also confront, disturb, and ultimately reconstitute the memory of cinema we have inherited. Beyond the opposition between continuity and discontinuity, and independently of any claim of medium specificity, what I propose to call “digital memory” is a memory that originates from the future—one that remembers not only what happened, but also what did not happen in our cinematic past (and yet might have had, under different conditions), what “will have happened” by virtue of these transformative appropriations. A memory of, and in, the future anterior.<sup>3</sup>

Several contemporary scholars, both inside and outside the field of visual arts, have paid attention to the future anterior, or future perfect, and the possibility of thinking the new through the intertwining of past and future which it entails. In *Quoting Caravaggio*, Mieke Bal writes of art history in the future anterior, turning to multimedia works that engage Baroque art and its attempts at construing a point of view in excess of Renaissance perspective. By appropriating Caravaggio, that is, by mobilizing a network of intertextual references that challenge the unity and self-presence of the viewing subject, artists such as Dotty Attie, Ken Aptekar, and David Reed practice a kind of “preposterous history,” a way of doing art that dispossesses the past of its priority over the present.<sup>4</sup> Like the subject and the object in the baroque world, the past and the present of this preposterous history exist in a relation of simultaneity and mutual influence, implicating—enfolding—each other beyond the constraints of chronology and causality. Reed’s installation “Judy’s Bedroom,” a homage to Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958), even creates a mise-en-abyme of this process of revision. Through digital manipulation, the artist inserted his painting #271—already a quotation of Caravaggio’s treatment of light, texture, and hue—into the

scene staging Judy's final reappearance as Madeleine, the woman she impersonates in the first half of the film. The painting is now above the bed in her hotel room, and she is walking past it, dressed and coiffed as Madeleine, a ghost enveloped in a haze of green light. In the installation, the monitor showing this reinvented scene stands alongside a replica of Judy's bed and (hanging right over it) Reed's original #271. Bal claims for such artworks the status of "theoretical objects," that is, a critical position beyond the distinction of theory and practice which the digital pieces under consideration also share. In their constitutive impurity, these works "perform the promise of what will have been," which is for Bal the task of preposterous history.

In *Time Travel*, Elizabeth Grosz also singles out the future anterior as the time of change: irreducible to the present and any autonomous temporal dimension, the future anterior provides feminist theory with the possibility of envisioning a future that does not resemble the past. While identifying two major ways in which time and futurity are conceived in feminist thought (the extrapolative trend, involving projections made on the basis of current states of affairs, and the utopian trend, producing highly imaginative visions of horror or bliss), Grosz proposes the work of Drucilla Cornell as the site of an engagement with the "virtualities," the "unactualized latencies" of the past.<sup>5</sup> The past is not given in the self-evidence of the present but ceaselessly unfolds in tension with a future that defies prediction—in turn, the openness of the future can be thought only in relation to a past that was never present or, rather, that was present only virtually. For Cornell, who explicitly refers to "Derrida's unique conception of the future as the not yet of the never has been," only this remembrance of things to come can constitute the basis for transformative political thought.<sup>6</sup> Many of the concepts crucial to feminist theory (sexual difference, identity, pleasure) will find new elaboration once we think time outside the oppressively repetitive trajectory of chronology and the constraints of the "here and now," itself

a fiction that substitutes presence for the risks and the promises of temporal excess and becoming.

My project too is committed to exploring “what will have been” in the coiling of past and future. However, unlike Bal, who reads baroque art as an instantiation of Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy of the fold, and Grosz, who finds in Henri Bergson, Deleuze, and evolutionism a philosophical counter-lineage, I will turn back to psychoanalysis and seek new points of friction in a thought that, even in its most sophisticated versions, threatens to repeat the past as it was (a notion of past as “what was”). Indeed, among my sources of inspiration is Sophie Calle’s exhibition “Appointment,” held at the London Freud Museum in 1999, not a digital work but a work that encourages us to play with the political possibilities of digitality. Through a deceptively discreet intervention into the ordered “scene” of the Freudian legacy, Calle places her own objects and garments in every room of this legendary house to tickle, tease the texture of its archive, interpolating memories that might have belonged to the house’s female patients.<sup>7</sup> But, after all, in several pictures she is wearing Freud’s overcoat, the same we see on him in a 1930s photograph taken at the London residence. What will have this other Freud, this Freud-in-drag, remembered? Following her lines of performance, I will think the political potential of archival art in relation to the figure of Antigone, Oedipus’ daughter, the marginalized and yet inerasable point of departure for another psychoanalysis—perhaps for another theory of the archive.<sup>8</sup> By burying her brother and claiming the right to commemorate his death against the injunction of the king, Antigone defies the law that sanctions the legitimacy of certain memories (of certain modes of remembering) while condemning others to obscurity. That in a past to come, the Oedipal archive of Freudian psychoanalysis will have become “Antigonean,” other than itself through the workings of digital memory—this is my stake in the question of the archive.

