

THE GLEANERS AND I
a film by
Agnès Varda

THE GLEANERS AND I

[Jazz music starts.] A cat is lying on a TV with “CINE TAMARIS présente” on the screen. Then, the full titles, in white, on a dark red background, can be read:

un film
a' AGNES VARDA

LES GLANEURS
ET
LA GLANEUSE

A row of dark red cover dictionaries appears. [Musical notes] Then Flipping through the dictionary to the page of the word “GLANEUSES”, while the cat is robbing.

Director: G as in gleaning.
To glean is to gather after the harvest.
A gleaner is one who gleans.
In times past only women gleaned.
Millet's “Glaneuses” (p.4) were in all dictionaries.

The original painting is at the Musée d'Orsay (p.5).

Different shots of many audiences around the world standing in front of the oil painting Les Glaneuses by French artist Jean-François Millet.



[00:42]

[00:50]



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5

Close-up and medium shot of an old lady with apron in the field.

Old Lady with Apron: Gleaning, that's the old way. My mother would say, "Pick everything up so nothing gets wasted."

But sadly we no longer do because machines are so efficient nowadays. But before, I used to glean together with my neighbors, for wheat, and rice too.

I would put my big apron on and we'd go gleaning ears of wheat, lovely ears we would find.

A black and white historical clip of people gleaning. Details of the painting of gleaning.

Old Lady with Apron: A whole day in the sun, with gnats and mosquitoes biting, it wasn't too nice, but we liked it. In the evenings, we were exhausted. Once home with our bags and our aprons we'd have a good time laughing and drinking coffee together. I was born in that farmhouse, and I'll die there too.

Director: But not quite yet!

Old Lady with Apron: OK, thank you very much. Thanks very much, all of you. I'm mixed up, you've confused me now.

In the restaurant, a woman with red hair is sitting in the bar counter, some other people are sitting around it including a old man.

Red Hair Woman: Yes, I've always gleaned. I remember, with my grandmother and my brothers and sisters.

Old Man in Green Cardigan: Before, during the war, they had to glean, they were starving. They pounded the grain to make flour, for bread.

Red Hair Woman: We no longer pick these days, we no longer glean to eat. There are still a few gleaners of corn around.

[Music starts ♫] *Different quick shots of people picking up things when market closes...*

Director: Gleaning might be extinct, but stooping has not vanished from our sated society. Urban and rural gleaners all stoop to pick up.

There's no shame, just worries.

[Rap Lyrics]

Yeah, food, grub
It's bad, sad, man
To bend down is not to beg
But when I see them sway
My heart hurts!
Eating that scrap-crap
They've got to live on shit-bits
They've got to frisk for tidbits
Left on the street, leftovers
Rough stuff with no owners
Picking up trash like the street sweeper
Zero for us, for them much better
They got to roam around to kill the hunger
It's always been the same pain,
will always be the same game



Medium shots of people picking up potatoes in the field.

Director: In the towns today as in the fields yesterday
gleaners still humbly stoop to glean.
But men have now joined with women
in gleaning.
What strikes me is that each gleans on his own.
Whereas in paintings
they were always in clusters, rarely alone.



But there's a famous one
painted by Jules Breton at the museum in Arras.

Long shots of trucks on the highway.

Director: We took the road north.
Lots of big trucks, but I'll come back to that,
and we arrived in the town of Arras,
we saw its square,
we saw its museum,
and Breton's La Glaneuse (p.10).

[music starts♪]

Director: I'm happy to drop the ears of wheat and
pick up my camera (p.11.2).
These new small cameras,
they are digital, fantastic.
Their effects are stroboscopic
narcissistic,
and even hyper-realistic.



[00:42]

There is another woman gleaning in this film,
that's me (p.11.1).

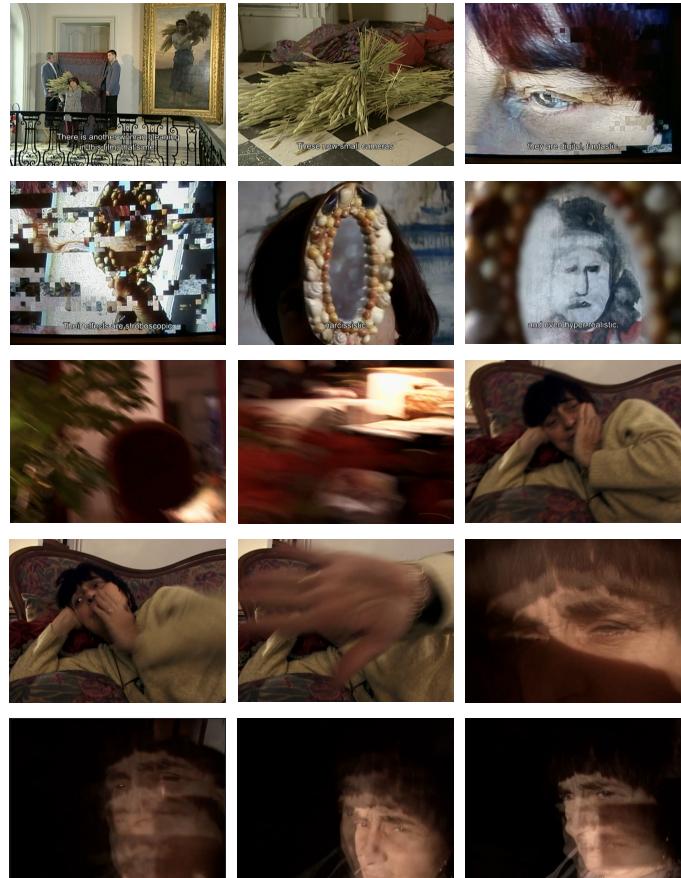
(p.13)
[04:30] [04:40]



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13





(p.15-16)
[04:25-06:08]



Director: No, it's not "O rage", no, it's not "O despair", it's not "Old age, my enemy", it might even be Old age, my friend but still, my hair... and my hands keep telling me that the end is near.

[F] OK, right now, we are driving towards Beaune, renowned for its wheat. The harvest being over we'll focus on potato gleaning instead. Destalking the fields makes furrows and ridges ready for the grubbing machine.

Long shots of a potato field, and trucks working on it. An Old Larger Built Man is gleaning...

Old Larger Built Man: Once the grubbing is over, we can glean the whole field.

Then the Man shakes hands with a Woman (Mrs. Buard).

Mrs. Board: Hello.

Old Larger Built Man: Hello Mrs. Board.

Since this morning, I've collected a full 120kg alone.

And these are good ones you eat with herring.
Lots of restaurants buy them.

Medium shot of another Old Man gleaning with a hoe on the field...

Director: Some people are quite pleased when the machine doesn't work properly

Old Man with Grey Beret: There are lots left here.
The tractor ploughs too deep and gets stuck.
They free it by lifting the machine and they miss potatoes there.

Director: So gleaners have a field day?

Old Man with Grey Beret: Oh yes definitely.
The owners don't give a damn
so long as there's nothing left.
They won't have to treat.

Director: You still must sort them.

Different shots of people working in the potato factory.

Old Man Working in the Potato Factory: In supermarkets, the firm ones are sold

in containers of 2.5kg, 5kg
and these have to be of a specific caliber,
of a specific size.

Young Worker with Denim Jacket: So we dump anything bigger.

Old Man Working in the Potato Factory: The potato harvest averages 4,500 tons per season.
But 25 tons are rejected and dumped.

Director: We followed these rejects all the way to the fields.

Long shot of the machine working to deliver the potatoes, and then the trucks during potatoes to the fields.



[07:54]

Old Worker with Sunglasses: We reject all the out-sized, green ones, and stones, the cut or damaged ones. Because they're unsellable. To the trade, we sell potatoes within a range of 45 to 75 millimetres and anything bigger is automatically thrown away.

Young Worker with Denim Jacket: Potatoes remain a staple foodstuff for many and because large quantities of potatoes are dumped, the practice of gleaning has reappeared.

Young Worker with Sunglasses: In general people wait nearby and follow the trailers.



[08:35]

Director: We followed the trailers but didn't see anyone except a man who might have known, not through a newspaper though for they never announce

"dumping here tomorrow, there next week." Potatoes left in the open like that soon become green and dangerous to eat. Sometimes the children give the signal.



[08:45]



[08:48]

Some kids are running on the field. And then switch to the medium shot of two kids sitting and playing on the a pile of potatoes.

Boy in the Red: Hey, we found a big one here!
C'mon, catch it!

Kids Singing Together: Monday, potatoes
Tuesday, potatoes
Wednesday, potatoes again
Thursday, potatoes
Friday, potatoes
Saturday, potatoes again
Sunday, potatoes au gratin

A Man is carrying a bucket of potatoes to his car and there are many bags of potato in it.

Man with Duckbill Hat: Look, I've picked up
100...150kg, more or less
You find very large ones in the leftovers.
The damaged ones we leave.
Some are too small, we take the large ones
rather.
You see,
There are deformed ones
heart-shaped ones.

Director: The heart, I want the heart! (p.25-28)

Different close-up of heart-shaped potato. Then the director is picking up them from the ground and putting them in her bag.

Director: I was glad.

I immediately filmed them up close,
and set about filming perilously with one hand
my other hand gleaning heart-shaped potatoes.

Then I took a few home with me.
I looked at them again, filmed them again.

[Jazz music starts ♫]

Director: Then it dawned upon me—the Good Heart
Charity Meals.
Why not organize an expedition
on the day the potatoes are to be dumped?

[Rap Lyrics]

When I think of all the food gone bad
That's enough to make me mad
If you've been kicked out and you're down and out
Then you need food for nought

Close-up of a Woman and a Man with a hill of potatoes...

Woman in the Sport Jacket: I take a few for me and my
kids,
and we collect together.



[09:58]

[10:06]



26



[10:10]

27



[10:17]

Man with a Pair of Glasses: I've joined the Charity Meals because I was unemployed. I still am but I expect to start on a trial job soon and meanwhile, I'd rather help people than do nothing, help people in dire straits.

Woman in the Sport Jacket: I'm a single mother. I get food from the Red Cross and the Charity Meals.

Man with a Pair of Glasses: When I see all this go to waste and that some people have nothing to eat, it's really disgraceful.

Medium shot of people carrying the potatoes to the car.

Director: On that day they collected almost 300kg At least that's something.

Long shot of a man's back, and then he starts to pick up some potatoes...

Director: A little later, almost on the same spot, we saw a man approaching. I went over to him and asked him how much he thought there was.