## 2. *Destroy She Said*

While emphasizing the hybrid and fragmentary nature of archival art, Foster suggests that its “orientation [...] is often more ‘institutive’ than ‘destructive,’ more ‘legislative’ than ‘transgressive,’” that is, geared less toward the dismantlement of the museum than toward the production of other kinds of ordering.<sup>9</sup> He wonders, however, about how this impulse relates to Jacques Derrida’s notion of archive fever and the aggressive energy that, in psychoanalytic theory, finds expression through the category of the death drive, but does not elaborate on such a point. The point is indeed crucial, as Derrida repeatedly states that the archive as “consignation”—as the gathering and ordering of signs into a system—cannot be thought independently of a drive of loss. The archive emerges at the crossing of place and law, there where the *archons*, the superior magistrates responsible for both the safety of the documents and their interpretation, have instituted a proper residence or domicile.<sup>10</sup> However, despite this very power of physical and symbolic supervision, “the archive always works, and *a priori*, against itself,”<sup>11</sup> writes Derrida, that is, toward its own effacement. How can we define this *other* and yet not external force, aimed at nothing but destruction? Because no archive would ever come into sight independently of a certain “scene of domiciliation” and the archontic power presiding over it, the death drive that pervades (and unravels) its inner workings can be said to be “anarchic, anarchontic.”<sup>12</sup> But, Derrida adds, “the death drive is above all *anarchivic*,” that is, archive-destroying, as if the latter qualification superseded the former, pointing to a deeper or more inclusive force.<sup>13</sup> However, maintaining the distinction proves critical at this juncture, as it allows us to ask—to the extent that it is anarchivic, is the death drive also always anarchontic? Yes, in so far as that which is being destroyed depends for its existence on a certain institutional

power. No, in so far as this inevitable self-erosion has not prevented the archive from continuing to exercise a fundamentally “archic, in truth *patriarchic*, function.”<sup>14</sup> Derrida himself acknowledges that the question of a politics of the archive permeates his entire lecture, noticing that “whatever one could attempt, and in particular in Freudian psychoanalysis, to rethink the place and the law according to which the archontic becomes instituted [...] would have grave consequences for a theory of the archive” and the order which such theory supports and by which it is in turn justified.<sup>15</sup>

At the intersection of architecture and authority a certain flow comes to a halt—is arrested, contained, and put to use by the laws sanctioning the circulation of signs. It is here that I will situate and develop Foster’s suspended inquiry by considering the works of Italian multimedia artist Monica Bonvicini and, later, of French filmmaker Agnès Varda. For over a decade, Bonvicini has engaged in an aggressive critique of the male-centered ideology of space and architecture, assembling large-scale, multimedia installations and sculptures that disrupt the alleged neutrality of our urban and domestic environments. Many of her pieces, like the video *Wallfuckin’* (1995-96) and the video installations *Hammering Out (an Old Argument)* (1998-2003) and *Hausfrau Swinging* (1998), undertake a feminist critique of architecture that, in direct dialogue with the contributions of theorists like Beatriz Colomina and Leslie Kane Weisman, looks at sexuality and space as mutually embedded dimensions of a politically constructed experience.<sup>16</sup> In *Hammering Out*, for instance, the video of a woman’s hands holding a sledgehammer and pounding on a plaster wall is projected directly onto one of the gallery’s walls, creating a tromp-oil effect of destruction. Both humorous and indomitable, her work presents itself as an invaluable site for thinking the complexity of the question Foster hints at but ultimately evades. How can the death drive, the archive-destroying force internal to any archival

desire, also become *radically* “anarchic, anarchotic,” that is, capable of subverting or undoing the (patriarchal) order that Derrida traces back to the *archons*, the guardians upon whose power of domiciliation the archive is founded?

Bonvicini’s two-channel video installation *Destroy She Said* (1998, 60 min.) derives its title from Marguerite Duras’ 1969 novel and film *Détruire, dit-elle* (*Destroy, She Said*), both fragmentary texts that explore the intimacy of violence and sexuality and drastically experiment with the compositional rules of literature and cinema. Bonvicini’s piece consists of two freestanding, plasterboard walls onto which are projected excerpts of European films from the fifties through the seventies.<sup>17</sup> The darkened exhibition space recalls an abandoned or temporarily deserted construction site—the walls, resting on wooden shafts like billboards, are lit from behind by red industrial lamps and surrounded by pieces of wood and other building materials, the markers of a process that has been suspended or displaced. The images alternating on these makeshift screens show the most iconic actresses of modernist cinema: Ingrid Bergman in Roberto Rossellini’s *Stromboli* (1950), Monica Vitti in Antonioni’s *L’Avventura* (1960), Jeanne Moreau in Antonioni’s *La Notte* (1961), Anna Karina in Godard’s *Vivre sa vie* (*My Life to Live*, 1962) and *Alphaville, une étrange aventure de Lemmy Caution* (*Alphaville*, 1965), and Catherine Deneuve in Polanski’s *Repulsion* (1965), among others. In all the selected shots the women appear leaning on walls, doorframes, and windowpanes, at once supported and constrained (“framed”) by the very architectural elements that also conspicuously model the exhibition space.

Meticulously excised from the original films, removed from their formal and narrative contexts, then edited together and projected side by side, these solitary images now exist in a state of strange simultaneity. All the shots in the piece, even if given to us in succession, seem to

partake of a configuration that refuses the stillness of archival synchrony and is instead pervaded by an unstable, intermittent temporality—as if the past and future of the other, invisible shots had irreparably infiltrated the visible present and disrupted any fixed point of reference. “C’è nessuno?” (“Anybody there?”), yells Monica Vitti in *L’Avventura*, pressing against the closed shutters of a deserted house, and the second time we hear her throaty voice is in *Alphaville*, where Anna Karina is calmly closing the door to Lemmy Caution’s hotel room. When Brigitte Mira cries at the cruelty and ignorance of the world, in Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *Fear Eats the Soul* (1974), her despair reverberates through the walls of *Alphaville*’s technocratic and loveless city and *Stromboli*’s arid insular landscape. Slowly, by virtue of rhythmic repetition, a hypnotic soundtrack, and the haunting use of slow speed, these images begin to touch each other, loop around, intertwine. As if the cut that, in an operation contrary to cinematic suture, has severed them from the original films could also expose the layers of a potential, forgotten relationality. Indeed, they appear like “promissory notes for future elaboration or enigmatic prompts for future scenarios,” implicitly mobilizing the suspended, oscillatory temporality of the future anterior on which we have placed aesthetic and political value.<sup>18</sup> What will have happened to Monica Vitti’s anguished look in the encounter with Anna Karina’s mysterious smile? Or to Lemmy Caution’s smooth gestures vis-à-vis Deneuve’s edgy behavior? What would it mean to re-envision the past of modernist European cinema—with its narrative, stylistic, and symbolic norms—in light of crossings that have never taken place, of events that exceed what is visible on the actual film strip?

However, I believe, *Destroy She Said* is less an invitation to invent new stories, by allowing characters to move outside self-enclosed fictional worlds, than to reconfigure the enunciation of existing ones, to imagine that they could have been told otherwise, spoken by

other speakers, and thus unfolded differently, become other than what they ended up being. Unbound by chronology and causality, the montage releases a play of gazes that radically disarticulates the dyad of male look and female image. Despite the complexity of camera and editing strategies, such a division is still operational in the films quoted, if only because many of the actresses there photographed (Bergman, Karina, Vitti) are indeed being photographed by their directors/husbands or companions (Rossellini, Godard, Antonioni). In its place, *Destroy She Said* activates a relationship of mutual “portraying” between the women on screen, a highly libidinal one in which the tension between sister-to-sister or mother-to-daughter kinship ties and what we call sexual love is ultimately irresolvable. That such a scenario violates the symbolic and its kinship structure does not extinguish the installation’s psychic intensity but, on the contrary, heightens it and makes it reverberate with a sense of doom.

The exchange between diegesis and enunciation becomes most palpable (because already anticipated, hinted at by the film) in the case of Karina and *Vivre sa vie*, a film in twelve episodes telling the story of Nana, a young woman who works as a clerk in a Parisian record store. She vaguely aspires to a movie or stage career but, in need of money to pay the rent, little by little turns to prostitution. In their book on Godard, Harun Farocki and Kaja Silverman highlight how the film’s penultimate sequence stages the complex dynamics of the relationship between artist and muse, at once affirming and, to some degree, undermining the rigid gender distinction it has historically entailed. The sequence consists of a series of close-ups portraying Karina in a small hotel room: first in front of a window, then against a white wall, and finally next to a photographic portrait of Elizabeth Taylor. As Karina poses still or gently moves her head, we hear a male voice reading aloud from Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Oval Portrait*. We initially assume the voice belongs to the young man in the room, whom we have just seen holding a Poe

volume, but soon realize it is Godard's. "This is our story," Godard says, "a painter portraying his love." The story is about an artist who paints the most life-like portrait of his wife and thereby drains her of her vitality until, with the completion of the work, she dies. We know a destiny of death will soon also befall on Nana, who will be killed by the pimps who are attempting to exchange her. Here, however, the mismatch of image and voice allows Karina, the actress, whose corporeality exceeds the role she plays, to claim a life of her own and "'talk back' from the site of Nana, transforming the authorial monologue into an intersubjective dialogue."<sup>19</sup> In *Destroy She Said* this process of authorial subversion goes even further. The voice of her director/husband having vanished, Karina's face begins to silently speak to Taylor's and the other actresses' solitary portraits.<sup>20</sup> What emerges is a perceptual and libidinal connectedness that had thus far remained latent, a bond that will have become visible as the enunciation of the original films is torn into pieces or, rather, twisted upon itself to the point of unraveling. It is as though the women on screen are now portraying, enacting a love that travels along the trajectory of their gazes, rather than intending an absent male figure, thus suggesting the possibility of telling other stories, and perhaps surviving their end.