Middle-aged Man: Almost a ton if you add all the

mounds together,
a ton of potatoes wasted.
Same thing with cauliflowers,
fruit and vegetables in other regions,
but here it's potato country, and we take what we
find.
We're better off working in the fields than shop-
lifting.
It's the same for all of us, I'm not alone.
We get by as best we can.
We do potatoes, we look in trash cans,
that keeps me going for now.
It's a hard life, that's all.
The year 2000 is upon us, great, heh?

The man is carrying two bags of potatoes, walking while talking...

Middle-aged Man: ok, I'm on my way with my 30kg, and there are several tons left, which could be picked,
but people don't know where to come to.
There you are.

The shot follows him walking to his home. It is in a rundown trailer park just near the highway. And some Gypsies Women also living there.

Gypsies Woman with a Scarf: They are hoboes in cara-
vans.

We are gypsies, we travel around. They're different from us.



[13:25]

Middle-aged Man: It needs to be cut up for the scrap merchant to come.

We don't have the necessary tools. No electricity, just candles.

Director: What do you do for water?

Middle-aged Man: What?

Water? That's all we have. It's over there.

That's our tap.

Director: What if it freezes?

Middle-aged Man: If it freezes...

we pad around the pipe, or we let it drip to stop it freezing when it gets really cold, like last year, when it got to -20, -25 on the ground.

You get used to it.

The shot follows them back to their trailer. And then they sit in the trailer.

Director: You seem to like beer?

Man holding the beer: I'd drink anything.

Director: How many beers is that?

Man holding the beer: I drink a pack a day.

Director: What?

Man holding the beer: Yeah, a pack of 24 a day.

The close-up of the Middle-aged Man sitting in the trailer while smoking.

Director: Tell me what happened to you.

Did you have a house before?

Middle-aged Man: Yeah, I had a job.

I worked impossible hours,
21 or 22 hours a day.

Director: Truck driving?

Middle-aged Man: Yeah.

Director: A trucker?

Middle-aged Man: Yes.

I drove long vehicles.

Then one day the police breathalyzed me and then...

That's how I lost my job.

Then my wife left me, she took my three kids with her,

and I was in free-fall after that.

Director: Divorce, everything?

Middle-aged Man: Yes, and I haven't seen my kids for almost 2 years.

They're 800 kilometres away from me.
I can't go and see them.
I don't have a car or a license.
Director: It's terrible.
Middle-aged Man: Yes it is.
I think of them every single day.



[15:25]

Medium shot of many Gypsies Women gathering at the trailer park.

One of the Gypsies Women: Here's Guilene.
Another Gypsies woman: She'll tell you everything.
Director: Did you know that once they're through picking potatoes,
you're allowed to take leftovers?
Guilene: No.
Director: You don't know or you just don't go?

Guilene: It's not allowed.
Director: Yes it is!

Guilene: I have something very important to say,
Why has the Mayor put us here, I've been here
four years,
and now he wants us to go.
He says he was fed up with us gypsies and all
that,
but I want to stay here.
I had an apartment but it cost too much.

Middle-aged Man is standing on the filed.

Middle-aged Man: Her first caravan cost her 2,000 francs
and the latest one,
where I am housed at the moment, 200 francs

The shot switches to the inside of the trailer, where the Man sitting with the Guilene.

Guilene: We met when I was working in a cafe as a cleaning woman,
that's how we met.

Middle-aged Man: So long as there's welfare money left,
OK, but after...
we have to get by somehow.
Then we have to beg

and forage through the trash.

Close-up of the Middle-aged Man talking next to a trash bin.

Middle-aged Man: We find food in the garbage.

Director: Good food?

Middle-aged Man: We're badly off. We do find good food. Which could still be sold in shops. But they have to change their shelves.

We take advantage of that, it's a lucky dip.
But we have to go through all the shop's bins
to recover stuff.



[16:55]

Middle-aged Man: That comes from the trash.
The expiry date is 11/29, two days ago.

Director: One day ago.

Middle-aged Man: Right.



[17:09]

That's still valid for seven or eight days, a week or so.

I've got fish which I found there.

It's good until 12/24.

We found it in the trash.

We're not afraid to get our hands dirty. You can wash hands.

Close shot of a Chef cooking in the kitchen of a restaurant.

Chef: Hey, guys, the new appetizer is lamb kidney in a chicory root sauce with a potato fritter and an aniseed and nut soup and mushroom mousse with truffle oil.

Director: As I watched all this cooking, I asked the chef if there were lots of leftovers, and what he did with them.

Chef: Nothing should be wasted. With the leftover lentils, we make a lentil soup, we make the squashes into a gratin, the meat bones we use for stock the fish bones for sauce. We shouldn't throw anything away. You have to be economical.

If I had to buy all the herbs I pick daily on the hills...

A small bunch of savory like this is eight francs and we use about 20 of them every day.

We'd be spending a fortune on herbs.

Anyway, I love picking them.

Long shot of the Chef walking with holding a pumpkin.



[18:53]

offers a gourmet menu for 600 francs.

Director: That nice inventive and thrifty chef offers a gourmet menu for 600 francs. Edouard Loubet is the youngest French chef to have earned two stars in the Michelin guide, now called the Red Guide.

The long shot of Edouard Loubet walking in the field.

Director: Surprisingly enough, Edouard is also a

born gleaner,
or rather a born picker.
With his hat on, in his shirt sleeves, he looks like
a Provencal figurine.

The close-up of him picking up apples.

Chef(Edouard Loubet): Don't tread on the apples!
We take what the farmers leave behind
or we pick the ripe fruit on the trees.
This is the best thing you can use
to make good spirits or good fruit jelly.
I never miss the chance.

Director: How come you, a chef, also pick?

Edouard Loubet: Firstly because my grandparents
taught me to along fields and roads,
and also because I then know what produce I
get and where I get it from.
I don't want refrigerated produce from Italy
which is sold only when someone feels like saying
it is ripe.

Director: As we're talking grapes and wine...

Edouard Loubet: Let's go, Isa!

Director: ...we might as well go to a wine area.
We're off to Burgundy.

[Jazz music starts.] *Long shot of driving on the highway with*

many trucks passing by...

Director: On the road, there are trucks, lots of trucks, (p.42) [20:14–20:49]

of the kind we loved when we were little.
We pass them and gaze at them.
Here's a very big one passing us, transporting
cars,
and here's another one.
And now we are passing him,
we struggle a little to pass this one.
It's like a child's game.

We're arriving in Burgundy.

Beaune to me is above all the Hospices
and the painting by Van der Weyden,

The Last Judgment. (p.45) [20:57–21:46]

The Archangel Michael weighs and judges the
deeds of the dead.
The ones who are light are to be resurrected,
and the heavy ones are to suffer in hell.

Long shot of the road in the countryside...

[♪] **Director:** The grape harvest is over, and yet nobody is in sight.
Why is that?



of the kind we loved when we were little.

We pass them and gaze at them.



Here's a very big one
passing us: transporting cars



And here's another one.



And now we are passing him



We're arriving in Burgundy.



Young Man with glasses: If you want your wine to be ranked as vintage, the yearly production is limited. That means you can only produce a certain quota per plot. Growing up, I didn't hear much about pickers. Wine growers have always protected themselves against them, for if you let people pick in your vines, how can you be sure they are not going to pick on a large scale?

Director: These vintage vines have been entirely harvested and, because of the quotas, the surplus has been deliberately left on the ground. They're drying out, lost for everybody.

Young Man with glasses: It's a measure to protect our profession and capital.

What you see here, is called second generation grapes, verjuice, or conscripts, depending on the area.

Close-up of another Man on the ground.

Man with Grey Shirt: Conscripts.

Director: Like soldiers?

Man with Grey Shirt: Exactly, like conscripts. Some people pick them. It's a second harvest and yields a cheaper wine called wine of the pickings.
Director: Will it taste of Pommard?
Man with Grey Shirt: No, not at all. It makes a table wine, a really cheap table wine.

Long shot of the vineyard. And then the shot switch to the close-up of an Old Man.

Director: The vintage wine region is not a good one for picking.

Old Man with Glasses: Gleaning, or picking, is forbidden in Burgundy.

It ended 3 or 4 years ago.

It's sad, but that's the way it is.

Gleaning was lovely.

We would see the gleaner, tramping along,

Gathering the relics

Of that which is falling Behind the reaper...

Do you know?

Director: Du Bellay? Right?

Old Man with Glasses: It is.

Director: Impressive, you know it by heart!

Old Man with Glasses: I took over my father's estate.

From the grape to the bottle,
I am the only master on board.
I have no cellarman, no head cellarman.
With Nadine, we choose the best blends for our
Chateau bottles.

Director: Do you both choose?

Old Man with Glasses: We both do, yes.

Director: Jean Laplanche,
a keen wine grower,
has another calling, psychotherapy.

Old Man with Glasses(Jean Laplanche):

I am a practicing therapist, but above all a theoretician,
or rather a philosopher of therapy.

Director: What's your theory?

Jean Laplanche: What distinguishes me, is that I have tried to integrate into man's psyche, the primacy of the other above the self, that is to say, I developed an anti-ego philosophy, a philosophy which shows how man first originates in the other.

Director: He copes with his double life?

Jean Laplanche: Rather well.

Jean's wife: He's good, isn't he?

Jean Laplanche: Rather well.

Jean's wife: He's intelligent, I think. And modest.

Jean Laplanche: It keeps me going.

Director: Does it not amaze you?

Jean's wife: What is?

Director: That he is a therapist and makes wine too.

Jean's wife: I was analyzed so as to learn a little more.

Director: By him?

Jean's wife: No, by Lacan.

Jean Laplanche: Ages ago.

Jean's wife: I was very young.

A long time ago.

We'll be married 50 years
in the year 2000.

The shot switches to the Red Hair Woman and her Husband sitting outside a cafe.

Director: Tell me how you met.

Red Hair Woman: At a village dance, where most people meet.

Man Sitting Next Table: The kiss!

Her husband: Right...

Red Hair Woman: No one's interested in that!

I must tell you something,
something the whole world should know about.
I met him, it was like a lightning bolt.

Her husband: You see?

Red Hair Woman: The way he was dressed, I couldn't possibly miss him.

He had a red cap on, honest,
he was back from the Riviera. He looked so...

He had a red cotton cap,
a green shirt,
mustard yellow pants,
rope espadrilles and...

Her husband: Yellow ones!

Red Hair Woman: Right.

And a multicolored belt. I couldn't miss him, just
couldn't.

Director: How was she dressed?

Her husband: That I can't remember. Yeah, it's the
old story.

But I didn't fall for her right away.

It all came later with me.

How mean of me!

Director: Is it true, Huguette?