### **Antigone and the Impossible Archive**

That Bonvicini is interested in foregrounding and dismantling the "walls" of a certain cinema—the boundaries between inside and outside, proper and improper, intelligible and unintelligible—affects not only the contents but also the structure of our memory archive, raising questions that will return later in this work. If, according to Derrida, the archive can only emerge at the intersection of place and law, requiring for its very appearance "a law which is the law of the house [...] as place, domicile, family, lineage, or institution," is Bonvicini's all-female and

ruinous archive destined to remain a criminal, aberrant, indeed impossible archive?<sup>21</sup> It is a deviant archive, certainly with respect to the logic of surveillance and social control that fueled the organization of memory in modernity, but also with respect to the paternal, patrilinear logic that Derrida exposes without actively betraying. What would entail rethinking the intersection of place and law in relation to the figure of Antigone, whom Derrida himself invokes when wondering if, vis-à-vis the psychoanalytic legacy, “Antigone/Anna Freud” has ever spoken in her own name?<sup>22</sup> Because “there is no meta-archive,” because any interpretation inevitably alters that which is being interpreted, this question is eminently not one of authorship but of order, the problem of order persisting even after that of authorship has been deconstructed.<sup>23</sup> As Derrida points out, what is at stake is nothing less than the unity and virility of the “we” which Yosef Yerushalmi adopts in speaking of the psychoanalytic archive: “*we* the fathers, *we* the archons.”<sup>24</sup> And yet, we must notice, such cohesion finds itself already internally disrupted by the double identification of Sigmund Freud with Oedipus and Anna Freud with Antigone. “Your Antigone,” writes Yerushalmi, but this also means: the one who is daughter and sister to you, her father and brother.

The death drive without which the archive cannot be thought is most political at this very juncture, because it is here that we encounter the limit instituting the political as a separate sphere. In contesting the Hegelian interpretation of Antigone and the distinction it draws between kinship and the state, Judith Butler emphasizes that Antigone comes to speak in her own name by adopting the language of the state she opposes, at once drawing upon and disrupting the linguistic boundaries that identify the domain of “sovereign authority and action” and distinguish the female from the male, the rules of kinship from the law of the state. Her claim emerges as one “not of oppositional purity but of the scandalously impure,” a transgression that is

inextricably embedded in what it transgresses—the symbolic as network of norms guaranteeing linguistic intelligibility on the basis of a regulation of desire structured around the incest taboo.<sup>25</sup> According to the Hegelian tradition, her complex act (burying her brother twice and not denying the deed in front of the king) and the violation of both gender and kinship norms it entails are posited as “necessarily failed and fatal,” as well as eminently, emblematically “criminal.”<sup>26</sup> “Antigone,” Jacques Lacan writes in the seminar devoted to the question of ethics, “chooses to be purely and simply the guardian of the being of the criminal as such,” pursuing her desire beyond the threshold of the *Ate*’—the border over which the living cannot cross for long without falling into incommunicability and indeed forfeiting their very right to life.<sup>27</sup> Against the grain of this tradition, Butler asks a question, which itself possesses the strength of a claim, that will be pivotal in our understanding of the relation between the death drive and the archive. Does Antigone’s willful death manifest the universal limit of the symbolic or “a limit that requires to be read as that operation of political power that forecloses what forms of kinship will be intelligible, what kinds of lives can be countenanced as living?”<sup>28</sup>

Antigone’s death, we know, is not one. Long before Creon condemns her to be buried alive, Antigone has been living a deathlike life. Under the weight of Oedipus’s curse (the wish that his children had not been born, the demand that Antigone be bound to no other man), she has experienced only a spectral, diminished kind of existence, without love or children. “Between-life-and-death”: this is the impossible zone where Lacan situates Antigone as she relentlessly pursues a desire in which incestuous love fatally coincides with self-destruction.<sup>29</sup> Traversing and, even more, inhabiting this zone, which for Lacan falls beyond the limits of the symbolic, cannot but bring about the subject’s “second death,” a demise that supersedes the conditions of physical destruction. In her obstinacy, Antigone makes visible for us “something that might be

called the pure and simple desire of death as such.”<sup>30</sup> Butler underscores that, caught in the temporality of the curse, Antigone has indeed inhabited this zone all her life, even before her defiant words and actions, so that descending into the tomb that Creon has arranged for her is but a return to a life that she has known all along, a familiar and familial one. At once a place of death and erotic fulfillment, and also a shelter, a dwelling place, the tomb is not only her final destination but also her place of origin. And yet, Butler asks, is the annihilation befalling on Oedipus’ cursed progeny that of death as inescapable limit of human life or, rather, that of a “social death,” the social non-existence imposed on those who do not conform to our culture’s symbolic norms?<sup>31</sup> That the price of a life exceeding these norms is death, that such a life could instead be conceived as a possibility that is not always already lost, that criminality asserts the contours of another legality—Antigone points us towards this other horizon of intelligibility as much as she displays for us the demonic power of the death drive.