Red Hair Woman(Huguette):

I'm not in his heart.

Her husband: It's true.

(They laugh.)

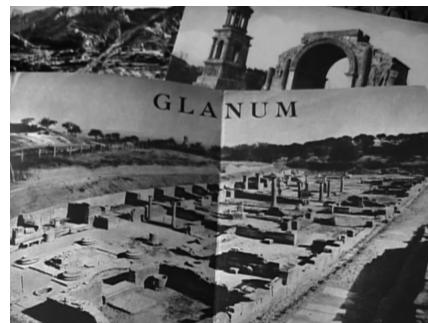
Different shots of people in the restaurant. And then the Red Hair Woman(Huguette) standing with her son.

Huguette: This is Laurent, my son.

A gleaner or a picker, I'm not sure.

Son of Huguette(Laurent): But I heard Glanum (p.51),
not gleaning,

that's why I talked about Saint-Rémy, where Glanum is.



[27:09]

Old Man in Green Cardigan: I've never gleaned.

Huguette: Because gleaning is very different from picking, you see.
But picking, yes.

Director: What's the difference?

Huguette: The difference is that you pick fruit that hangs,
that is hanging, and you glean things that come up.

Old Man in Green Cardigan: Like grain. It's different.

Huguette: Olives and grain.

Old Man in Green Cardigan: Almonds...

Huguette: Figs too, people make jams out of figs.

Old Man in Green Cardigan: The fig, you pick.



[27:42]

Medium of Director picking the fruit from the tree and eat it.

Director: Look, nature's wonders!
Overripe and beautiful!
That's fruit from heaven!
I'm torn between interfering,
but it is none of my business, they can do what
they like with their fruit.
This one's almost pure alcohol, I'll be tipsy.
Anyway, half the people are stingy.
They won't allow gleaning because they don't
feel like being nice.
There's a lot left.

Man with beard: The harvest is over now.

Director: Are these not edible?

Man with beard: Edible, yes, but not good for making candied fruits.

Director: Do you allow people to collect them?
Man with beard: No. I'm not the owner, but up to now, it's never been allowed.

The shot switches to a cabbage field. A man dressed like a Lawyer and holding some books is talking...

Lawyer: The harvest of the cabbages is over, only a few are left here and there. These cabbages can be gleaned with absolute impunity by gleaners from Avignon or around.

Here are lovely tomatoes. The machine hasn't taken the lowest ones. All these tomatoes, which are just as red as my bible, the penal code, all can be gleaned.

And it's not me, it's the penal code that says so, in article R-26.10. Here: gleaning is allowed from sunrise until sunset. First requirement. The second requirement is that gleaning occurs after the harvest is over. And here, we can clearly see the harvest is over.

Paging through an old law commentary I happened upon a decree,

or rather an edict, dated November 2nd, 1554
which says just the same as the law today.
It allows the poor, the wretched,
the deprived, to enter the fields once harvesting is
over.

Director: Old documents talk of the poor, the desti-
tute,
but how are we to consider those who want for
nothing
and glean just for fun?

Lawyer: It's as if they needed something too.
If they glean for fun, it's because they have a need
for fun.
So if the requirements and the times are adhered
to,
they can glean as the poor used to.

Director: Thank you.

Lawyer: Sure. I'll take a walk in the cabbages.



[30:24]

[Piano music starts♪] **Director:** I'll walk my small cam-
era among the colored cabbages
and film other vegetables which catch my eye.

(p.56-57)

Director: On this type of gleaning, of images, im-
pressions,
there is no legislation,
and gleaning is defined figuratively as a mental
activity.
To glean facts, acts and deeds,
to glean information.
And for me and my poor memory, returning from
a journey
it's what I have gleaned that tells where I've been.
From Japan, I brought back in my case souvenirs
I had gleaned.

(p.59-91)
[31:29-33:11]



and film other vegetables
which catch my eye.

[30:31]



[30:54]





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one plant has died, the others haven't.



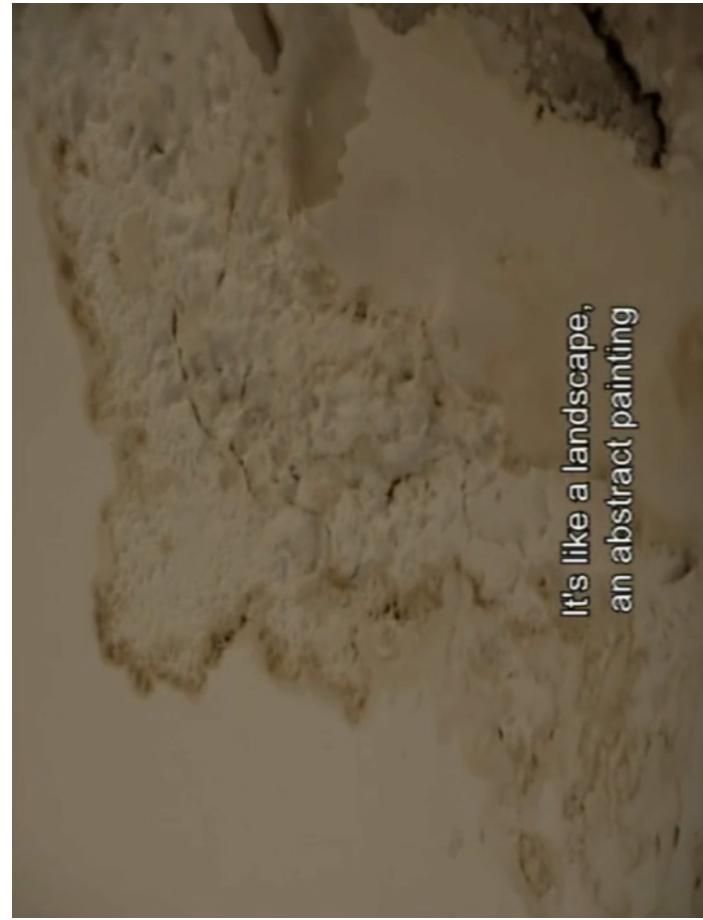
Then I look at the leak in the ceiling
and the mould

I've got used to it.





I like it in the end.



It's like a landscape,
an abstract painting



a Tàpies



a Guo-Qiang



a Borderie.

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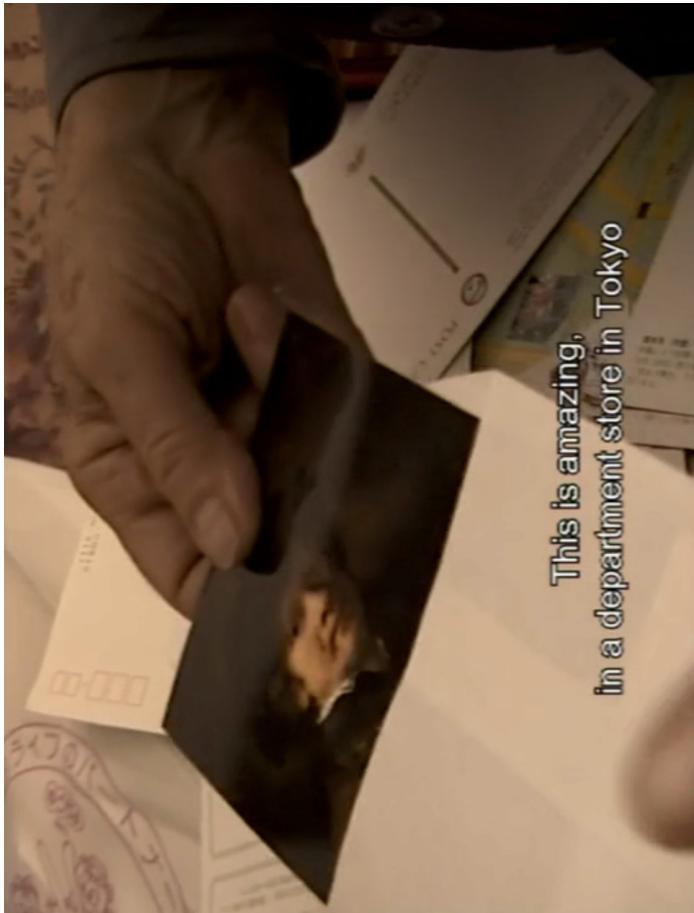
There's water dripping

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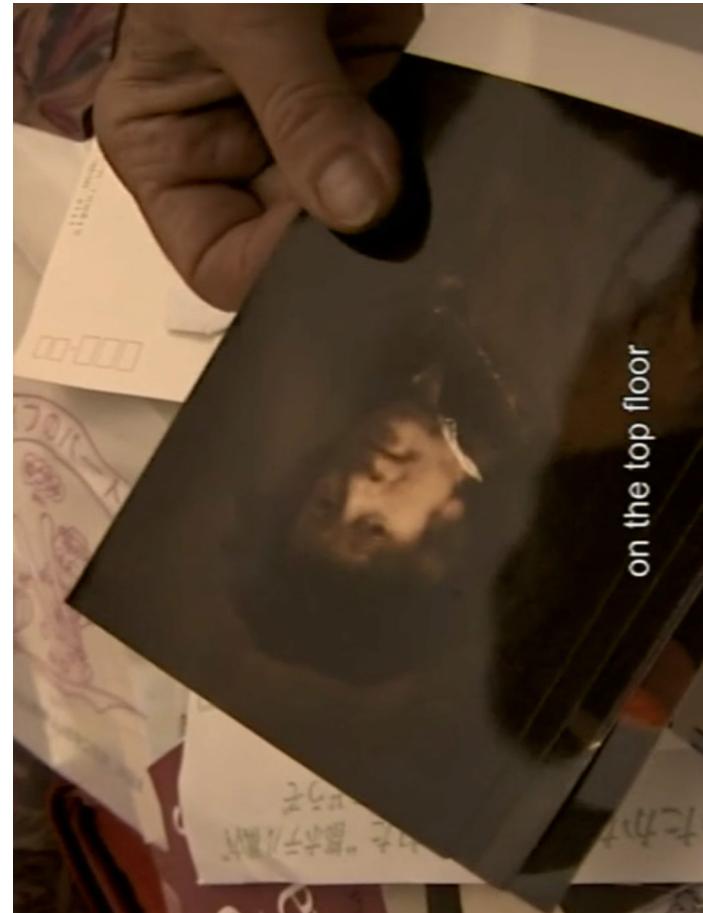


I open my suitcase.





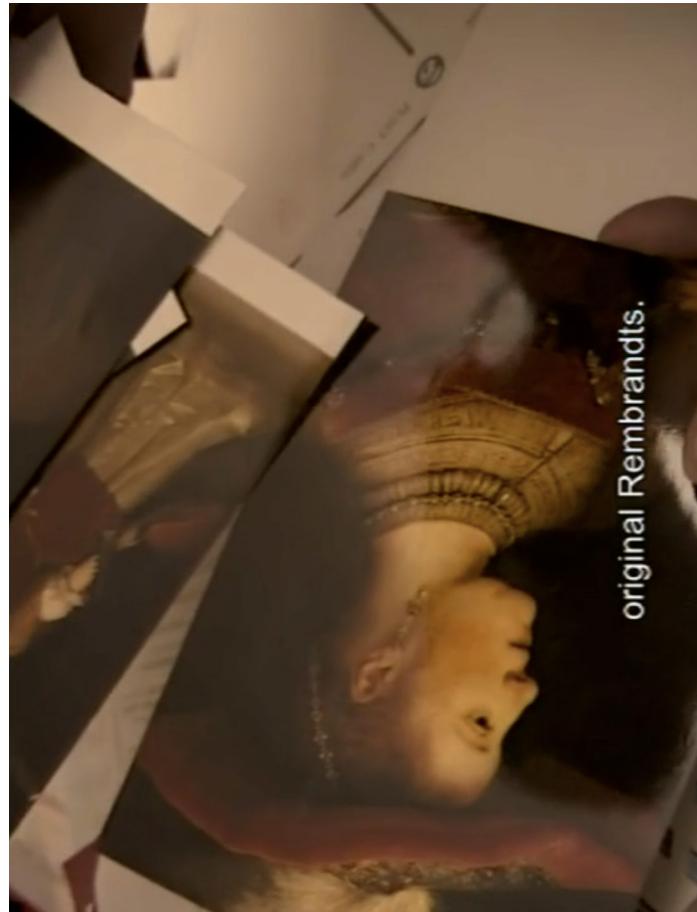
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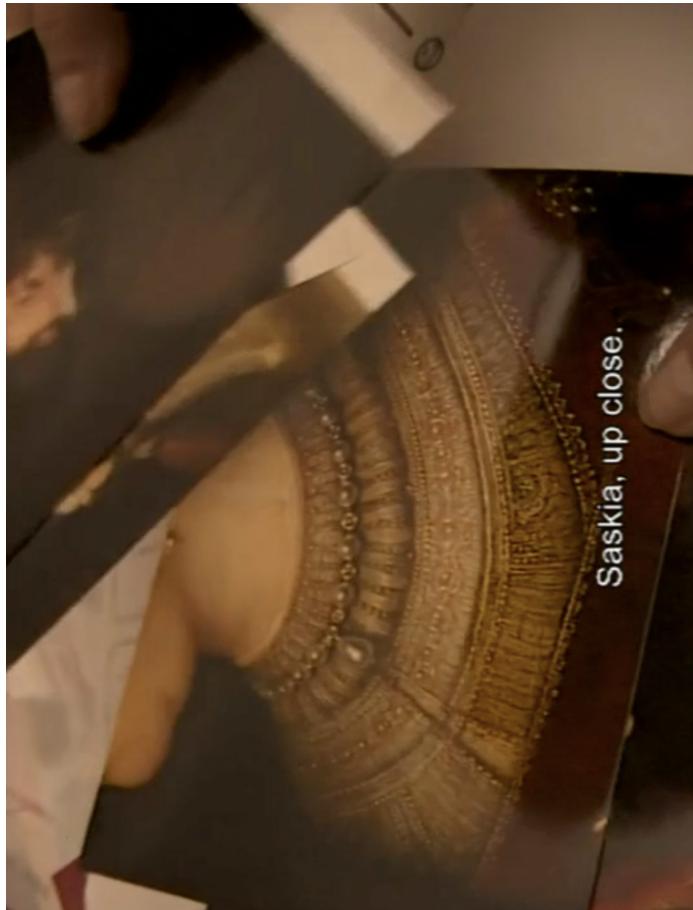
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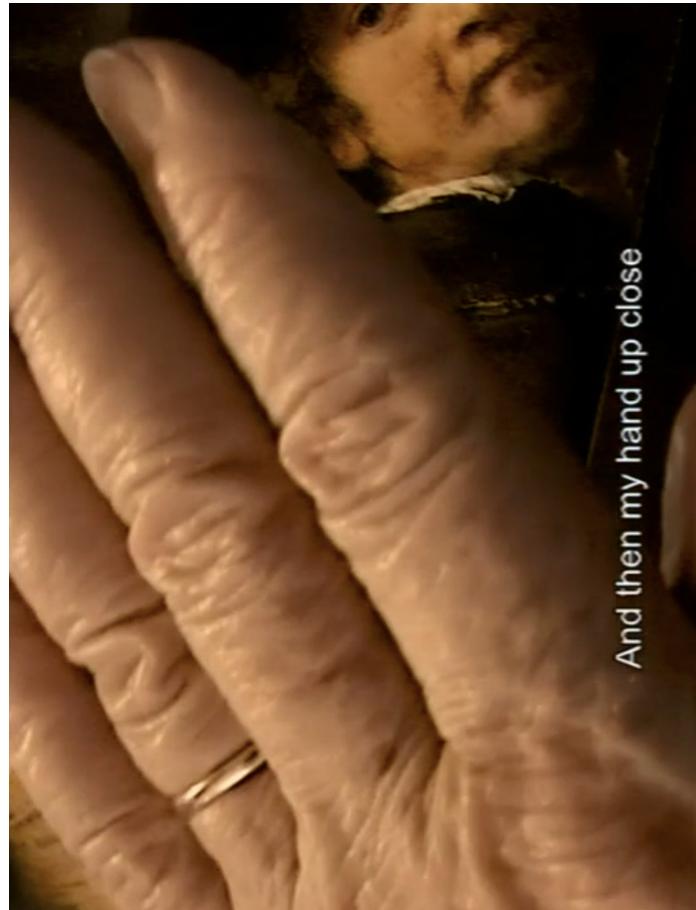
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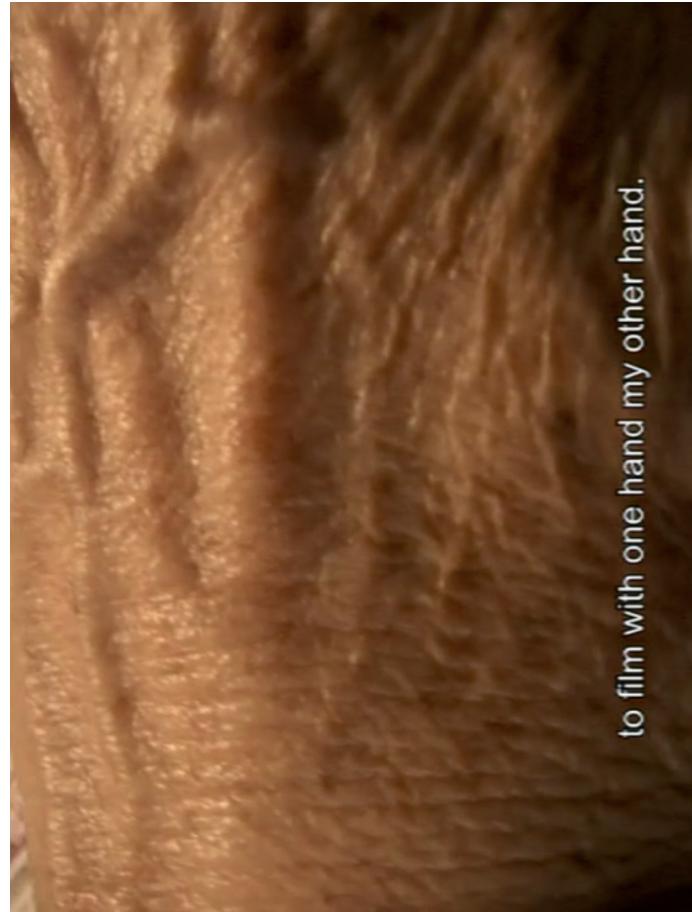
Saskia, up close.