The question of the archive reinserts itself precisely at this juncture. “Archive fever” (*mal d’archive*) is Derrida’s name for the workings of the death drive—an internal erosion, a forgetfulness that does not oppose memory from the outside but unravels its very texture. And yet—does the memory of Antigone reveal the vicissitudes of the death drive in its purest form or does it persist as the reminder of that which we have to forget, to foreclose for the archive of Oedipus and the fathers of psychoanalysis to gather its signs, to establish a domicile? That a living tomb imposes itself as the “house” of this other archive, as the only site where the memory of Oedipus’ progeny can be both preserved and erased (preserved as the reminder of that which needs to be erased) seems less to affirm the necessities of death than to expose the violence of a particular socio-symbolic arrangement. If every archive is in principle spectral, ghostly, eroded by the death drive, we must then determine whether it is inevitable for the death drive to follow

the one path that condemns Antigone to a living death. How can we envision an archive where the death drive (the path it takes in a patriarchal order) is diverted, detoured, given more than one route, so that the house that constitutes its domicile can be other than a funeral chamber? But what would this other domicile—this other “scene of domiciliation”—look like?

### **3. *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse***

At the forefront of audiovisual experimentation since the early sixties, Agnès Varda turned her attention to the digital camcorder in the late nineties, producing the film essay *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (*The Gleaners and I*) in 2000 and, shortly afterward, the companion piece *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse... deux ans après* (*The Gleaners and I: Two Years Later*). A superb example of ciné-écriture, both documentary and philosophical meditation, *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (82 min.) presents us with the mise-en-scene of a marginal and yet diffuse practice—“gleaning,” which the Merriam-Webster defines as the gathering of “grain or other produce left by reapers” as well as of “information or material bit by bit.” The reasons for gleaning are as diverse as its objects: gleaners glean for necessity, ethical stance, pleasure, picking unharvested wheat, odd-shaped fruit and vegetables, expired food, discarded appliances, and abandoned toys. A deft documentarist, Varda locates and engages in conversation with gleaners of all kinds, as they wander the countryside, the seashore, and the city, but—“in times past,” her voice over tells us, “only women gleaned,” while a montage sequence shows us female gleaners from paintings by Jules Breton and Jean-François Millet, black and white Larousse pictures, and a turn-of-the-century film clip. Gleaning, we will soon realize, is not only what she documents but also what she performs as she gathers images from the contemporary world and the art-historical past, tracing constellations that at once display and repeat the humble gesture of

the *glaneuse*. Can we look at this cinematic practice as a practice of the margins, a mode of cultural preservation at odds with the archive as “archic, in truth patriarchic” ordering of space and time? The promise of a different genealogy, indeed of a non-linear, disorderly lineage?

Varda’s filmmaking, I claim, articulates a heterodox image archive not only through choice of topic but also by virtue of an editing style that undoes the distinction between subject and object—of recording, classification, and interpretation. Indeed, we will see, there is no stable archival object nor archiving subject which we can hold, or by which we can be held, in a time that is simply present or past. The initial montage sequence already reveals or, rather, enacts this irreducible entanglement of “identities” and temporalities. While offering a first audiovisual definition of gleaning, it comprises shots that constantly shift between media—painting, printmaking, photography, and film—and historical periods—nineteenth century, early twentieth century, and the turn of the millennium. A crucial transition occurs when a close-up of the women portrayed in Millet’s painting, which Varda tracks down at the Musee d’Orsay, turns into the close-up of an older woman standing at the edge of a plowed field. Speaking directly to the camera, she says, “gleaning, that’s the old way...my mother said, ‘pick up everything so nothing gets wasted’...” In the following shots, her body fully visible against the bare landscape, she proceeds to pick up a few ears of wheat, gathering them in a large apron. She does so for the camera slowly and with a strange mix of ease and hesitation—her gleaning is a performance of gleaning for Varda’s camera and on Varda’s behalf, and we are all aware of this. But her performance is doing something more—it is repeating not only what has happened an endless number of times (to her and other women through the centuries) but also what is now happening in front of her. In fact, she is mirroring what Varda herself is doing, that “digital gleaning” which

we will soon become the occasion for a tableaux and which is itself nothing but a repetition of the peasant's gesture.<sup>32</sup>

What interests me, together with the delineation of a gesture that has no original, that constitutes and undoes its own original through repetition, is the temporality of the encounter between the archived and the archiving, the impossibility of disentangling the one from the other and assigning them a fixed position in time. To increase temporal confusion, a shot of our "contemporary" gleaner is followed by a brief clip of found footage, probably from the turn of the century, showing several women working in a wheat field. Wearing long dresses, their heads covered with white caps, like in a Millet painting, they are performing the same activity, though at a much more sustained pace and without clear signs of self-awareness. The flickering of the film and its dark diurnal light suggest a mixture of remoteness and immediacy—we would like to see more but Varda, whether for lack of footage or compositional restraint, cuts to the image of other female gleaners, again not in the present but in the art-historical past. What emerges, through an operation of montage that folds its materials upon themselves, interweaving them rather than proceeding by accumulation or dialectical tension, is a process of mutual portraiture. Like in Bonvicini's video installation, the editing traces the contours of a figure that exists only in between times, a self-differentiating, heterogeneous figure that archives its own perpetual transformations. Here, however, the sense of doom that still pervades the exchange between Bonvicini's women has lifted or, rather, undergone a mutation. After the early cinema detour, we return to contemporary France and see our woman pointing at a modest house, right next to the wheat field: "I was born in that farmhouse and I will die there too," she says almost matter-of-factly. "But not quite yet!" responds Varda. Like her model or accomplice gleaner, Varda too has death on her mind but she is determined not to quit gleaning. Not quite yet.

Later, a sequence shot in Varda's home, but enveloped by—and enveloping—shots of the rural landscape, further reveals the aesthetic and political complexity of her image archive. Varda has just returned from Japan and is opening her suitcase, retrieving all sorts of objects, from ornamental boxes to postcards and print fabrics. This is how she remembers, her voice says, by gleaning “souvenirs” and bringing them back to her house, which through the years, despite its leaky ceiling and strange mold spots, has become a small archival depository. Many postcards replicate images that we have come to identify as typically Japanese: sushi, Mount Fuji, Okusai's wave, Kabuki masks, the white cat, etc.. There are also a catalogue bearing her name on the front cover and postal stamps reproducing her face—quite likely she traveled to Japan on the occasion of a film retrospective and the wealth of materials, however briefly and unassumingly exhibited, is a testament to her prestige. She goes through the items at a fast pace but then starts lingering on something that, to her amazement, she found in a Tokyo department store: beautifully detailed, lustrous postcards showing Rembrandt's portraits of himself and his wife Saskia. We see her hands taking the postcards out of a white envelope and delicately passing them in review. “Saskia, up close,” we hear over the details of Saskia's embroidered collar. “And then my hand up close.” Now she is holding the camera with one hand, while the other is floating above the Rembrandt paintings, almost caressing them. “I mean this is my project: to film with one hand my other hand. To enter into the horror of it. I find it extraordinary. I feel as if I am an animal, worse, I am an animal I don't know. And here's Rembrandt's self-portrait, but it's just the same in fact, always a self-portrait.” The proximity of the camera draws us into the creases and dark spots of her aging hand, transforming its surface into an alien landscape.

Self-portrait, autobiography, memoir: Varda's extraordinary shots present us with a philosophical meditation that unfolds not despite but *through* the body, challenging a tradition of

thought as old and self-assured as that of Western metaphysics. If René Descartes, in order to guarantee the autonomy and self-presence of the thinking subject, had to separate the “I am” from its own living body, which was then reduced to a corpse or a machine, here Varda reverses this movement of thought to the point of bringing animality, the mystery of the animal(s), into her reflection on the self.<sup>33</sup> These hands through which she (audiovisually) writes—and through which she is written, committed to memory, archived—do not exist in the immediacy of the present nor in a state of solipsism, but are invisibly connected to the other hands we see or glimpse at in the film. Indeed, they form the figure of an irreducible plurality. Moreover, to say that they stand as both object and subject of portraiture would be to understate or even miss the extent to which Varda’s ciné-écriture undermines the Cartesian division of mind and body.<sup>34</sup> As the right hand touches the left one by virtue of the camera, its look coming into being as “palpation at a distance,” and the left hand projects its own eerie landscape onto the right one, we witness the movement of a folding or reversibility that, even within the shot, undoes the distinction between subject and object—of memory, writing, archiving.<sup>35</sup> Archiving as gleaning being that which occurs in between hands, not the activity of the one upon the other, or the passivity of the other toward the one. Finally, this zone in between hands is also a zone in between the living and the dead, the ghostly zone of writing (archiving) and the death drive. The body that is at once filming and being filmed has emerged as the bearer of a temporality already split in the anticipation of death. “My hands,” Varda says the first time she is filming one hand with the other, “keep telling me that the end is near.”

Carefully intercut with shots of rural France, the Rembrandt sequence affirms gleaning as a mode of remembrance that mobilizes often improbable (even perishable) objects, like heart-shaped potatoes and a lucite clock with no hands. These objects find in Varda’s old house not a

monumental, official residence—the “fortress” of Alain Resnais’ *Toute la mémoire du monde* (1956), the French National Library, or Freud’s house/museum—but a fragile and yet enduring shelter, a domicile with porous walls, rhizomatically linked to the other odd depositories she encounters during her travels.<sup>36</sup> A few examples: the studio where a self-defined painter-and-retriever arranges the objects he salvages during his nocturnal expeditions; the totem towers built by a retired brick mason from Russia using scraps of all kinds, but most prominently dolls; the studio where artist Louis Pons composes by virtue of chance, turning “useless things” into “sentences”; and, most remarkably, the cabin filled with spices and odd objects where Charles, an older Vietnamese man, cooks the discarded and yet still edible food which Salomon, a younger African man, recovers in the city’s back alleys. This is how they describe each other: “Mr. Charles, he’s a friend, more than a friend; a protector, a godfather, he’s everything to me,” says Salomon. And Charles, in return: “Salomon is a little bit like a migrating bird; he arrives, he moves, he disappears; and then he comes back again, and then leaves.” For Varda and her interlocutors, gleaning performs its own effacement through detours that allow differing lives to delineate and affirm themselves, as lives in their own right, even if in conflict with officially sanctioned forms of kinship and community. Like in the case of Alain, who resides in the immigrant shelter where he volunteers as a literacy instructor, and sustains himself by selling papers in front of train stations and eating vitamin-rich vegetables off urban markets. With respect to the singularity of these lives, and of her own, Varda’s house is not a death chamber but the place in which she assumes her mortality, making visible a time that cannot be measured or translated into discreet units. This time, unlike Antigone’s, does not obey the temporality of a curse that has always already been happening, secreting instead an excess of life capable of transforming the relation between past and future. Here, Antigone can be glimpsed at as a figure

whose destiny, under different socio-symbolic conditions, can be imagined as other than what it was.