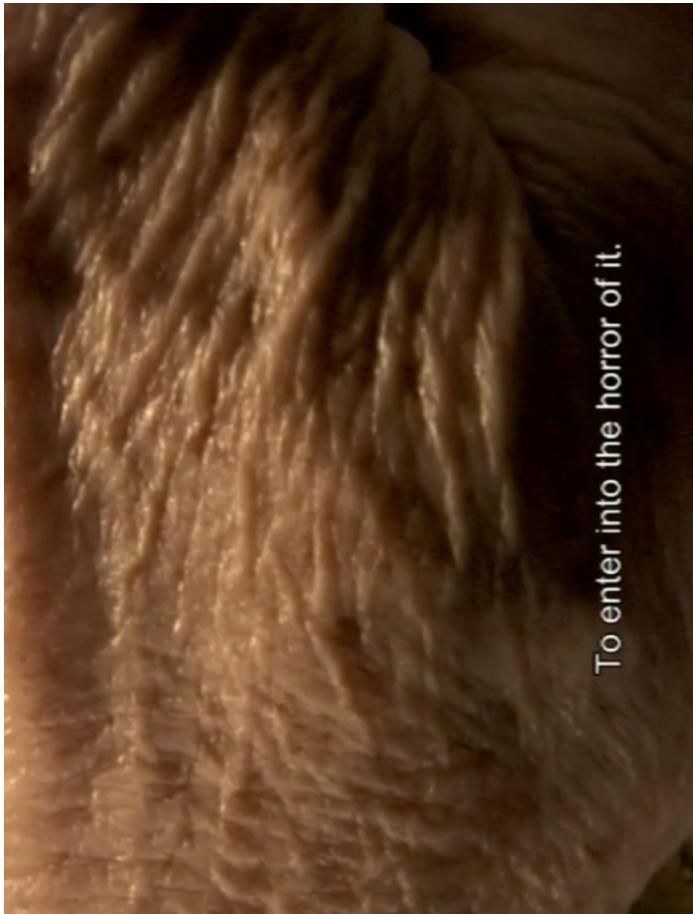
And then my hand up close



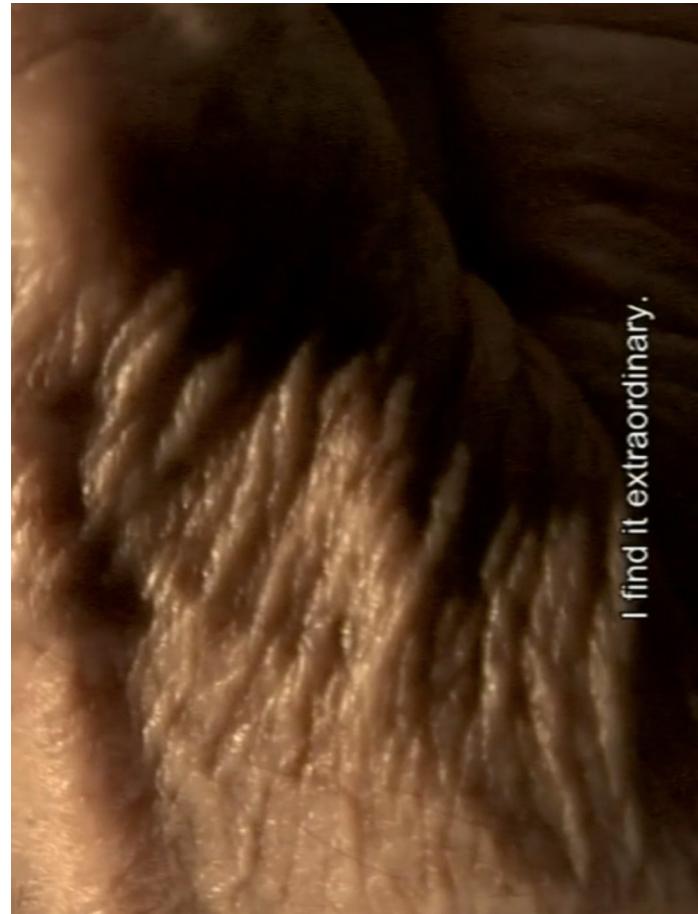
I mean, this is my project -



to film with one hand my other hand.



To enter into the horror of it.



I find it extraordinary.

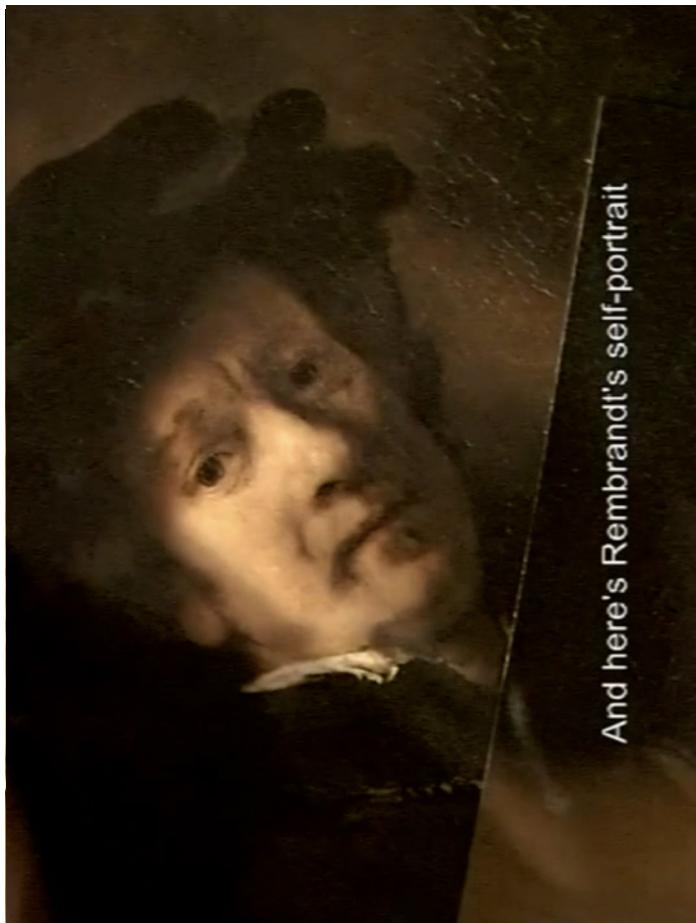


or worse, I am an animal I don't know.

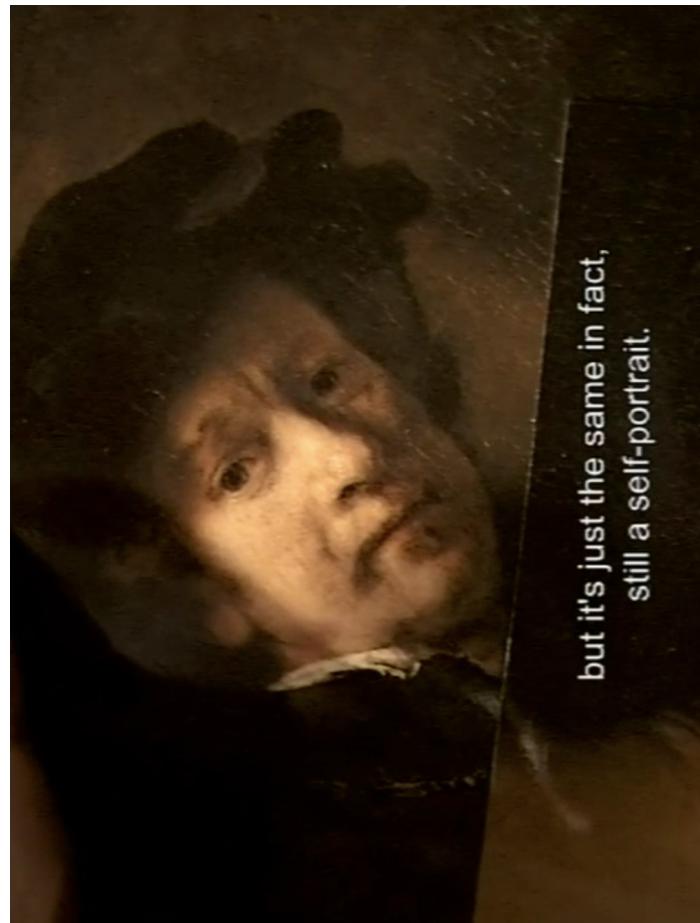
I feel as if I am an animal







And here's Rembrandt's self-portrait



but it's just the same in fact,
still a self-portrait.



[33:18]



[33:26]



[33:29]

[#] Director: As for Maurice Utrillo we saw in a very small museum in the former City Hall of Sannois. We were going to film nearby, at Herve's, alias VR99.

The shot switches to the inside of a room, a young man is sitting on the ground.

Director: In the year 2000, his alias will be VR2000.

A Man in White Sweater: "Loading up" means retrieving heavy objects people get rid of. To do so, town councils and city halls provide small maps such as this one. It shows all the streets, the districts and the days on which one can go and pick them up.

Director: I think they're actually printed to show where to dump things

A Man in White Sweater: Yes, right, well, I read the map my own way because

that's where I find my raw material.

I am, among other things, a painter and a retriever. (p.94-95)

I prefer night time, and because I go by bike, I can only carry small things home.

It'll be easier if I show you.

I make images from salvaged material, frames from wood, I use food packages, slates, and then I also recycle

my own packets of cigarette paper, and what's good about these objects is that they have a past, they've already had a life, and they're still very much alive.

All you have to do is give them a second chance.

The young man is riding a bike, and looking for the objects people abandoned on the street.

All you need to do is wander around, locate sites, and then simply help yourself, like in a real department store.

On site, you find heaps of heavy objects, it is best to get there quickly, because the competition is fierce. Objects go quickly.

They're like presents left on the street, it's like Christmas.



[34:40]



[34:47]

[34:55]



94

95

When I was a kid, my grandfather used to salvage things as well.
He made piles.
I've always liked the world of dumps and salvage,
anything that's been sort of discarded by society.

The medium shot of a small shelter he built, where the trash objects all around. (p.97) [36:11–36:53]

Director: It's like a cavern here.

A Man in White Sweater: My own little cavern, that's right.

A place where I combine objects differently.
I need to accumulate.

Director: Does it protect you as well?

A Man in White Sweater: From what?

Director: From emptiness. Because it's full here.

A Man in White Sweater: I'm moving towards emptiness now, or rather, towards lessness.

As much lessness as possible.

Director: You're still a long way away!

A Man in White Sweater: I am.

Right now, I store up things
because I know I will need to recycle some.
The encounter happens on the street.
The object beckons me, because it belongs here
in a way.



[Music starts♪] *The long shot of driving on the road...*

Director: The encounter also happens on the road, and it happened to us.
On our left, an abandoned factory.
On the other side, a sign “Finds”.
“Curios” is common, but “Finds” is more inviting.

[#] The shot switches to a thrift store...They shake hands with a dummy...

Yellow Hair Woman: Hello, how are you?

Director: Hello.

Turn and face me! He won't.

Director: I spotted some wheat behind that chap, and behind the robot, I discovered a painting of gleaning. (p.99) (37:43-37:48)

It contained both
the humble stooping of Millet's Glaneuses
and the proud posture of Breton's Gleaner.
The painter doubtless had an old dictionary at hand.

Honest, this is no movie trick,
we really did find these Glaneuses purely by chance.

The painting had called to us because it belonged here in this film.

Back to the long shot of driving on the road. And then an old



man is a retired bricklayer, standing in front of a totem tower he built himself.

Director: On the road again, off to the Ideal Palace of Bodan Litnanski, a much visited, much publicized place.

This retired bricklayer came from Russia
builds totem towers
made of things he found in dumps
and brought back in his trailer behind his moped.

Retired Bricklayer: It's solid stuff, you know, very solid.
I am a bricklayer.

(p.103–106)
[36:11–36:53]

Retired Bricklayer: I like dolls, they're my system.
Dolls are characters.

Director: What do you think of all this?

Bricklayer's wife: He's an amateur.

Director: Sorry?

Bricklayer's wife: He's an amateur.

We can't stop him, we let him.

Director: But your husband is an artist.

Bricklayer's wife: An artist, well, maybe...

Director: Why not?

Bricklayer's wife: There's better than that.

Director: What?

Bricklayer's wife: Better, much better than that.

The close-up of flipping through the book of the art works made from many trash objects. Then an old man named Louis Pons talks about his own art works.

Director: Like Louis Pons, for instance, who uses junk as an inspiration. He draws through objects, he accommodates chance.

Artist Louis Pons: All these objects around here are my dictionary, useless things.

People think it's a pile of junk. I see it as a pile of possibilities.

Each object gives a direction, each is a line, picked up here and there, indeed gleaned, and which become my paintings.

The aim of art is to tidy up one's inner and exterior worlds.

These are just crayons, children's crayons. Here we have tins and spools...

This bobbin becomes the tongue of a small bell.







I make sentences from things.
A cricket on a heap of trash.
Cages are interesting too, a bit like boats, like
violins
and things like that whose...
shapes at first are very simple and the same,
but the possible variations are infinite.
These are skirting boards and frames.
There is a thing... from a car...
a windshield wiper.
But for me they are strokes.
I have to balance the strokes.
That's a statement. Horizontal statements, nothing else.

[Music starts♪] Back to the long shot of driving on the road...

(p.108)
[41:14–41:55]

Director: Again one hand filming the other hand,
and more trucks.
I'd like to capture them.
To retain things passing?
No, just to play.

[♫] The long shot overlooking the ocean and people running



on the mud flat. Then the close-up of people working in the oyster factory.

Director: The causeway that leads to the island of Noirmoutier
Is as well known as its oyster.
People glean there
after rough storms and very large tides.

Man in Green Coat: Storms dislodge oysters from
their beds
and wash them ashore.
But they all know that around Christmas time,
we are so busy to go and collect the oysters.
So we leave it to the gleaners.
They go as soon as
the storm has abated.

Some people is picking up oysters on the mud flat. And the
medium shots of them talking while gleaning.

Director: A high sea over the beds is a pretty
sight
but to profit from the low tide
gleaners need a copy of the Tide Tables.

Man in Black: We come every year for the big
tide.

Driver in Yellow: They're going to follow the

receding sea
and anything they find they pick up.



[42:22]



[43:22]

Woman with Sunglasses: People collect the oysters that have come loose.
In theory, they keep out of the poles around the beds.
They must keep out.
They are too close.
Here the oyster farmers let them carry on, but...
it degenerates sometimes.

Old Man Holding Some Oysters: We don't trespass!
The limit must be here, but...
we encroach a little sometimes.

Woman in the Yellow Coat: We're not stupid. We see others and do the same.

Old Man with Hat: If they tell us anything, we leave.

Young Man: It's tolerated but not really allowed.

It's not downright illegal.

Old Man with Blue Hat: There still exists a right to glean,
provided people glean 10, 15 metres from the beds.

Old Man in Green: 25 metres away.

Old Man with Blue Hat: Is it 25 metres now?



[44:12]

Director: What are people allowed to do?

Old Man in Green: To collect up to 3kg each, nothing more.

Middle-aged Man in Green: 10 metres away minimum.

Old Man in Green: Right.

Old Man in Blue: 5kg per person.

Old Man Smoking: 3kg of clams and 5kg of oysters, something like that.

Woman in the Yellow Coat: 5kg per person, I think.

Driver in Yellow: Three dozen per person
but surely they take more than that.

Man Working in Oyster Factory: They pick up small
inedible oysters
that were churned by the waves and are full of
sand.
People from the mainland eat them,
and then say they get sick.



[44:51]

Back to driving on the highway...

[Music starts ♪]

Director: The Jura region was flooded.
The river Dard barred our route. [45:14-45:37]
I liked it when animals barred my way, (p.113-115)
or I just stopped for them. [¤]



or I just stopped for them.





114



115

The medium shot of a family on a vineyard, picking while singing a beautiful song together.



[45:42]

Director: The Nenon family, in the hills near Apt, present a special case of picking.
The vineyard they found was wholly abandoned.

Director: That's a fully fledged harvest here!
Nenon Family Dad: Yes, the entire vineyard was left unpruned last year.
An entire harvest going to waste.
I spotted this place and I was very intrigued by it.

Director: Could anybody say anything?
Don't the owners care?

Nenon Family Dad: No. After November 1st, we are allowed to pick grapes in the vineyards.
If not, they're eaten by wild boars or birds.

Director: Do wild boars like grapes?
Nenon Family Dad: They love grapes.

The close-up of them singing together.

Director: On that day,
I filmed dancing pruning shears.
I forgot to turn my camera off,
which is why we get the dance of the lens cap.

[Music starts♪]



[46:57-47:39]

The shot switches to a nother field. And then the close-up of a medium-aged man shows up.

Director: The cap has stopped its crazy jig.
We're off to see the only owner
who cares for his gleaners.

Middle-aged Man: I warn children about the terrible effects if they eat too much, but I take for granted that the adults know and I leave them alone.

Director: Jerome Noel-Bouton shows us an old photo of his vines which used to be Etienne-Jules Marey's. There is a mini-museum in the cellar. An engineer and erudite physiologist, Marey invented chronophotography. He was a visionary. He analyzed movement before Muybridge and the Lumieres. He is the ancestor of all movie makers, and we're proud to be family.

Middle-aged Man (Jerome Noel-Bouton): Marey was my father's grandfather, which makes him my great-grandfather, and to be more specific, my grandfather was Marey's son-in-law, since... his wife, my grandmother, was Marey's daughter.

She married a man named Bouton and this estate, which used to be in the Bouton family,

was bought by Marey, and returned to the Bouton family when his daughter married a Bouton.

Director: Congratulations!

Jerome Noel-Bouton: The tower you can see over there, he built with his own two hands to house his still camera equipment.

He set up wires and waited. Animals or birds went past, triggering the camera.

That's the hut from which, with his chronophotographic rifle, he broke down the flight of birds.

Director: That's Demeny, Marey's assistant, holding the rifle and the film reel. I wonder who the boy with a bowler hat is. [Music starts♪] Marey's experimental pictures and pieces of film, technical prowess aside, are pure visual delight.

(p.120–121)
[49:48–50:05]



*The long shot of driving, at night or in the daytime, and passing the factory, the street lamps, the train, the mountains.
[鼓掌] And then the medium shots of a group of young homeless gathering on the street.*

Director: Our train leaves Austerlitz station and happens to slows down as we pass Ivry waste collection center. The heart of our topic, since we're going to Prades, home of our musician Joanna. She met youngsters who had had a brush with the law for damaging the trash bins of a supermarket because the contents had been doused in bleach. I thought I could film them explaining the case if I met all the protagonists - the youngsters gathered on the square, the manager of the shop, and the magistrate from the court, who seemed concerned and polite. I wanted to know how these young homeless people coped with the law.

Director: Should squatting be legalized?

Magistrate: I could work on it, if not for this robe.

Director: But your robe is lovely!

Magistrate: It was a simple case of youngsters van-

dalizing things.
I found them guilty of violence.

Director: You mean before bleach was sprayed on?

Shop Manager: They'd knock over the trash and my staff had to clean up after them. That led me to apply the law and bleach the trash, which they didn't appreciate.

Youngsters 1: We got angry.

Youngsters 2: But nothing serious.

Youngsters 3: We knocked over trash cans, and damaged the wall with graffiti and tomatoes.

Shop Manager: They broke the camera.

Youngsters 3: It was locked, we had to climb a little.

Shop Manager: They went over the fence. They were trespassing on private property.

Magistrate: Appearing in court was itself a penalty for these youths who want to be free of all rules.

Youngsters 4: We only stole trash.

Magistrate: The aim isn't to fine them but to remind them of the law.

Director: They all played their part, applying their own logic.

The kids said what they were supposed to.
We filmed them with their dogs. It was pictur-esque.

Youngsters 1: I'm not that antisocial.

Director: May I ask you how old you are?

Youngsters 3: 22.



[52:29]



[52:31]



[52:36]

Director: Their beauty is poignant when you realize that, for whatever reason, they get most of their food from trash cans.
In court, I was told it was a dialogue of the deaf, but not of the dumb.

They seized the chance to have fun.

Youngsters 5: I said she was mad, she cited me for contempt of court.

Youngsters 1: We said she was out of her mind, and she would go: Write it down!

Youngsters 2: Recorder, write down: Out of her mind!

Youngsters 3: We felt it was a foregone conclusion. It was sickening.
She opted for trial in closed court. I shouted and slammed the door.

The long shot of driving on the highway again.

Director: They haven't finished talking about this episode, and I'm not still thinking about it in my hotel room.

We filmed and continue to film people who hang around trash bins.

They have various reasons for doing so.
Each experiences it differently.

A man with Boots is walking towards shot.

Man with Boots: Hi!

Director: Here he is!

Man with Boots: How are you?

Director: Sit down, there's coffee for you.
We had been told, He wears rubber boots. He salvages everything.

Man with Boots: Yes, I live almost 100% on things I salvage.

The Man is rummaging through the trash bin on the street.

Man with Boots: Everybody, rich or poor,
throws food away. Why?
Because we are so stupid with food!
If we're past the sell-by date of a yogurt, people
go:
Oh my God, I can't eat this!
It'll kill me!

So stupid.
It's easy
to tell from the smell of it if it's OK or not.
It's quite simple, I've eaten 100% trash for 10
years now...
for 10 or 15 years,
I've never been ill.

Director: You don't have a job?

Man with Boots: I do.

I have a job, a salary, a social security number.

Director: So you are not forced to do that?

Man with Boots: Absolutely not.

Salvaging is a matter of ethics for me,
because I find it utterly unacceptable to see
all this waste on the streets.

That proves we're heading for disasters, like the
Erika oil spill.



[54:47]

The shot switches to the mud flat near the sea. People are cleaning on it and rescue the sea birds trapped there.

Man with Boots: Sea birds,
guillemots, razorbill penguins,
all those who were totally smashed up real good
by Total Fina Oil,
those who will get smashed up real good
by this over-consuming society... If they are
cleaned,
the birds might still get caught in nets,
it's for them that I'm an activist.
All the rest can die in their apartments,
on their trash, I don't care. Birds first.

Director: Do you always wear boots?

Man with Boots: Yes, rubber boots have two advantages,

on this hostile ground, they're really good stuff.
There's a psychological aspect too,
with my boots, I'm like the lord of this town.
All these idiots dump away,
I come after them and rake in the chips.

The close-up of some newspaper appears and then some kids are playing with trash objects.

Director: My Beautiful Trash Bin
An exhibition featuring pretend trash bins
was organized to teach children
how to sort out the trash.
At My Beautiful Trash Bin, they like colors,
and children play with bits of junk.

Teacher(Gino Rizzi): This is just plastic from the street.

Director: Gino Rizzi is in charge of the kids' workshop.

He himself transforms pots of yogurt into flowers and plastic bottles into mobiles.

Where does play end and art start?

The shot switches to the exhibition at the Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art.

Director: The American artist Sze
exhibits mobiles made with lots of bits and pieces.

The kitchen trash has made it to the art world,
where junk is highly prized and priced.

Director: In any case, museum trash
is small, cute, clean and colorful.
Have those kids ever seen brooms in action,
or shaken hands with a garbage collector?

The medium shot of a man in black greeting to the Trash Truck Workers.

Trash Truck Worker: How are you?
Man in Black: Fine.

That's neighborhood life.

The medium shot of the man's home and it seems like a back yard, around by trash objects.