In the hands sequence, what is unique and yet less recognizable in terms of identity and identification is chosen to sustain a meditation on death and the possibilities of life. Here, gleaning takes its maximum distance from the modern archive, the nineteenth century archive, with its drive toward the classification of individuals and the ordering of time.<sup>37</sup> Early cinema, Mary Anne Doane reminds us in *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, originated from and contributed to this very archival impulse: its capacity to provide a direct record of what happens, as it happens, participated in the structuring of contingency and the reification of time that modernity was already vehemently pursuing through a variety of technological means. The instant, the point, the absolutely present—that which can be seized, stored, and represented as self-identical: though irremediably “haunted by historicity,” this is the time which the modern archive aims at construing and appropriating.<sup>38</sup> What would it mean then to rethink the history of cinematic practice in relation to gleaning? Gleaning as a mode of archiving that refuses not only the distinction between subject and object but also the temporality of the clock, its irreversibility and measurability. Varda herself offers us an invaluable suggestion when she visits the estate of Étienne-Jules Marey’s great-grandson and films the hut from which Marey, cinema’s great ancestor, captured images of flying birds with his chrono-photographic gun. She goes even further, showing us some of Marey’s experimental pictures and film bits which, “technical prowess aside,” she says, “are pure visual delight.” This is perhaps the digital *glaneuse*’s ultimate gesture of re-vision. Well beyond the apparent intention to capture and decompose movement, could we consider the chrono-photographic gun as an unwilling and improbable

precursor of Varda's camera? That is, could we conceive of gleaning not only as the digital future of cinema but also as its forgotten analog past?

Through their interventions in the cinematic archive, Bonvicini's video installation and Varda's film trace for us the lines of a memory to come—a memory of cinema that is multiple, incomplete, ever-shifting, in which the digital does not realize the dream of an absolute, immaterial, totalizing recall but, on the contrary, allows for the proliferation and mobilization of singular viewpoints. Emerging there where a disorder of media coincides with a disorder of time, these works can help us envision the contours of a subterranean or latent audiovisual modernity. If the archive (of both cinema and psychoanalysis) still privileges the lineage that runs from Oedipus to Freud, relegating Antigone/Anna Freud to its margins, the archives of the so-called digital age can help us imagine an unruly, incoherent legacy, one in which the women of modernist cinema tear to pieces the enunciation that had initially decided of their destiny, and the gleaner's camera reconfigures the path marking the anticipation of one's own death. Antigone's "scandalously impure" claim, a claim that appropriates the very language of the power she defies, stands here as the point of departure for another understanding of cinema's possibilities (and, conjointly, of psychoanalysis' shunned ties). Indeed, this is my question for cinema's futural past—will Antigone's claim also have been an archival one?

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Marguerite Duras, “Destruction and Language: An Interview with Marguerite Duras,” trans. Helen Lane Cumberland, in *Destroy, She Said*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Grove Press, 1970). The interview features Duras in conversation with critic Jean Narboni and director Jacques Rivette.

<sup>2</sup> See Hal Foster, “An Archival Impulse,” *October* 110 (Fall 2004), 3.

<sup>3</sup> In this work, I am not invested in pursuing questions of medium specificity. Indeed, I will consider the digital as a medium that invents itself by reinventing other media, a medium for which contamination seems to be the most distinctive mode of existence. What I am interested in exploring are the political possibilities of digitality, the culturally transformative uses to which digital technologies can be put by virtue of their socio-economic availability. Along the same lines, I prefer the term “cinematic” rather than “post-cinematic” in order to define a non-oppositional and, above all, non-chronological relation between cinema in the age of film and in its digital incarnations.

<sup>4</sup> Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 76.

<sup>6</sup> Drucilla Cornell, *Beyond Accomodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction, and the Law* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 108.

<sup>7</sup> Sophie Calle, *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005). For a reading of this exhibition in relation to the archive of psychoanalysis, see Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: MIT Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> On psychoanalysis as a theory of the archive, see Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996). On Antigone as the point of departure of another psychoanalysis, see George Steiner, *Antigones* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996), and Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Foster, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Derrida, 2: “the meaning of ‘archive,’ its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded.”

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<sup>11</sup> Derrida, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Derrida, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Derrida, 10.

<sup>14</sup> Derrida 3, my emphasis.

<sup>15</sup> Derrida, 3-4. Cf. also Derrida, 78: "... the anarchic, in short, the possibility of putting to death the very thing, whatever its name, which *carries the law in its tradition*: the archon of the archive, the table, *what* carries the table and *who* carries the table, the subjectile, the substrate, and the subject of the law."

<sup>16</sup> See Beatriz Colomina, ed., *Sexuality and Space* (Princeton: Princeton Papers on Architecture, 1992) and Leslie Kane Weisman, *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> Shelley Winters in John Berry's film noir *He Ran All the Way* (1951) figures prominently as an exception.

<sup>18</sup> Among Foster's examples of archival art, many inhabit and complicate the threshold of cinematic practice (Douglas Gordon, Tacita Dean, Pierre Huyghe), emerging as constitutionally incomplete projects, without a clear beginning or a definitive end. Foster proposes that we look at them not only as remakes or "postproduction pieces" but also as "promissory notes for future elaboration or enigmatic prompts for future scenarios." Cf. Foster, 4-5.

<sup>19</sup> Kaja Silverman and Harun Farocki, *Speaking about Godard* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998), 29.

<sup>20</sup> Among the faces which this exchange of gazes indirectly conjures up is Renee Falconetti's. In fact, we might recall that, in *My Life to Live*, Nana watches Carl Theodore Dreyer's *La Passion de Jean d'Arc* (*The Passion of Joan of Arc*, 1928) and finds herself moved to tears by the film's extraordinary close-ups. As Farocki and Silverman notice, the two women come to mirror each other, their fate of death having been sealed by external, oppressive powers (the Church and its judges, in one case, capitalism and the male pimps, in the other). Despite their limited agency, both women voluntarily assume their destiny, becoming the very example of ethical being. But is their death inevitable? The death about which the character of "the philosopher" speaks toward the end of Godard's film is "voluntary and temporary," theirs is freely assumed yet unwanted and permanent.

<sup>21</sup> Derrida, 7.

<sup>22</sup> In his *Freud's Moses, Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), whose ingenious writing Derrida patiently re-enacts, Yosef Yerushalmi addresses Freud's phantom in the second person, asking him if his Antigone ("your Antigone") indeed was

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speaking in her own name or in his. The reference is to the 1977 invitation that Anna Freud received by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem to inaugurate a chair “carrying the name” of her father and to the written statement she sent instead in her proxy. Cf. Derrida, 41-43.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Derrida, 67: “the interpretation of the archive (here, for example, Yerushalmi’s book) can only illuminate, read, interpret, establish its object, namely a given inheritance, by inscribing itself into it, that is to say by opening it and by enriching it enough to have a rightful place in it. There is no meta-archive. Yerushalmi’s book, including its fictive monologue, henceforth belong to the corpus of Freud (and of Moses, etc.), whose name it also carries.”

<sup>24</sup> Derrida, 48.

<sup>25</sup> Butler, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Butler, 6, and 33, 55.

<sup>27</sup> Lacan, 283

<sup>28</sup> Butler, 29.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Jacques Lacan, *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York and London: Norton, 1992), 272.

<sup>30</sup> Lacan, 282.

<sup>31</sup> In his work on slavery, Orlando Patterson proposes the term to define the unlivable life of those who are deprived of fundamental human rights and Butler adopts it to identify other kinds of social non-existence, for instance in the case of HIV and AIDS patients and non-normative forms of kinship. Cf. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

<sup>32</sup> In another sequence, Varda makes clear that she is the other gleaner in the film, the glaneuse of the title, the one who gathers images that are left behind, unaccounted for, stepped over or sent to the trash heap. Standing next to Breton’s famous painting of a lone gleaner, she humorously (and solemnly) mimes her pose, holding a bunch of wheat ears on her shoulder and looking at the camera, in suspended motion, with a curious and vaguely enigmatic smile. Will the tableau come to life? Indeed, as Varda drops the ears of wheat on the floor and, lifting her right hand, places her digital camera in front of her eye and conspicuously points it toward us.

<sup>33</sup> On questioning the limits of the human in the context of Western philosophy, see Jacques Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008)

<sup>34</sup> In “Matter, Time, and the Digital: Varda’s *The Gleaners and I*,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 24 (Fall 2007), 422, Homay King emphasizes that the film “denies the digital this divorce

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from the tangible and the time-bound. It uses digitality in ways antithetical to the Cartesian dream of immateriality [...] it insists on matter, body, and duration [...]. With *The Gleaners and I*, Varda crafts a digital cinema that is material, feminist, phenomenological, and political.”

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 123.

<sup>36</sup> To emphasize that Freud’s house/museum constitutes the stronghold of a *certain* psychoanalytic legacy, in *The Big Archive*, 187 Spieker refers directly to Yerushalmi, who writes: “the Freud Archives ... were created by Anna Freud, Freud’s devoted daughter, and Dr. Kurt Eissler, surely the most zealous guardian of his reputation, for the ... express purpose of preserving Freud’s legacy and memory for future generations.” Clearly, the “Antigone/Anna Freud” I have been interested in following is not the devoted daughter, but the defiant daughter and sister.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October* 39 (Winter 1986), and Carlo Ginzburg, “Clues: Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes,” in *The Sign of the Three: Dupin, Holmes, Peirce*, ed. Umberto Eco and Thomas A. Sebeok. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983)

<sup>38</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2002).