Man in Black: I live here
at Mr. Charlie Plusquellec's, because he's a friend.
More than a friend,
a protector, a godfather, he's everything to me.
I am so very very happy, very glad, I am here
surrounded by nature.
You see,

it's worse than paradise.

Mr. Charlie Plusquellec: Salomon is a little bit like a migrating bird.
He arrives, he moves in,
and then one day, he disappears.
And then he comes back again, and then leaves.
So far he's been back 3 times.

Man in Black(Salomon): Every day, I come out of here,
I wander around,
looking here and there for throw-aways.

The shot of Salomon picking up food when markets closed.

Woman Working at Market: Don't touch anything!
You hear me?

Salomon: Yes, Ma'am.

Woman Working at Market: Don't you understand what I said?

The close-up of some people gathering around a trash bin, including Salomon.

Man in Blue Jacket: Every morning, early, you come across a little something.

Salomon: It's like a lottery.
It's good.
There's lots.
Do you need it?

Man in Blue Jacket: Wait, he might want some.
Want some bread?

Salomon: I always come here and help myself.
Sometimes you get good cold meats,
sometimes fowl, a bit of everything.

Mr. Charlie Plusquellec is cooking the chicken legs.

Mr. Charlie Plusquellec: Salomon found Some chicken legs.
So I'll cook the meat before it goes off.
Director: You're going to eat chicken and rabbit for a month!

Mr. Charlie Plusquellec: No, don't worry.
We always find someone to share with.
Guy trash picker(Salomon
We give it to the neighbors, the woman next door especially.

Salomon is walking with a cart and looking for some trash objects, then taking them home.

Salomon: That's good.

Mr. Charlie Plusquellec: Right now,
we have 1 , 2, 3,
4 fridges and 2 freezers
that we picked up and fixed.

Salomon: I patch them up, I fix them, and when the machine works I sell it or... I give it away to our neighbors.

The different shots of fridges on the street.



[1:01:06]



[1:01:10]

Director: Fridges are everywhere on the streets. Sometimes they work, sometimes not.

The “Wasteland” artists of Villeneuve-sur-Lot collects fridges [\(p.133\)](#) [1:01:25] [1:01:38] and recycle them as fully furnished, fitted spaces.

The shot switches to a march on the street.

Director: My neighbor the Lion of Denfert-Rochereau [\(p.134.1\)](#)

is made of bronze.

My friend the Lion in Arles [\(p.134.2\)](#) is made of stone.

We got there in the early hours.



The people from the fair were still asleep,
and I saw a man looking at the river flow by. (p.135.1)

I half-felt like talking to him.



[1:01:50]



[1:01:52]

The shot switches to an apple grove. Some people are picking up apples and carrying the bags around the grove.

Director: Further on, along the Rhone,
in a blissful orchard
I saw gleaners arrive.
You can tell them



[1:02:08]



[1:02:16]

from their boxes, sacks and plastic bags
which don't look anything like the standard containers of the workers.

Young Man named David: My name's David, I'm a foreman at the Cape farm.
We often allow
gleaners to come in after our pickers
provided they remain 10 metres behind.

Man with Glasses: Look, there's still a lot left in the trees.
We just take advantage of this.

Old Man with Beard: I collect them so that they don't go to waste,
and I share them out,
we stew them or whatever.

Woman in Black Sweater: I want to pick them because there're lots left as you can see.

Woman in Black Shirt: I don't take damaged ones, because my children are very particular. They're used to perfect fruit.

Woman in White: This one is damaged so I chuck it away.
We gleaners also discard some fruit.

Cape Farm Owner: Here's an apple which has got nothing going for it, it's like an ugly and stupid woman. It's small and sunburnt. Commercial value: zero. We can't prevent people from providing themselves with apples once we have finished harvesting. So we proclaim an official gleaning period, we take car registrations down,

if it's a moped, we ask for a copy of the owner's ID and we tell them from when to when they can come and collect.

Director: Isn't it a bit over-regulated?

Cape Farm Owner: Well, it's either that or nothing at all.

Once people are registered, they can take 200kg of apples, I don't mind, even they don't buy any for the rest of the season
Good for them.

In this field of 3 hectares, at least 10 tons will be left unpicked. That gives the gleaners quite a lot of exercise.

The close-up of an Old Man in the apple field.

Old Man with Big Beard: You have to find them behind the trees, under the leaves. It takes a while to fill up a basket. Picking is not a piece of cake, it's hard work.

The Old Man is shaking the apple tree, and some apples falls.

Old Man with Big Beard: Quite a few have fallen here. You just have to pick them up.

Director: Robert, a gleaner of many crops, let us follow him. He knows good spots for quinces

and where to help yourself in greenhouses

Old Man with Big Beard(Robert): I'm looking for pine nuts.

Director: You're really thorough!

Robert: Right, I really don't let anything go by. In this greenhouse, the tomato harvest is over. We pick the remains before they clean the place. Here, see the tomatoes...

That's nature, it shouldn't be wasted.

It's abandoned. Once the harvest is over, it's not worth hiring people just for those. They'd rather let us do it.

Director: Can anybody go in the greenhouses? No, not the greenhouses. I don't know what the law is.

The shot switches to the close-up of the Lawyer.

Lawyer: Greenhouses are a facility to grow vegetables.

Once the harvest is collected, there's some left, a few tomatoes, grapes, carrots or celery.

If gleaners remain within the law farmers can't say anything, can't sue them for anything.

Director: Even on their property?

Lawyer: Even then, precisely, gleaning is always on private property.

The long shot of traffic in the city. There are many abandoned household appliances on the street and a woman in rope standing next to them.

Director: Mr. Dessaud, our lawyer in the fields, explained gleaning rights.

Mrs. Espie, our lawyer in the streets, tells us about salvaging rights.

Mrs. Espie: The law on gleaning doesn't apply to these objects.

"Res derelictae"
are ownerless things,
since the owner's intention has been clearly expressed:
they have deliberately abandoned them.

Only the penal code deals with their status
and says this property can't be stolen since it has no owner.

Those who take the object become its legal owners.

This acquisition is unusual, since it comes from no one.

Once taken, the object belongs to them irrevocably.

Director: Thank you very much.

Mrs. Espie: You're welcome.

[Music starts ♫] *The different shots of abandoned household appliances especially many tvs.*

[Rap Lyrics]

Yeah. Sidelined beds on the sidewalk
Washed-out machines, tired-out fridges
just bend down and grab your furniture

Yeah. Cookers, cushions, club armchairs
Weary wood chairs and TVsets, Worn-out couches
just bend over, you're made over
Street rehab and TVrap, yeah, yeah!
Broken TVs

☒ **Director:** I've seen lots of tvs abandoned,
and within a few minutes
somebody was taking out the copper.

It's the copper from the deflector coils.



[1:08:11]

I looked at the magic screen
I began this film
right after the eclipse shown on tv,
continued while the countdown to Y2K was shown
on tv,
and ended the film on the 1st of May...



thinking
[1:08:20]



[1:08:33]

Less violent people
take tvs home, hoping to repair them.

I found 2 small chairs on the street and took them
home.



[1:08:54]

The shot switches to a Man in white driving at night. And then the Man is rummaging the objects on the street.

Director: One night when the bulky refuse is
thrown out,
I drove around with Francois who had done one
of my film scores
and who also sang.

[Soft song starts♪]

Director: He has dressed in white for 25 years.

Francois is curious, he likes rummaging,
but he didn't find anything that night.
He looked at an empty clock (p.143-144)
and he turned it down.

I picked it up and took it home.

A clock without hands is my kind of thing.
You don't see time passing. (p.147-157)



[1:09:40]



[1:09:49]

144

145



[1:09:55]

146

147



[1:09:56]

148

149



[1:09:57]



[1:09:58]

152

153



[1:09:59]

154

155

[1:10:00]



156

157



[1:10:13]

Director: I like filming rot, leftovers, waste, mould and trash.

[#] But I never forget those who shop in the leftovers and trash when the market is over.

The shot switches to the plenty of cartons and rubbishes after the market is over. A Young Man with Glasses keeps picking up the rest of food from the ground.

Director: It's past 2 o'clock.
I've done my shopping and I linger on until the market is over.
I notice a man with a large bag eating on the spot.

I would see him now and then, always with his bag,
always eating.

The day he was eating parsley

I went over to him.

Director: Do you often eat parsley?

Young Man with Glasses: Sometimes yes. Parsley's full of vitamin c and e, beta carotene, zinc, magnesium, it's excellent.

Director: His answer amazed me.

Over the following weeks, I filmed him repeatedly, with or without sound, and he talked in snatches.

Young Man with Glasses: I pick up food at the markets and I save money that way.

I'm mostly a vegetarian, so I find what I need.

I don't earn much money, but I still have to eat.

You should see what they get rid of... From the markets, I get fruit, vegetables mostly, sometimes cheese too, but that's rare.

I eat a lot of fruit, I particularly like apples. And here I can get as many apples as I want.

Director: How many apples a day do you eat?

Young Man with Glasses: 6 or 7.

Director: Is it your staple diet?

Young Man with Glasses: I also eat bread.

I get up at 4, I take the train
and I arrive in Paris at 5:45.
Between 6 and 7,
they throw away all of the bread from the day
before.

If you spot a trash can near a bakery
it's likely to contain sandwiches, bread,
and all that.

I eat a lot of bread. It's a staple food full of proteins and glucids.

Director: It's strange to be concerned...

Young Man with Glasses: About balanced diets?

Director: Yes.

Young Man with Glasses: Since I studied biology,
it's quite normal I've retained some knowledge.

I used to be a teaching assistant.
When people find out I have a Master's degree,
they don't understand why I sell newspapers to
make money.

I sell street papers or magazines.
Most times in front of the train station.

[Music starts♪]



[1:13:52]



[1:14:06]

¶ The shot switches to the inside of a building at night.

Young Man with Glasses: I live in a shelter where 50% of the people are illiterate.

Immigrants from Mali and Senegal mostly.
I arrived in that shelter 8 years ago,
and I've been teaching them to read and write for 6 years.

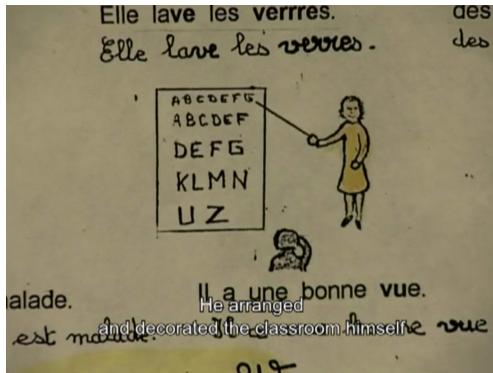
I am not part of the school system, I don't get paid for it.

I teach every evening from 6:30/7:00 until 8:30/9:00.

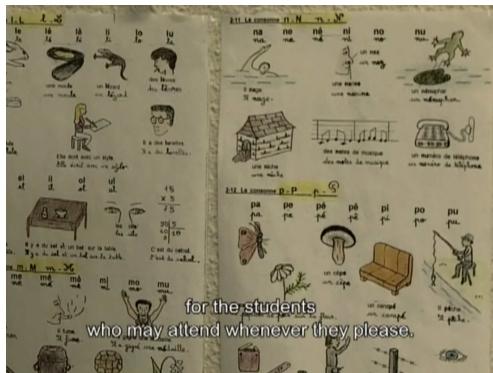
[Music starts♪]

Director: He arranged and decorated the classroom himself (p.162)

for the students who may attend whenever they please. ¶



[1:14:56]



[1:14:48]

The different shots of he teaching in the class.

Student: Ac, ec, ic, oc...

Young Man with Glasses: And see, for example,

Student: a noc-turnal ac-tivity.

Young Man with Glasses: Right, a nocturnal activity.

What does "nocturnal" mean?

Young Man with Glasses: Success? Success is...

Student: Isn't success like a behavior?

Student: It's to succeed in life.

Somebody who has succeeded.

Student: Like Celine Dion has?

Young Man with Glasses: Right.

Student: Famous?

Young Man with Glasses: But it's more like the will to...

Student: Succeed.

Young Man with Glasses: Yes, when you've succeeded, that's success.

Young Man with Glasses: A use-ful... in-sect.

What's that?

Student: A cockroach.

Young Man with Glasses: I don't know if it is useful but...

but it is an insect.

[Music starts♪]



[1:16:16]

Director: Meeting that man
is what impressed me the most.
And the time it took to find out about his nocturnal
and voluntary activity in a suburban basement.

[♩] *The shot switches to the warehouse of the Museum of Villefranche, two women are moving the paintings.*

Director: The other deep impression is quite different in kind.

I talked the Museum of Villefranche
into bringing out from its reserves
a painting by Hedouin (p.165-166)
which I had seen reproduced in black and white.
Brigitte, the curator, and her assistant, Julie
had to disturb several sleepy paintings
before finding the one I wanted to reveal:
Gleaners Fleeing Before the Storm.



[1:17:26]

[Music starts♪] To see them in broad daylight,
with stormy gusts lashing against the canvas,
was true delight.

[♩]



[1:17:28]

[1:18:48]
THE END

Interview:
Gleaning the Passion of Agnès Varda

Andrea Meyer, 2009

[Andrea Meyer] Gleaning is such an unusual subject. I wonder what drew you to it as the topic for a documentary.

[Agnès Varda] Gleaning itself is not known – is forgotten. The word is passé. So I was intrigued, by these people in the street picking food. And then I thought, what's happening to the fields of wheat? Nothing is left in the fields of wheat. So I went to the potatoes, and I found these heart-shaped potatoes, and it made me feel good. Made me feel that I was on the right track.

You put so much of yourself and your emotions into your films, it makes the audience put themselves into it.

Exactly. You know, that's what I really want – to involve people. Each person. An audience is not a bunch. You know, it's not "Audience." For me it's 100, 300, 500 people. It's a way to meet her, meet him. It's exaggerated, but, really, I give enough of myself, so they have to come to me. And they have to come to the people that I make them meet [in the film]. And I don't think that we forget them. Because the people [I interview] are so unique, so generous – they know so much about society. They are not bitter, mean. They are generous. They are gray, anonymous – you know, humiliated people, in a way. In a way, they make us feel we have to be ashamed, not them. And, obviously, I put a lot of energy to make them look good, express clearly things, including the pain, the hassle, the difficulty to live, to eat. You know, we overeat all the time. Everybody does. And half of the world is starving.

You seem to relish the experience of making the film?

Sometimes I'm touched to tears, you know. That one in the caravan [trailer] was painful. He lost a job, he lost a wife, he lost the kids. Then you feel like you should be silent, listening, and trying to be very small in the caravan. With a small camera, I try not to disturb the flow of his words. And then the editing, you see what you'll do with it. And in the open markets, I was so moved. So painful to see old women, you know, having difficulties to bend – and coming out with one piece of food. And bending again to get another thing. You know, there is an old woman there? She goes into these eggs. Most of them are broken. She finds a box and ends up finding some not-broken eggs. When you know the price of an egg, you understand that she needs the money. She wouldn't be doing this for half an hour to get six eggs. And so my heart was really hurt by that misery.

How much of what you shot was planned?

Very little is planned. What is planned is to meet this one or this one. After looking for them, which took a lot of time. I didn't have a list of gleaners handy. I had to find them.

Gleaning becomes a metaphor for so many things, even film-making.

Yeah. It is true that filming, especially a documentary, is gleaning. Because you pick what you find; you bend; you go around; you are curious; you try to find out where are things.

But, you cannot push the analogy further, because we don't just film the leftovers. Even though there is some analogy about people that society pushes aside. But it's too heavy an analogy.

One of the other things that makes the film so appealing, like your other work, is that it's as much about you as the people whose lives you document. You film yourself – your hands, your face, even the moldy spot on your ceiling.

I have two hands. One has a camera – the other one is acting, in a way. I love the idea that with these handheld cameras – these new numeric things – very light, but, on the other hand, very "macrophoto." You know what is macro? You can approach things very near. I can, with one hand, film the other one. I like the idea that one hand would be always gleaning, the other one always filming. I like very much the idea of the hands. The hands are the tool of the gleaners, you know. Hands are the tool of the painter, the artist.

I noticed that you have almost the same exact shots in Jacquot, only it is Jacques' hair and hands. Those shots are so beautiful, so loaded with emotion.

When I did my own film, I thought I was just doing my self-portrait, in a way. Now, many viewers – and I'm glad you brought it up, because nobody did here – came to me and said, "It was so touching that, over the years, you reached the same shots that you did for Jacques: his hair,

his eye, and then his arm. And his hand, with the little ring there."

And they say, "In a way, it was like touching his hand of the film, over the years." And when the man told me that, I cried. I had not realized it. You know, thank God I try to be very clever in the editing room. But when I film, I try to be very instinctive. Following my intuition – is that a word? Following my connection, my association of ideas and images. And how one thing goes to another. But then, when I do the editing, I'm strict, and trying to be structural, you know. And when he told me that, I never thought of it. But he said, "You did the same shots."

I was so impressed, I cried. And he said, "I didn't want to hurt you." I said, "You don't hurt me – you make me feel good." I was crying, but he made me feel, oh, that I was joining [Jacques], you know, in some way. And I thought: Well, I'm glad I work by intuition. Because if I'd organized it, I wouldn't like it so much. I understood that this is to be an artist, you know – because you work by intuition. You go to the right thing, to the right place, to the right image, with your own feelings.

Following your intuition is also responsible for all your wonderful digressions in "Gleaners."

It's like a jazz concert. They take a theme, a famous theme. They play it all together as a chorus. And then the trumpet starts with a theme and does a number. And then, at the end of his solo, the theme comes back, and they go back to the chorus. And then the piano takes the theme again. The other

one goes crazy, you know, then comes back to the theme and back to the chorus. I had the feeling my digressions were like this – a little fantasy; a little freedom of playing the music of things I feel, things I love. And come back to the theme: People live off of our leftovers. People feed themselves with what we throw [away]. And I say “we” because it’s you, it’s me – it’s everybody.

What does this retrospective of your work mean to you?

Well, I'll tell you. I had a retrospective at the MoMA; I had one at The American Cinematheque; I have one at The Walker Art Center of Minneapolis; in France I had one at The Cinematheque. Well, I'm getting older, and people start to put my films together.

What do you think your films offer to people today?

Well, you have to tell me.

That would be cheating. What do you think?

I would say energy. I would say love for filming, intuition. I mean, a woman working with her intuition and trying to be intelligent. It's like a stream of feelings, intuition, and joy of discovering things. Finding beauty where it's maybe not. Seeing. And, on the other hand, trying to be structural, organized; trying to be clever. And doing what I believe is *cinériture*, what I always call cine-writing. Which is not a screenplay. Which is not only the narration words.

It's choosing the subject, choosing the place, the season, the crew, choosing the shots, the place, the lens, the light. Choosing your attitude towards people, towards actors. Then choosing the editing, the music. Choosing contemporary musicians. Choosing the tune of the mixing. Choosing the publicity material, the press book, the poster. You know, it's a handmade work of filmmaking – that I really believe. And I call that cine-writing.

I think, if a film is well-done, it's well-written for me. Cine-written. So I fight for that. And even though I know that some screenplays can be beautifully made together with another director, and then another editor. I've seen films beautifully made that way. But the way I film is, I love to be responsible for the whole thing. I never work on other people's projects, on other people's screenplays. It's modest, but I did my own work, trying to make it believable, touching. Try to be clever, bringing the audience to be intelligent. And I tell you – they do behave like an intelligent audience with me. They raise beautiful questions; they speak to me after the screenings; they tell me personal things – they want to be involved. They tell me they are touched. This is a good feeling. It has nothing to do with the box office. I hope it does well, but it's totally different. I'm happy when it works. You've seen "101 Nights" – it was a total flop. But when people speak about it and like it – fine. It doesn't break my energy; it doesn't make me feel like I'm a loser or anything. I had flops, I had success.

This one is so beautiful, everyone's going to love it.

I'm just on the road again. Going to be on the road – yeah.
Free – trying to be free. Of what other people do; of success.
You know, trying to be free of minor things. I feel very much
on the road. Even though I live in a city, and I have a roof.

A beautiful roof, I might add.

A rotten roof, I may add – but I fix it. Don't you think it's funny the way I say [the ceiling] could be a painting – that we could admire it in a museum? Yeah, anything could be art. Anything could be beauty. And let's not be, "This is the ceiling rotted. And this is the museum." The ceiling is rotten – it disturbs me, the leak. There is water coming – tack-tack-tack. But look, Why should I go in a museum and say: "Tpies is beautiful when I have this on [the ceiling]?" [In the film], I say, "my ceiling is a piece of art." And that's turning life into – You know, finding not only beauty – amusement, joy, fun. Finding fun where sometimes it's just a bore; finding fun when it's a burden. You can always make something look different. Which is a way of saying that I'm, in a way, protected from being unhappy. There is a big unhappiness in my life and big pain. And I'm protected, in a way. You know, I feel that even the dead people around me protect me. So I'm not too much entitled to complain.

